JOHN JACOB ASTOR

ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH

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BOOKS BY
ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH

BIOGRAPHIES

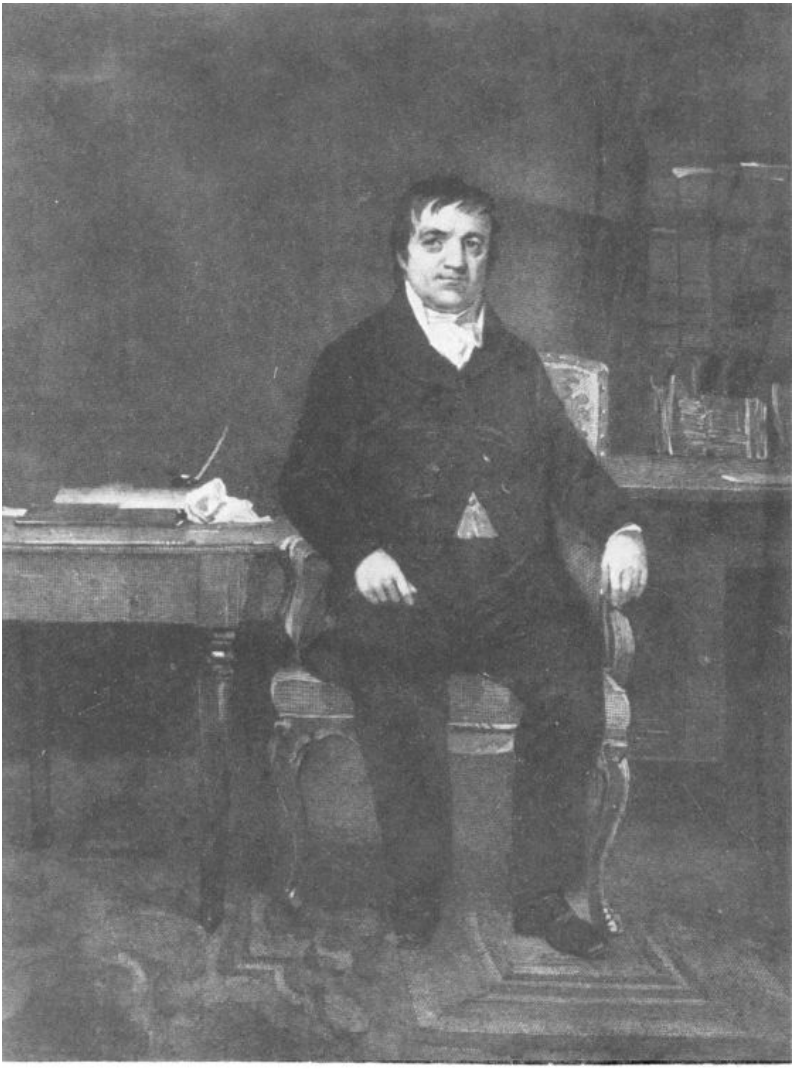
JOHN JACOB ASTOR
LANDLORD OF NEW YORK

COMMODORE VANDERBILT
AN EPIC OF AMERICAN ACHIEVEMENT

NOVELS

HATE
"A living saga of the high seas"

PORTO BELLO GOLD



John Jacob Astor

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LANDLORD OF NEW YORK

BY

ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH

WITH 16 ILLUSTRATIONS

PHILADELPHIA & LONDON
J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY
1929

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TO
VICTOR MORAWETZ

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ILLUSTRATIONS

BOOK ONE

A VENTURE IN FLUTES

A VENTURE IN FLUTES

I

When the gaudy regiments of the German Allies crossed from the Brooklyn shore after the battle of Long Island in August, 1776, and paraded up Broadway with their British comrades-in-arms, they brought with them one, who, indirectly, was to have a more important influence upon the sleepy, little city and the country which had only just been born, than any other in the glittering column pressing relentlessly in pursuit of Washington's beaten battalions. None of the Germans' swaggering officers, neither von Knyphausen nor von Riedesel nor blustering Colonel Rall, who should die gloriously after erring tragically, was to play so vital a part upon the world's stage. For that matter, no Britisher there present, not even fat, pleasure-loving Sir William Howe, himself, was to do as much toward shaping the future of the sturdiest of the British Lion's whelps as a certain stocky, fair-haired peasant named Heinrich Astor, who clung precariously to a sutler's wagon in rear of the Hessian contingent.

This youth of twenty-two—who pronounced his name in such a fashion that for years afterward it was spelled, by himself, as well as by others, Ashdour—never carried a gun in battle or risked so needlessly the exceedingly healthy physique nature had provided him. His service as a tool of destiny was to consist in the writing of letters, crude, ungrammatical letters, but sufficiently instinct with life to tempt after him a greater: his younger brother, John Jacob, already chafing, as he had chafed, against the hide-bound routine of a German village, under the restriction of a father unsympathetic and intemperate.

The father, likewise named John Jacob, was a butcher by trade, and had taught his craft to Heinrich. Heinrich had no fault to find with butchering as a livelihood, but he considered the community in which they dwelt too small to afford opportunity for the pair of them, so, when the Prince of Hesse beat up for conscripts for the expedition to America, he left home and secured employment in the sutler's train. It was the only way he knew of securing free passage to the one land the Eighteenth Century afforded where a poor man might hope to alter the scope of his endeavor. The fact that he embarked for this land as an enemy in no wise affected his unimaginative German phlegm. He was, after all, going to America because he wanted to be an American. That was enough for him, and it should be enough for anyone else. Generally speaking, it was, although occasionally, in times to come, people would say unkind things, which seldom bothered Heinrich's sensibilities. That was one of the advantages of following the butcher's

trade. A man couldn't afford to have tender feelings if he was a butcher, and Heinrich was a very successful butcher.

Of the 29,166 men who served in the German contingents during the war he alone profited lastingly by the experience—unless you take account of the stay-at-home Princes, who rented out their troops to George III at a gross sum of £850,000 a year, including hand-money, blood-money and incidental charges. By some hook or crook, he amassed sufficient funds to set up as a minor contractor of meats soon after the British occupied New York, and in succeeding years became middleman for the raiding parties—De Lancey's Royal Americans, Brunswick Jaegars, Queen's Dragoons—that forayed the Westchester farms. Somebody had to market the cattle and produce lifted so ruthlessly from a rebellious population, and why should Heinrich forego the chance to augment his business? It wasn't easy work. There was as much labor in butchering a seized rebel beef as in butchering the most loyal bull that ever bellowed. An unanswerable argument!

It is a tribute to his character that despite his known record during the war he became genuinely popular in the city. The old saw about success applies here, of course. Heinrich possessed the same instinct for the right venture that distinguished his younger brother, even though he lacked the miraculous quality which moved Philip Hone to exclaim of the second Astor to reach the New World: "All he touched turned to gold, and it seemed as if fortune delighted in erecting him a monument of her unerring potency." But people liked Heinrich. There was something ruggedly sincere about him. If he wasn't a Patriot in "the days that tried men's souls," he could scarcely be blamed, who had been born in a foreign land and crossed the ocean with a hostile army. At least, he became an American citizen as soon as possible after the peace.

So much for Heinrich. You shall meet him again, but he enters these pages simply because he left a younger brother behind him in the sleepy village of Waldorf, some eight miles from Heidelberg, to whom, as has been said, he wrote letters describing the marvelous possibilities of this America, where a petty tradesman might make of himself whatever he would.

A good butcher, Heinrich. But a better letter-writer—which must have seemed as inexplicable to himself as it does to you and me.

II

Waldorf—Wald Dorf, "The Village in the Wood"—was one of seven villages on the fringes of the Black Forest, dotting the ancient Roman road which runs south from Spires toward Italy. It was a plain, primitive place, more rural than its proximity to the university town of Heidelberg might

indicate. The Astors had been settled there for three generations, the great-grandfather of young Jacob having fled from France to Lutheran Germany after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes made their homeland intolerable for the French Protestants. And the descendants of the exile would have us believe that he was a gentleman of quarterings and seignorial ancestry, no less, indeed, than Jean Jacques d'Astorg, great-grandson of Joseph d'Astorg, Marquis de Roquepin, whose grandfather, in turn, had been Antoine d'Astorg, Baron de Monbartier in the Haute Garonne, twelfth in line from Pierre d'Astorg, Seigneur de Noaillac in Limousin, who could trace his lineage to Pedro d'Astorga, a knight of Castile, who fell at the taking of Jerusalem in 1100. The name of this dim Spaniard, according to legend, came from a grant of arms conferred upon him by a Spanish Queen: a falcon, argent, on a gloved hand, or—a play on a Spanish word for goshawk, azor.

Whether this pretty story be true or not, there seems to be no doubt that a Frenchman with a name which soon became Ashdor or Ashdour or Ashtor or Astor, under the guttural pronunciation of South Germany, did leave France in the year 1685, and after a period of wandering, in the course of which he acquired a knowledge of Italian and German, reached Waldorf, and there married in 1692 Fraulein Anna Margaretha Eberhard. In the dubious traditions of a family which has always had a fantastical craving for the outward trappings of gentility, this Jean Jacques d'Astorg is represented as possessing the means to pose as a small landowner or squire, a position his children clung to after his death in 1711 at the age of forty-seven. But by the time his grandson, John Jacob, entered the world, in the year 1724, the best an Astor could hope for in Waldorf was an honest living earned by the sweat of his brow, and John Jacob, parent of the subject of this biography, was duly apprenticed to the butcher's trade.

A figure almost as dim as Pedro d'Astorga, the Castilian, this elder John Jacob. We know that he was lusty of body, optimistic of temper, a lover of festivities, a stout trencherman and a notable harrier of the bowl. We know, too, that he had the wit to marry on July 8, 1750, Maria Magdalena Vorfelder, a conscientious, thoughtful woman, whose character was to achieve a durable impression upon their son, who was to make of their obscure name a household word. And finally, we know that he was improvident, lazy and selfish, at least, when in drink; and that none of his children liked or respected him, his four sons quitting his roof as soon as each was able to, and his two daughters marrying at the earliest opportunity. We know that after the death of his hard-working wife, an event which occurred when young John Jacob was about fourteen years old, he lost no

time in presenting a step-mother to his children, a woman they detested. But that sums up our knowledge.

The old butcher lived to the grand age of ninety-two, dying in Waldorf in 1816, after his son had plumbed the full measure of success. What did he think of the boy he had thwarted and hindered? Had he any perception of the prank of Destiny which made him father of a prodigy? Did he realize the glamor which should cluster around his name? Did he grasp the significance of Astoria? Could he comprehend the true rôle of the fur trade? When he looked at the cheap, colored print of New York City, hung on the wall of his parlor, could he glimpse, shadowy above the tree-tops, a barrier of towers such as the world had never seen? My guess is that he mumbled his pipe-stem and grumbled to the neighbors because John Jacob didn't make him a more generous allowance—he never had any luck with his boys. *Ach, du lieber!*

George Peter, the eldest, born in 1752, had flitted first. A musical lad, George. He emigrated to London and secured employment with an uncle, one of the butcher's brothers, who was a partner in the prosperous firm of Astor & Broadwood, musical instrument-makers, and under the name of Broadwood, still a factor in the piano industry. Heinrich, the second son, born in 1754, we have met already. Perfectly willing to be a butcher, as George was not, Heinrich rebelled at butchering in Waldorf. So did John Melchior, the third son, five years junior to Heinrich. One Spring morning after Heinrich's leave-taking John Melchior vanished, and when next heard of was learning a trade in a distant city.

This left young John Jacob, who was thirteen years old in that mystic year of '76—he was born July 17, 1763—alone to assist his father, and John Jacob was soon very unhappy. A good student, eager to improve himself, he acquired all the knowledge he could in the village-school, which, like most similar institutions in Germany, was superior to village-schools in other countries. His master was a Huguenot refugee like his great-grandfather, a progressive, intelligent man, Valentine Jeune, who taught in close co-operation with the Lutheran pastor, the Reverend John Philip Steiner. Both preceptors thought well of Jacob, as he was called, and encouraged him, so that by the time he was ready for his First Communion at fourteen, the age when schooldays were considered ended, he could read and write with ease, cipher as far as the Rule of Three, knew his catechism, prayer-book, and hymnal and performed very fairly upon the flute. In other words, he was remarkably well-educated for a peasant-lad in the Eighteenth Century, much better-educated than most poor boys in America.

In disposition he was kindly and affectionate, devoted to his mother during her lifetime and to her memory after she was gone, and from his

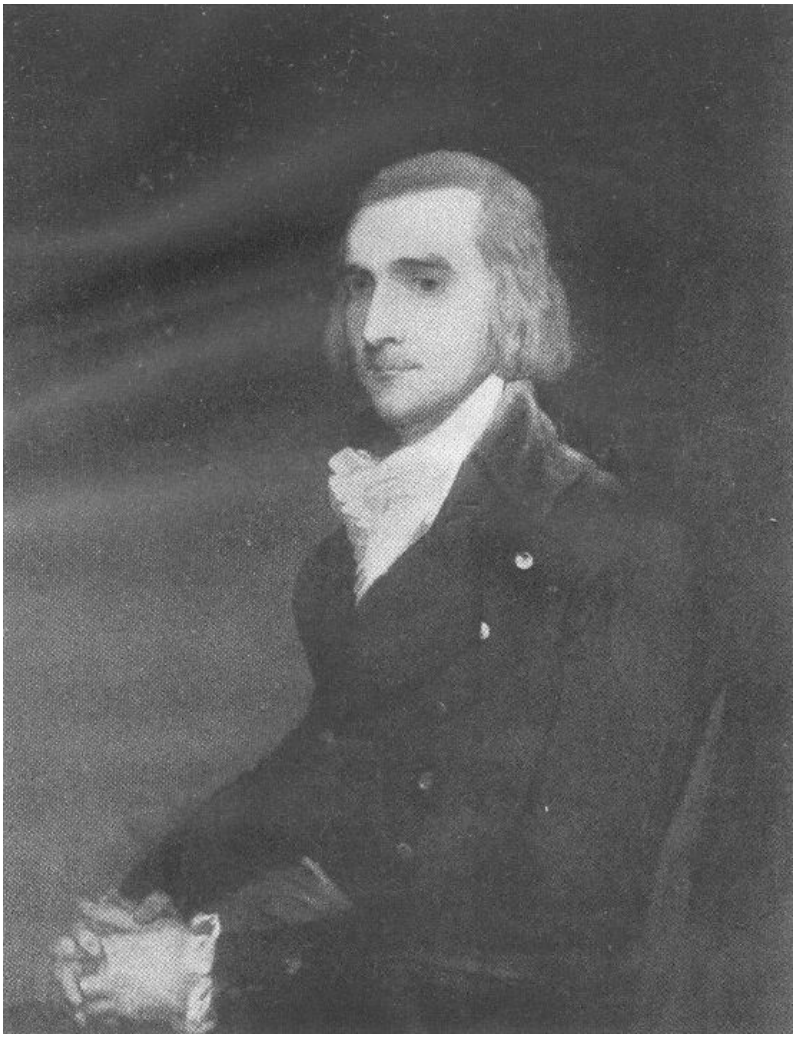
earliest years particularly fond of young children. Older people, as a rule, liked him, but the unhappiness which preyed upon him after his mother's death tended to drive him away from the company of his peers, and he developed morose tendencies in no wise typical of him. It was reported of him at this time, that is, during the period of his stepmother's rule, that he would absent himself from home for days, sleeping in any corner he could find, even a straw-bed in a neighbor's barn. His father he held in contempt. The two were quite inimical: old John Jacob with never a thought for the road ahead or a care for anything he could not see; young John Jacob furiously discontented with his present lot, and curious of all the stirring events boiling in the outer world.

Yet he was no ninny-come-nanny, this blond peasant-lad. Thick-thewed, with a barrel-chest and heavy limbs, his muscles were developed by strenuous labor as his mind was slowly developing under the impulsion of an alertly inquisitive mentality. He liked to sit by and listen while Pastor Steiner talked with Schoolmaster Jeune of the web of Continental intrigues which momentarily threatened war, and the implications of the vague struggle beyond the Atlantic. There would be letters from brother Heinrich, telling of this or that—the Americans were beaten, they were not beaten, they were starving and freezing to death, they had obliterated the Grenadier Regiment Rall, there was talk of peace, there was talk of war, the von Trumbach Regiment was for Canada, no, the Brunswickers. The pastor and the schoolmaster would read over the frayed letters Jacob brought them. Letters from other homesick soldiers, too. Oddly enough, these Hessians, whom the American soldiers were taught to hate, more often than not evinced an uncanny sympathy with the cause they had been sold to suppress. And as one year slipped into another this feeling became more tangible, especially amongst the younger men. Heinrich Astor sensed it. There was a thing called freedom. One man was as good as another—if he deserved to be. No more kings, no more nobles, a fair chance for all, the people to rule themselves, a man to enter any business he chose.

It seemed too good to be true. Pastor Steiner wagged his head forebodingly. Freedom was a dangerous toy for light heads. Kings had their heavenly purpose. Weren't they in the Bible? The Americans were a good people, no doubt, but—And Valentine Jeune would flare into rapid speech. If Kings were unjust they deserved no more consideration than common people. And why couldn't a nation govern themselves—as the Church governed itself, say? This Washington, now, even the Great Frederick spoke well of him. And the Declaration of Independence was a dignified document, speaking for all self-respecting men in its assertion of primary rights.

Jacob hugged his knees and listened. This was fascinating—and fat Heinrich was in the middle of what was going on, over there in New York, a place where the trees grew much bigger and thicker than in Waldorf, where a mighty river flowed down to the sea and ships-of-the-line might anchor under the very shore, and a boy who was willing to work could become a rich merchant in the course of time. He'd go home from one of these discussions, and try to talk to his father about it all, and the butcher would curse him for his pains. What a fool boy! Did he think the English King would fail to curb these rebels? What? With all the High and Mighty and Serene Princes lending him aid, the best troops in Europe. Ach, what fool talk! Off with you. Eckholz will have that sow of his butchered for his daughter's wedding.

But in a year or so came more letters, telling of a battle at a place none of them could twist their tongues around. Saratoga! Was ever such a name? Thunder and lightning! And the English beaten, yes, more than beaten—captured! And thousands of good Germans with them, Hesse-Hainau men, Hesse Cassel men, Brunswickers, the great von Riedesel, himself.



Wide World Photos

PORTRAIT BY GILBERT STUART OF JOHN JACOB ASTOR

This put a new aspect upon the talk. For the first time, really, from end to end of Europe, men began to doubt Britain's invincibility. France, itching to avenge defeat in the Seven Years War and redeem her prestige, conscious that her Navy was in better fighting shape than ever it had been, prepared to throw in her lot with the Colonists. Wily, old Frederick the Great, who had taken the part of the Americans from the commencement of the struggle, allowed himself to become a trifle more partisan. The Allied Princes wept and wrung their hands—and instructed their diplomatic agents in London

and Hanover to make certain the casualty reports were accurate and obtain every last stiver due under the contracts of indemnification.

George Peter, Jacob's brother in London, wrote, too. The City merchants were uneasy; the Opposition in Parliament criticized the Ministry severely; the Americans were winning. Their privateers were scouring the seas. Insurance was all but prohibitive. Even shipping to Ireland wasn't safe. If things went on like this, what with the French coming in, the war was as good as lost; and if that happened there was no knowing what would follow. Men who ought to know believed the Americans would be bitter competitors for markets.

Jacob wrote to George Peter, wrote, also, to Heinrich. Was he wrong to wish to emigrate? Had he a right to expect a future overseas? The answers came, the first after many weeks, the second after many months. By all means, he should emigrate, advised George Peter, but why go to America? Here in London work awaited a smart German boy who had knowledge of music and was apt with his hands. Come ahead, urged fat Heinrich in his fat, stubby scrawl. A man makes twice as much butchering in New York as in Waldorf. But it would be well to practise English. These people are very stupid at languages.

Jacob conned both letters. Of course, he must know English, but he could never learn it in Waldorf. London was the place for that. His uncle had many German employees, who would make it easy for him. And after London should come New York. A step at a time, that was wisest—a policy he was to practise, life-long.

Wisely, then, he talked to Pastor Steiner and Schoolmaster Jeune, pressing them to intervene in his behalf. And between the three of them they dinted the stubbornness of old John Jacob. Perhaps the boy should have a chance to make more of his life, and to be sure, there wasn't a future worth speaking of in butchering in Waldorf, as Heinrich had said, scarcely enough work for two. But he must wait another year. Next summer, when he was sixteen. Perhaps. Let's see how he feels then, eh?

And young Jacob was content. Why shouldn't he have been? The letters kept coming in. Not only from Heinrich, but from other German lads, including some of those captured at Saratoga, who were actually living amongst the Americans and discovering them to be agreeable people, with very attractive daughters.

III

It was on a warm Spring day in 1779 that young John Jacob left Waldorf, the equivalent of two dollars in his pocket and a bundle of clothes slung

from a stick across his shoulder, his eyes blurred with tears. A knot of friends and relatives escorted him to the end of the cobbled street, where it joined the Roman road that sliced through the green countryside as ruthlessly direct as the spears of the legionaries who had first built a highway to the Rhine. His sisters wept; his father was sullen, inclined to self-pity at the loss of the one remaining son; the neighbors were envious or sorrowful, according to their several dispositions. Only Schoolmaster Jeune was cheerful and encouraging, joking at every opportunity, rebuking the sour gossips, who shook their heads and predicted hunger and cold as the least evils awaiting the wanderer.

It seemed to Jacob that the partings would never be over. His father gave him a very damp, beery kiss on either cheek, muttering something about remembering the dead mother old John Jacob had forgotten quickly enough. His sisters threw themselves convulsively into his arms. There were more kisses and handshakes, messages for Hans in London and Lothar in that distant New York, where the red Indians prowled the streets by night and bears invaded the churches. Jacob was at the breaking-point, and kindly Valentine Jeune spun him around and gestured down the tree-bordered road.

"Off with you, youngling. The good God keep you!"

So Jacob squared his shoulders, swallowed hard and trudged off upon the first lap of his Odyssey. He heard parting shouts, hysterical injunctions from his sisters, but he dared not look back. That would have been to surrender all trace of dignity. He just trudged on, oblivious to his surroundings, and as he disappeared beyond a rise Valentine Jeune turned to the little group of villagers and exclaimed:

"I am not afraid for John Jacob. He'll get through the world. He has a clear head and everything right behind the ears."

Some of the Waldorfers agreed and some dissented. Old John Jacob blubbered that there was nobody like his boy, the sisters wept some more until Jeune comforted them, and finally everyone dispersed. Young John Jacob had had his turn at the center of the stage. And, indeed, about that time he was feeling lonelier than ever—sitting beside the road on a hill-top, whence he might see the red tiles of the village roofs gleaming amongst the trees, wiping his eyes dry, and as he recounted in after-years, making three resolutions: "To be honest, to be industrious, and not to gamble"—two of which he most certainly observed successfully. Himself, of course, he believed that he observed all three. And possibly he did. Honesty is largely a state of mind.

However that may have been, he rose refreshed and consoled by his moral reflections, and tramped on. The breeze was soft and warm, bearing the rich, sweet perfumes of the new life that was burgeoning under the touch

of Spring. From the distant aisles of the Black Forest, from every wayside farm and field, the lush odors wafted to his nostrils. He sniffed them avidly, and forgot to be sad. A carter hailed him, and was properly impressed by his destination. A wandering student jested with him. A batch of farmers shared bread and cheese at noontime. Insensibly, he was blended with the pageant of the road. If he no longer might lord it in the center of a stage, yet he had acquired a part in an infinitely greater drama. The very pulse of Germany throbbed under his dusty boots, appealing to his imagination with an intimacy he had never known during the cloistered years in Waldorf.

Reaching the Rhine, he experienced no difficulty in obtaining employment upon one of the immense lumber-rafts, which were floated downstream to the Netherlands at this season of the year. And for the ensuing two weeks he enjoyed an idyllic existence. In the daytime the raft's crew had little to do, except work the long sweeps to fend off the river-craft or free their unwieldy charge from a sand-bar. At sunset they tied up to the bank, kindled fires ashore, and lounged on the grass, telling stories, singing songs, listening to Jacob play the homemade flute he had tucked in his clothes-bundle. The raft-master supplied plenty of food, the weather was good and for all of them the voyage was rather a holiday than a serious effort.

On the fourteenth day they bumped into the lumber-wharves of Amsterdam, and Jacob was paid off, receiving ten dollars, an enormous sum in his estimation, for the two weeks. This enabled him to book passage in a North Sea packet for London, and a few days later he was walking gingerly through the bustling streets of the English capital, inquiring his way to the quarters of "Ashdour undt Pbroadtvoodt." Somehow or other—he never could remember how—he gained his destination at long last, and was ushered by a suspicious porter into the presence of his brother, George Peter, who took one look at the stocky, tousle-haired lad in ill-cut, patched garments, and snatched him to a Teutonic embrace.

The uncle was equally kindly, if less demonstrative. There was employment for the boy, and George Peter found him lodgings. And satisfied, beaming with pride, Jacob promptly addressed himself to his two-fold task: to learn to speak English, and to save the money to pay his way to America. But this last ambition seemed impossible of attainment. English he acquired readily—he could make himself understood after six weeks. To save money wasn't so easy. He worked hard, reporting at the factory at five o'clock in the morning, and usually staying until evening; but his wages were small, living was expensive, and despite his frugality, four years were required to put by $75 and the price of a good suit of English clothes.

In the meantime, his uncle and George Peter urged him to remain with them. He was willing, anxious to please and they promised him advancement. But Jacob matched his own observations with the letters Heinrich wrote from New York, and concluded his earlier plan was best. The most favorable opportunity in England must be narrower than the chances America afforded the emigrant. Whatever doubts clouded his mind were dispelled by the news of the signing of the Treaty of Ghent in September, 1783. He was now twenty, he had in hand ample funds for the Atlantic voyage, and he resolved to waste no more time in deliberation, so he hied himself to the Pool, and applied to the first sailor he saw, one John Whettin, mate of an unnamed American brig.

Whettin took a fancy to the German, and very considerately advised that he take passage in another, and more comfortable, vessel, skippered by Captain Jacob Stout. Astor accepted the advice, and repaid Whettin years afterward by making the sailor master of one of his own merchantmen. With Captain Stout, Jacob bargained for a passage in the steerage, food to be provided the same as the crew's, for $25. This left $50 of the wanderer's capital, and $25 was invested in the purchase of seven flutes, which he obtained from his employers. Why on earth he chose flutes for his first venture I don't know, unless it was that he figured on obtaining the American agency for Astor & Broadwood products, and considered it good policy to establish relations with the firm at once. Whatever his motive, it is amusing that a young man as intelligent as he was should have fancied a market for musical instruments in a country emerging from eight years of war, and specifically, in a city which had suffered all the stagnation of a protracted siege and was to be further ruined by proscription and eviction. Yet the fact remains that those seven flutes may be said to have constituted the foundation of the Astor fortune, and in the circumstances you will be doubly entertained by the story of what happened to them.

In November Captain Stout sailed, perhaps the least conspicuous of the ship's company the fresh-faced German lad in the steerage, who could boast for his worldly possessions:

Item, $25 in English coin.
Item, the clothes he stood in.
Item, 7 flutes.
Item, 1 spare suit of clothes.
Item, an inquiring mind.
Item, a will to work.
Item, 1 healthy body.

You will observe that this inventory includes a number of possessions in addition to those with which Jacob started from Waldorf; but he hadn't made any very substantial progress in the four years. Probably, his best single asset was his knowledge of English. His capital was grotesquely insufficient. He would have to start all over again. Indeed, he was already starting, pointing his nose in the direction Destiny had plotted for him, although of this he was entirely ignorant.

There were a number of Hudson's Bay Company officers aboard, as well as a young German, who had traded independently with the Indians for furs. Jacob overheard the Hudson's Bay men discussing the fur trade with his compatriot and became interested in so novel an enterprise. The voyage was long and stormy; the passengers were thrown much together, and the two Germans had their nationality in common. Jacob was fascinated by the adventures of this man, little older than himself, who had commenced trading on a small scale, then gradually acquired capital, invested it in skins, taken them to England, turned his profits into trade-goods, and was now planning to repeat the operation. This was exactly the sort of enterprise Jacob must try, if he was to succeed, and in the course of the voyage he was at pains to learn the names of the different skins and their values, in America and England; the names of the principal dealers in Montreal, New York and London; how to buy, preserve, pack and transport pelts; and how to deal with the Indians. He was amazed to hear that in New York it was possible to buy furs from river-boatmen on the wharves for a handful of sweetmeats or a toy, furs which would bring in London from five to ten times their value in New York. And he stowed this information away in his memory, with the private intention to turn it to account at the earliest opportunity.

After a series of baffling head-winds, the ship made the Capes of the Chesapeake toward the end of January, 1784, but the Bay was so full of ice that she could make no progress to Baltimore for nearly two months. The richer passengers soon became disgusted with the delay, and landed over the ice; but Jacob couldn't afford coachfare to Baltimore. Besides, he was being fed and lodged without additional expense, and learning the details of a fascinating new business, into the bargain. So he stayed aboard and tucked away generous rations of hard-tack and salt-horse, until the ice broke, and Captain Stout was able to jockey the ship up to her berth, substantially the loser by the members of his company who had taken full advantage of their passage-agreements.

From Baltimore Jacob took coach, in company with his friend, the fur trader, for New York, this journey wiping out what remained of his tiny capital. When he said good-by to his shipmate at the Battery pier, where the Jersey ferry landed them, he had no more than a couple of shillings left to

rub against each other in his pocket. He must find Heinrich, and at once, if he wouldn't go hungry—as the wiseacres of Waldorf had predicted.

Ah, but under one arm he carried a package containing the seven flutes. His stock in trade. And he might hug himself exultantly, walking up Broadway, staring at the many negroes, and the broad tulip trees rattling their branches overhead, and the free carriage of the people, and cocking an ear to the ringing cries of the street-vendors, offering their wares—"Here ye are! Niii-iice, clean Rockaway saa-aand! Sand yer floors!" "Hot corn! Hot corn!" "Greenwich spring-water, two cents a paa-aail!" "Fresh straw! Throw out yer ticks! Fresh Jersey straaaw!"—watching with envious eyes a boy sucking at a pear lifted by the stem from the bowl of molasses in which it had been stewed. He was in New York. He stood on the threshold of Fortune.

IV

There was never any question of Jacob's starving or lacking a roof. He was willing to work, and although New York was poverty-stricken and down-at-heels in that Spring of 1784, reduced in population, too, by the loss of the Tory families that had fled with the British garrison, work was available for all who sought it. And if he hadn't found work, still fat butcher Heinrich would have stood by him. Heinrich was uproariously glad to see "der kleine Bruder," and Heinrich had prospered in a small way. He boasted his own stall in the Fly Market and had married a fine, bouncing wife, Dorothy, step-daughter of John Pessenger, who held stall No. 1 in the Market. The Pessengers were from Stone Arabia in Tryon County, which then comprised the entire northwestern part of the State, and I suspect that they were Palatines, of the same general stock as the Astors.

Heinrich was tremendously proud of his pretty, young wife—"Dolly wass der pink of der Powery," he used to say, according to De Voe's quaint "Market Book," which enshrines a host of interesting facts and anecdotes relating to the city's earlier tradesmen—no less proud of the business he had established, unaided. Not even John Jacob could work any harder than Heinrich. Up at dawn, push a wheelbarrow to the Bull's Head Tavern—the first of that name, on the lower Bowery—resort of the drovers, load his clumsy vehicle with as many carcasses as it could carry and then trundle back to the market, where he must prepare his cuts in time for the early-rising housewives, and be on hand during the day to wait upon all and sundry. Tired at night? Yes. But his own master, and tucking away shillings which some day should double and triple themselves in sound bank-stock and real estate. He was a saving fellow, was Heinrich, and quite satisfied

with his occupation. A butcher always knew exactly where he was at. You chose your meats, you fixed a fair price, you paid cash and demanded cash —and you couldn't have trouble.

In proof of which contention, he pointed to the growth of his business. Really, he needed an assistant. Dorothy helped all she could, but a stout lad like Jacob would find plenty to do, and he'd pay a fair wage. But Jacob repelled the suggestion. Hadn't he fled Waldorf to escape being a butcher? Anything but that! Besides, he didn't want to cling to his brother's coat-tails. He had come to the New World to seek an opportunity to strike out for himself, and he intended to do so.

Heinrich took the answer in good part, and presented Jacob to George Diederich, a German baker, in Queen (now Pearl) Street, who required a helper. It was no part of Jacob's ambition to be a baker, but rather a baker than a butcher during the interval while he familiarized himself with his new surroundings and hunted something better to do. And he threw himself cheerily into the work, which was as taxing as any he had done. Under the agreement, Diederich boarded and lodged him, in addition to a wage so slight as to be negligible. The 'prentice was expected to help in the baking as well as the sales, and in the forenoon either made deliveries or peddled trays of cakes through the streets, adding his resonant tenor voice to the medley of street-cries which was one of the characteristics of old New York.

Jacob loathed this work, but he was amply rewarded for the faithful diligence he put into it. At 81 Queen Street, a few doors from Diederich, lived a widow, Mrs. Sarah Todd. Mrs. Todd was a woman of excellent family, related amongst others, to the Brevoorts; but she was in reduced circumstances, and obliged to take in lodgers to make both ends meet. Whettin, the seaman who had befriended Jacob in London was a relative of hers by marriage, and it may be that they met through him. At any rate, Mrs. Todd had a daughter, also named Sarah, several years younger than Jacob, a solid, substantial sort of girl, who, like her mother, was more inclined to shift for herself than depend upon the benevolence of relatives. The young people became acquainted, and on Sundays, after church, of course, went walking under the tulip trees and horse chestnuts that made the Bowery deserving of its name. Mrs. Todd liked the young German, with his nice manners and serious ways. He was less inclined to wildness than the American boys of his age, many of whom had been in the army and were unsettled by the experience or else had learned to ape the profligacy of the British officers of the garrison. He had a pretty taste for music, was decently religious and well spoken of by his employer. A lad with a future, older men said before he had been many weeks in the city.

For in those days everyone knew everyone else in New York, and each addition to the population, however humble, was discussed over the tea-cups from the Battery to Warren Street, where the open fields stretched north clear to the rocky heights of Harlem. So it was not to be wondered at that the yellow-haired German boy, who trotted up and down Broadway, balancing a tray of cakes on one palm, bowing politely to the ladies and gentlemen he recognized as patrons of Diederich's shop, was early singled out for observation. But Jacob was a cake-peddler only a few weeks when Robert Browne, an elderly Quaker fur merchant, who lived near the Todds, offered him a clerkship at two dollars a week and his board and lodging. Here was exactly the opportunity he craved, and he leaped to accept it. He'd learn the fur business. Then——

But "then" seemed a long way off in the summer of 1784. Jacob was called a clerk, but most of the work he did consisted of beating the stored furs to keep the moths out of them—camphor was too expensive for such use in the Eighteenth Century. However, he worked so diligently that his new employer was impressed, and in the Fall sent him out of town to several near-by localities to purchase skins from the local farmers. He bought so wisely that in the Spring Browne dispatched him up the Hudson into the Iroquois country, where the mighty Six Nations preserved a shadow of the sovereignty which had made them masters of the New York frontier for a century.

This was the richest fur country within the bounds of the state, but its richness was relative rather than absolute. Even the counties adjacent to the city produced a substantial crop of pelts annually, and should continue to do so for many years to come. Skins still had an actual money-value, heritage from the early Colonial days when they passed as currency, and in the outlying settlements of the frontier constituted as valid wealth as coined silver. Furthermore, the interruption of the fur trade during the Revolution had enhanced the price of furs abroad, so that this was one business which picked up very rapidly after the suspension of hostilities. Jacob's employer could sell furs as fast as the trappers traded them in.

There was danger as well as hardship for the American fur trader in the country of the Long House. The British, in defiance of the Treaty of Ghent, retained the military posts at Detroit, Michilimackinac, Oswego, Ogdensburg, Niagara, Iron Point, and Dutchman's Point on Lake Champlain, a chain which barred the Americans from the whole vast area south of the Great Lakes and enabled the occupants to dominate the Six Nations, who had been divided by the Revolution and were inclined to be hostile to Americans, a feeling skilfully nourished by the British military officers, naturally bitter over the outcome of the War and anxious to do

everything they could to make things difficult for the new nation. It was necessary for Jacob to operate surreptitiously. He must feel his way carefully, approaching only villages of savages who cherished no grievances for the bloody devastation wrought upon several of the tribes by General Sullivan and gallant, old Marinus Willett. And with a sixty-pound pack on his back and a rifle over his shoulder, he must tramp twenty miles a day in the wilderness, and have his wits about him when he approached a group of lodges at the journey's end.

He was extraordinarily successful. With typical German thoroughness, he was at pains to learn all he could of the Indian dialects, their customs, whimsies, and peculiarities. He discovered that they were fond of music, and more than once with the trills of his flute soothed a sour-visaged Seneca or Mohawk, who thought of lifting a blonde scalp in revenge for some clan-brother lost at Oriskany or on the Sacandaga. The news of his coming presently filtered through the forest aisles in advance of him. A merry, yellow-haired white man, who spoke as if he was munching a mouthful of husked corn and made pleasant noises on a stick. He paid fair prices for furs, but he knew a mangy skin when he saw one. Grant him a seat by your council fires, O, brothers of the Hodenosaunee.

Jacob was very happy over his trip. He returned to New York with a pack half again as heavy as that with which he had sailed up-river on a bluff-bowed Albany sloop. And he was proud of his musical prowess, too. Surely, he hadn't made a mistake in venturing his first capital in those seven flutes. They must be sold by now, he told himself. Before leaving he had entrusted them to Samuel Loudon, the printer, who published the *New York Packet*, to sell on commission, and so soon as he had reported to Quaker Browne—and paid a call at 81 Queen Street—he hastened around to Loudon's office. No luck! There were his flutes, neatly rolled in the original bundle, and until March of 1785 New Yorkers might read weekly in the columns of the *Packet* an advertisement notifying them that "German Flutes of Superior Quality are to be sold at this Printing Office." Whether they were sold by that date or not I cannot say. Probably they were, because if they hadn't been Jacob scarcely would have embarked upon his next independent venture. He must still have believed in flutes, you see.

V

Say what you please of our John Jacob, hate him as you may before we are done with him—and if you hate him or despise him you'll share no opinion with me—his life was as packed with the essence of romance as a nut is with meat. The fellow couldn't move in the ordinary byways of

commerce, without stirring the stardust that should be reserved for the halos of great adventurers. And he as prosaic, commonsensical, stolid an individual, when he wasn't tootling at a bit of Mozart, as you'd find perched atop of a high stool in any counting-room!

Take the byordinary matter of matrimony. He manages to impart a tinge of story-book magic even to that. For here you have the poor emigrant-boy, landing penniless in a strange city, going to work for a master on the same block with the girl of his dreams, courting her most deferentially, struggling upward at express speed the while, faring forth into the wilderness to risk death from the tomahawks of Indians or the claws of catamounts, proving his mettle thereby—and, by George, sir, returning to marry her! That is precisely what happened.

The only distressful aspect of the event is the damnable lack of detail attending it. Not a soul among the 23,000 inhabitants of New York City, in 1785, had an idea that there could be anything significant in the marriage of young Jacob Ashdour, as he continued to pronounce his name, and Widow Todd's girl. The Brevoorts may have sent some small gift to their poor kinswoman, and undoubtedly Heinrich and Dorothy were generous by their lights; but the festivities were very plain, and there was no honeymoon. The young couple blushed and tittered in acceptance of the rough congratulations offered and continued on at their several occupations: Sarah assisting her mother, who had one more lodger in her son-in-law, and Jacob sturdily endeavoring to merit the increased salary he had wrung from Quaker Browne.

He had done well by Browne, and Browne was doing well by him. The marriage was hardly more than consummated before the fur merchant was commissioning his clerk to journey north to Montreal. The Congress forbade the importation of furs from Canada, and Canada, due to the retention of the frontier posts by the British, was securing the pick of the Western furs. Browne's correspondents in London were clamoring for more pelts than he could send, so the wily Quaker determined to send his German assistant to Montreal to buy from the Canadian trappers, and ship direct to London. Jacob acquiesced with his usual cheeriness, and took passage by river-sloop for Albany, whence he tramped overland, pack on back, to the foot of Lake George. Here he hired a canoe, and paddled the lake, portaged to Lake Champlain and continued by water as swiftly as his lithe muscles would propel him.

An arduous and perilsome trip, which, coming so soon after the traversing of the Long House, made of him a very capable forest runner. He knew the tricks of the frontier, how to find his way by the stars and the sun, how to tell which was north by the moss on tree-trunks, how to throw up a

lean-to and build a fire in the rain, how to stalk deer or wild turkey, how to detect the crisp warning of the rattlesnake, how to repair a slit in the birchen walls of his frail craft with a slice of bark and a handful of spruce-gum, how to judge the morrow's weather. More important than this, though, were the contacts with new minds and intelligences and the perspective he was gaining on a country which had been a mere blob on a map to him two years since. He was, in a very real sense, discovering America for himself, getting a clearer idea of its resources than was possessed by most of the great merchants in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, who talked leisurely of what the Constitutional Convention might accomplish—if it accomplished anything, which a good many persons of consequence gravely doubted.

In one short year, you will note, Jacob had mastered the complete process of the fur trade. He had learned to care for furs, to differentiate them and judge their quality; he had learned the technic of trading with the Indians, who must always be made to believe that they had the best of a deal; he had learned how to bargain with the farmers, who trapped and hunted to vary the monotony of their work, and must be lured with oddments whose cheapness was disguised by novelty; he had learned the international aspects of the business, and made himself known in Montreal to the factors and powerful free trappers, who were called—and not in mockery—"*Les Seigneurs des Lacs et des Forêts*"; he had learned the geography of the fur business, where the best pelts of different species of animals came from, where was the heaviest volume of trade and the trade-goods which appealed most successfully to this tribe or that.

Fast work for the emigrant lad. The four years in London hadn't been wasted, for it is obvious that he must have acquired more there than a facility at English. He had developed in his mind the power of analyzing and comprehending the unfamiliar, and schooled himself to meet and attract very different types of men. Already, at twenty-two, he was a personality. He was lifting himself out of the rut, which had clamped his family for three generations to the earth. He was reaching upward, as naturally as a tree reaches for the sunlight, for the power which should be his—and for which, as yet, he had no conscious use. That he was discontented, fiercely, blindly discontented, was perhaps the healthiest sign of all. If he could do so much for Quaker Browne, what couldn't he do for himself?

The venture in flutes? He refused to be discouraged by the memory of this failure. There was a reason for that, he was certain. You couldn't sell goods successfully without a shop to display them in and to attract customers. And if he secured the agency for Astor & Broadwood instruments, Sarah could manage the sale of them over the counter while he was out in the woods collecting furs for a complementary business. People

who bought musical instruments likewise bought furs, and those furs he couldn't sell in New York he'd find a market for in London. He returned from that trip to Montreal with a very definite project in his head, and all the arguments of Quaker Browne couldn't deter him. He'd come to America to be his own master, and his own master he proposed to be, an ambition which Sarah frankly encouraged. She was a perfect partner. Everything she possessed, mental, physical, material, she plumped in with his. And unlike many women, who labor to advance a hard-driving husband, she drew a fair reward of happiness.

BOOK TWO

THE FOREST RUNNER

THE FOREST RUNNER

I

Sarah had brought with her a dowry of $300, and Jacob had managed to hoard a couple of hundred more, mostly the result of occasional private ventures in the rarer furs. This sum was their capital. For shop they were contented with the front first-floor room in Mrs. Todd's house; the rear room on the same floor was their home, living quarters, kitchen, sleeping chamber, and presently, nursery. Their stock in trade Jacob obtained from his uncle in London on long-term credits, and on May 22, 1786, the couple's venture was publicly launched with a card in the *New York Packet*:

"Jacob Astor, No. 81 Queen Street, Two doors from the Friends' Meeting House, has just imported from London an elegant assortment of musical instruments, such as Piano Fortes, spinnets, guitars; the best of violins, German Flutes, clarinets, hautboys, fifes; the best Roman violin strings and all other kinds of strings; music boxes and paper, and every other article in the musical line, which he will dispose of for very low terms for cash."

Thus was the Astor fortune started. You will observe that there is no word of furs in this advertisement—an omission which is to be explained by the fact that time was required to collect a stock of peltry. The very day the advertisement appeared he was plunging through the forests on the Niagara frontier, back bent beneath the weight of his pack, rifle in hand, bullet-pouch, powder-horn, hunting-knife, and haversack slapping his thighs. Clouds of gnats settled on his sweat-daubed face; his torn and dirty clothing stuck to his body; briars tripped him; pains shot up his loins and racked his shoulders. At intervals he leaned against a tree to rest, every couple of hours slipped off the seventy-five pound pack, and straightened his limbs and flexed his cramped muscles. Perhaps he stuffed a palmful of tobacco into his pipe, and puffed luxuriously, stretched out on the carpet of the leaves. But his self-indulgence was short-lived. In ten minutes he would be on his feet again, slinging the heavy pack into place, whistling gently as he set his moccasined feet to the trail.

At night he was fortunate if he might share the hearth of a settler's cabin or scratch fleas with the inmates of an Indian's bark lodge. As often as not he slept beneath the stars, fir-boughs for his couch, a hastily contrived lean-to for roof. Wherever he went he was keen for a bargain. No trade was too small for him. He'd dicker half an hour for a muskrat skin, dole out the pile of beads or needles and thread which were his price and be off once more, whistling cheerily one of those tender, sentimental tunes he had learned from

Valentine Jeune and stray Heidelberg students. A cheerful, friendly, curious fellow, this Jacob, as all who encountered him were willing to testify.

He liked people in a hearty German way, was interested in what they were doing and in their problems, always willing to stop and discuss the chances for crops with a farmer or swap experiences with some far-ranging trapper. He had an eye, too, for geography and economic factors. When Syracuse and Rochester, Utica and Buffalo, were scanty clearings he was predicting the cities that should crush the forest beneath a ponderous weight of brick and stone, and a generation before the Erie Canal was dug he held forth in the taprooms of wilderness taverns concerning the results which should flow from a line of transportation linking the Great Lakes with the sea. In a couple of years he became a familiar figure in the most remote corners of the State. Each Spring men would cock their ears for the welcome tang of his guttural, broken speech—"Ach, mein friendt! vot vas it like, der vinter for you, eh?" He could be trusted to have all the latest gossip of New York, a vast, sprawling town, which, men said, in awe-struck tones, now boasted of 25,000 people. He would know what was doing in politics, whether it was true that there was to be a Republic, and General Washington wasn't to be made King, after all. He even could tell you what the rich merchants had heard from London by the last mail-packet, and predict the trend of business in the coming months. And he always carried honest goods, too. No man who traded with him had cause for complaint. True, he drove a sharp bargain, but that was to be expected, and he was always alert to add to his stock odd things he found a demand for.

Besides the annual journey North into the Iroquois country, where the People of the Long House sat sullenly by their dying counsel fires, dreaming of their glorious past, nursing red-painted axes for the day of vengeance that should never come, Jacob resumed on his own account the trips to Montreal he had made formerly for Quaker Browne. There was more profit for him in this roundabout trade, however questionable—with its evasion of the prohibition of intercourse betwixt Canada and the free Colonies not yet cemented into the United States—than in his precarious ventures on the Niagara frontier. Where a Yankee would have been suspect, perhaps laid by the heels, this German youth had free entry, and was encouraged to make what he could out of the baffling situation. So every dollar he could save or borrow to augment his scanty original capital went in trade-goods to purchase the furs that the Canadian "Lords of the Lakes and Forests" fetched from Michilimackinac, Grand Portage, and Sault Ste. Marie.

Yet it is an indication of the stuff of which he was made that this relatively easy trade beyond the frontier didn't spoil him for the less profitable ventures. He continued, not only his visits to the Long House, but

shorter trips up Long Island, through New Jersey into Northern Pennsylvania, and along the line of the Hudson to Lake Champlain. In the milder months of the year, sometimes when the country was deep under snow, he was tireless on the trail, plodding, plodding, plodding, never less than sixty pounds weighing down his broad shoulders—and never content unless his load grew heavier with the substitution of stiff pelts for the lighter bulk of the knickknacks that paid for them. Thousands of miles he walked every year, and always burdened, remember. If he was afloat, there was a paddle to wield. And he couldn't pause if the weather was inclement. Time was too precious, money too scarce.

He was hard put to it for funds in those early years, and at first, he turned to Heinrich. Brother Heinrich was prospering. The richest butcher in the Fly Market, folks whispered. He had adopted a policy of riding fifteen or twenty miles into Westchester County to meet the drovers bringing their herds in to sell to the city butchers at the impromptu stockyards adjoining the Bull's Head Tavern on the Boston Post Road (Third Avenue). Meeting a herd up near White Plains, say, Heinrich would cannily offer a price considerably under what the beasts should be worth, at the Bull's Head, and the drovers glad to be saved an extra day's work, would accept. Whereupon Heinrich, with a couple of lads to help him, would conduct the herd to town, able to undersell the other stalls in the Fly Market and possibly dispose of a few head to his father-in-law and his friends—at a substantial profit, to be sure.

Sometimes, then, Jacob borrowed from Heinrich, which wasn't a pleasant experience because Heinrich was a person who cordially disapproved both of borrowing and lending. Other times Jacob borrowed from Nathaniel Prime, the outstanding banker and money-lender of Wall Street, but this was an even more unpleasant experience than going to Heinrich and being received with a bellow of curses and admonitions. Prime was a hard man, who operated at a time when usury was the rule; he demanded a very high rate of interest and a large commission for getting what was termed long paper discounted. And so, after being pinched a few times, and compelled practically to double his loan upon repayment, Jacob turned his back upon Prime. He'd deal with brother Heinrich. Better be abused than squeezed by a usurer.

The next time he had obligations to meet, and no funds available, he called on Heinrich. Stumblingly, shamefacedly—for he hated borrowing, himself, with the instinctive hatred of the thrifty—he stated his need. He must have two hundred dollars at once. And he couldn't afford to pay Prime's interest charge.

"Two hundred dollars," shrieked Heinrich. "Gott im Himmel, boy, am I made of money? Must you forever be picking at my pocket? Where will you

carry yourself by such practices?"

"But it is not that I have been extravagant," pleaded Jacob. "You know I have had to expand my business, and with next to nothing to work with."

"You are a fool to expand beyond your means. Go slow, and be safe."

"I will after this, Heinrich. But I have had to take every opportunity, and if I do not find two hundred——"

"No! No—a thousand times no," growled Heinrich. "Borrowing is becoming a habit with you. You need a lesson."

"It will be an expensive one," Jacob answered bitterly. "I will lose half a season's income."

"Economize, then," snapped his brother. "Bah, I tell you what I will do. I will not lend you two hundred dollars, now or any time; but I will give you one hundred dollars, on the understanding that you never seek to borrow from me again."

Jacob really needed that two hundred dollars, and it was entirely true that his lack of it was no fault of his own. His business, and with it his commitments, had grown out of all proportion to his limited means. He had been obliged to incur debts in order to seize profits. But he couldn't afford Prime's charges, and he knew that when Heinrich's voice acquired a certain edge there was no arguing with his usually good-natured, but always pugnacious and opinionated, brother. Heinrich's trouble was lack of imagination, of that quality of vision which leads a conservative, sound-thinking man to take chances. And that was why Heinrich died a successful butcher, worth half a million dollars, and Jacob—— But we are going too fast.

Having gulped down the unpleasantness of his situation, Jacob cogitated swiftly, and fell back upon his usual final recourse.

"I'll talk to Sarah," he said. "Perhaps she can see a way for us. But I really need that extra hundred, Heinrich. If you—"

"A hundred I give you. That's all. A man who goes too fast ends in the Bridewell."

The law of New York, like the law of all countries at that time, provided for the imprisonment of debtors, and Jacob shuddered at the mere suggestion.

"I'll come back tomorrow," he said, and hastened home to Queen Street, where Sarah was nursing Magdalen, their firstborn, and contriving to vary housekeeping with tending the shop.

I can't pretend to know what device she suggested, but at all events, the two of them managed to conjure up the odd hundred by the ensuing morning, and Jacob accepted Heinrich's gift on the terms stipulated. It had seemed an unfair, a heartless, proposition, when he first heard it; but after a

talk with Sarah and a night's sleep, he was disposed to adopt his brother's philosophy. A young man in his position simply couldn't afford to over-extend himself. He must adjust his affairs so that he could meet his commitments by the use of customary credits. And so strongly did he come to feel on this point that he never borrowed money again—until the day arrived when his business had swollen to such a size that loans were a safe and economic factor in it.

It must appear from this incident that Sarah was more than ever a partner with her husband. Shoulder to shoulder, they worked and struggled, scrimped and saved. But you needn't pity them. They found happiness in their toil. They were as happy in their two rooms in the Widow Todd's house as they were ever to be—although they were of the few couples, who climb from poverty to riches, and who are able to retain touch with the realities of life. It never bothered Sarah that she was without a waking moment to herself. If there wasn't housework to be done or a baby to tend or a customer to serve, there were packs of fur to sort and rearrange, pelts to be cured or beaten. All the light work, if there is such a thing, she did—and that meant all the work, when he was absent on one of his trading trips, which consumed about half the year.

She had an excellent eye for furs, a better one than he had, he was used to saying; and he was always willing to accept her judgment of values, as he was, likewise, amenable to her advice. She wasn't at all a lovely woman, and labor and constant child-bearing soon robbed her of youth's freshness; but she retained that bloom, the inexplicable aura, which is distinctive of the woman beloved. I doubt if she would have exchanged her life, with its privations and wrenching toil, for any other existence. For she possessed the satisfaction of accomplishment. Whatever she attempted wasn't done in vain. She had set out to help her husband—and she did. She strove for their children—and she raised the five who survived of the seven she bore to heights she could never have imagined in this stark period of unyielding effort.

A truly great figure, who had as much to do as Jacob with the foundation of the Astor power. Like her mother, in that she wasn't disposed to exaggerate the advantage of possessing good blood. Hard-headed, practical, she took for granted that a cousin of the Brevoorts, who happened to be poor, was as obligated to work as pretty Dorothy Pessenger, Heinrich's "pink of der Powery"—and perhaps because of her blood, perhaps because of her practicality, she made very much more of herself than did pretty Dorothy. I like to think of her, trotting from front room to back in the Queen Street house, comforting a baby with colic, waiting on a petulant customer, answering a merchant's inquiry—"I'm sorry, sir. Mr. Astor won't be home

from Canada before the month's out. But if 'tis that package of otter skins—Yes, sir, I have them ready for you. The price will be——"

II

The earlier years of the Astors' venture were starred with failures and disappointments, but in speaking of these afterward they were accustomed to remark that they never had been discouraged. I see no reason why they should have been. Possibly the progress they were making seemed slow at the time, but expressed in cold figures, either of time or of dollars and cents, it was as inevitable as taxes. Their set-backs were transitory; their achievements were real and continuous. Within two years and a half of the first card in the *New York Packet*, Jacob was able to advertise in the same medium, January 10, 1789:

John Jacob Astor
At No. 81 Queen Street,
Next door but one to the Friends' Meeting House,
Has for sale an assortment of
Piano Fortes of the Newest Construction,
made by the best makers in London, which
he will sell at reasonable terms.
He gives cash for all kinds of Furs
And has for sale a quantity of Canada
Beavers and Beavering Coating, Raccoon Skins,
and Raccoon Blankets, Muskrat Skins, etc., etc.

The musical instrument trade is still emphasized, but the fur trade evidently is coming to the front—a foreshadowing of Jacob's decision several years hence to retire from the instrument business, and make over his connections with Astor & Broadwood and other manufacturers to Michael Paff, who entered business as his successor, and was a famous gossip and man-about-town for a generation or so.

In 1789 Jacob was also able to make his first real estate investment: two lots on the Bowery Lane, which he purchased for £250 (equivalent to $625) "current money of the State of New York." He paid cash, and Heinrich was witness to the deed. It is not without significance that this inauguration of the Astor holdings occurred in the year in which George Washington entered upon his duties as first President of the United States. Jacob, as I shall show presently, while, in the ordinary sense of the term, a good citizen—he became one as soon as he could—was never a good American; but his

prosperity was bound up with the national fortunes. The German peasant boy, who had landed at Baltimore with twenty-five dollars, when the federated Colonies were just beginning to bicker over what form of Government should replace that which they had cast off, mounted step by step the ladder of wealth and fame, precisely as the thirteen constituent units of the Republic drew closer together, and expanded under the relentless urge of circumstance. If he had realized this more clearly, if there had burned in his soul a hot flame of patriotism, his wealth, vast as it should become, must have been infinitely greater. But probably this is asking too much. Your trafficker in commerce seldom, if ever, is granted the statesman's mind.

In less than a year after his investment in the Bowery, Jacob had money to spare to purchase a house and lot at No. 40 Little Dock (now part of Water) Street, and at this address makes his first appearance in the City Directory: "Astor, J. J., Fur Trader." The music business, although not yet discarded, had become entirely secondary by this date. Indeed, he had purchased the house in Little Dock Street to provide room for his expanding fur business—and in part, at least, for his growing family; two children, apparently, had been born in the pair of rooms in Queen Street, and there was prospect of another. Very likely he heard of the house in Little Dock Street through a hatter named Cooper, who dwelt not far from No. 40, and was a good customer of his. Cooper had a small son named Peter, who afterward had some business relations with Astor, but at this date was occupied in pulling the long hairs out of the rabbitskins, which his father employed in making the cheaper grades of hats.

Obviously, the pressure on Jacob and Sarah was easing somewhat. But they were as stinting of themselves as ever. They took no heed to luxuries or indulgences. They had no social life. Most of the rooms in their new house were used for the storage of the cumbersome packs of fur, which were sent to Jacob, now, by hunters and storekeepers acting as his agents in the less settled districts. Already, he was building in embryo the organization, which, a few years hence, should carry his name across the continent and make him the most famous merchant of the period. And building such an organization, laying the foundations for a great business, was expensive. All the money that came in, and that wasn't necessary to keep body and soul together and care for the children, was diverted to the nourishment of the machine which had produced it. Jacob no longer tramped the forest trails, pack on back. That would be a waste of time. He traveled by wagon, picking up peltry at convenient points where the trappers who dealt with him either left their catches or met him. But this didn't necessarily mean that his journeys were free from danger. The Wadsworth who was Squire of Geneseo in the last decade of the eighteenth century liked to recount how he met Trader Astor in

difficulties on the bounds of his domain. Jacob's wagon had bogged down in a swampy bit of road, a small keg of gold, representing his capital of the moment, had rolled over the tailpiece and disappeared in a patch of quicksand, which had likewise devoured the frantic horses, and Jacob himself had struggled clear with no more than his axe. What most impressed the worthy Squire, however, was the fur trader's imperturbability in face of such a disaster. Jacob's attitude was that the worst had happened. Very well, forget it and start afresh. After all, it was better to lose a keg of gold in a quicksand, and wipe the slate clean, than to commit yourself to Nathaniel Prime for interminable years at a mounting rate of interest and commissions, bonuses, and penalties.

He continued to visit Montreal every year. His trade from Canada direct to London was at least as important as the trade he conducted through New York. A friendly soul, he had been fortunate enough—or sufficiently far-seeing—to strike up an acquaintance in Montreal with a fur trader named Alexander Henry, a man of some education, endowed with considerable powers of observation, who left a record of his experiences, "Travels & Adventures in Canada & the Indian Territories," which is an accurate source of information on the trade. Through Henry he met other prominent traders, and was enabled to fortify himself in a position which I have already described as questionable, but which became more assured from year to year.

The demand for furs was undiminished, and now that there was peace, and that the nearer Indian tribes were fairly friendly, so far as the Canadians were concerned, furs poured into Montreal.

For instance, in 1793, the Northwest Company of Canada shipped 106,000 beaver, 2,100 bear, 1,500 fox, 400 kit fox, 16,000 muskrat, 32,000 marten, 1,800 mink, 6,000 lynx, 6,000 wolverine, 1,600 fisher, 100 raccoon, 1,200 dressed deer, 700 elk, and 550 buffalo skins. This company operated almost entirely in the country bordering the Great Lakes; it was a determined opponent to American attempts to invade its territories, now and in the future. But its managers seem never to have realized that in allowing Astor, first, to embark upon the trade in Montreal, and second, actually to push west with its brigades into the forbidden lands, it was preparing the way for an onslaught which must drive it to the wall.

Why he was ever permitted to go is difficult to determine. Possibly, it was his continental personality, his foreign manner and broken speech, which differentiated him from the hated Yankees. Possibly, Henry and other Canadian friends contributed to the result. Certainly, he was a winning fellow when he wished to be, of a pleasantly virile personality, rugged in physique, hardy, a good talker, and popular for his gift of music, always

welcome at any campfire. His features had begun to settle into the cast which was to become familiar to New Yorkers of the next half-century. It was a strong face, as his contemporaries testified, clean-shaven, the hair straight and long and fair, the eyes "deeper set than Webster's," the nose large and high-arched, the jaw square and heavy, the mouth firm. The head, a conqueror's head, firmly set on a thick neck.

Whatever the reason for the favor shown him, he was no longer content to visit Montreal, and purchase his furs at second hand. He started North earlier, in time to connect with the jovial brigades that left for Grand Portage as soon as the ice was out, and took his place in one of the immense canoes of four tons burthen, which composed the Spring fleet, each carrying, besides its crew of eight or ten men—"Pork-eaters" in the parlance of the frontier—sixty-five ninety-pound packs of trade-goods, six hundred pounds of biscuit, two hundred pounds of pork, three bushels of peas, two oilcloths to cover the cargo, a sail, an axe, a towing-line, a kettle and a sponge to bail with, since the bark hull of the monstrous craft was too delicate to permit the use of any more substantial utensil.

One of these canoes, or a part of its cargo-space, would be hired by Jacob, who already had arranged to import direct from London whatever trade-goods he required—coarse cloth, milled blankets, linen and coarse sheeting, threads and twine, hardware, arms, ammunition, cutlery, ironmongery, brass and copper kettles, silk and cotton handkerchiefs, hats, shoes, stockings, blue beads, calicoes, cottons, and strangest of all, penny prints made in England for the amusement of children, which were in demand amongst the savages as talismans against evil. He also fetched with him from New York a quantity of wampum, which he bought by the bushel from the Dutch of Communipaw, in New Jersey, as well as from the Long Island Indians, who dwelt along the Great South Bay and were experts at cutting, polishing and boring the periwinkle, clam and oyster shells of which it was made. Wampum had an established value, and was used as currency by the rural Dutch, no less than by the Indians. Six beads of white or three beads of black were equal to one English penny; a string six feet long was worth four guilders, or $1.50—and the six feet were measured by the distance between a man's arms outstretched, always the tallest, longest-limbed man procurable. The inland tribes especially prized wampum because of its rareness with them. Jacob found it one of the best, and cheapest, means of barter available.

From Montreal to Grand Portage was eighteen hundred miles, and the canoes of the fur fleet might make as much as six miles an hour in good weather; but they had only six inches clearance when loaded, and the least storm on the open lakes drove them to the beach. The men who composed

the crews, white men and half-breeds, were mostly French Canadians, dark, swaggering, hard-living wastrels, almost as difficult to manage as the proud savages of the tribes below the Lakes, who were still jealous of the white man's intrusion, and should not cease to be a menace to the settlers seeping down the Ohio until after Tecumseh's confederacy was crushed by William Henry Harrison at Tippecanoe in 1811—or, as a matter of fact, until after the conclusion of the War of 1812 convinced the Western tribes that the British could not help them regain their lost lands between the Lakes and the Ohio.

The trader who dealt with the *voyageurs* and their wilder brethren, the *couriers des bois*, or trappers, who dwelt with the outlying savages, sometimes beyond the Mississippi, must possess tact and firmness. There was a constant need of rough diplomacy, the knowledge when to say no, with a curse to emphasize it, and when to interpose a jest or turn an ugly threat with a reasonable counter-offer. The Indians, too, required deft handling. They must not be hurried in driving a bargain, and as I have said before, they must always be sent away with the impression that they had bested the white man. Brawls were frequent, and a brawl meant bared knives or tomahawks, victims screaming on the ground under the pressure of gouging thumbs.

Death was an incident to such men, and their manners were colored by a lifetime of association with Sacs and Foxes, Winnebagoes and Pottawotomies, Shawnees and Hurons. They labored only when they must, like the Indians; they took no thought to what lay ahead; they drank themselves into a stupor whenever the opportunity offered; they were as touchy as children, and as thoughtless, hated whoever chanced to incommode them, took scalps with a blithe zest and were as superstitious and as ignorant as their red neighbors, their religion a quaint jumble of depraved Christianity and Indian folklore. But with all their vices and shortcomings they were the advance-guard of the white race in the penetration of the continent. They, and men like them, were the precursors of Daniel Boone, Kit Carson, Jim Bridger, and all the glorious company of trapper-adventurers, who made known the wonders of the West and established a definite grip upon a domain which had been only legendary until they explored it.

From these wide-wandering forest runners Jacob heard stories of rivers and teeming prairies and mountain-ranges which could be found on no map of that day; and when, after days of paddling, the fur fleet reached Sault Ste. Marie, and came to rest for a week, he had confirmation of these stories from the rich free-traders, who dwelt by the Straits—John Johnson, the Irish husband of White Fisher, daughter of a chief; and George and Charles Ermatinger, sons of a Swiss merchant, who were delighted to hear their

German speech, and pressed Jacob to stay with them a while. Why not? They had ample stores of peltry for trade, and would secure him anything he desired. He might, if he chose, fare afield with some of their Indians, trade for himself with the near-by tribes.

He was tempted, for the journey had been a weary one, and the stage ahead was more dangerous. Also, the Ermatingers and Johnson lived in luxury, considering the leagues of wilderness which separated them from the more primitive civilization of the frontier. But when his new friends supported the tales of the forest runners he would not relinquish his intention to continue with the fleet. He felt already the itch for opening up this unknown country, which should dominate him all his life and compel him, in spite of certain blindnesses of conception, to be perhaps the most potent individual factor in the acquisition and settlement of the trans-Mississippi West. And he wanted, as a business man, to learn this country, to be in a position to estimate its resources. So he shoved off with the diminished fleet —for some of the canoes tarried to ferry back to Montreal the fur take of the Straits—and waved a dripping paddle in farewell to the kindly Swiss.

On, then, day after day, around the shores of Lake Superior to Grand Portage, with its imposing fort, wharves, and several trading-posts, at the terminus of a road, which led ten miles across country to Pigeon River, down which came the canoes of questing savages or *couriers des bois*, eager for the delights of this outermost outpost of civilization after the hardships of the winter. Here there was a rude, but bounteous, hospitality. Here, those hearty, loud-mouthed, feudal-minded gentry, the "Lords of the Lakes and Forests," dwelt in semi-royal pomp, supplied with choice wines and liquors, cherished by harems of Indian wives, lording it more or less successfully over the red minions, who hated them, but must trade for the precious rifles and ammunition, which were becoming as necessary to the Indian as the white man.

The *Seigneurs* of the Kingdom of Fur seem to have taken a fancy to the young German trader. Was it his gift at tootling sentimental tunes? Or the intangible quality of worth, which was making friends for him so rapidly amongst the merchants of New York? Whatever the reason, he was bidden to the festal boards, talked to openly and frankly, suffered to meet and interrogate the shambling, lank-haired forest runners, whose restless eyes flickered continually this way and that in their copper-brown faces, who jumped lithely at a furtive step behind them. Here were men to satisfy Jacob's curiosity! Men who told him of the wealth of beaver and otter on the Red River of the North, who had seen the yellow Missouri in spate, who spoke haltingly of what they called the Shining Mountains, hulking across the Western sky, propping the clouds upon their dazzling peaks. How far? A

shrug. It might be so many pipes—vague reckoning, at best. In your forest runner's lingo, a pipe was a league, three miles; but very few men, Jacob knew from experience, nursed a load of tobacco longer than two miles, some not so far.

However, he was fascinated by the slow-drawled stories of these men, who were separated so often from their own kind that they had lost the faculty of ready speech. They confirmed him in the opinion that the known fur countries were backed by others infinitely richer. The problem of the future, as he saw it, was to establish the means of reaching out, farther and farther, into the dim regions of the West. The man who pushed farthest and fastest would be the man to control the trade, and although he never voiced the thought to his hosts, he suspected that in the course of years the Canadians' initial advantage would be neutralized by the more direct routes open to the Americans and the richer markets which could be developed in the cities of the Atlantic coast.

So, all summer, at the crude banquets in the trading-posts, the carousels on the open prairie, where white man, red man, and half-breed drank and boasted and quarreled together in a mental atmosphere like nothing so much as the ale-bouts of a group of Viking chiefs, all summer, then, Jacob gathered information with his furs. Both came cheap. He paid much less for the peltry here at Grand Portage than he had in Montreal, and he was able to select a better quality. It was a trip worthwhile. When he was homesick, when he thought of Sarah plodding up and downstairs in Little Dock Street, probably one of the babies whining with "summer complaint," he found comfort in the reflection that there'd be more money to spend next year. He missed Sarah a great deal. He was, all his life, a man whose chief recreation was his family, who loved children very genuinely and appreciated with a certain taut sincerity the true measure of the debt of gratitude he owed his wife. But fortunately for him the phlegmatic temperament inherent in his racial strain helped him to curb depression, so that no matter how his heart ached, he could manage to sing a *Volkslieder* or tootle "*Ein Feste Burg*" for some ochre-streaked Dakotah chief, who must be impressed with the white man's omniscience.

Well, it was worth it all. He began to feel that he was gaining a true perception of this vast, inchoate America, and sometimes, sitting at table with the *Seigneurs* and their red guests, or listening to the naïve boasts of an Ojibway half-breed, who shared red world and white and belonged to neither, he would chuckle absentmindedly as he recalled the boyish dreams that Heinrich's brash letters had evoked in Waldorf. Waldorf! Incredibly remote, now—more remote than those half-mythical Shining Mountains of which the forest runners spoke. And that Heinrich—Ach, he knew nothing

of the real America, this interminable land of forest and plain, lake and mountain. All Heinrich knew was New York, as far as White Plains. Nothing! This America *he* knew might contain all of Europe. Here, in this very wilderness someday, should rise cities, the smoke of farm-chimneys threading them together. But in the meantime there was fur. And such fur! The harsher winters of the Northwest insured richer pelts, yet they cost even less than the scrawny hides the Iroquois hunters haggled over.

For a common musket he could get ten prime beaver pelts. For a pound of gunpowder, two pelts; for four pounds of shot, one pelt; for a hatchet, one pelt; for six small knives, one pelt; for a pound of glass beads, two pelts; for a cloth coat, six pelts; for a petticoat, five pelts; for a pound of cheap snuff, one pelt; for a stroud blanket, ten pelts; for a white blanket, eight pelts; for a foot length of Spencer's black, twist tobacco, especially craved by the savages, one pelt; for a bottle of rum, two pelts. And so on. The cheapest commodities, awls, flints, steels, toys, knickknacks the New York shops couldn't sell, would turn out to be worth more than their weight in gold. He must break into this field, he decided. Enough, for the present, to have the privilege of participating in the trade through Montreal, but the time must come when his own brigades, based from New York, should drive along the southern shores of the Lakes, and reap an independent harvest.

III

At the conclusion of the summer rendezvous Jacob fared eastward with the returning Northwestern brigades. In Montreal he arranged to ship his purchases to London, wrote his agents there ordering additional trade-goods for the coming season, and bidding good-by to Henry and the rest of his boisterous friends, embarked alone for his overland journey to New York. First and last, I suppose he'd travel more than 5,000 miles in the course of these summers, and even his iron muscles must have been weary as he plied his paddle in warm weather and wet or labored under canoe and pack across the portages. He wasn't finished with his task by any means, for he must stop off at intervals along the way to pick up packs of furs collected by his agents or ascertain what they had forwarded to New York for him in past months. For example, there would be Peter Smith at Utica. Peter had a son who should be famous, Gerrit. He was an occasional partner of Astor, the trading-store he ran, in a corner of his house at the forest crossroads where a city was to spawn, serving as a convenient assembly point for the furs collected by the Indians of the Mohawk Valley.

But at long last the Dutch-gabled houseroofs of Albany would rear above the tree-tops, and Jacob might sigh contentedly and consign himself

and such spoil as he had acquired to a river-sloop for the voyage down the Hudson. He could never tell how long this voyage would take, five days probably, at the least, and the interest the other passengers showed in the adventures of one so far-traveled couldn't stifle the growing impatience for a sight of Sarah and the children. All these months he had never heard from them—so far as he knew, they might be dead. New York was ravaged every summer by epidemics which filled the cemeteries with victims of wrong dieting and limited medical skill. And more than once ill tidings met him at the door.

I wonder whether the saddest tragedy of his life—and Sarah's—happened during one of these unavoidable absences: the accident which made his oldest son, John Jacob, 3rd, an idiot. Whenever he came home his first question would be: "How is der poy?" And Sarah knew whom he meant—not William Backhouse, the grubby urchin crawling on the floor, but the vacant-eyed creature kept in a room upstairs. And the tears would dew her cheeks as she answered invariably: "Just the same, Jacob." Neither of them ever quite relinquished hope that some miracle of science or nature would retrieve the unfortunate's normality, and in the most touching clause of his will Jacob stipulated that the income of $10,000 provided for the maintenance of his namesake should be increased to $100,000 in the event of a restoration of sanity—this after a lapse of fifty years.

But they were a sensible couple, who realized they had much to be thankful for in the rest of their offspring, a sturdy, upstanding brood. Besides William, named for a merchant who had befriended them in this striving time, Dorothea was born in Little Dock Street, and a fifth, Eliza, was to come after they had removed to a more fashionable neighborhood. Two others, as I have said, died in infancy, victims of those devastating fevers which swept the insanitary city in the hot months. Seldom a year passed that Sarah wasn't either bearing or nursing a child in the midst of her innumerable tasks, but it would never have occurred to her to protest what she regarded as an inevitable—and on the whole, welcome—consequence of matrimony.

Proud Sarah! All the toil and heartache, all the waiting and longing, seemed worthwhile when her Jacob stumped up the street, pushing a handcart laden with the cargo he had brought down-river from Albany. They'd sit atop of the hair-speckled table on which the furs were beaten to dislodge the moths, their arms around each other—and first Jacob would tell of the immensity of the inland seas he'd traversed and the richness of the West and the splendid furs he'd shipped to London—and then she'd tell how Captain Cooper's hat business was growing, and he must have two hundred more prime beaver skins—and break off to recite an anecdote of Magdalen's

helpfulness—and be reminded that Mr. Backhouse and Mr. Browne had asked for him, and that horrid Mr. Prime—and Heinrich had another assistant in the stall in the Fly Market, but no, Dorothy hadn't a baby yet, probably never would have one, now—and he'd whisper in her ear, and she'd giggle, and hug him closer. They couldn't work hard all the time or be forever serious, could they?

Well, the hardest years were practically over for them. In 1794, Jay's Treaty with England was signed, and although the illustrious Chief Justice of the Supreme Court had never heard of so humble a person as a German-American fur trader named Astor, the effects of the Treaty were more important for him, perhaps, than for any other individual. Under its terms, the British reluctantly evacuated the line of military posts, by means of which they had successfully barred the Americans from the Great Lakes and the territory immediately south of them, and the fur countries of the West were laid open for his exploitation, either through Montreal or New York.

The Treaty couldn't have come at a better time for Astor's interests. He had built up his business to a point where he was justified in devoting more of his time to his managerial responsibilities; he had established a chain of agents, which he was able, by reason of his many contacts with frontiersmen, to expand immediately; and his connections at Montreal, Sault Ste. Marie, and Grand Portage permitted him to obtain all the furs he could handle at the moment from the Canadian field. He didn't, of course, abandon altogether his direct trade from Montreal to London. There were certain obvious advantages in it, the saving in transportation costs, the broadening of his purchasing field and the conciliation of those arrant Britishers, who disliked to deal with the United States; but he pegged away at the development of a system of posts, agents, and transportation brigades between New York and the far West, so that in the long run he could dispense with Montreal as a shipping point.

His purpose in this was economic rather than patriotic, I gather. The outstanding defect in his character was the element of impersonality which entered into all his business enterprises. Cautious, cold-blooded, essentially phlegmatic, he measured any deal by the safe profits he could foresee. If he couldn't foresee safe profits, he wasn't interested. And it didn't seem good business to him to adopt a policy for national or patriotic reasons, regardless of the stake in view. A strange blind spot. Except for it, he had in him the true instincts of the Empire-builder. Indeed, and almost in spite of himself, he *was* an Empire-builder—in a sense, the greatest Empire-builder the country ever knew. But he muffed his full opportunity because he measured it in strict terms of dollars and cents, electing to sink his investments in the narrow compass of Manhattan instead of the untamed lands his trappers won

for the Republic. Had he done otherwise, his descendants might not have inherited so many millions, although even that is questionable; but surely, his statue would have been the favorite monument of the West, and probably, the Pacific would have laved the shores of a State named Astoria.

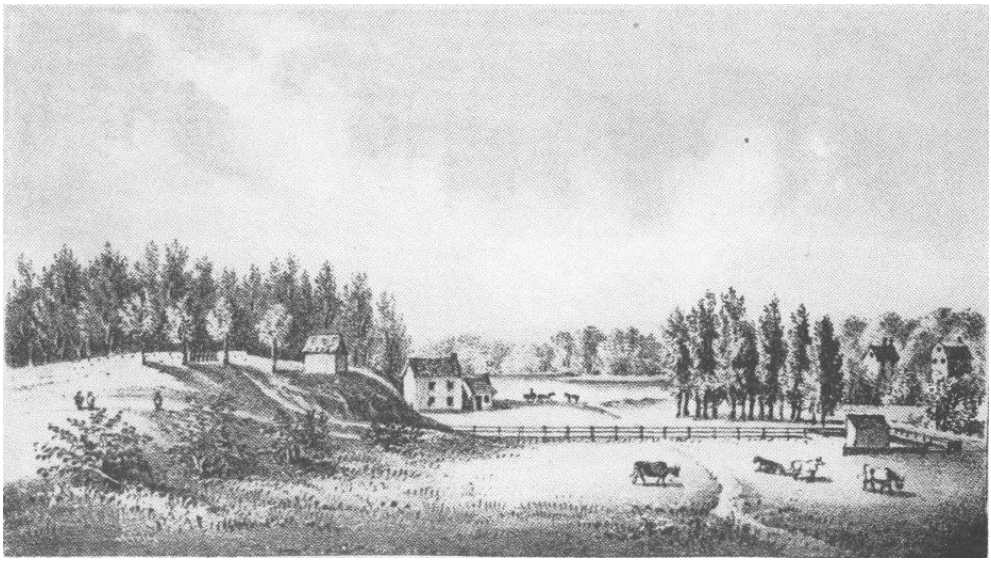
None of which debatable eventualities could have been apparent to him in 1794. What was apparent was that the country was fairly launched as a sovereign entirety, and that, after the years of uncertainty and fumbling endeavor succeeding the Revolution, a period of prosperity was at hand. Two separate causes made for this: the natural growth and evolution of the country, itself, encouraged by the realization of a permanent government, and the series of wars, consequent upon the French Revolution, which should rack Europe for the ensuing twenty years and divert to American hands an abnormal share of world commerce.

New York, itself, mirrored the nation's situation. By the middle '90's, while still tagging Philadelphia, the national capital, its population had swollen to 40,000, and it was commencing to dribble across Warren Street into the Lispenard Meadows. People complained of the overcrowding, which was really unhealthy, and the influx of immigrants, mainly refugees from Haiti, French folk and people of color, driven out by the negro insurrection—but one result of this latter phenomenon was a supply of excellent servants to augment the slaves, who constituted a recognizable strata of the city's life for a generation to come. Business was booming. The overseas trade was on the verge of the tremendous leap forward, which should frighten Britain into promulgating the series of Orders in Council and similar obnoxious measures, designed to restrict American commerce, which, in turn, should help to drive the two nations into a second war, advantageous to neither. But as yet American shipping hadn't attained the proportions it was to reach within a very few years, when the sails of our merchant fleet whitened every sea, and the Starry Banner was familiar from St. Petersburg to Canton. At this time only some hundred vessels plied from the city, of which number forty were square-riggers, averaging not over 110 tons, the largest of 250 tons, while the remainder were schooners and sloops in the coasting or West India trade.

Keeping step with the trend of affairs, Jacob moved his residence and shop from Little Dock Street to more pretentious quarters at 149 Broadway, thus ranging himself with the vandals who were enraging Philip Hone and other merchants of birth and property by their profanation of what had been the city's most fashionable thoroughfare. Broadway was doomed. Its stately tulips and maples, which had seemed so gracious to the emigrant-boy, would outlast his era, casting their shadows across cobbles jarred by an endless procession of omnibuses; many distinguished citizens, himself not the least

amongst them, would persist in clinging to its dusty curb. But genuinely smart people moved over to upper Pearl Street or Greenwich Street or into the newer streets cut through the meadows and fields beyond Warren Street. Wall Street, alas, wasn't what it had been either, with bankers and shippers buying up every house or lot offered for sale. Well might the elder generation wag their heads, and grumble that the city was ruined. An opinion Jacob rejected with guttural contempt—*Dumkopf!* he grunted of such.

And a "*Dumkopf!*" from him meant something nowadays. He was highly respected by the leading merchants, known as a young man who did not need to seek credit to meet his obligations. Even Heinrich had stopped patronizing him, and instead, bragged to customers across the counter of the stall in the Fly Market of "mein leeddle brudder, Yakob," and the part he, Heinrich, had played in persuading him to come to America. Well-off as Heinrich was, Jacob was wealthier, his wealth increasing at a rate only he and Sarah knew. The string of trading-posts and agencies in the West lengthened from year to year, and the fur packs thudded in from the Albany sloops at a rate, which presently required Jacob to charter all the cargo-room of a ship for his London consignment.



Lith. by Geo. Hayward, 177 Pearl St. N.Y.
for D. T. Valentine's Manual, for 1860.

LISPENARD'S MEADOWS.

Taken from the site of the present St. Nicholas Hotel, Broadway, N.Y.
Drawn by A. Anderson 1785— By the Middle '90's New York Was Commencing to Dribble Across Warren Street Into the Lispenard Meadows

It was no accident that the master of this ship was the same John Whettin, who, as a mate, had advised Jacob which was the most comfortable craft to book passage in from London in November, '84. Jacob never forgot this favor, and the friendship which sprang from it persisted as long as the two men lived.

The emigrant-boy was thriving. People pointed to him in the street —"That's Astor, the fur trader. 'Ships more than all the rest put together." He was a Master Mason in Holland Lodge, No. 8, and a trustee of the German Reformed Church, the Consistory of which often met at his home. He and Sarah had servants to wait upon them, and while they lived very simply, they were able to enjoy occasional diversions—the theater, of which Jacob, especially, was very fond, and music, which he liked still more. But it was the exception for them to go out in the evening. He preferred to sit home, with a pipe and a mug of beer and a friend over a game of checkers, or perhaps, read in his Bible or Doddridge's "Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul," or, if it wasn't Sunday, *Silliman's Journal*, the organ of the fur trade. Speaking generally, he was as yet no reader, although he had the traditional German respect for knowledge and for men who possessed it.

He was frugal in his habits, too. By the end of the century he was reputed to be worth two hundred and fifty thousand dollars, which was a large fortune for those days; but the only changes in his method of living were brought about by consideration of his family's comfort and his own health. He gave up the house at 149 Broadway, moved his business to 71 Liberty Street, and established Sarah and the children in a very handsome, commodious residence at 223 Broadway, above Vesey Street.

It was one of a row of half a dozen, all with open porches, fronted by massive pillars. "The best people" still dwelt in this row, but what pleased the Astor tribe was the plain satisfaction of possessing a home. No longer must they smell the animal odor of raw fur whenever they were indoors, and mingle with customers, draymen, and business callers in the hall. There was ample room for all the five children, and the unfortunate son had the privacy his condition demanded.

Jacob, himself, indulged in the luxury of a saddle horse. Accustomed as he had been to the vigorous routine of the forest runner, he felt the need of outdoor exercise, and very sensibly decided to leave business in the middle of the afternoon—he was in his office every morning at dawn—and after an early dinner, ride out the Bowery, lined by rows of quaint, low-roofed, old Dutch houses, covered with flowers in summer, or it might be, through the lane that was to be Bleecker Street, where wild roses and blackberries stirred in the soft wind. Then, ahead of him, he had the choice of various bypaths across the Stuyvesant meadows and the thickets, swamps, and farms

stretching northwards beyond Greenwich Village to the Harlem hills. Not time wasted, these rides. He cherished an inflexible aversion to what he termed stock-gambling—or any form of speculation, for that matter—so most of his spare capital went into real estate, and his conception of the New York of the future was acquired in cantering the rough tracks which penetrated the little city's belt of wastelands.

The forest runner had become a man of affairs, laying away bramble-choked blocks of acres to mature into building-sites as less visionary citizens laid away pipes of port or madeira. A far cry from the emigrant-boy, trudging up Broadway, with his seven flutes under his arm.

BOOK THREE

FUR AND TEA

FUR AND TEA

I

The final decade of the eighteenth century bustled into the past with a resounding crash of values and scrapping of outworn ideas. This preposterous thing called Liberty, which Pastor Steiner had doubted, was gnawing like a maggot at the underpinnings of autocracy and hereditary privilege. If it was not precisely true that "all men are created equal," none-the-less advanced thinkers persisted in asserting the right of all men to an equal opportunity. That is, no man should be restrained from attempting to advance himself through any accident of birth or economic limitation; but not even the wildly radical United States conceded political rights to the mob. Manhood suffrage was unthought of. Property qualifications hedged the vote with jealous safe-guards, and in New York would be maintained until 1822. There was, too, in America, a recognized upper class, an aristocratical tradition, which was the backbone of the Federalist Party and should contrive to resist the assaults of the frontier Democracy for another generation.

Much could be said for this aristocratical tradition. It leant a mellowness to contemporary life, an easy dignity, a fine savor of manners, which temporarily curbed and softened the uncouth tendencies of the restless commonalty, whose idol was Jefferson—himself an aristocrat of aristocrats—and who were grasping, quite naturally, for a share in a government, which, in spite of all the fine phraseology of the Declaration of Independence, was as much oligarchic as democratic. The aristocrats, mercantile as a class in the North, provided the support, which enabled the country to withstand the storms and crises of the years succeeding the Revolution: the bickers which rent the Provisional Government, the issue of confederation or nonconfederation, the struggles in the Constitutional Convention, the fight to secure the necessary ratifications of the Constitution after it was adopted, the troubles of Washington's two Administrations—Shay's Rebellion, the Whiskey Rebellion, the violent controversy over the question of backing revolutionary France against Britain.

But say what you may for the aristocratical tradition, it had had its day. It stood for the old order, and manifestly, any order called the old order is doomed, for that is a confession that new ideas are abroad—and when did new ideas ever fail to supplant the old? Allowing, to be sure, for the fact that what are called new ideas frequently are old ideas redressed in a new verbiage, perhaps even a shoddy verbiage—which, again, has nothing to do with the major argument. No, the aristocratical tradition in America was

reaching the end of its tether, although it had a deal of sterling service yet to give, should, for one thing, operate to check the over-enthusiasm of the Democrats, who were all for an alliance with the French against the whole of Europe. An instance of the danger of logical reasoning.

Hadn't our own Revolution inculcated the French with the spirit to cast off the shackles of the Bourbons? Any American of the 1790s would have answered: yes. Very well, then. Weren't we responsible for this striking tribute to our own political sagacity and independence? We-ee-ell, perhaps—not so unanimous on this point. And if we were responsible, didn't it stand to reason that we, as an honorable nation, should lend our strength to the encouragement of doctrines we had fathered? More especially, when the chief enemy of this offspring of the yeasty visions given shape in Independence Hall was the same Britain that had endeavored to frustrate them at birth? Knotty questions, which brought factional brawling in their train, dividing public sentiment from Massachusetts to Georgia. Your Federalist, with his aristocratical tradition, was all for freedom in decency, but he repudiated Madame Guillotine and saw nothing praiseworthy in decapitating fat, stupid Louis and blonde, insipid Marie Antoinette. And he was much more prejudiced in favor of Britain, racially akin, than a pack of grinning, murdering, monkey-faced Mounseers—damned peasants, sir! Papists, by God, when they ain't worshippin' this Goddess of Reason. He firmly believed that Robespierre drank the blood of aristocrats, and Marat bathed in it. Napoleon, when he bobbed out of the smoke of the guns that blasted the last barricade, was equally anathema, an upstart, worse, an Italian upstart, later, an insult to the aristocratical tradition, in that he erected a tinsel monarchy of adventurers and place-buyers. But on this last point most of the Democrats agreed with the Federalists, for in their eyes the Corsican was as tainted as the Bourbons—or the Federalists—with the aristocratical virus, and however much they hated to be at one with their political enemies, they couldn't stomach Napoleonic France.

Up to this point the Federalists, the aristocratical tradition, had acted as balance-wheel to regulate the nation's sanity. But the Federalists spun off on a tangent, in their turn, developing an exaggerated, an unnatural, loyalty to Britain and the ancient connection with the mother country, which became the more confirmed as the transitory intellectual sympathy for France was dissipated. They condoned Britain's interference with American commerce, partly a result of the determination of American merchants to evade the blockade by means of which the British Admiralty attempted to shut off France and the countries subject to her from the world's trade, and partly a product of British jealousy of the increase of American shipping and consequent growth of American overseas trade. They became more and

more out of touch with informed public opinion, and in the War of 1812 made the crucial mistake of adopting an attitude of frank disloyalty.

As a political party, this ruined them. As an aristocratical tradition, they managed to linger on until the triumph of Andrew Jackson definitely put the frontier Democracy in the saddle, and drove gentility out of fashion in politics and business, if not in society. But while they lasted, they exerted an important influence upon American progress, on the whole, a healthful influence. It would have been a good thing, probably, if they had been able to exert their influence a few decades longer, particularly in business. We should have had less of the cut-throat, conscienceless, rowdy element, who dominated finance and industry throughout the middle years of the nineteenth century, and the country's economic evolution must have been proportionately sounder, if not so rapid. But such speculations are futile. It is idle to expect good judgment from the aristocratical tradition. It is as spontaneous and uncontrolled in its actions as the growth of a protoplasm, doing good, I dare say, by accident, and harm by misfortune.

I have gone to these lengths to analyze it because it was an essential factor in moulding the background of affairs in the years when John Jacob Astor was striking out from the path he knew into remote and dangerous fields. In New York City it was all-powerful in business, and what passed for society, and contested politics, at first, evenly, afterwards with the unflagging determination of a compact minority.[1] He, Jacob, was not born to this tradition, but of it. His German background and training had stamped its precepts on his brain, while a pronounced vein of personal egotism—almost an invariable characteristic of great men in all walks of life—made him desirous of utilizing it to emphasize the authority and prestige he acquired. He had very little, if any, democratic instinct, notwithstanding that only a democracy could have afforded him the opportunity he exploited; and he studied events rather with an eye to their possible use for his purposes than in curiosity as to their reaction upon the body of mankind. He was bigoted, self-assured, vain—in a peculiarly bland, childish fashion—opinionated, narrow-minded and entirely selfish, where his family was not concerned. Traits which became more and more confirmed as his confidence in himself increased. An arrant individualist. Conservative, distrustful of people in the mass.

In fine, the essence of the aristocratical tradition, this German peasant, who, whatever his vague ancestors may have been, was bred in the atmosphere of the slaughterhouse and until his middle years was ignorant of the niceties of life. As he forges ahead, clutching avariciously at every chance of wealth he encounters, you will see the tradition clamping tighter

its hold upon him. He was never working for the community, for the country. He had no sense of social obligation. He worked for John Jacob Astor—for the Astor name. Give him credit for that. Strictly speaking, the name came first. It must be a symbol of power, as trenchant a symbol as a coat-of-arms. And in fur, in tea, in real estate, wherever he cast his nets, he aimed to be supreme, autocratical. Above all, he loathed dividing his profits, and he would squeeze the last penny out of anyone dealing with him. But—and this is the vital clue to his character—he never knew the reverse side of the aristocratical tradition: the obligations of gentility, the warm courtesy, the kindly deference, the appraisal of money as a vehicle to a certain end, not the end, itself. He was never, in the finer sense of the word, a gentleman.

There is an amusing anecdote which suggests this aspect of his personality, as well as the lovableness which radiated from him in the family circle. After he had achieved prosperity, he brought over from Germany his sister Catherine, a bright, witty woman, never a respecter of persons. She had married George Ehninger, a distiller of cordials, who came with her, and resumed his business in New York, much to the disgust of Jacob, who, as a rising merchant, wasn't anxious to be known as brother-in-law of a distiller. Some such comment by the head of the family was repeated to Catherine, who stuck her nose in the air and announced to anyone who happened to be listening in Broadway:

"Humph! Yakob vas nodding vunce himself but a paker's poy, undt soldt preadt undt cake in der street."

A remark which upset him even more than the recollection of his brother-in-law's occupation. But the corollary to it is that he respected Catherine's independence, and refused to nourish resentment against her. Personally, he could be amazingly petty, and that was the side the world usually saw. There was another side, which was withheld from all except Sarah and the children and a handful of relations—who, incidentally, with the exceptions of Sarah and Catherine Ehninger, were as devoted to the aristocratical tradition as the chief of their clan. Good, hard-boiled Junkers, these Astors, you might infer, and contemplate more favorably the authenticity of that Astorga genealogy. But I wouldn't be too severe with them—or Germany. America has stimulated the aristocratical tradition in pants-makers from the ghetto of Bucharest.

I cannot resist quoting fully from "The Old Merchants of New York," Walter Barrett's disquisition on the mercantile aristocracy of the city as it existed during the first half of the Nineteenth Century and until the social upheavals following the Civil War. He has just the right touch of delightful snobbery and race consciousness—you find the identical feeling, for

instance, in the Sieur Geoffrey de Villehardouin's description of the robber barons who participated in the Fourth Crusade:

"There is an old aristocracy in this city, which is not generally understood. There is no class of society so difficult to approach or reach. This class makes no noise, no fuss, nor is it at all pretentious. If one has qualities and attributes that will place him at the firesides of the old set, he will there find all solid and substantial, but no gingerbread or mushroom work. The sideboard is deep shaded, because it is old solid mahogany. On it are real cut glasses, decanters, and solid silver salvers. The wines are old and pure. There are apples, cakes, cider, and hickory nuts. The habits of the olden time are kept up. The young man in this set courts the fair girl of the same level, as in the olden time. Origin causes no mark of distinction in this old society. It comprises all countries—old Knickerbocker families or those descended from the original Netherland settlers—from the old English families, who took part in the Revolution as Whigs—those who rose to distinction and political power under the American Constitution or during the war, as Generals, or before and during the war as signers of the Declaration of Independence, members of the Continental Congress, or framers of the Constitution.

"Among the Dutch names that claim rights among the old clique I allude to are found the Van Rensselaers, LeRoys, Schuylers, Stuyvesants, Beeckmans, Bleeckers, Strykers, Anthonys, Van Waggennens, Van Vleicks, Cregiers, Laurenses, Wyckoffs, Van Cliffs, Gouverneurs, Stenwycks, Janceys, DePeysters, Nevinses, Ruyters, Van Wycks, Hoffmans, Van Cortlandts, Provosts, Kipps, Verplancks, De Kays, Dyckmans, Vermilyeas, Bensons, Van Schaicks, De Forrests, Van Zandts, Brevoorts, Marvinses, Vances, Van Horns, etc.

"The English descendants and Puritan stock are mixed up with the old Dutch breed in forming the highest class of society, though not the most showy. Originally the set went to New England, and came straggling into New York City in the course of years. They pioneered in the excitement that led to the American Revolution and took an active part in the seven years war. There were such names as Kent, Jay, Alsop, Lawrence, Laight, Hicks, Phoenix, Post, Perit, Thurston, Jones, Wetmore, Hays, Woodward, Bard, Walton, Fleming, Delancy, Cruger, Marshall, Gibbs, Deming, Clarkson, Newbold, Fuller, Scott, Beach, Aspinwall, Curtiss, Waddington, Brooks, Gracie, Savage, Barclay, Goodhue, Grinnell, Ogden, Howland, Davis, Macy, Morton, Ray, Whitlock, Ward, King, Sands, and others. Another class of the old set are descendants of Huguenots who came here prior to the Revolution —Lorillard, Seguine, Masier, Delaplaine, Latourette, Law, De la Montagne, Jumel, Depau, De Rham, Pintard, Delevan, and Purdy.

"It was from these names the managers of the 'Bachelor Balls' were taken thirty years ago. Then the City Hotel, located on the block in Broadway above Trinity Yard, was the only headquarters of the pure, genuine aristocracy of which we speak."

While the above lists are substantially accurate and comprise a very fair digest of the swank families of ancient Gotham, "Barrett" lets his customary quota of errors slip in. Jumel was an émigré, who came over in 1798. The first De Rham, Henry C., arrived from Switzerland in 1806. The Barclays were British subjects, hereditary Consuls to the Crown. The list of families of English stock is as notable for names left out as for those included—for instance, the Hones, who are mentioned frequently in this book and of whom Philip, especially, was among the most distinguished leaders of society from the dawn of the century until his death in 1851; the Irvings, the Minturns, the Swords, the Moores—one of whom, Clement, wrote "The Night Before Christmas"; the Murrays, descendants of "Quaker" Murray, of Murray Hill, who owned one of the five coaches the town could boast on the eve of the Revolution; the Livingstons, the Lenoxes, the Goelets, the Griswolds, the Coopers, the Bloodgoods and the Costers.

Even of the Dutch he leaves out the Remsens, Rutgers, and Roosevelts, three sturdy clans that left their imprint upon city, state, and nation.

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[1] See note at end of chapter. [Transcriber's Note: It is not clear to what this refers.]

II

Toward the close of the eighteenth century Jacob found himself with a cellar full of extra fine pelts, unsalable in the American market in bulk. Packed carefully in barrels, under the immediate supervision either of Sarah or himself, they represented the cream of several seasons' collections, put aside with no very clear idea of what should be done with them, merely an anticipation of turning a profit in the future. Each time he counted over the lustrous contents of a barrel—mink, otter, silver-fox, marten, wolverine—he'd grumble to Sarah at the idle capital represented.

"Vot do we make of dem? Noddings!"

Sarah suggested the obvious solution: ship them to London for disposition. But at this time Jacob hadn't a regular agent in England, and was loath to commit such valuable furs to a dealer of which he wasn't sure. Finally, he determined to go himself. He'd get a better price than any dealer would, he argued, in addition to saving the dealer's commission and gaining

an opportunity to examine the London market and visit George Peter and his uncle. Sarah thought it an excellent plan. To tell the truth, she was worried about Jacob. He had evinced, in recent years, a tendency to restlessness when Spring came around. He'd leave his work in the shop suddenly, without rhyme or reason, and disappear for an hour or two, returning to talk with unaccustomed garrulity of the forest runners and the unknown lands beyond the Mississippi. And as summer dragged along he'd become irritable and snappish, which wasn't at all like him. So Sarah, wise wife, encouraged the London voyage. A man like her Jacob, she knew, needed new contacts to stimulate his energetic mind.

If Sarah approved, that was all he asked. He appointed her to manage the business in his absence, and took ship for London, apparently in the Spring of 1799—in the steerage! There is something pathetic about this instance of parsimoniousness. For parsimoniousness it was. He was well to do, nowise cramped for money. And he wasn't sufficient of a sentimentalist to think of repeating the sensations of the emigrant-boy of fifteen years past—to return as he had come. No, he was just saving money because saving money had become a habit with him, and he wasn't as yet used to the moderate degree of luxury which considerations of business, as much as his family's comfort, compelled him to adopt. A striking illustration of the perversion which often springs from exaggeration of the most laudable traits. Born to poverty, Jacob in youth had enforced upon himself the utmost care in all expenditures. Money was as his life-blood. He denied himself ordinary wants in order to acquire more of it, to be able to pay his bills without recourse to Heinrich or Nathaniel Prime. A dollar saved was more than a dollar earned. It represented an enlargement of the scope of his enterprise, and money invested was even more precious, for it constituted a guarantee against the specter of poverty always lurking in the background of his subconscious mind.

And what was the consequence of his rigid self-denial? A respect for money, which gradually became more than respect, as the instinct so carefully and honorably cultivated became increasingly dominant in his character. Parsimoniousness turned into acquisitiveness and acquisitiveness developed a passion for hoarding, and hoarding, once it was a confirmed habit, created the churlish penuriousness of the miser. Money! Everything was money. Nothing else counted or mattered. Nothing must be permitted to stand in the way of money, of procuring more money, of squeezing the utmost amount of interest out of the money already possessed, of guarding and preserving all the money in his coffers. Not Nathaniel Prime, himself, was half so miserly as Jacob was to become under the lash of habit.[1] Who

remembers Prime today? Who remembered him fifty years after Jacob's voyage to London, when "Old Astor" was the best-hated man in New York, perhaps in the country? Poor Jacob! He was the slave of his own virtue, warped and swollen out of resemblance to the honorable purpose from which it sprang.

But here we are again, peeking over the horizon of life, as though we had booked a passage in Mr. Wells' "Time Machine" instead of the smelly, rat-infested 'tween-decks of a London packet-ship, which seemed comfortable enough to Jacob after the dirt and smoke and vermin of Indian lodges and the wet and cold of lean-tos on forest trails. He had a fair passage, and landing at Greenwich, ordered his barrels of peltry lightered ashore, and carted them straightway to the purlieus of the city, where they were disposed of with a celerity beyond his expectations. He had known, of course, the principal fur dealers, and wasted no time in procuring bids. The quality of his goods did the rest. They were a better consignment, of a more uniform grade of excellence, than the London market had seen. So Jacob stuffed a handsome letter of credit in his pocket, and sauntered up the Cheap one fine morning with several weeks on his hands before his ship was due to sail on the westward voyage.

He had called on George Peter and his uncle before this, and resumed acquaintanceship with other friends of his years in the Astor & Broadwood factory. The time remaining to him he determined to utilize in meeting as many merchants as possible, and learning all he could about every commodity which came from America or could be exported to it, prices, sources of supply, markets, conditions regulating production, variances in grading. Up and down, in and out, he wandered through the narrow tangle of streets that radiated from the hub of old St. Paul's, making friends in coffee houses, effecting introductions through these friends to other merchants, pushing his way by sheer personality into counting-rooms where he wasn't known. And day by day, his thorough German mind was accumulating and arranging facts, storing them for reference, comparing and contrasting them.

Unfortunately, the only record of those days comes from him, and it must have been colored by failing memory and the childish egotism which I have referred to previously. It is, as I shall show, at least partially apocryphal, but if we cross-check it as thoroughly as he cross-checked the business facts he thought worthy of retention in his mind we shan't go very wrong in estimating its true value. Certainly, the main adventure of his London visit was the turning-point of his career, although he didn't recognize it as such at the moment, and probably was led to romance about it in his old age for that very reason.

One day near the end of his stay, he was passing East India House, the headquarters of that amazing enterprise in commercial imperialism which had won, and administered, the immense British possessions in India: a company which held kingdoms and principalities in fee, which made treaties as a sovereign, which maintained armies and waged war. This apotheosis of merchantry intrigued Jacob's interest, and he tarried to question the porter at the entrance about the organization of so mammoth a corporation. How did it operate? Who controlled its operations? There was a Court of Directors, explained the porter—impressed, as all men were, by the serious earnestness of this casual wayfarer. And under the Court of Directors was a Governor, whom the porter mentioned by name, a German name, which Jacob recalled as belonging to a boy slightly older than himself, a Heidelberg student, who had gone abroad in search of fortune as he had. Yes, assented the porter, the Governor had come from Germany as a lad. Why, then, he must be the same boy, Jacob decided, and with this for excuse, persuaded the porter to send in his own name to the great man.

To the porter's surprise, he was admitted, and the Governor recognized him, treated him kindly, invited him to dinner and asked if there was any service Jacob required. Unfortunately, Jacob realized, he was not equipped with clothes to dine at a table so grand as he was sure the Governor's would be, so he must decline the invitation, also the offer of service, for his furs were disposed of, and the money he had received already invested in trade-goods to be shipped to his agents on the frontier. But the Governor would not suffer him to depart without promising to return, and on the occasion of this farewell visit presented him a little packet, with the brief remark: "Take this, my friend. You may find it of value." Jacob thanked him, a thought bewilderedly, and they separated with mutual expressions of esteem: two German exiles, happier for having recovered momentarily a glimpse of boyhood days in the kind land they never ceased to love. It hadn't occurred to Jacob that there might be an advantage to himself in the meeting, and he was at a loss upon opening the packet to discover its contents to be a "Canton Prices Current" and Permit No. 68, issued by the Honorable the East India Company to Jacob Astor, of New York City, in the United States of America, authorizing any ship which carried it to trade at ports controlled by the Company. Jacob had no intention of trading to the East Indies; his one purpose was to extend the web of agents and traders he was weaving across the forests and streams of the Western fur countries. So he tucked the documents into a pocket, with the reflection that his friend the Governor had meant well, and forgot them until he was home in New York, discussing his travels with Sarah.

Sarah could think for herself, as you must have noticed before now. She demanded to see the Permit and the Prices Current.

"Why, they buy furs in Canton," she exclaimed, studying the latter.

"What use is dot to us?" he countered. "We have no ship."

"Charter one," she suggested.

But that would cost too much money, he objected. A dangerous venture.

"There is Mr. James Livermore," she said. "He has several big ships, Jacob, in the West Indian trade, and this trouble with the French has kept them in port. Why don't you ask him to go into partnership with you in a China venture?"

For the first time, Jacob was seriously impressed with the importance of the Governor's present.

"Dot's a goodt idea," he conceded. "Ja, I talk to Livermore."

Livermore, with his West India trade crippled by the depredations of French men-o'-war and privateers, which were seizing American vessels plying to the British possessions, exactly as the British seized American vessels attempting to enter or leave French ports, was impressed by Astor's proposition of a venture to the East Indies.

"What's your offer, Mr. Astor?" he asked.

"You furnish a ship mit der cargo," Jacob answered promptly. "I loan you der Permit. One-half der profits to me."

"You don't risk a cent?" Livermore exclaimed with indignation.

"I loan you der Permit. Mit dot der ship goes anywhere."

"I won't do it," asserted the West India merchant. "It isn't a fair bargain."

They argued a while, without either of them yielding, and that was as far as they got. Jacob went home, his documents still in his pocket, and nothing happened for some days. In the interval, Livermore reconsidered the project; Astor's offer seemed fairer in retrospect, and he was worried over the prospect of his ships lying idle indefinitely. The country was practically at war with France. Congress had authorized the seizure of hostile French vessels, suspended commercial intercourse and legislated for a provisional army, of which General Washington was commander until his death in December, 1799. Any venture that promised to take a vessel into seas not ravaged by the two major combatants was reasonably safe, and the East India Company's Permit insured her against British interference. He seems to have given much weight to this latter circumstance, to have believed that the Permit would confer extraordinary opportunities for trade, denied other American vessels—indicating he was very gullible, if it is true.

But whether true or not, Livermore did call upon Astor, and accept the original terms. His largest ship was laden with a cargo of ginseng, lead and

scrap-iron and $30,000 in Spanish silver in her strong-box. No furs were listed in her manifest, which may indicate that Jacob was too doubtful of the venture to risk more than the two documents which had cost him nothing. And early in 1800 she put to sea, taking the route of the East Indiamen, via St. Helena to the Cape of Good Hope. For more than a year nothing was heard of her, during which time Jacob proceeded with the extension of his fur trade in the West, while Livermore strode his counting-room and chewed his nails, and wished he'd taken a few thousands extra from the underwriters. Then, when both of them had decided she was gone, the Indiaman lumbered in past the Hook and came to anchor under Governors Island. Livermore, prepared for the worst, nearly fainted when he heard his captain's report. The ginseng, which had cost twenty cents a pound in New York, was sold for $3.50 in Canton; the lead went for ten cents a pound and the iron fetched higher prices. The proceeds of the sale of the cargo, plus the $30,000 in the strong-box, the captain had put in tea, which Livermore experienced no difficulty in disposing of at a profit of a dollar a pound.

Some weeks later a dray drove up to the Astor store, then at 68 Pine Street, and delivered a number of very heavy little kegs which chinked faintly as they were rolled in through the door.

"What on earth are those, Jacob?" Sarah demanded when she happened in during the afternoon.

"Der fruits of our East India pass," he answered, his deep-set eyes twinkling merrily.

"Money?"

He nodded.

"Ho-how much?"

"Fifty-five t'ousan' dollar."

"Jacob!" she gasped.

And well she might. It was as rich a coup as he ever achieved. So rich that he decided to enter the Canton trade for himself—which suggests an examination of the credibility of this whole story of Permit No. 68 and the "Canton Prices Current," as told by Jacob and handed down by his descendants. Quite a yarn, you will see.

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[1] Yet Prime was the more consistent character. In old age, obsessed by an unreasoning fear of poverty, he cut his own throat with a razor.

III

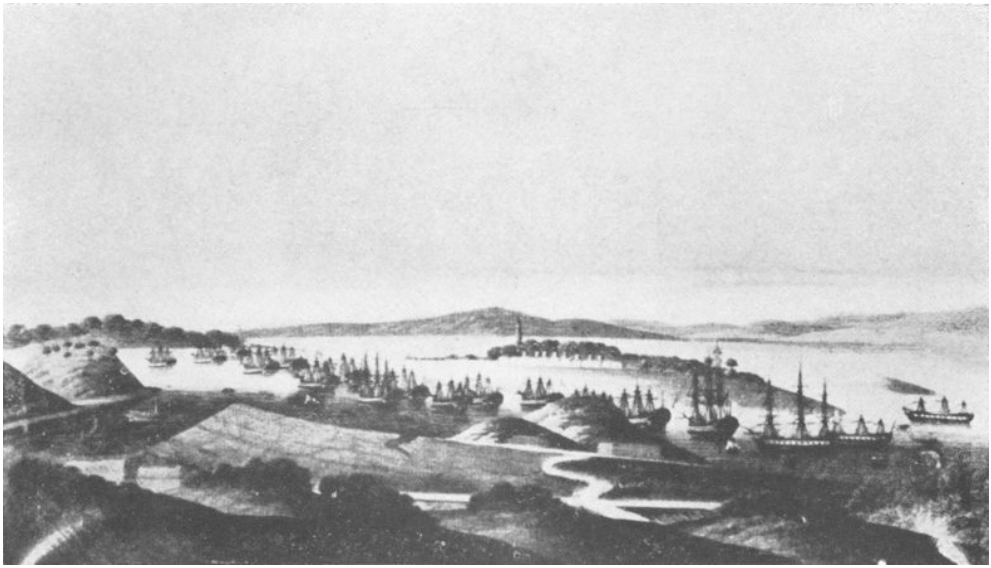
The truth is that John Company had no more authority in Canton than Jacob, himself, while American vessels were free to trade where they pleased in the British dominions, even at the ports of India which the Company did control. By a decree of the Emperor Yung Ching, issued in 1745, the Fan-Kwae, or Foreign Devils, were restricted to the use of the one port of Canton, open to all of them so long as they observed the stringent "Eight Regulations" and paid the outrageous customs fees and cumshaws demanded. And although the British Government could, and did, forbid vessels of British registry, other than those in the East India Company's fleet, to trade in the Far East, American vessels were never required to recognize the Company's monopoly and plied at will to Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras, so soon as the Treaty of Paris had acknowledged the independence of the United States.

More, American vessels proved a thorn in the side of the Company through their success in trading between the Company's ports—running cargoes, for instance, from Madras to Calcutta, and then ferrying a second lading to Colombo in Ceylon, returning to Rangoon to pick up a load for Bombay, whence they would clear for home. With a most un-British forebearance, the powers of East India House tolerated this latter invasion of the Company's prerogatives until 1811, when they secured from His Majesty's Government an Order in Council forbidding American vessels to make any save direct voyages between India and the United States. Not until 1834, and then in desperation over the increasing competition of the United States in the Indian market, should Parliament remove the Company's monopoly and make the East Indies free to all British shipping. What a harvest our Yankees had reaped in the meantime!

Americans were not slow in recognizing the possibilities of profit in the East India trade. We were a nation of tea-drinkers, and we had been on short rations since the Boston Tea Party of December 16, 1773. It was almost exactly ten years to a day after that rowdy demonstration of patriotism, and the ink was scarcely dry on the treaty of peace, when the fifty-five-ton sloop *Harriet*, of Hingham, Hallet master, sailed from Boston with a cargo of ginseng for China; but Captain Hallet was saved full half his voyage, for, stopping at Capetown for wood and water, he encountered the master of a homeward-bound British East Indiaman, who, out of the private venture which all officers of the Company's ships were allowed, purchased the ginseng for twice its weight in Hyson. The honor of first displaying the Stars and Stripes in the Far East was reserved for the ship, *Empress of China*, fitted out by a group—what nowadays we should call a syndicate—of New York merchants, who entrusted the direction of the voyage to the supercargo, an unusual arrangement, to be explained by the personality of this

functionary, Major Samuel Shaw, a young Boston merchant who had served with distinction in the Massachusetts Line. To Shaw must go the credit for establishing our first foothold in the lucrative China trade. He was an early captain of industry, whose premature death denied him the measure of fame and wealth his talents merited.

The *Empress of China* sailed from New York in February, 1784; she came to off Macao August 23, took on a Chinese pilot and tacked slowly up-river for thirty miles to the Bogue narrows, girdled by forts, where an officer of the Banner in garrison boarded her for military scrutiny. Passed by him, she sailed more tediously up the remaining thirty miles of the twisting channel to the famous Pagoda Anchorage off Whampoa, the foreign suburb of Canton, which lay several miles further upstream. Here, along the shore, were built the rambling godowns—variously translated as factories or warehouses—of the thirteen Hong merchants, the intermediaries officially designated by the Emperor to conduct all transactions with the despised Fan-Kwae, whose absurd costumes, uncouth habits and pungent body-smell disgusted the fastidious Chinese. Over the several godowns waved the flags of Britain, Holland, Spain, Denmark, and Sweden; and in the stream lay vessels representing all these nations, tall, frigate-built ships, manned by crews as numerous as a man-o'-war's, their lofty bulwarks pierced for imposing batteries of cannon. Amongst these noble craft squattered huge tea-junks, lumber-junks, rice-junks, rising high at bow and stern, brown matting sails creaking stiffly, slant-eyed crews all sneering curiosity. And to and fro darted myriads of sampans, large and small, yelping, singsong voices summoning a passage.



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The Pagoda Anchorage at Whampoa
(*From an old Chinese Painting*)

A fascinating spectacle for the first Americans who witnessed it. No less amusing the elaborate ceremonies which followed: the visit of the Imperial Linguist, customs inspector and official interpreter combined, personal representative of that awesome official, the Grand Hoppo, who, in due course, to a solemn clanging of gongs, rowed alongside in his barge of state, attended by the Hong merchant who was to represent the newly arrived ship and act as security for it and the behavior of its crew. The Hoppo was the Emperor's superintendent of the foreign trade, and few Mandarins attained his power or wealth. Silken-clad, portly, inscrutable, he was as likely as not to have an infantile passion for Connecticut clocks or old madeira. Rapacity was his watchword. His the task to oversee the crowning ceremony of "Cumshaw and Measurement," by which the port charges, customs dues, and authorized blackmail were estimated.

While all watched with bated breath, his subordinates stretched a measuring tape from the ship's rudderpost to her foremast, and then across her waist just abaft the mainmast. Followed much nodding of heads, daubing of brushes at ink-blocks, scrawling of weird idiographs on yellow ricepaper, the result of which was a multiplication of the two measurements to secure the total number of "covids" in the ship. The "covid" multiplied by so many taels per "covid" gave the ordinary measurement fee or customs duties. But to the ordinary fee must be added one hundred per cent for

"cumshaw"—an untranslatable word, wider than graft, deeper than dishonesty, more inclusive than plunder; fifty per cent for the Hoppo's "opening barriers fee"; ten per cent to the superintendent of the Imperial Treasury—this ten per cent to cover "transport of duty to Pekin and weighing in Imperial scales"; seven per cent to adjust difference in weight between Canton and Pekin systems; and one-fifth of one per cent "for work of converting" all cumshaws into definite taels. A sorry tael—if you will pardon one sorely tempted. On a ship of three hundred tons, which was about the size of the *Empress of China*, the taxes would approach $3,500, a relatively enormous, indeed, preposterous, sum, which foreigners could afford to pay only because of the equally enormous and preposterous profits to be earned by a China voyage.

The Hong merchant Major Shaw selected to represent him was the celebrated Pinqua, friend and confident in years to come of dozens of American skippers, supercargoes, and merchants. After the tax had been calculated, Pinqua signed a bond for the Hoppo guaranteeing its payment, whereupon the Hoppo issued the ship a "permit to open hatches." The next step was the discharging of the cargo, which was lightered to Pinqua's godown, measured and weighed there by officials of the Hoppo's office, and finally sold. While this was going forward Shaw arranged with the Hong merchant for his return cargo, mostly tea, with a quantity of silks, cinnamon, and china ware. The lading took three or four months as a rule, the new crop of tea not being ready until November, which meant that the *Empress of China* sailed for home about the end of the year. It was seldom that a Canton voyage took less than fifteen months. But the profit, as has been said, was enormous. So rich, in the case of the *Empress of China*, that other shipowners were led to repeat it. Shaw, himself, sailed a second time in 1786, with the honorary title of United States Consul at Canton, aboard the ship *Hope* of New York, James Magee master, charged by his syndicate with the establishment of the first American commercial house in China. He had rented a godown and hoisted his flag beside the ensigns of the great trading nations of Europe when the *Empress of China* arrived on her second voyage, and not long afterward, the ship *Grand Turk*, of Salem, Ebenezer West master, one of the fleet of the enterprising Elias Hasket Derby—"King" Derby to his contemporaries.

The Derby family, luckily, have preserved the records of their ancestor's commercial campaigns, so that we may learn from them what an early Canton trader's manifest was like. The *Grand Turk* carried in her hold, when she warped into Derby Wharf, May 22, 1787:[1]

240	chests Bohea Tea }	$17,510
175½	chests Bohea Tea }	
2	chests Hyson Tea	95
52	” Souchong Tea	521
32	” Bohea Congo Tea	459
130	” Cassia	779
10	” Cassia Bud	85
75	Boxes China	1,923
945	Ox Hides	1,050
100	Shammy Skins }	
50	Buck Skins }	184
130	Ordinary Hides }	
10	Casks Wine	568
1	Box paper	44
		$23,218

Adventures:

13	chests Bohea Tea	$650
6	” Canzo	300
6	boxes China	135
24	pkgs. Bandanna Hdkfs.	72
24	chests of Muslins	
		$1,157

It should be remarked that the hides and skins included in the *Grand Turk's* manifest were taken aboard at Capetown. The “Adventures” were the private ventures of the ship's officers; for some reason, the “24 Chests of Muslins” are not valued in Captain West's record. The cargo was sold by Derby at a figure, unspecified, which enabled him to make a profit of one hundred per cent on the outgoing cargo, valued by him at $31,000—the difference between the $31,000 in goods exported and the $23,218 actually expended abroad for the return cargo representing expenses, customs fees and losses on incidental trafficking. One hundred per cent was not an abnormal profit in the early period of the Canton trade. Many years later

thirty per cent was regarded as a very conservative return on a China voyage, and by this time competition was flooding both markets.

I have gone at some length into the initiation of the Canton trade because of the bearing these facts have upon Astor's outrageous bargain with Livermore. Fourteen years before Livermore's ship dropped anchor off Whampoa, merchants in New York, Salem, and Boston must have known that they need take no heed to the East India Company, either in China or in India or the innumerable islands dotting the seas northward to where Japan lurked sulkily behind a barrier of prejudice. There were men in New York, when Jacob returned from London with Permit No. 68, who had made small fortunes trafficking between the Indian ports which John Company held as a sovereign. When Major Shaw visited Calcutta in 1794 on the voyage which was to be his last, he found Benjamin Joy, an old friend in Boston, conducting a mercantile business for American traders. A Salem merchant, Thomas Lechmere, became an Alderman of Bombay. Salem shipowners, before the end of the century, were clamoring angrily against the insurance rate on their vessels from Calcutta to the Sand Heads, at the mouth of the Hoogly—sixteen per cent, in recognition of the trickeries of the channel, the tidal bores and the occasional violence of the monsoon. From the Sand Heads to Hamburg the coverage was but eight per cent.

Calcutta, Bombay, Madras, and Canton, were as familiar to American skippers as Liverpool, Rio de Janeiro, Cadiz, or Copenhagen. Not only was this so, but American merchants, and notably, Boston merchants, more than ten years before Livermore's ship beat out past Sandy Hook, were addressing themselves shrewdly to solution of the problem of maintaining the Canton trade on something approaching equality with the British, whose Eastern possessions produced various staples for which there was an active demand in China—opium, mummie, sharks' fins, edible birds' nests, the cheaper grades of Indian cloth—whereas practically the only domestic product the Americans could sell profitably to the Hong merchants was ginseng, the supply of which was limited. Both British and Americans were obliged to rely mainly upon coined silver for trading purposes, and silver was an especially uneconomic article of trade for Americans because of their perpetual shortage of specie, which, of itself, arbitrarily hindered the circulation of commerce at home.

It is a tribute to American ingenuity that the Bostonians hit upon a medium of exchange, which compensated their original handicap and enabled them to conduct the trade advantageously until the birth of the industrial era permitted the United States to create new markets in China. In doing so, too, they anticipated Astor's most dramatic undertaking, opening the path which was to lead him to millions, although he never expressed

appreciation of their pioneer efforts. On the contrary, arrogating to himself credit for doing what other men had made possible. And this is said, remember, with no intent to deprecate the commercial genius which carried him to the pinnacle of success—a success achieved deservedly by bold use of tactics lesser men practised feebly or maladroitly.

Major Shaw had observed during his first stay at Canton that there was a steady demand for furs. The Hong merchants complained they could never obtain enough. Their only sources of supply were itinerant English traders, who occasionally fetched in a shipload of Alaskan sea-otter bartered from the fierce Indian tribes of the islands north of Puget Sound. Attention had been focused recently on these tribes and the rocky coast which fostered them, by the publication of the account of Captain Cook's third voyage and John Ledyard's report on the Russian fur trade in Bering Sea. And a group of American merchants, putting the scattered evidence together, decided there should be profit in a trade over the route Boston-Northwest Coast-Canton. Ships would sail from home with a cargo of goods to be exchanged with the Indians for furs, which would be carried across the Pacific to Canton and there exchanged for tea, silks, nankeens, and the bright willow-ware, to be the favorite breakfast china of generations of Americans yet unborn.

This group—Joseph Barrell, Samuel Brown, and Crowell Hatch, merchants of Boston; Charles Bulfinch, the architect, who hadn't yet clinched his right to fame with the Tontine Crescent; John Derby, younger son of "King" Derby, of Salem; and J. M. Pintard, of New York—raised $49,000 to outfit the ship *Columbia*, John Kendrick master, and the ninety-ton sloop *Lady Washington*, Robert Gray master, which sailed from Boston September 30, 1787, for Nootka Sound on the island of Vancouver, a region then as mysterious to Americans as the High Atlas is today. No more was heard of the expedition for three years. It was August 9, 1790, when the *Columbia* sailed proudly into port, the first American vessel to circumnavigate the globe. Captain Gray, who was in command of her, reported that Captain Kendrick had remained on the Northwest Coast, with the *Lady Washington*, to establish a trading-post, and his backers allowed him no more leisure than was required to unload cargo and overhaul his ship before they sent him out again to brave the Horn and belt the continents. It was on this second voyage, May 12, 1792, to be exact, that, sighting "appearance of a spacious harbour abreast the Ship," the *Columbia* discovered and entered the river which bears her name. About the same time, the indefatigable Captain Kendrick, in the miniature *Lady Washington*, was carrying the first cargo of sandalwood from the Sandwich (Hawaiian, we call them nowadays) Islands to Canton, thus inaugurating another trade,

which would help the Americans to offset the fat cargoes of Indian opium forming the mainstay of British commerce with China.

The Northwest trade, as it was dubbed, grew rapidly. Hard on the heels of the *Columbia* sailed the brigantines *Hope* and *Hancock* and the ship *Margaret*, precursors of dozens of sturdy, little craft, which took for granted the logging of forty thousand miles in the two or three years they must remain away from home, running south with the trades, beating around the Horn, then north the length of South America, up the North American coast to the foggy waters which lapped the jagged shores of Puget Sound and the fiords beyond, where dwelt hosts of treacherous Indians, always alert for pillage and massacre. A dangerous trade. These Northwesters were armed man-o'-war fashion. They bristled with cannon, and the instant a fleet of long, wooden canoes put out around some spiny headland, the crews were mustered to quarters, boarding-nettings rigged, great guns cast loose, muskets and pistols primed, regardless of the heaps of furs freely displayed by the approaching savages.

Even so, there were occasions when vigilance was lulled asleep, and war-clubs won a chance to gut a ship.

But a Northwester's voyage was only half-completed after she had crammed her holds with the glossy black pelts of the sea-otter, each five feet by two, and whatever other prime furs the natives offered. Now, she must haul her wind, and claw off a coast as treacherous as its inhabitants, and bearing south by east, wing out into the wide waters of the Pacific, breaking the monotony of months afloat by visits to the palm-crowned islets which lifted unexpectedly above the horizon. It was Northwesters, who, first of Americans, visited Hawaii and the Marquesas, the Fijis and the Gilberts. The crew of the brigantine *Hope* brought home to envious tars of the Boston waterfront reports of the beauty of the Marquesan women, launching a legend which has made more beachcombers than any other one cause. Captain John Boit, Jr., nineteen-year-old master of the eighty-nine-ton sloop *Union*, of Boston, who visited "Owhyhee" in 1795, was obliged to record in his log that "the females were quite amorous." And sailors made light of scurvy because an outbreak of the disease compelled a skipper to halt at one or other of the island groups, and give his men a run ashore. Sometimes the natives of the islands resented the familiarities of the white visitors, and there'd be swift, deadly brawls on the beach, rushes of outrigger canoes in the darkness—and perhaps a "long pig" broiling on the hot stones next day.

If a master successfully navigated the Pacific, dodging the unmarked shoals and reefs, weathering hurricanes and hostile natives, he had still to traverse the seas beyond, where typhoons and Malay proas took toll of the venturesome, and off Macao, itself, with its festering life of intrigue shut

like a tumor within a belt of gray walls, he might have to crack on all sail to avoid a fleet of pirate junks, which would pursue him up-river to within range of the Bogue forts. Canton, too, could be difficult for him. He must rigidly observe the solemn ritual the officials prescribed, compose himself to interminable delays and grin cheerfully under continual blackmailing, see to it that his crews obeyed the ridiculous "Eight Regulations"—kept within the bounds of the factories when ashore, "except on the eighth, eighteenth, and twenty-eighth days of the moon" when they might "take the air in the company of a Linguist to visit the Flower Gardens and the Honan joss-house, but not in droves of over ten at one time"—and weren't murdered or unduly robbed in the gayly-painted singsong boats that battened on idle sailormen.

Finally, if the ship at last received her chests of Hyson and Souchong, her bolts of heavy, raw silk, her crates of china elaborately packed in aromatic ricepaper, there was the long road home to consider: dangerous seas again as far as Java Head, almost as dangerous seas beyond that landfall, the whole vast sweep of the Indian Ocean to compass—the tricky currents of the Agulhas Bank, the baffling winds of the Cape of Good Hope, only less trying than the Horn; the torrid South Atlantic, the lonely weeks of slanting northwest across empty wastes, where a sail was to be fled lest it prove a British frigate short-handed, with a press-gang ready to go overside; the doldrums of the line, the rasping snarl of gales keen-edged off the Arctic ice. Many a homebound American beat forlornly back and forth for weeks almost within sight of port, unable to make head against contrary winds. Some, with rich cargoes, were wrecked under such circumstances, having four times crossed the Equator and escaped scores of perils in three toilsome, anxious years. But most got in, and when they did the fort guns roared an answer to their salutes, and crowds pelted to the wharves to gape at salt-white bulwarks and torn sails, and the plunder of gaudy tropic birds and feather cloaks and silken shawls the survivors of the crew brandished at their friends. And the owner, three years of worry peeling off his brow, hustled down from his counting-room to shake the skipper's hand, and over glasses of madeira con the manifest to gauge the cargo's worth at current market rates.

They earned their profits, those Northwesters.

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[1] "The Log of the Grand Turks," by Robert E. Peabody; Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1826.

IV

It must be apparent that in the eyes of the Grand Hoppo Jacob's Permit No. 68 would have had distinctly less value than a ticket in the Macao lottery. Indeed, any foreign trader who came to Canton with the idea that the East India Company's approval was requisite to his success would have incurred the bitter enmity of the Chinese, who scorned the Fan-Kwae of every race and tolerated the few they admitted merely for the value to China of the oversea commerce involved. Livermore's captain must have kept very quiet about the permit in his talks with the Hoppo, the Linguists, Pinqua or Houqua or whoever of the thirteen Hong merchants acted for him. Otherwise his vessel would have been confiscated, and he and his men cast into prison or awarded the Thousand Cuts. The Canton Prices Current was of more substantial use in estimating the character of cargo required for the trade, and the quantities of goods which might be procured in exchange.

But I'm not prepared to junk the story as entirely false. It was iterated and reiterated by Jacob and his children, became a stock anecdote of New York business and continued as such for the next seventy-five years—or until the rush of new events after the Civil War destroyed the interest of Americans in their beginnings, an interest which was not to be reawakened until the World War left us with enormously increased responsibilities and a converse tendency to search the past for lessons for future guidance. A story that persisted so, that was so circumstantial, must have had some germ of truth in it. John Jacob Astor was neither so mendacious nor so imaginative —perish the thought!—as to be capable of deliberately propagating such a legend out of the uncut cloth. No, there must have been a Permit No. 68, and however spurious its forthright value it surely suggested to Livermore some profitable use.

Possibly he regarded it as a safeguard against the innumerable British cruisers, ready to seize American vessels suspected of intending to trade with the enemy, while a second consideration might have been a questionable degree of protection from French men-o'-war, equally determined to check American commerce with Britain. The Permit, bearing the seal of the East India Company, the instrument which had crushed France's ambitions in Bengal and the Carnatic, conceivably might irritate any Frenchman, yet, together with the ship's papers, it guaranteed her ultimate destination. There could be no harm to France in a voyage from New York to Canton, despite incidental stops at British East Indian ports. Indeed, it was to France's interest to strengthen America's commercial competition with the British in the Far East. But nevertheless, and whatever modicum of truth there may be in these suppositions, Livermore paid an

outrageous price for the document, one out of all proportion to its worth—a tribute to Jacob's salesmanship.

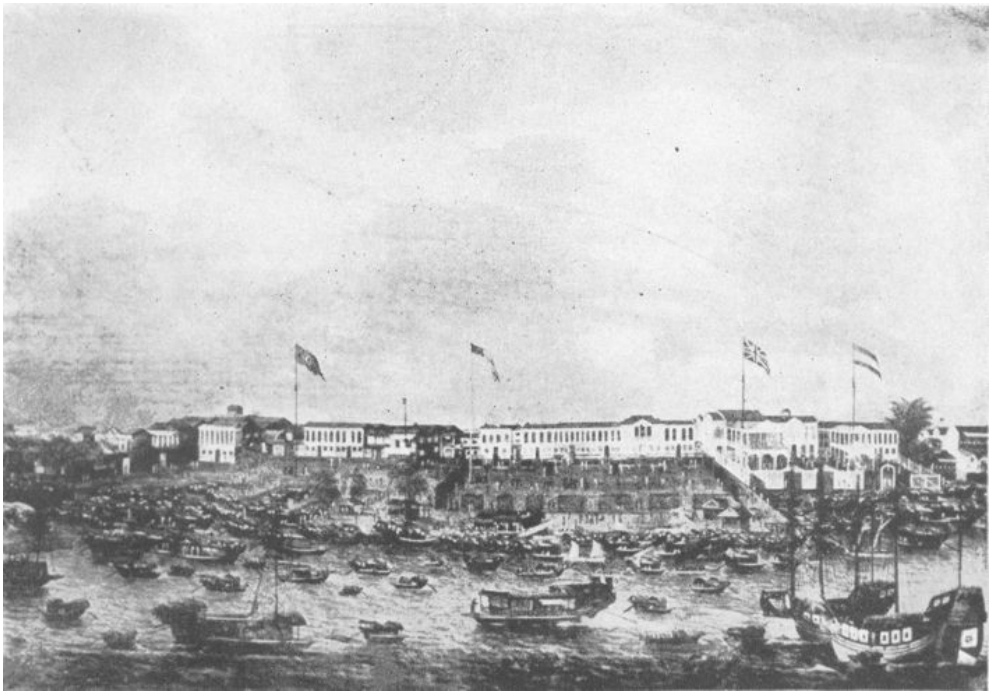
The immediate consequence of the episode was Jacob's determination to enter the Canton trade upon his own account. With the fifty-five thousand dollars Livermore paid him he purchased a ship—at this time stout, handy vessels of two hundred and fifty tons cost about seven thousand dollars—and loaded it with an assorted cargo such as Livermore had chosen, including a substantial sum in silver dollars. But in the meantime he had learned something of the Canton trade, and instead of sending his ship out by way of the Cape of Good Hope, he eschewed the dubious advantages of Permit No. 68, and instructed his captain to follow the route of the Boston Northwesters around the Horn. He wasn't as yet, however, thinking of the new trade in terms of fur. His ship was not to visit the foggy inlets of the northwest coast, but to strike off across the Pacific by way of the Sandwich Islands stopping there for a deckload of sandalwood, always in demand in China.

The gossipy gentleman, who, under the pseudonym of Walter Barrett, wrote that most amusing and delightful book, "The Old Merchants of New York," a compendium of information and misinformation, invariably entertaining, on the leaders of the city's business life during the years between the Revolution and the Civil War, would have us believe that Jacob's captain and supercargo were ignorant of the value of sandalwood, actually didn't recognize its smell when they handled it, for, says he:

". . . she touched at the Sandwich Islands to take in water and fresh provisions. They also laid in a large stock of firewood. When the ship reached Canton a mandarin came on board, and noticing their firewood, asked the price of it at once. The Captain laughed at such a question, but signified that he was open to an offer. The mandarin offered five hundred dollars a ton, and every part of it was sold at that price. That was *sandal*wood. For seventeen years Mr. Astor enjoyed that lucrative sandalwood trade without a rival. No other concern in the United States or England knew the secret. Nor was it discovered until a shrewd Boston shipowner detailed a ship to follow Mr. Astor's, and observe the events of the voyage. Then, for some time, that house was a participant in this valuable trade."

Very interesting, but the fact remains that sandalwood was discovered on "Owhyhee" by Captain Kendrick on one of his voyages from Nootka Sound to Canton in the *Lady Washington*, prior to 1794. He happened to know its value in Chinese eyes, and the fragrant commodity subsequently became a part of every Northwester's trans-Pacific cargo. Sandalwood was an old story to the Boston skippers years before Jacob's first independent Canton

venture; by 1805, they were landing 1,600 piculs annually at the Whampoa godowns. There can not be the slightest doubt that Jacob learned it was obtainable in the Sandwich group either from some Bostonian or the public prints, which frequently mentioned its prominence in the Canton trade.



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THE HONG FACTORIES AT CANTON
From an old Chinese painting

Worthy Mr. "Barrett" was likewise responsible for the dissemination, if not the propagation, of the yarn describing the miraculous qualities adhering to Permit No. 68. He tells it more circumstantially than any other early biographer, with so much vivid detail, in fact, that, as I have said before, he contrives to invest it with an atmosphere of verisimilitude, even for one who knows how preposterous is his general thesis. But it is only fair to add that he possessed a wide acquaintance with many of the merchants of the thirty years or so immediately preceding the Civil War, men who were contemporaries and business associates of Astor. The yarns he repeats are not original with himself, but fragments of the myth which human nature insisted upon creating out of the truths and half-truths known about a figure as remarkable to the mercantile society of the period as any Napoleon or Lincoln. Long before Jacob died he was a legend rather than a human figure:

"Astor," "Old Astor," "Old Hunks," "The Old Skinflint," "Miser Astor," and, apotheosis of all, "richest man in the country."

His second Canton venture was as successful as the first, and *all* the profits went to him alone. One ship ceased to suffice his needs. He bought more. By 1803, he was building his own vessels. In this year his famous ship *Beaver*, of four hundred and twenty-seven tons burthen, was launched from Henry Eckford's shipyard at the foot of Clinton Street on the East River. Presently, to quote his own expression, "he had a million dollars afloat, which represented a dozen vessels"—and their cargoes, of course. His name, hitherto known only in New York and the outposts of the frontier which were centers for the fur trade, began to be heard all up and down the Atlantic seaboard and in many an outlandish port of the Orient. In Bristol and London his house-flag was a familiar sight amongst the assembled shipping.

He was a great man, familiar with the aristocrats of merchantry—John G. Coster, his neighbor on Broadway; Francis Depau, who had married Sylvie, daughter of the French Admiral de Grasse, who out-generaled the British fleet off the Capes of the Chesapeake and enabled Washington to take Yorktown; Comfort Sands, whose daughter had married Nat Prime, the money-lender, once the plague of Jacob's life; John Hone and his brother Philip, the diarist and future Mayor; William Walton, whose great, yellow, brick house at 326 Queen (Pearl) Street was one of the show-places of the city, and Gerard, his brother, a retired Admiral of the British Navy—ex-Tories, this pair, among the few who had dared to remain after the British evacuation, pillars of the St. George's Society, but respected for their lineage and financial integrity; rugged, old Marinus Willett, hero of the Revolution; David Lydig, the flour factor, who had risen along with Jacob since he opened shop at 21 Peck Slip in 1790; Stephen Jumel, the dapper and kindly French wine-merchant, of 39 Stone Street; Jacob Barker, the energetic banker, financial dictator of the generation; Archibald Gracie, who was already hewing out a second fortune after losing one through seizure of his ships by the French.

When Jacob entered the Tontine Coffee House, in Wall Street, where the Merchant's Exchange—precursor of the Stock Exchange—met, men hurried to speak with him, indicated him to out-of-town correspondents, invited in for a chunk of raw codfish and a glass of spirits at "nooning" that they might be able to report to their dazzled friends in the backwoods on the notable persons of the day. And when he passed Mrs. Keese's boarding-house on the northeast corner of Broadway and Wall Street, across from Trinity Yard, where the politicians and lawyers congregated, he'd be tackled by such distinguished gentry as William P. Van Ness, Thomas J. Oakly, DeWitt

Clinton, John Armstrong, Chancellor Livingston, Solomon Van Rensselaer, the Patroon, down from his manorial estate for a visit; Barent Gardinier and Aaron Burr—before the exile. They were always friends, Astor and Burr. The little, wispy, dapper gentleman, who ruined a promising career by an accurate pistol-shot on Weehawken Heights, had descried valuable possibilities in the stolid, chunky, young German at a time when the distance separating their stations might well have seemed an unbridgeable void to Jacob. Tea changed all that. Tea and fur.

V

If Jacob was ignorant of the demand for furs in China when he entered the Canton trade, he wasn't slow to learn from the experiences of the Northwesters who had preceded him; and as matters developed in the early years of the new century he was soon able to outpoint the Bostonians at their own game. Where they were obliged to secure all their furs on the Northwest coast, his chain of trading-posts along the shores of the Great Lakes and the Ohio, Missouri, and Mississippi valleys, provided a constantly increasing harvest of peltry. And the Louisiana Purchase, in 1803, ultimately extended the bounds of his empire to the Rocky Mountains. He had competitors in this field, but none who could meet him on an equal footing. And when he decided to take another leaf from the book of the Northwesters, and dispatch an annual vessel to the waters north of Puget Sound, it was simply because the yield of his trading-posts was no longer sufficient to meet the requirements of domestic consumption, the European market, and China. The American beaver couldn't breed fast enough to supply top-hats for the Occident and fur pelisses for the Orient.

The Northwesters continued their trade, undaunted by his competition—after a temporary stoppage during the War of 1812, they struggled on until 1837—but they could never hope to rival the efficiency and multiplicity of Astor's efforts. Where they must follow one set formula, and be entirely dependent upon the diligence and friendship of an unusually lazy and treacherous race of savages, in order to procure the necessary cargo for a Canton voyage, Jacob could operate on one of several lines. He might, if it suited him, employ their formula, dispatch a ship from New York, with a cargo of trade-goods—pocket-mirrors, shoes, duffle coats and trousers, chisels, knives, buttons, gimlets, needles, nails, flints, steels, muskets, etc.—around the Horn to Vancouver, exchange this cargo for furs, sail for the Sandwich Islands, trading there for sandalwood and pearls, and so on to Canton, where tea, matting, willow-ware, cinnamon, silks, and nankeens replaced the pelts and sandalwood. Or he might ship a cargo of furs to

England or the Continent, exchanging it for goods adaptable to the Canton market, which the vessel would then convey to the Far East around the Cape of Good Hope. Or he might ship a cargo of furs provided by his trading-posts direct from New York for Canton.

The scale upon which he worked, and the extraordinary success he attained, combined to provide him resources surpassing those of all competitors. He could buy trade-goods cheaper, procure furs cheaper and in greater variety and if one of his markets suffered a slump for local reasons divert his energies from it temporarily without undue dislocation of his efforts. He might even refuse to send furs to Canton at a pinch, disposing of them elsewhere and turning their value into the heavy Spanish silver dollars which the Chinese would accept failing a barter in kind. Tea, to be sure, he must have. Tea was one of the two foundation stones of his rapidly expanding business. Fur the other. The cardinal principle of his business was that fur must be sent out of the United States, and tea fetched in. If he kept these two commodities flying back and forth across the world, he couldn't very well lose. For a time, perhaps; but in a limited sense, and not nearly so much as other merchants, who were neither so securely entrenched nor so widely spread in their undertakings.

Forty-odd years later, Philip Hone, whose firm were auctioneers, licensed by the State under existing law, wrote in his diary:

"The fur trade was the philosopher's stone of this modern Crœsus, beaver skins and muskrats furnishing the oil for the supply of Aladdin's lamp. His traffic was the shipment of furs to China, where they brought immense prices, for he monopolized the business; and the return cargoes of teas, silks, and rich productions of China brought further large profits; for here, too, he had very little competition at the time of which I am speaking. My brother and I found Mr. Astor a valuable customer. We sold many of his cargoes and had no reason to complain of a want of liberality or confidence. All he touched turned to gold, and it seemed as if fortune delighted in erecting him a monument of her unerring potency."

That final sentence might well serve as epitaph for Jacob's eventful career, but Hone trembles on the verge of exaggeration. Jacob never monopolized the tea trade, and his monopoly of the domestic fur trade was severely contested almost to the end of his reign over the raw regions of the West. Nor was he content to rely absolutely upon the fur trade for the overseas commerce which required a fleet of a dozen ships. He sent his captains wherever opportunity of profit was promised, and he dealt in any and all goods for which he perceived a market. A good man to deal with—in a strictly business way—his fellows said. He named a price for goods—and stuck to it. And he never misrepresented what he had for sale. In other ways

he could be as shifty as an eel, but concrete things—what you could put your hands on—he sold with scrupulous honesty.

John Robins, who was almost as famous a drygoods merchant as Astor was a fur trader, handed down an anecdote which illustrates this facet of his character. During the War of 1812 there were intermittent shortages of goods, due to the British blockade, and far-seeing merchants were always trying to corner the available supply of any specific article. Robins had once purchased all the long nankeens on the open market from the Hones' auctioneering firm. Only one other supply existed, and Astor owned that. So Robins hustled around from his store in Pearl Street to Astor's, which was then at 69 Pine Street.

"Hear you have some long nankeens, Jacob," he said.

"Ja."

"How many you got?"

Jacob told him.

"I'd like to see 'em."

"Ja."

And Jacob went to one of the shelves, lifted down a bolt and carried it to the long counter which ran down the center of the store. Here he dusted off a space, slowly and methodically, and spread the goods for Robins' inspection.

"What's your price?" asked the drygoods man.

Jacob named it. He knew, as everyone downtown knew, that Robins had cleaned out the only other lot that morning; but instead of quoting an extreme price, in an attempt to exploit his customer's situation, he named one very slightly above the figure the Hones' lot had brought at auction.

"I'll take 'em, Jacob," Robins answered promptly, not really surprised, for he was used to dealing with Astor.

"Have dem today, Chon?" Jacob inquired, methodically folding up the bolt he had displayed.

"Yes, send them up to 450 Pearl."

A half-century afterward Robins, still hale and hearty, brushing off the walk in front of his store every morning and paying the highest property tax of any citizen, including William B. Astor and A. T. Stewart, liked to retell this story to the young merchants, who wouldn't think of demeaning themselves by taking a broom or a bolt of goods in their own hands.

"That was Jacob Astor," he'd say. "An easy man to get on with. He said what he meant, and he meant what he said. He had one price, it was a fair one, gauged on the market, and you could take it or leave it. He wouldn't haggle with you."

As often as not, Robins or whoever happened in would find Sarah in the store, especially if there was a ship loading for China. It wasn't necessary these days for her to help in beating and packing the pelts, but Jacob had the highest respect for her judgement of furs, and he wouldn't have dreamed of dispatching a cargo of which she hadn't given definite approval. He paid her handsomely for her work, too.

"Vell, Sarah," he'd say at early breakfast over his steaming cup of Mocha—which Captain Joseph Ropes of the Salem ship *Recovery*, had introduced to the country in 1798, "ve going to load dot *Beaver*. You vant to look at dem pelts from der Lakes? Der musquash, dey ain't so goodt."

"I'm a busy woman, Jacob," Sarah would snap back, twinkling. "This is a big house, and the girls—"

"It don't take long," he'd wheedle. "Undt I pay you. Ja!"

"How long?"

"Maybe vun hour, maybe two." His twinkle would match hers. "Nobody like you to chudge furs, Sarah. Come! I pay you."

"You'll have to pay well to get me away from this housework," she'd chuckle.

"How much you vant?"

"Five hundred dollars an hour, my man."

"You got it. I tell der poys to spreadt out dem packs for you. Ten o'clock, ja?"

One circumstance, which facilitated Jacob's Canton trade, as it did the ventures of all the merchants trading to the Far East, was the Federal Government's practice of extending credit to importers for the duties owed for periods of nine, twelve, and eighteen months. Of course, all importers were allowed this facility, but it was especially valuable to the tea-merchants because of the length of the voyage involved and the tremendous tariffs on teas, which were usually in excess of one hundred per cent and occasionally as high as one hundred and seventy per cent. Instead of being saddled with the payment of these sums immediately after entering his manifest, Jacob would be extended credit for them by a paternal government—which, of course, had taken his bond, in the meantime—with the effect of a proportionate increase in his liquid capital.

In other words, he was able to operate to a considerable extent on government capital, amounting to hundreds of thousands of dollars a year, sufficient to finance several additional voyages for each one concluded, according to an authority previously quoted[1]:

"A house that could raise money enough to send $200,000[2] in specie could soon have an uncommon capital, and this was the working of the old

system:

"The Griswolds owned the ship *Panama*. They started her from New York in the month of May, with a cargo of perhaps $30,000 worth of ginseng, spelter, lead, iron, etc., and $170,000 in Spanish dollars. The ship goes on the voyage, and reaches Whampoa in safety. Her supercargo in two months has her loaded with tea, some chinaware, a great deal of cassia, or false cinnamon, and a few other articles. Suppose the cargo is mainly tea, costing about thirty-seven cents per pound on the average.

"The duty was enormous in those days. It was twice the cost of the tea at least; so that a tea cargo of $200,000, when it had paid duty of seventy-five cents a pound, which would be $400,000, amounted to $600,000. The profit was at least fifty per cent on the original cost, or $100,000, which would make the cargo worth $700,000.

"The cargo would be sold almost on arrival (say eleven or twelve months after the ship left New York in May), to wholesale grocers for their notes at four and six months, say $700,000.

"In those years there was credit given by the United States of nine, twelve, and eighteen months! So that the East India or Canton merchant, after his ship had made one voyage, had the use of Government capital to the extent of $400,000 on the ordinary cargo of a China ship.

"No sooner had the ship *Panama* arrived, or any of the regular East Indiamen, than the cargo would be exchanged for grocers' notes, for $700,000. These notes would be turned into specie very easily, and the owner had only to pay his bonds for $400,000 duty, at nine, twelve, or eighteen months, giving him time actually to send two more ships with $200,000 each in them to Canton, and have them back again in New York before the bonds on the first voyage were due.

"John Jacob Astor, at one period of his life, had several ships operating in this way. They would go to Oregon on the Pacific, and carry from thence furs to Canton. These would be sold at large profits. Then the cargoes of tea for New York would pay enormous duties, which Astor did not have to pay to the United States for a year and a half. His tea cargoes would be sold for good four and six months' paper or perhaps cash; so that for eighteen or twenty years John Jacob Astor had what was actually a free-of-interest loan from the Government of the United States of over $5,000,000. Astor was prudent and lucky in his operations, and such an enormous government loan didn't ruin him, as it did others."

In his rambling, repetitious way, old "Walter Barrett" presents the working of the system very intelligibly, but as usual he requires checking up. While it is true that outbound cargoes for Canton did run as high as $250,000, such an investment was very much the exception rather than the

rule, and in the heyday of the trade, when Astor participated in it, $200,000 cargoes were unheard of. We are told that he regarded $30,000 as a fair profit on a China voyage, and, as "Barrett" says, fifty per cent was a fair rate of return, which would indicate an initial investment of $60,000. But on the other hand, Astor's ventures increased substantially after the War of 1812, in keeping with the expansion of his fur interest, and what would have been considered by him a good return in the first decade of the century must have seemed trivial by 1820.

Again, "Barrett" is manifestly in error when he speaks of the postponement of payment of the duties as "a free-of-interest loan from the Government." Technically, it was; but the importer, of course, had to put up a bond, on which he must pay interest to the bondsman. Yet there is no dodging the main point involved. In effect, the Government allowed importers the use of large blocks of credit at a rate of interest ridiculously low in that day of three and four per cent a month paper. Any importer who didn't jump at the chance of utilizing the time placed at his disposal was a fool. He could very well afford to pay a bondsman for eighteen months' coverage, even for twelve months. If he didn't care to employ the capital so released to him in another China venture, there were plenty of opportunities closer to home. He might turn a pretty penny by doing no more than loaning out the Government's credit at three per cent a month to needier small merchants and tradesmen.

The temptations inherent in the system were irresistible alike to fools and knaves, and as was to be expected, it was abominably abused. Between the years 1789, the birth-year of the Republic, and 1823, the Government lost $250,000,000 in import duties, payment of which had been postponed, and it is significant that none of the defaulters were prosecuted—for the simple reason that they were bankrupt. Bonds had been posted, to be sure; but bonds in that age of innocence were worth the financial capacity of an individual, and no more.

But there is another side to the picture. The country was woefully short of cash in its infancy. There wasn't in existence, and shouldn't be for several generations, a banking structure worthy of the name, as we comprehend banking today; and American merchants, laboring under this handicap, must withstand the competition of foreigners who were possessed of infinitely greater credit facilities. Congress had realized this difficulty, and provided for easy terms of payment of import duties to help native shippers and merchants. And the system did help honest, intelligent merchants, allowing men in Boston and New York to compete on something approaching even terms with houses in London that were financed by the Bank of England and Baring Brothers and the Rothschilds.

More, it directly aided the Canton trade because the necessity of shipping large amounts of silver to this market aggravated the perennial specie shortage still further—so much so that the recurrent financial depressions were blamed partially upon the continual withdrawals of coined silver for export to Canton. It will be remembered that it was to meet this problem that the original Boston syndicate of Northwesters dispatched the *Columbia* and the *Lady Washington* to Vancouver, with the idea that furs should take the place of silver. Alas, there weren't enough furs on the continent of North America, apparently, to trade for the tea the country's gullets craved. Silver continued to be a staple of export, and so late as 1819 the panic of that year, the most disastrous the country had yet suffered, was ascribed in the report of a special committee of the New York State Senate to the remorseless drainage of milled dollars into the lazarets of the tea-ships —"the result," remarked the Committee, "has been the banishment of metallic currency, the loss of commercial confidence, fictitious capital, increase of civil prosecutions, and multiplication of crimes."

At this time the banks of New York had in circulation $12,500,000 of paper notes, bottomed on reserves of $2,000,000 in specie, a sum which was insufficient to maintain the notes at anything like their face value. Indeed, in times of stringency paper money became quite worthless, and the banks calmly shut their doors, appealed to the State for military protection and left their depositors to misery, bankruptcy, or suicide.

On the whole, it is difficult to say whether the deferred payment of duties was a curse or a help to prosperity. It certainly stimulated overseas trade; but equally certainly, it deprived the Government of more than $250,000,000 in revenues. It helped to make possible the shipping of coined silver to Canton to buy tea and other Chinese products when American merchants had no barter in kind to offer; but this was at the cost of distortion of the country's rickety financial structure. Perhaps it deserves to be judged in the light of an assertion of grim Nat Griswold, of the great firm of N. L. & G. Griswold, one of Jacob's contemporaries—"Three merchants out of every hundred succeed. The rest go bankrupt or quit." Success is for the few, and if the deferred-duty system did nothing else, it helped John Jacob Astor to amass the money he needed to enlarge his fur business. Yet it is to be observed that he finally retired from the Canton trade because of a condition in the tea market directly attributable to abuse of the Government's credit by another merchant.

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[1] "The Old Merchants of New York," by Walter Barrett.

[2] Barrett was writing of the period about 1830, after Astor's retirement from the trade and when the values represented in it had increased materially; but the essential elements of it, as he indicates, remained the same.

VI

New York, like every other shipping town on the Atlantic seaboard, was animated by a spirit such as pulsed through the narrow lanes of Elizabethan London. In a fine, rich glow of initiative, her merchants—merchant adventurers, in very truth—were speeding their ships to the uttermost corners of the seas. The harbor was choked with craft. Wharves thrust their stubby fingers into the channel from every street end, and foot by foot, the shoreline of Manhattan was trenching upon the swirling currents of East and North Rivers. Front Street, which faced the forested slopes of Brooklyn, should soon lose the point of its name, and Water Street appear where once tall ships had lain; but not for many and many a year would the growing wall of warehouses be pushed into midstream to form South Street. Along the North River front, too, the dumpers were tirelessly busy; houses on the westward side of Greenwich Street need no longer be erected on piles; gardens extended farther and farther beyond them. Presently, Washington Street should rise from the mud, and after that, West.

The East River front rang to the clinking of hammers and battering of calkers' mauls in the row of shipyards, which gave off a pleasant, clean smell of seasoned pine and cypress and the salty aroma of oak beams soaked in water to toughen them. Block after block, the ways stretched northwards, beginning with Forman Cheesman's at Corlears Hook, where the *President* frigate was built in 1800; next, Vail & Vincent's, builders of the *Oliver Ellsworth* packet, which made the voyage from New York to Liverpool in fourteen days; Sam Ackley's, foot of Pelham Street, where the *Manhattan* East Indiaman, a leviathan of six hundred tons, was created; Henry Eckford's, Christian Bergh's—noted for the speed of his craft, this cantankerous Dutchman; Adam and Noah Brown's, John Floyd's. Not even the depredations of Frenchman and Britisher, Barbary corsair and Malay pirate, could check the labors of these yards. The Embargo of 1807, which forbade American ships to clear for foreign ports—a reprisal against France and Britain, which, the Federalists said, was a case of cutting off your own nose to spite your face—was a hindrance, and it slowed up trade, ruined many; but New York didn't feel the ill-effects so drastically as New

England. The tonnage of shipping owned in the port increased from 217,381 in 1807 to 268,548 in 1810.

In common with other unpopular laws, the Embargo Act was a source of considerable lawlessness. Your true-blue American was as disdainful of a law which incommoded him in 1807 as he is in 1928. The mercantile interests of the seaboard towns snarled that they were the victims of the agricultural South and the radical new frontier states, jealous of the indubitable wealth which overseas trade was pouring into the tills of New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Salem, Portsmouth, and a dozen places now dozing in a haze of half-forgotten memories of their mighty past. The South and the frontier rapped back that the shipping centers were unpatriotic, lacking in national pride, and what was most heinous, battening selfishly on the needs of the rest of the country. A breach was made, which was to be the source of unparalleled disaster during the approaching War. For the first time the menace of sectionalism appeared. Hatred was stirred. Men openly advocated defiance of a law they held to be unfair—even so essentially conservative a person as John Jacob Astor flouted it, if the evidence at hand means what it seems to.

During the summer of 1808, when the Embargo was being most rigidly enforced, and the naval patrols refused to permit vessels to pass Sandy Hook, unless they were certified in the coasting trade and had given bond not to touch at any foreign port, it became noised about in Broadway and Wall and Pearl Streets that Astor's ship *Beaver* was loading for a China voyage. Other merchants listened to the reports with incredulity. Inquiries were launched, which produced nothing. Astor was uncommunicative; he could be very silent in a stolid, German fashion. "Der *Beaver* vass being overhauled, ja." For the rest, he shrugged his shoulders. And honest men said it wasn't any of their business, and dishonest men wondered what trick the Dutchman had in mind to smuggle past the patrols a four-hundred-ton East Indiaman. A fake voyage to New Orleans, say? Not likely! Chance a dash out through the Sound? Tight quarters for a big ship, with a frigate on her heels, unless the wind was just right.

Then on August 13, in the shipping column of the New York *Commercial Advertiser*, appeared this one-line notice:

"Yesterday the ship *Beaver*, Captain Galloway, sailed for China."

There was a roar of indignation. Stout gentlemen choked over their raw codfish at nooning in the Tontine, and must gulp down an extra glass of spirits lest they choke—on rage rather than codfish. "Why should one merchant be favored?" "Damme, sir, I hold nothing against Astor, but——" " 'Tis favoritism. Favoritism, I say, sir. Rank favoritism." And so on.

They bombarded the local representatives of the Federal Government, who were distinctly uncomfortable. It appeared that Mr. Astor had obtained special permission for this voyage, so that he might send home to Canton a great Chinese mandarin, who had been visiting our shores, in striking contrast to the traditionally exclusive attitude of his class. A great Chinese mandarin! Other tea-merchants pricked up their ears. There was a hasty canvassing of ship captains and supercargoes. Had anyone heard of a mandarin taking passage from Canton? Not for New York? Well, perhaps for Boston? Salem? But nobody had, and gradually suspicion ripened into conviction. There wasn't any mandarin. But there was, insisted the flustered Government officials. They had seen him in his silken coat and peacock button, drinking tea in the *Beaver's* cabin. Whereupon the other tea-merchants laughed or choked again, according to their several dispositions. One of the latter variety, unable to control his wrath, wrote to the President, denouncing the hoax—"the great Chinese personage was no mandarin, not even a Hong Kong merchant, but a common Chinese dock loafer, smuggled out from China, who had departed from that country contrary to its laws, and would be saved from death on his return only by his obscure condition."

The President ignored the letter—very wisely; but the *Commercial Advertiser* attacked him editorially, and for the first time during the controversy with Jacob was drawn. A full statement of the facts should be conveyed to the editor, wrote Jacob, if the editor was unprejudiced and not influenced by envy in formulating his opinions. With the facts in his (the editor's) possession "he shall be convinced that the Government has not been surprised by misrepresentation in granting permission, and the reputation of those concerned cannot be in the slightest degree affected."

Rather incoherent and scarcely ingenuous. How was the editor to prove himself unprejudiced? And in whose eyes? Jacob's? His own? Must both be at one in the matter? It couldn't be done! So, with a deal of table-banging and corner-gossip and ferocious editorializing, the tempest blew itself out. Jacob should worry. The *Beaver* was safe at sea, with practically no rival ships to compete with her for the market, and by the time she dropped anchor off Governors Island again the country would be as thirsty for tea as it had been immediately after the conclusion of the Revolution. Justifiable optimism, too. When the *Beaver* returned in the Fall of 1809, the gossip of the Tontine common-room was that her owner cleared a profit of $200,000 on her cargo. Fifteen months of the Embargo had thrown the entire commercial framework out of kilter; grocers were clamoring for tea, and Souchong fetched the price once asked for Imperial gunpowder.

It was Jacob's biggest coup, most noteworthy, however, not for the addition to his swelling account in Jacob Barker's Bank, but as the first

occasion of his brushing the law from his path. And it isn't to be wondered at that the law never afterward seemed so forbidding or majestic to him. Why should he allow it to hinder him, who had successfully tricked or bulldozed or bought the President of the United States, Thomas Jefferson, himself, author of the Declaration of Independence; the Federal District Attorney, the Revenue officers, and the Naval authorities? The law was for ordinary men, not for those who looked ahead and struggled against stupidity and official lassitude to build an empire on a base of fur and tea.

It was typical of Jacob that he was perhaps the one man in New York to profit from the Embargo. For the country at large, regarded solely as an economic experiment, it was a tragic misfortune. It crippled the new-founded overseas commerce, and must have wrecked our shipping, except for the extraordinary vitality of the seaboard towns and the favorable situation provided by European politics. The merchant marine in the foreign trade, about 900,000 tons in 1807, was earning an average of fifty dollars per ton per year, or $45,000,000, it has been estimated, and the fleet which produced this princely revenue cost around twenty-five or thirty dollars per ton to build. That is, the country's overseas fleet was earning nearly twice its capital value when Jefferson decided to subordinate economics to politics, with the consequences inevitably attached to so crass a perversion of statesmanship.

What did more than anything else to save the financial skins of the merchants who managed to survive the arbitrary curtailment of trade was the determination of the British to press their campaign against Napoleon in Portugal and Spain. For the ensuing three years, or until we, ourselves, declared war upon Britain, the United States practically supplied Wellington's army; and this comparatively short-haul traffic provided the means for resumption of the East Indian, Baltic, Caribbean, and South American trades. But John Jacob Astor, thanks to that one unscrupulous Canton voyage, with "a great Chinese personage" in the *Beaver's* cabin, had no occasion to fret himself over insurance rates to Lisbon against seizure by French privateers. He placidly continued trading fur for tea, and tea, in one shape or another, for fur.

He was, by now, the first merchant of New York.

VII

The War of 1812 was more disastrous to American commerce even than had been Jefferson's Embargo Act. The glorious roll of naval victories and the ravages of our privateers couldn't offset the practical stoppage of the overseas trade. It is true that the 517 privateers and letters-of-marque we

sent to sea captured 1,345 prizes, augmented by 254 taken by the vessels of the Navy, with a total value of $45,600,000; but our merchant marine had been earning in excess of this sum annually before hostilities, and it must be remembered that the depredations of British cruisers were almost as severe. [1] Our harbors were jammed with useless shipping, their topmasts housed, tar-barrels called "Madison's night-caps" covering their mastheads as a protection against the rotting drip of moisture.

For two and a half years American vessels—that is, as purely merchant craft—hardly showed themselves offshore. The few that cleared were heavily armed as letters-of-marque, carrying expensive crews to protect their cargoes and seize upon whatever opportunities occurred to make prizes of weaker Englishmen. Jacob refused to commit capital to so chancy an undertaking as privateering, so none of his ships is to be found in the roster of fifty-five privateers outfitted from New York; but his business requirements obliged him several times to make use of letters-of-marque. In March, 1813, he dispatched the *Lark*, with provisions and supplies for his post at Astoria, in Oregon—the story of this, the most pretentious of his enterprises, will be told elsewhere—and she succeeded in running the blockade; but was wrecked in a gale off the Sandwich Islands, and so far as I can learn, took no prizes.

About the same time two of his tea-ships succeeded in evading the British patrols in the Pacific, the Indian and Atlantic Oceans, and landed bumper cargoes on the Astor dock in Greenwich Street, between Liberty and Courtlandt Streets, over against the brick warehouse he had purchased some years since to care for his East Indian trade. As during the Embargo, he turned a tidy profit on these voyages, thanks to the curtailment of tea imports; but they couldn't compensate him for the loss of Astoria and the wrecking of his fur trade by the ebb and sway of the fighting on the Western frontier, where the red men plied tomahawk and scalping-knife in a last desperate struggle to stem the tide of white emigration which was forcing them out of their hunting grounds this side of the Mississippi. Nor was a cargo of tea so valuable, despite the restricted supply, when insurance rates from Canton were seventy-five per cent and upwards on ships built before the war, and fifty per cent on the new clippers, with sharp hulls and raking spars, designed for speed rather than stowage. Very soon, too, there ceased to be any reason for marine insurance, for in December, 1813, Congress laid a second Embargo, not only upon overseas but coastwise shipping. "Madison's night-caps" became the costume de rigeur for everything that floated.

But Jacob was undismayed. Temporarily, fur and tea had failed him. He developed other sources of income. Possessed of ample liquid capital, he proceeded with the cool detachment that was his dominant business trait, to exploit the troubles of less fortunate merchants and investors. Men whose ships were taken by the enemy or whose livelihoods were affected by the stagnation of trade were forced to borrow money on notes or mortgages. Jacob had scant use for notes, but a mortgage to him was a sound investment, and he had no scruples about foreclosing one. During the War and subsequent years he acquired several of the most valuable parcels of real estate, which ultimately formed the bulk of the Astor fortune. He bought land cheap, too. And he wasn't above making money out of the Government's difficulties. In December, 1812, Congress authorized a loan of $16,000,000 to finance extraordinary military expenditures, and of this total $10,000,000 was taken by Jacob, David Paris, and Stephen Girard, of Philadelphia, for themselves and their friends. They bought the bonds at 80; a year after peace was declared the issue commanded 120. In the meantime, while the price was low, Jacob bought all he could carry from the Doubting Thomases, who foresaw bankruptcy for the United States. He could well afford the loss of $800,000 in his Astoria venture.

He had his finger in many financial pies during these troubled years, taking advantage of abnormal conditions to corner the available supply of staple goods, buying shares of stocks from embarrassed friends, financing overland freight ventures to replace the coastwise traffic—dubbed by Federalist newspapers the "horse marine"—and contractors who worked on the fortifications. Like the Rothschilds, he had a keen perception of the value of news in high finance, and throughout the war was served by an elaborate underground organization, which kept him informed regarding the inner secrets of Congress and the Cabinet, as well as the developments in the enemy's camp. Albert Gallatin, Secretary of the Treasury, another emigrant lad, was his personal friend, leaned on him for advice—and repaid obligations in the coin of confidence. His affiliations with Canada enabled him to maintain contact with Montreal, despite the hostile armies cumbering the Niagara frontier. Forest runners, who were his men, rather than King George's or the President's, slipped back and forth almost at will, and Jacob knew weekly what reinforcements had reached Halifax, the trend of Napoleon's declining fortunes, the number of King's ships on the coast, the latest gossip of Westminster and the Royal Exchange.

When the Peace Commissioners met at Ghent, he arranged for a series of relays from Montreal to New York, by means of which he received word of the signature of the treaty on December 30, 1814, two days in advance of the Government, to which he communicated his intelligence with naïve

satisfaction—but not until after he had unloaded his stocks of foreign goods on hand at the current local prices. His brig *Seneca*, commanded by Captain Augustus DePeyster—who, in 1837, skippered the Black Ball packet *Columbus* in a race against the *Sheridan*, Russell, master, of Collins' Dramatic Line, from New York to Liverpool, $10,000 a side, which the *Columbus* won in sixteen days—carried the news of peace to the Cape of Good Hope in fifty-five days, said to have been a record at that time, and pressed on to relieve the uncertainty of the Yankee tea-ships immured at the Pagoda Anchorage, in fear of the British cruisers lurking in Macao Roads.

If he wasn't a red-hot patriot, just the same Jacob was glad the War was over. It hadn't really served anyone, except the Republicans—or Democrats, as they called themselves with equal facility—and this mainly because of the inept politics practised by the Federalists. New York, and the country as a whole, was going to know hard times for years to come: partly the natural consequence of national conditions, partly a repercussion from the more widespread commercial depression which was Europe's normal aftermath to the series of wars that had continued with slight intermissions for more than twenty years. It would be another twenty years before shipping climbed back to where it had been—New York, which had boasted 268,548 tons in 1810, could claim only 231,215 tons in 1820, and this was typical of all the seaports. But hard times didn't bother Jacob. The Midas touch never failed him.

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[1] James, the British naval historian, claims the capture of 2,000 sail. Coggeshall, the American, concedes 500. The true estimate would be between those totals, I imagine.

VIII

How the man thrived—and dwindled! Thrived as merchant, hoarder of dollars; dwindled as individual in direct ratio to the increase of his wealth. Money gnawed like a canker at Jacob's soul. The innate lovable qualities, the boyish exultation in tasks accomplished, the zest for adventure and the forest trail, the simple homeliness—all these diminished their influence upon his character. He became harsher, sterner, less sympathetic, more overbearing, regardless of others, cold-bloodedly selfish. The acquisition of money was everything to him. He could count a million—and wasn't satisfied. Two million—and chafed that Girard had more. The sufferings and hardships of men he foreclosed or drove to the wall made him only impatient. Dumkopfs! It was their own fault.

One virtue remained to him: for his family he couldn't do too much or make any sacrifice in vain. Sarah enjoyed whatever comforts were obtainable, grand clothes, a carriage and pair, servants. His daughters were given every advantage the town afforded; they took their place in the society of the period. William must have the education his father was denied: Columbia College, and after that, Gottingen. Nor were the relatives in Germany neglected. George Peter, who had assisted him to his job in his uncle's factory in London, was brought to New York in 1816, and set up in the musical instrument business at 144 Water Street. The rest, old John Jacob, in Waldorf, and Melchior and several sisters, were allowed liberal incomes out of the millions Jacob was squeezing from fur and tea—and other people's misfortunes.

He could afford to do all this, but what is remarkable is that he did it at all, considering the intemperate meanness, the pitiful avarice, he displayed in his business dealings—sometimes to his own discomfort. What are we to say of the man who refused to buy a chronometer for that one of his skippers whom he called his "king of Captains"? This captain, Cowman by name, demanded the instrument as an aid to navigation on the long voyage to Canton and return. Astor's reply was that a chronometer cost $500, and Cowman had been able to get along very well without it. Cowman's argument that it would materially curtail the time required for the voyage, and more than pay for itself, was curtly dismissed, and he quit Astor for a merchant who thought as he did—and in his first voyage under his new employer's house-flag, brought his ship into port days ahead of Astor's, with the result that the market was glutted with tea before she arrived, and Astor lost $70,000. But it says much for Jacob that, meeting Cowman on Broadway, he took the sailor's hand, and admitted his own fault—"You vass right, Cowman. Seventy t'ousan' dollar' I lose for dot chronometer."

A second captain, who chanced to be at Canton when Astor's agent there died suddenly, took measures promptly and skilfully to establish himself in the dead man's place, and so saved his employer the $700,000 worth of property involved, which, under the drastic Chinese law, should have reverted to the Grand Hoppo and the minions of the Dragon Throne. Upon his return to New York, Astor thanked this captain profusely—and never rewarded him with so much as a bottle of wine. Which reminds me of still a third captain, to whom stingy Jacob had entrusted two pipes of Madeira to be transported to Canton and back in accordance with the accepted theory that sea-air and the joggling of the waves ripened this wine better than any other means. The day the ship docked at New York, Jacob appeared on her deck, more anxious about his Madeira than the thousands of chests of tea stacked above it. For some obscure reason, he wanted the two pipes

immediately, which wasn't like him, for he seldom drank wine, and attached little importance to it; but at any rate, the captain undertook to humor him, and put the crew to work, burrowing through the cargo to where the Madeira lay. It meant two days' delay in unloading, two days' extra work; and Jacob, apparently appreciating this, promised the captain a demijohn so soon as the pipes were safe in the cellar of 223 Broadway.

Sweating and grunting, the sailors finally reached the huge, aromatic, damp-streaked hogsheads, and swung them overside to the waiting dray, with "a yo-ho-ho and a rumble-O!" And their skipper licked his chops daily, thinking of the demijohn that should come to his table. Not many men could afford to lay down Madeira, and then ship it half-way around the world to impart to it precisely the right bouquet. But the hogshead never appeared. The ship sailed, made a second voyage to Canton and returned; and one day, in the counting-room, the captain remarked jokingly to Jacob: "What about that demijohn of the Madeira you were going to let me have, Mr. Astor?" Jacob coughed apologetically. "Ach, it issn't fine yet," he replied. The captain made a third voyage to Canton, and returning, more for fun than any other reason, broached the subject of the hogshead again. Jacob was as apologetic as before—"Ach, it issn't fine yet, Cabtain." It never was fine, so far as the Captain knew.

The truth was that Jacob hated to part with anything that came into his possession—unless it was for his family. Perhaps because they seldom abused his generosity. Sarah's tastes were as simple as his own; William was a serious, plodding fellow, burdened with a sense of responsibility and a liking for the drudgery of detail; the girls were well brought up, bright, kindly and affectionate. The young people had a secure social position, as did Jacob and Sarah, in so far as they cared to make use of it, and all four children made brilliant marriages. Magdalen, born in the squalor of the two rooms in Queen Street, married first, in 1807, Adrian Bentzen, a Dane, who was Governor of the Island of Santa Cruz in the West Indies, and second, the Reverend John Bristed, from Dorchester, England, who quit the ministry for the law, and became a partner of Beverley Robinson. Dorothea married Walter Langdon, scion of a distinguished family of New Hampshire. Eliza carried the family into international society by selecting Count Vincent Rumpff, a Swiss, who was Minister of the German Free Cities—still possessed of a measure of the prestige of the ancient Hanseatic League—at Paris, and afterward at Washington. William made his father proud by selecting for a wife Margaret, daughter of General John Armstrong, who was Minister of War in Madison's Cabinet, and of Alida Livingston.

Photo by International Newsreel Corp.

JOHN JACOB ASTOR (FROM AN OLD ENGRAVING)

This last was in 1818, when it could truly be said that the Astors were honorably established in the New World, allied with as good blood as there was on the Continent. Jacob was at least as much respected as hated. Sarah was universally loved. If an occasional boudoir pussy commented that those Astor girls had been born in the Pearl Street slums, and did you know their father was a cake peddler—Well, the Astors needn't take it to heart. Jacob had become the kind of silent strong man who leads without seeming to. He was never, understand me, an old hunks. There wasn't about him any of the outward grime or slovenliness of the stage miser. Dressed plainly, unostentatiously, he was always neat, paid his employees well, maintained a

comfortable house, entertained agreeably, contributed to the church, and in moderation, to charity. The awful thing about his meanness was that it was a meanness of the soul, a vice contracted through abuse of a fundamental virtue. It led him to practices which were unnecessary, which abased an otherwise noble character. But it would be unjust to say that meanness was the machinery of his wealth. There, again, the situation is infinitely pitiable, for I am persuaded John Jacob Astor would have been rich, if he had never shaved a note, foreclosed a mortgage or schemed to exploit the troubles and oversights of others.

He was now a national figure, next to Stephen Girard the richest man in America. In 1816 he was appointed a director of the Bank of the United States. He was one of four financiers—the others were his old bête noir Nat Prime, John Hone, and John Robins—who arranged the Ohio canal loan. His interests were broadening rapidly, but he refused to permit anything to divert his major absorption from the two commodities upon which his fortune was erected. Fur, as I shall show later, was looming continually more important in the scheme of things, the Astor brigades so many spearheads for the white man in the vague country beyond the prairies and the Shining Mountains—which the trappers were beginning to refer to also as the Great Stonies. Tea was the principal staple of the East India trade, the immense revenue from it, however, attracting so much participation as to cut the profits for everyone. Still, it was, and remained for some years, a lucrative article for Jacob to handle, mainly because he was able to purchase and market it more efficiently than his competitors.

The arrival of a tea cargo was an event, attracting popular attention from the moment a panting clerk burst into the owner's office—"The *Beaver's* in the stream, Mr. Astor. She's riding deep"—until the last chest had been dispersed at the auction which consummated the venture. Small boys would jam the entrance to the wharf, snuffing their noses at the pungent aroma wafted from the matting-wrapped chests the sailors hove up out of the holds with block and tackle and tailed over the gangplank in a double line. Passersby would stop for a moment to peer into the fragrant dark interior or eye the salt-stained spars of the ship and the bulwarks which had been battered by 14,000 miles of ocean. From the fo'c's'le fighting cocks, China Reds, crowed defiance to the lords of the city's cock-pits; a lean-faced officer tramped the poop; from the row of ports poked the muzzles of cannon, threatening despite the tompions that choked their throats. What hadn't she seen, that ship! The palest clerk could achieve a thrill from her halo of mystery.

Advertisements in the newspapers would shortly announce an auction of: "The cargo of Mr. John Jacob Astor's ship *Beaver*, arrived this past

week, with 2,500 chests of prime teas, produced last season from the best Bohea and Sung-lo fields; the sale to be conducted by Mr. John Hone, the auctioneer, by open bidding, on Mr. Astor's wharf, foot of Liberty Street." And on the day in question a notable array of factors, dealers and tradesmen would swarm the wharf, consulting the handbills distributed by the auctioneer's assistants, gossiping over the probable values: "I am told the Kongo is excellent, but with an hundred and seventy per cent duty 'twill come high." "Ah, well, there are fifty chests of the Imperial gunpowder. Whettin assures me it cost forty-two cents the pound, and with a fifty cent duty——" "Two dollars the pound, sir! Monstrous! I'll rather bid on the Hyson. It couldn't have cost above thirty-seven the pound, and the duty's but twenty-five cents." "They'll start it at a dollar, sir. Mark me! If you'll have a cheap grade, take my advice, and bid for the Souchong—fifteen and a half cents in the hold, and a twenty-five cent duty. It shouldn't go above seventy-five here."

Beside the auctioneer's desk stood a huge bowl of punch, and a courteous negro freedman filled glasses as rapidly as the bidders presented themselves. There was a continual buzz of conversation, interrupted periodically by the suave voice of Mr. Hone, announcing lots, calling for bids, urging the prices higher, the staccato exclamations of his patrons so many punctuation-marks in what amounted to a polite bedlam. Ladies hovered on the fringes of the throng, and persons who had dropped in out of curiosity nodded to acquaintances, exchanged comments with the merchants who had an interest at stake. Nobody was in a hurry, as a rule the best of feeling prevailed—"Sir, I regret to have deprived you——" "Tush, sir! Your privilege. I trust you have the right market." "May I pass, sir?" "Ah, your pardon, sir." On such a day the wharf acquired an atmosphere resembling that of a drawing-room, but infinitely more romantic and picturesque, what with the river-smells blowing between the stacks of chests, the lapping of the water against the piles, the rustle and creak of the ship, riding a trifle wearily at her moorings alongside. Brave days, soon forgotten!

The one difficulty was that the Government had made things too easy for the tea-merchants. Jacob and conservative men like him were the prey of irresponsible speculators, who flooded the market, and then, having smashed prices, and forced the more substantial merchants to absorb the excess tea in an effort at least partially to stabilize prices, themselves went broke and were fruitlessly posted for the millions they owed the Treasury Department and their associates. This sort of episode was recurrent, but matters reached a climax in 1826 when the Philadelphia firm of Thompson & Company, one of the three biggest tea houses in the country—the other two being J. & T. H. Perkins, of Boston, and Thomas H. Smith & Company, of New York—

crashed, after an attempt to swindle the Government, dragging down Thomas H. Smith & Company in its fall. Jacob was an innocent victim of this disaster, his involvement having been due to his efforts to maintain the market in face of the dishonest methods practised by Thompson, who had so abused his credit with the Treasury Department that the Collector of the Port of Philadelphia refused to accept his bonds for duty on additional imports of tea.

Thompson was an influential man, however, and brought pressure to bear upon the Collector, using the argument, of course, that if he wasn't permitted to import and sell tea he never would be able to pay the duty he already owed. As a compromise, the Collector ruled that Thompson might place his latest importations under lock in the Custom House, withdrawing them as customers appeared and paying the duties on such withdrawals as he made them. Thompson went through the motions of complying with this agreement, but actually turned it to account to perpetrate a clever swindle on the Custom House authorities. Whenever they issued him a permit to withdraw one hundred chests, acknowledging therein the payment of duty on this amount of tea, he would contrive to raise the amount and sum specified to cover a withdrawal of one thousand chests, shipping his booty immediately to his New York agents, who dumped it without loss of time on the market, regardless of what it did to prevailing prices.

Astor and Smith were so heavily committed that they were compelled to continue absorbing Thompson's offerings to protect themselves against a complete slump. Their warehouses were already bursting with teas they had no use for when the Philadelphian's swindle was detected, and he was jailed for a defaulter—to die in his cell several months later, the imposing fabric of the business he had created an evil-smelling heap of ruins about his ears. They thought their troubles were ended, but the Treasury Department determined to dispose of the balance of Thompson's teas, impounded in the Custom House at Philadelphia, and offered to sell for the value of the duties, purchasers to be entitled to debenture on them—which meant that the teas would cost purchasers nothing shipped.

This sounded more than fair; a merchant ought to be able to turn a profit on goods which required no investment before he marketed them. So Astor and Smith accepted the Government's terms, and cast their eyes abroad for a market, no matter how cheap. But very soon they blinked with apprehension, for nowhere could they locate a demand for tea. From Bristol, Southampton, London, Havre, Hamburg, Bremen, Copenhagen, their agents reported a glut. Price meant nothing. Merchants simply wouldn't undertake to buy more teas as a measure of self-protection; and in desperation, the two Americans resolved to try the Mediterranean, instructing their supercargoes

to accept any offers. But the Mediterranean peoples were accustomed to obtaining their teas by the overland caravan routes across Central Asia, and the Thompson teas went for sums insufficient to pay freights, duties and other charges.

The one thing Astor and Smith accomplished by their intervention in the Thompson scandal was the maintenance of the New York market, although in the long run their efforts here were in vain. Poor Smith, overstrained by his endeavors to keep pace with Astor & Son—the style of Jacob's overseas trading firm—went the way of Thompson, found himself owing the Government $2,000,000, and was forced to assign. The Perkinses drew in their horns for the time being, and the tea market entered upon a period of stagnation which unsettled business for the next five years. Jacob was thoroughly disgusted. He was never one to push a losing proposition, and he saw that the great days of the trade were ended. Other men might be satisfied with lower profits, but not he. In the following year, 1827, he severed his Canton connections, wound up his domestic business, sold off a portion of his fleet and threw himself with renewed ardor into the development of the fur trade.

Perhaps he must have done so in any event, for competition was increasing in the fur trade. The white man was about to occupy definitely the Empire Napoleon had sold Jefferson in order to keep it out of Britain's hands. And from the Mississippi to Alta California the trapper blazed the way for pack train and covered wagon.

BOOK FOUR

AN APOSTLE OF EMPIRE

AN APOSTLE OF EMPIRE

I

No American was more keenly appreciative than Astor of the value of the territory comprised in the Louisiana Purchase. He had traveled widely at a time when successful merchants seldom wandered from the center of their activities. For years he had been filing away in his memory the half-legendary tales of the free trappers and engagés of the Canadian Northwest Company, who brought into the posts at Michilimackinac, Detroit, and Grand Portage the reports of their journeys to the Shining Mountains. And his preoccupation with the Canton and Northwest trades had naturally focused his interest upon the Pacific coast north of Alta California. Americans held that Louisiana included this northern coast above the Spanish lands; Great Britain was inclined to dispute the claim. And so, through a series of circumstances, with which he was vitally connected, the title to the coast became a subject of controversy, and was finally compromised under terms unfavorable to the United States.

The story of this episode is the best clue to his character. The way his mind functioned in meeting its problems, the attitude and policies he adopted, show the manner of man he was, emphasizing alike his virtues and his failings. An empire-builder in spirit, capable of daring and bold conceptions, he was utterly lacking in the essential gallantry, the selfless determination, which steel a man to the chancing of high risks and ruthless prosecution of a cause which seems to fail. It was, whether he appreciated the fact or not, the great tragedy of his life. Instead of being remembered as just a rich man, he might have won an extraordinary niche as statesman and patriot. But it wasn't to be. The necessary springs of ambition were lacking in his makeup, although, I think, he would have liked to play the loftier rôle. Certainly, he made some pretense to it in old age, and persuaded easy-going Washington Irving to embalm him as a disinterested patrioteer in a rather sloppily written work called "Astoria."

There is a tinge of epic quality in the affair, all the more human, and therefore the more interesting, for the failure which dogged it. The stake was the coastlands of North America, from the borders of the Spanish Crown to the fiords of Alaska, where Count Baronhoff ruled for the Czar. Had Astor won, Canada would have been barred from the Pacific, and who can say what might have been the resulting effect upon the relations between the United States and their northern neighbor? A Canada denied a Western seaport must have been urged to closer ties with American industrialism: all the wealth of timber, minerals and agriculture that flow to Vancouver

contributing to American prosperity; a railroad linking Puget Sound with Alaska—the possibilities are limitless, and fruitless to discuss. For Astor didn't win. But even in failing, and despite the errors of his course, he established the American title to Oregon and its hinterland, and so helped secure an empire sufficiently ample to satisfy most Americans, except the rabid breed who presently commenced to shout: "Manifest Destiny!" By which cryptic utterance they implied a conviction that Divine Providence favored the extension of the Eagle's sway the length and breadth of the Continent. We have them with us yet.

II

There was every practical reason why Astor should be interested in the Louisiana Purchase. If he thrilled to the trappers' stories of hidden lakes, and a Salt Sea surrounded by the habitations of a race of giants, mysterious walled cities, armies of thousands of horse Indians, mountains crowned with perpetual snow, still, what really caught his fancy were the descriptions of countless herds of animals and rich promise of the small fur bearers. The fur trade was entering upon its climacteric period: a period of expansion and cut-throat competition, accentuated by the realization on all sides that it was the entering wedge of the white man's conquest. First the trapper; next, the settler; then the farm—and the village. In the closing years of the eighteenth century the sequence was remarkably rapid. Daniel Boone, restless under the restraints of ordered life, already had seen Kentucky wrested from the Indian, forests leveled to make room for towns, and had now fled across the Mississippi to the frontier of Missouri, moving west whenever he heard of a plow.

The colonial government in Canada was alert to the importance of pushing the fur brigades farther and farther into the unknown, and lent every possible support to the Northwest Company and lesser competitors. A fur trading-post was always a nucleus for white men, an assertion of power. Wherever one was maintained, there you might find in miniature the civilization which was slowly mastering the opposition of nature and barbarism. If it was a Canadian post, it stood for Great Britain and British rule. If it was an American post, it stood for all the Thirteen Colonies had fought for. And the Americans were quite as alert as the Canadians. For some years the Government at Washington was to maintain its own trading-posts in the Indian territories, yielding them only in face of the obvious superiority of private enterprise for achieving the very purpose it had in view. And long before this happened, the Federal authorities were

supporting the private companies, in so far as the law permitted—in the case of Astor, rather beyond the due limits of the law.

The struggle to dominate the trade was as fierce as any war, involving bloodshed, treachery, every resource of an acute antagonism. Nor was this merely because of opposing national aims. Bearing in mind the relative wealth of the period, the trade itself, was a fat prize. It was figured that in the early years of the nineteenth century 6,000,000 pelts were sold annually at prices ranging from fifteen cents to five hundred dollars apiece. Every gentleman in Europe and America, and many below that arbitrary scale of rank, must have his beaver hat; and a beaver hat meant at least one pelt, which cost one dollar in trinkets to buy from an Indian trapper, and sold in London for twenty-five shillings, which would purchase English cloth and cutlery marketable for ten dollars in New York. This, as has been said, was the scale of values in the first decade of the new century. Some years later a beaver pelt was worth ten dollars in St. Louis. Other furs had value, but the beaver was the standard pelt, and the one most sought.

At this time the outstanding Canadian competitor was the Northwest Company, which had been organized in 1783. It was the first of the powerful fur companies—with the exception, of course, of the Hudson's Bay, which didn't enter the American field until near the end of the struggle. Twenty-three partners composed its directorate, and on its muster rolls it carried 2,000 employees—factors, clerks, boatmen, trappers. Most of the partners and the senior men were Scots; the rank-and-file of courier des bois, and engagés were French Canadians and half-breeds. It was an intelligently managed organization, progressive and aggressive. One of its chiefs, Sir Alexander Mackenzie, had made the first recognized crossing of the Continent in 1793, many miles north of what was to be the American border, however.

A second Canadian competitor, the Michilimackinac or Mackinaw Company, was actually established on American soil, and while not so big as the Northwest Company, was as much of a thorn in the side of the Americans because of its strategic relation to them. Generally speaking, the Northwest Company worked the territory west and north of the Great Lakes, and the Mackinaw Company restricted its operations to the regions below the Lakes, where the American competition was strongest—although the Americans for years had labored under the handicap entailed by the occupation of this country by the British in defiance of the Treaty of Peace after the Revolution. We have seen how the removal of these illegal garrisons by the terms of Jay's Treaty in 1794 had assisted Astor in an earlier stage of his career.

Many men in his position would have been tempted to fight the Canadians with the weapons they, themselves, so casually used—rifle and scalping-knife. The smaller American traders did so at every opportunity. But Astor, possibly because of past associations, preferred to work out an amicable relation with them, which implied at least a partial surrender to their interests: a policy which should have drastic consequences for all concerned. Yet he wasn't disposed to yield more than he felt necessary. Indeed, anyone willing to abandon outright resistance to the enterprising Northwest brigades must have been denied their respect. So he was eager to develop new trapping territories, and awaited anxiously the reports of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, dispatched by Jefferson to survey the Louisiana Purchase.

Very likely, isolated white men had crossed the Rockies and the tablelands beyond, traversed the Cascade Range, and glimpsed the surf of the Pacific. But if they did, they told their adventures only to others as ignorant as themselves, who were incapable of appreciating the significance of the exploit. And if the mere glory of crossing the Continent means anything, credit should go first to Mackenzie, although Mackenzie's expedition was trivial in its after-effects compared with Lewis and Clark's, which definitely turned the nation's face toward the Pacific coast. From that moment the country's destiny, whether manifest or otherwise, was assured. Not even Astor's bunglings could alter the supreme event.

He was, to do him the justice he deserves, aware of the ulterior implications of the moment as were few of his contemporaries. And for that very reason the more blame attaches to him for his stupid penny-chasing and fearful seeking of the correct path, when what was needed was a dauntless rush and a devil-take-the-hindmost spirit. But he wasn't that kind of a German, our Jacob. Thorough, systematic, insistent upon details, he would move just so far as he could see, and trust no subordinate to see farther. And he *did* see an American Oregon, saw it, for him, precipitately. Unwilling to await the formal report of the expedition, he fell upon Patrick Gass's[1] Journal, published in 1807, devoured it, realized the profits awaiting him in the untapped fur countries it described and envisaged an immense expansion of his business. The machinery he had employed up to this time would no longer be sufficient for such tasks; he must have an instrument to work with which would allow of the broadest possible range of activities.

So John Jacob Astor, Fur Trader, gave place to The American Fur Company, incorporated in New York, April 6, 1808. According to a descendant of his[2], this corporation was simply "a fiction intended to broaden and facilitate his operations"—in other words, as will become

apparent when his operations are scrutinized, a holding company. The first, remote precursor of a corporate device which was regarded as highly original nearly a century later. Astor discovered it to be handier, if anything, than he had anticipated, and adapted it to meet several of the problems the capitalists of his era hadn't perceived in their more restricted dealings.

The capital of $1,000,000 was entirely subscribed by himself, which gives an inkling of the wealth he had acquired. Girard was wealthier, but no other merchant, not the shipping kings of Boston and Salem, could match Astor by 1808. It is obvious, too, that he still intended to make his business a one-man affair. He had a very definite plan in view. He'd stretch out his chain of posts along the Great Lakes to the Mississippi as far as St. Louis, running a second string along the Missouri westward to the Rockies. Intermediate posts in the mountains would link the Missouri chain with a third chain down the Columbia to the Pacific. The main distributing and collecting center for the eastbound trade would be at St. Louis. A fort at the mouth of the Columbia would afford a haven for his China ships, which could load there direct for Canton. A post in the Sandwich Islands would be a stopping-place, both on the voyage to Canton and from New York to the Columbia.

A grandiose scheme, but sound. Developed logically, it must assure him control of the entire region. His brigades would be so situated that they could repel any invaders, while the complementary arrangements for marketing the catch would give him an east and west dispersion, guaranteeing a maximum of economy. He'd be able to buy furs cheaper, and sell them at a lower price. But he wasn't contented with the arrangements already outlined. The Russian Fur Company in Alaska, practically a Government subsidiary, worked under several difficulties. It lacked transportation facilities at sea, and it was forever complaining of the depredations, violence, and opposition of the Boston Northwesters. Astor conceived the idea of joining forces with the Russians, so that their furs, too, should pass through his hands. His light-blue eyes, peering out of their cavernous hollows, contemplated eventual dominance of the fur trade of the Continent.

He carried the idea to Washington, where Jefferson bestowed enthusiastic approval upon it—"I considered as a great public acquisition," the President stated later, "the commencement of a settlement on that point of the Western coast of America, and looked forward with gratification to the time when its descendants should have spread themselves through the whole length of that coast." But it is to be doubted that Astor considered the project in as impersonal a mood as did the man who wrote for his epitaph: "Author of the Declaration of Independence and of the Statute for Religious

Freedom of Virginia, Founder of the University of Virginia." To the fur trader the whole proposition was simply an excellent device for making money.

Other men had glimmerings of the same plan. The Canadian Northwesters were alive to the situation, but they lacked a real incentive in pushing to the Coast, in that, as British subjects, by the terms of the East India Company's monopoly, they would be denied access to Canton. At the same time, their natural jealousy spurred them to compete with the Americans for the interior fur countries, while the American free trappers and traders west of the Mississippi were quite as jealous of Astor's company as they were of the Northwest men. In 1809, Manuel Lisa, one of the ablest of the Missouri traders, organized the St. Louis-Missouri Fur Company, known historically as the Missouri Fur Company. It was the first of a succession of independent companies which should fight the American Company for a generation, blazing trails the "Trust" followed, as a rule, with lethargic ingenuity.

It is difficult to understand why Astor didn't effect a combination with Manuel Lisa and his men. Instead, he turned to the Northwest Company, to men who were Canadians, active trade enemies, who very readily might become national enemies, in the troubled state of public opinion. But if such a contingency occurred to him it must have had no weight. He doesn't seem to have made any endeavor to interest other American capital or individuals in his enterprise. The capital he palpably didn't want, preferring to contribute all, himself, and monopolize whatever profits were earned. But his objection to Americans as partners is more obscure. It is true that he had known the Canadian traders for years, and in his young manhood had gotten along with them when native-born Americans couldn't. Possibly, he thought Canadians would be easier to work with. And he seems always to have been contemptuous of the American trappers who were the pathfinders of the West. They were a turbulent, lawless lot, more individualistic than the French Canadians; but their individualism made for initiative, and as a rule five of them were worth more than ten of the Canadians and half-breeds.

It has been argued, and perhaps soundly, that in attempting to combine forces with the Northwest Company he hoped to neutralize the opposition of his strongest rival; and this argument is supported by the suspicion with which his approaches were received by the Canadians. They were establishing several posts west of the Rockies, and felt themselves capable of resisting American competition. Moreover, normal trade and national jealousies tinctured their resentment at being offered only a one-third interest in the new corporation Astor planned to launch. They spurned an alliance, and he set himself with misguided subtlety, to undermine them in

another fashion by luring to his service five of their ablest factors—Donald McKenzie, Alexander McKay, Duncan McDougal, David Stuart, and Stuart's nephew, Robert.

On June 23, 1810, he organized the Pacific Fur Company, the first subsidiary of his American Company, with a capital of $200,000, divided into one hundred shares. Of these he retained fifty shares for himself; his five Canadian partners received four each; and five went to his one partner who was a citizen, Wilson Price Hunt, a native of New Jersey. The remainder were to be distributed amongst the clerks, with the intention of heightening their interest in the venture—the whole distribution effecting what nowadays we should regard as a mutualization. Under the terms of the agreement entered into with his six partners, Astor was to provide all the equipment required, vessels, provisions, arms, ammunition, trading goods, etc., and to bear all losses for five years, his total commitment not to exceed $400,000. The contribution of the partners was to be their knowledge and skill; and they were to have charge of the company's pioneering work, plotting of trade routes, building posts, organizing relations with the Indians, surveying trapping grounds.

Superficially, it appears a fair and satisfactory arrangement. There was even an element of triumph in it for Astor. He had deprived his biggest competitor of the aid of several of its best executives. And he did not stop here, either. A majority of the clerks he hired were Northwest Company men. Indeed, so grave were his inroads upon the personnel at Montreal, Sault Ste. Marie, and Grand Portage that a fresh crop of hardy, young Scotsmen was required to make good the depletions. And Astor, reading indignant letters, listening to outraged comments when he stopped off at Montreal, chuckled inwardly over the embarrassment he was causing. He was so satisfied with his policy of kidnapping Canadians to employ in starting an American fur company, that in the following year, 1811, he induced several Northwest Company partners to join with him in buying out the Mackinaw Company.

This concern, he argued, was a nuisance to both the larger companies, competing with the Northwest in Canada and with the American below the Lakes; the interests of both would be served by a division of its trade between them. As a company, the Northwest refused to connive at the obliteration of another Canadian Company; but equally as a company, it had no objection to individuals amongst its partners joining with Astor to remove the troublesome competitor. And he and his latest batch of alien associates took over the Mackinaw, reorganizing it as a new corporation, the Southwest Company, under the American Fur Company's charter. Astor, who had found most of the money for the deal, was to have a two-thirds

interest in the Southwest Company's trade in the United States for five years, after which time it was all to lapse to him.

Again, this may seem like a long-headed scheme for the elimination of a competitor; but examination of it in the light of known political conditions at the time arouses a sense of bafflement. It is all but inconceivable that a man of Astor's undoubted intelligence, perspicacity and acquaintance with public opinion should have committed himself to a policy so obviously bristling with perils. Relations between the United States and Great Britain were dangerous in 1810, bad in 1811 and hostile in 1812. Throughout this period, indeed, from about the time of the blackguardly engagement between the *Leopard* frigate and the ill-omened *Chesapeake* in 1807, there was a seething current of bitterness separating the two countries. At sea the British men-o'-war searched our vessels and pressed our seamen; on the frontier, their agents encouraged the Indians to war upon our settlers. The British, on their part, deeply resented the prosperity which had fallen to American commerce as a result of the Napoleonic Wars. So well-recognized was this feeling that McDougal and another of Astor's Northwest partners called upon Jackson, the British Minister at Washington, before sailing with his expedition for the Pacific Coast, to ask for instructions as to their conduct when hostilities occurred.

Men took for granted that there would be war—all men except Astor. He continued blithely the preparations for his great project. McKay, McDougal, and the two Stuarts left New York with one contingent in the ship *Tonquin*, September 8, 1810. Hunt and McKenzie, with the overland expedition, left Montreal July 5. And in March, 1811, an Astor agent sailed for Russia to negotiate an agreement for co-operation with the Russian Fur Company. Everything was going fine, Astor thought. He still thought so in May after the *President* frigate had defeated H. B. M.'s *Little Belt* sloop-of-war in a purely unofficial engagement, not in any way, of course, retaliation for the humiliation of the *Chesapeake*. The British would learn the Yankees had teeth, he concluded. And when, toward Christmas, the post brought word out of the West of Harrison's defeat of Tecumseh at Tippecanoe, he reasoned only that conditions would be easier for his fur brigades east of the Mississippi. It never occurred to him that if the British permitted the destruction of Tecumseh's confederacy to stand, they must lose forever their prestige with the disgruntled border tribes, who looked to the Canadian officials to support them against the Longknives of the Ohio valley.

[1] Gass was the last survivor of the expedition. He died at Wellsburg, W. Va., in 1870. It is almost incredible that the events he witnessed could have occurred in one man's lifetime.

[2] William Waldorf, first Baron Astor, in the Pall Mall Magazine, Vol. XXV.

III

The plans for the joint expeditions, which were instructed to establish a fort and trading-post to be called Astoria at the mouth of the Columbia River were precisely drawn, as might have been expected of a mind as prone to meticulous detail as Astor's. Sitting on the porch of his house at 223 Broadway, in his office in Pine Street or on the dock where his Indiamen lay, he had constantly in view the tremendous potentialities involved. This was no ordinary project of merchantry. Success would make him emperor in fact, if not in name, over a domain of limitless expanse. The fur trade would be his from shore to shore; he'd be able to manipulate prices so that the proud Northwest Company would have to jump to the tune he played. And rubbing his muscular hands together behind his back, whistling softly between pursed lips, he let his imagination range across the scene of his endeavors—the *Tonquin*, slanting south with the trades; Hunt and McKenzie and their buckskin brigade, poling and towing by cordelle against the muddy flood of the Missouri; his emissary trudging from one stuffy bureau to another about the quays of St. Petersburg.

Say this for him. Wrong or right, he made his dispositions, calmly, methodically, and then awaited fate's decision with an imperturbability which savored somewhat of Teutonic phlegm. No welcher. No protester. With hundreds of thousands of dollars at stake, he went to his other affairs as whole-heartedly as though the Pacific Fur Company, the Southwest Company, the American Fur Company, Astoria, were so many empty words scrawled on a blackboard in the Tontine common-room. His friends fretted, worried, snarled at critics. He laughed at them kindly, enjoyed his flute or an occasional evening of music, loved his family very heartily—and kept a keen watch for a near-due mortgage or a piece of sound property going cheap.

Lucky for him he accepted uncertainty so easily, for two years should pass before he'd even hear his expeditions had reached their destination, two years of shoddy patriotism, and political claptrap, and thundering cannon. A little more energy in his conduct, a little less stolidity, a flare of the

impersonal vision so lacking in him—and he wouldn't have waited two years for that message. But great men are as much a prey to their weaknesses as any puling, thumb-sucking infant. The Astoria venture might have furnished material for a splendid national saga. As matters fell out, the best we can say for it is that it dramatized Oregon for our people, fixing in the memories of a busy generation the fact that our flag had flown on the Pacific Coast.

The story of the expeditions falls properly into two distinct chapters, one party traveling by water around Cape Horn, the other tracking the steps of Lewis and Clark. And inasmuch as the *Tonquin* contingent started first and arrived first, we may give them precedence, qualifying this concession with a reminder that the overland journey was infinitely more difficult.

A stout little ship, the *Tonquin*, two hundred and ninety tons burthen—about the size of an ordinarily hefty tugboat—with ten guns in her battery, and a crew of twenty men. For master, Astor had especially engaged for this voyage Lieutenant Jonathan Thorn, an officer of the United States Navy on leave of absence. Thorn was a veteran of the Tripolitan fracas, a very fair sample of the average naval officer of the period, honest, opinionated, loyal, childishly touchy. A good, but not an inspired, seaman, and handicapped by the routine of the naval service. He was, as matters turned out, the very last man for the job in hand; but he was precisely the sort of conscientious martinet who would infallibly appeal to Astor. If Thorn hadn't been appointed the *Tonquin's* master, you may be sure the Navy List would have been ransacked for another of the same stripe—"a gunpowder fellow, who'd blow all out of the water if there was a fight," Astor described his captain to the Northwest partners on the ship's passenger-list. A recommendation which assured the Canadians in a belief that the skipper was antipathetical to them.

Swaggering Highlanders, vain of their names and lineage, cadets of families ruined in the Jacobite intrigues, these gentry had been impregnated with the feudal atmosphere of the Northwest Company. All four were as quarrelsome as Alan Breck. Each had a *skein dhu* ready to bare for any fancied insult. They held Americans, Yankees, in a contempt which was with difficulty restrained, and were impatient of all rules and restrictions not formulated by themselves. Captain Thorn they marked down for an enemy the first night out when he issued orders that the cabin-lights must be doused by eight o'clock. McDougal, chief troublemaker, promptly seized a pistol, and vowed he'd drill the skipper's heart, confirming Thorn's suspicions of their disloyalty—suspicions which were only too just, as was afterwards proven.

But neither Thorn nor the employer of them all knew the worst. It was months before Astor came to understand the extent of his blunder in dispatching a British force to establish an American post—of the thirty-three Pacific Fur Company men aboard the *Tonquin*, all four partners were British subjects, as were eight out of eleven clerks, and fifteen of the eighteen subordinate employees. These last, Canadian voyageurs, harum-scarum, roistering sons of the forest, had come from Montreal to New York by canoe, making of their journey a gay gasconade, in mockery of the Americans they passed among, scaring the peaceful Dutch farmers of the Hudson valley with their scalp-yells and war-whoops, plaguing the women they encountered with bawdy songs and amorous advances. They arrived at New York in great style, paddling around the Battery to the accompaniment of loudly bawled chansons, their painted buckskin garments and bright featherwork attracting the curiosity of the street crowds. The city, at first, regarded them with interested amusement; but soon issued particular instructions to the watch. Astor, disturbed by their alien ways, insisted they must become American citizens prior to the *Tonquin's* departure, and was told they had fulfilled his stipulation, only to discover, too late, that his Canadian partners had lied to him.

It is difficult to see why he should have been surprised. There was open talk in New York, before the expedition sailed, that the Northwest Company was tampering with its members; and reports came from Halifax of an armed ship of the Company, which was to overhaul the *Tonquin* at sea and press the British subjects aboard her for the King's fleet, reports so persistent as to induce Astor to procure his vessel the escort of the *Constitution* frigate, Captain Hull, until she was out of sight of land. To tell the truth, the Northwest Company had no wish to deter the Astoria expedition from sailing. The Company, and the colonial authorities, who were likewise apprised of all that went on, could have asked nothing better calculated to support their interests than the inclusion in the advance party of so many ardent British partisans.

You might suppose, in view of these circumstances, with the war-clouds hovering lower, that Astor would have altered the composition of the *Tonquin's* company at the last moment. He could have, had he chosen to, for it is ridiculous to say, as Irving does with sycophantic servility, that he was unable to obtain the services of Americans, skilled and competent in the lore of the fur trade. Such men were plentiful on the border, and in years to come should frustrate the opposition of the Northwest and Hudson's Bay Companies, and prosecute the most exhaustive explorations of the regions still unknown beyond the Rockies. They were, individually and collectively, the ablest frontiersmen on the Continent. But they were incorrigibly

independent, and must always be handled with gloves. Not for them the iron caste system of the Northwest Company, the arbitrary feudal ranking of voyageur, courier de bois, clerk, factor, partner. One man was as good as another, in their simple philosophy. And Astor, influenced by his instinctively European conception of business and society, shrank from dealing with their kind. He preferred the Scotch Highlanders, who ruled their fur brigades as so many clans, and the French Canadian trappers, whose boisterousness was balanced by the ingrained respect of peasants for their seigneurs.

The Astoria expeditions were organized as they were because their backer wished them to be so organized; and the troubles they encountered were merely what any intelligent person could have forecast. Canadians and Americans hated each other at this stage of history as we friendly neighbors of today can scarcely believe possible. A considerable portion of the Canadian population was composed of Tory exiles from the original Thirteen Colonies; and by a strange quirk of human nature, the Scottish emigrants, almost entirely the offspring of Jacobite families, were fanatically loyal to the Hanoverian dynasty their forefathers had fought to dethrone. Yet Astor preferred these rabid Royalists and despisers of Yankees to American woodsmen, who refused to doff their coonskin caps when they entered a factor's store.

By a readily understandable and amusing inconsistency, the feudal-minded Scots and French Canadians aboard the *Tonquin* found no difficulty in contracting a savage animosity against Captain Thorn, who was far closer to their type than he was to the average American of the day. To them, in the first place, it was a joke for any man to have been an officer in the American Navy, which was one of the biggest jokes, by itself, anybody had ever heard of. A dozen or so bundles of pine boards called frigates and sloops-of-war! And expecting King's ships to exchange salutes with its dirty, crank craft! And this dour laddie, Thorn—aye, and full of 'em he was, nae doot!—setting up tae be an officer, God save us! Him that was captain of a lousy merchant ship presuming to dictate to chentlemen, whose fathers and grandfathers had the right of entry to Holyrood and could muster twa-three hundred claymores for a Low Country chaunt.

It wasn't to be thought of, and so, in the narrow quarters of the little *Tonquin*, a ceaseless bickering divided her company into two opposed groups. The four Scots partners persisted in regarding the vessel as a vehicle for their convenience, to be managed in accordance with their wishes, and her master as no more than the servant of their company charged with her navigation. Captain Thorn, worthy man, had definite instructions from Astor, and maintained that the partners and their followers were but

passengers, who were as much under his orders as members of the crew. He seems, in the main, to have been right; but he was one of those terrible persons who can be right with offensive determination. And he was anything but tactful in his handling of the innumerable petty disputes which arose partially from sheer lack of occupation for the landsmen in their months of enforced idleness.

Still, he should be commended for resisting the demands of the Scots to visit the islands off Africa, merely to satisfy their curiosity and enable them to boast that their travels had extended so far afield. And if he had tarried at every palmy isle of the West Indies they cried for, given them a run ashore in Patagonia—to look for the fabled giants; permitted them to refresh their literary memories on Robinson Crusoe's Island; and strayed off his track to exhibit the beauties of Easter Island—Well, it is quite on the cards Astoria might never have been founded at all. He did, requiring water, furnish the company a diversion by putting in at the Falklands, and had so much trouble securing attention to his embarkation signals that in a fury he made sail, and left behind him two of the partners, McDougal and Stuart the elder, who, with six lesser wights, pursued the *Tonquin* for three and a half hours, tugging breathlessly at the oars of their quarterboat.

McDougal and McKay had delayed coming aboard a few days previously at another landfall in the Falkland group, and Thorn was firm for teaching them a lesson, nor could he be deterred by young Robert Stuart, who presented a pistol to his head on his own quarterdeck, and threatened to blow him to eternity if he did not order the helm put up—but, he wrote Astor of the incident, "had the wind (unfortunately) not hauled ahead soon after leaving the harbor's mouth, I should positively have left them; and, indeed, I cannot but think it an unfortunate circumstance for you that it so happened, for the first loss in this instance would, in my opinion, have proved the best, as they seem to have no idea of the value of property, nor any apparent regard for your interest, although interwoven with their own."

View of the Falkland Islands
Boat and five passengers pulling after Ship Tonquin— McDougal and Stuart with Six Lesser Wights Pursuing the Tonquin

To make the situation more disagreeable for Thorn, the Scots quarreled with one another when they weren't quarreling with him; and the main cabin resounded nightly with their fantastic disputes over precedence, and who was superior at this or that. But with all the unpleasantness the *Tonquin* made headway, rounded Cape Horn on Christmas Day of 1810, and on February 11, 1811, dropped anchor off Hawaii, where the partners and clerks and their Canadian henchmen must have opportunity to see where Captain Cook was killed, and make acquaintance with the luscious brown maidens they had heard so much about. The Scots, to achieve a better impression, donned kilt and tartan, and informed Kamehameha, the King of the Islands, that they were eris, or chiefs, the King being sufficiently impressed to sell poor Thorn at a good, stiff price, the fresh meat, fruits and vegetables required for the common health, and permit the enlistment of twenty-four of the Islanders to augment the *Tonquin's* crew in the dangerous seas she should visit, and assist the French voyageurs in operating the canoes and small craft necessary for collecting furs along the banks of the Columbia and its tributaries.

Despite the break in the monotony of the voyage, the spirit of the company wasn't improved. The *Tonquin* had barely sunk the mountains of Oahu astern when a fresh altercation burst forth. McDougal and his allies

had abstracted some equipment and materials from the goods destined for the post, and Thorn protested vigorously, asserting the cargo was under his control as skipper. For answer McDougal brandished his protocol from Astor as chief of the landing party, in charge of the erection and management of the post pending the arrival of Hunt with the overland column. But Thorn persisted, and finally McDougal, a little, peppery man, as self-sufficient and important as the sailor, told him flatly the Canadian party were the stronger numerically, and intended to do as they pleased, regardless of his wishes.

Thorn conceived this as rank mutiny; yet one way or another a truce was patched up, until the captain's suspicions were reawakened by observing the Scots to speak in Gaelic whenever he was within earshot. This implied only the one thing to his fevered imagination: his baiters were plotting to take possession of the ship, and very probably, to murder him. The truth was that the Scots talked Gaelic to annoy him, and for no other purpose. It wasn't in the scope of their tentative plot to take the ship or divert the expedition from its purpose. They wanted to reach the Columbia, and build a trading-post as soon as possible—if for no other reason, because they happened to know that the Northwest Company had dispatched a brigade overland to outrace Hunt, and establish a post in advance of the Astor men. And if they, as old Northwest men, hoped to drive a profitable bargain someday with the company they had deserted, they were assured from experience they must have a worthwhile stake to offer. Their whole purpose, in so far as it had yet taken definite shape, was to play both ends against the middle. With consistent Scots thriftiness, they hoped to cash in by (a) getting all they could out of Astor; (b) serving the Crown; and (c) holding up the Northwest Company for better jobs than they had formerly held. Of course, they also had in view a fourth reward, in the shape of satisfaction over the destruction of the American attempt to occupy Oregon; but unfortunately, they couldn't devise a fourth way to profit by their projected efforts.

So the "mutiny" boiled out in denunciations and accusations. The one result was to complete the unsettlement of Thorn. He was so badgered and harassed that, I suspect, his seamanship suffered. Arriving off the mouth of the Columbia on March 22, he made a great to-do over finding a channel across the bar, losing his chief mate and seven men, the most of two boats' crews, in attempts to reconnoiter a passage of the breakers, and seemed more disposed to pick quarrels than to assist the landing parties in the establishment of the post, which it was as much his duty to promote as theirs. But the irate McDougal, who was on his own element at last, was more than a match for Thorn's obstructive tactics, and succeeded in forcing the *Tonquin's* skipper to accept his plans. A site was picked on Point George

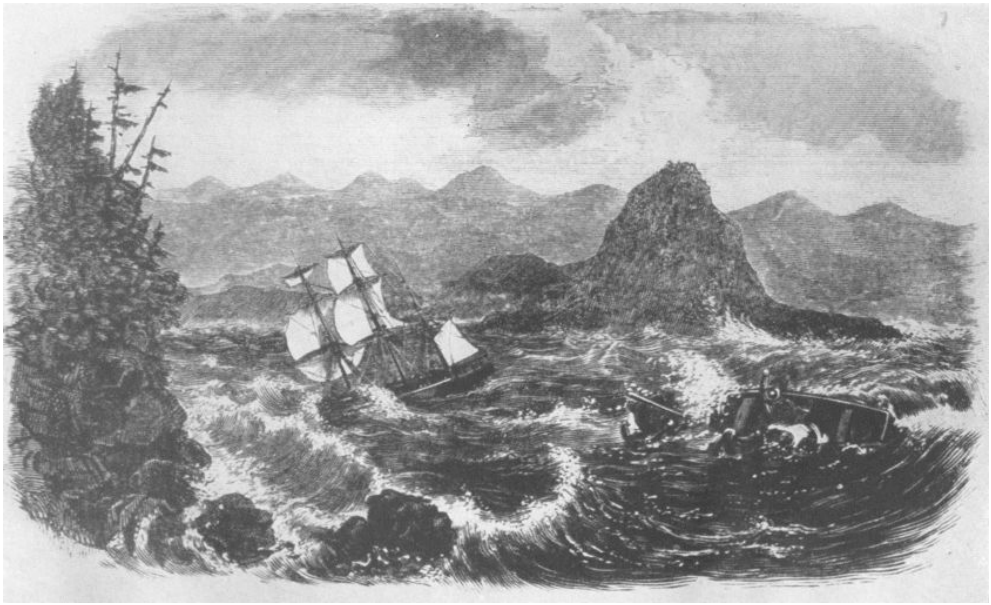
on the south side of the river's mouth, and here the ship landed the stores and equipment, including tools and materials for the building of a small schooner.

IV

You must pry deep in American history to come upon a journey so fraught with drama, hardship, and stubborn heroism as that of the overland brigade Hunt led from Montreal to Astoria. Ill-starred in its inception, a prey to the same blindness to contemporary conditions which marred the *Tonquin's* voyage, it was infinitely more eventful, serving to re-emphasize in the popular imagination the potentialities of the vast range of country Lewis and Clark had explored. Many ships had rounded the Horn and attained the Northwest Coast. Only one other column had forced the defiles of the Rockies and the arid wastes of the plateaus beyond, where the Snake River thundered sinuously through a succession of forbidding gorges to a confluence with the Columbia.

In his original instructions Astor associated in the leadership with Hunt the fifth of his Scotch partners, Donald McKenzie, who had spent ten years in the service of the Northwest Company, was familiar with all the details of the fur trade, used to handling savages and the scarcely less savage white men and half-breeds who composed the fur brigades, and had won frontier fame as a rifle-shot. Astor's thought, of course, was that McKenzie's knowledge of border conditions would atone for Hunt's deficiencies in the same field, the American's sole qualification for command being his experience as a trader in St. Louis. Hunt had never traveled beyond the frontier or led men on the march or in battle, or found his way through unknown country. On the other hand, he possessed genuine intelligence, probity and determination, and was by far the most attractive of the partners associated with Astor in the Pacific Fur Company.

Hunt and McKenzie left New York in July for Montreal, where, in accordance with Astor's crazy purpose to employ Canadians rather than Americans, they were to recruit their personnel. In Montreal, however, they encountered the quiet opposition of the Northwest Company, eager for any chance to put American rivals to greater expense. The voyageurs were disposed to be fearful of the transcontinental journey, and reluctant to commit themselves to so long a term of employment as the five years the Pacific Fur Company required; but a month's propaganda and lavish expenditure of money secured the nucleus of an expedition, and on July 5 the partners started by canoe for Michilimackinac, hoping to have better luck there.



Entrance of the Columbia River
Ship Tonquin crossing the bar, 25th March, 1811— Thorn Lost His Chief Mate and Seven Men Attempting to Reconnoiter a Passage of the Breakers

It was the same story over again, though. The Mackinaw Company—still a separate entity—was as jealous as the Northwest Company. The voyageurs were mainly interested in securing heavy advances of pay, and then evading their obligations. Hunt—or, more probably, McKenzie, who knew his people better—finally hit upon the crafty dodge of issuing ostrich feathers and cock's plumes to members of their brigade as a uniform distinction, and this so entranced the childish Canadians that they were as eager to be enrolled and to start upon the venture as formerly they had been unreliable and unwilling. Moreover, Hunt had a real stroke of luck in the accession to his ranks of a young Scotch-American named Ramsey Crooks, who, after a period in the employ of the Northwest Company, had been working as a free trapper up the Missouri. Crooks was destined to become one of the leaders of the fur trade, and a rich and distinguished merchant. His first service to his new employers was to point out the insufficiency of their force of thirty men. He was recently returned from an expedition to the headwaters of the Missouri, where he had experienced the hostility of the Sioux and the Blackfeet, the two most dreaded tribes in that area. Any small expedition must arouse the cupidity of these fearless raiders, he asserted, and urged the recruitment of the brigade to a strength of sixty, and with this object in view, an adjournment of their efforts to St. Louis.

Hunt and McKenzie accepted his advice, and after a series of carouses for the benefit of their voyageurs—inevitable prelude to a journey in the wilderness—left Michilimackinac early in August, driving their enormous birchen canoes over the customary route of the fur traders from Green Bay, via the Fox and Wisconsin Rivers, to Prairie du Chien, and so down the Mississippi to St. Louis, as yet a huddle of cabins crowding about several glaringly new brick houses and stores, the whole clinging to the edge of the bluff a few miles below the mouth of the Missouri. Here they were amongst Americans once more, although the population included many Frenchmen and Spaniards, reminiscent of Louisiana's mingled Latin heritage. Here, too, they were confronted once more by the jealousy of a rival company.

The Missouri Fur Company, only two years old, and battling vigorously to maintain itself against the hostility of tribes egged on by the Northwest Company, couldn't regard favorably the entrance of another American company, which its personnel regarded as actually a mask for the operations of their Canadian competitors. Lisa, the dominant figure in the Missouri Company, bent his influence to cripple the newcomers, who would have had a hard time without Hunt's knowledge of the local population and Crooks' prestige with the free trappers.

It was September 3 when the Astorians reached St. Louis, too late in the year to contemplate the ascent of the Missouri to the foothills before winter should lock its waters under ice; but Hunt and McKenzie, very sensibly, determined to remove their men from the temptations of the little settlement, and make as much westing as safety permitted, at the same time saving money by putting the brigade in a position where its members could feed themselves with the game which fell to their rifles. On October 21 they set out, and by November 16 had sailed, poled or towed four hundred and fifty miles to the mouth of the Nadowa, where the imminence of freezing weather prompted them to establish a permanent camp. In the course of this journey they were overtaken by a messenger from St. Louis, bearing a dispatch from Astor, instructing Hunt to assume unrestricted command of the expedition; McKenzie henceforth was to be merely his chief lieutenant. This move, prompted by the discovery of treachery in the *Tonquin's* company after the ship had sailed, came too late to do any real good, its one result being to embitter McKenzie and lead him to regard Hunt with an ill-feeling which further complicated a situation already over-complicated.

Hunt seems to have mistrusted McKenzie on his own account, and possibly Astor's decision was partially influenced by complaints forwarded by his American partner, either from Montreal or Michilimackinac. Whether this was so or not, Hunt took immediate advantage of his new authority to promote Joseph Miller, a former Army officer, whom he had engaged, to a

partnership, and, deciding to return to St. Louis to conclude his arrangements for additional men and supplies, appointed Miller jointly with McKenzie to command the camp. The two evidently didn't get on well together, since five of the American trappers in the camp pursued Hunt to St. Louis to complain of conditions there—apparently, the Americans, greatly in the minority, were at odds with the French Canadian voyageurs, and the partners, sufficiently inimical personally, were unable to adjust the dispute to the satisfaction of the more independent faction. It was, first and last, an impossible situation.

In St. Louis, Hunt's chief business was the hiring of an interpreter, and after a deal of fussing, he selected Pierre Dorion, a Sioux half-breed, son of Old Dorion, who had filled a similar position with the Lewis and Clark expedition. Dorion had been working for the Missouri Company, and quitting in debt to its commissary, his employment by Hunt was resented by Lisa, who took every possible recourse, including the novelty of legal proceedings, to lay the 'breed by the heels. This very natural procedure operated to confirm Hunt in a suspicion of Lisa, which had been inculcated by Crooks who credited the Spanish-American with having stirred the Sioux to attack him on his recent expedition. So, when Lisa made overtures to Hunt, offering to join the Astorians with a Missouri Fur Company brigade he was leading up-river to provision his posts, Hunt declined, notwithstanding the immunity from the savages guaranteed by so numerous an array of rifles.

Hunt did, however, secure the services of enough Louisiana and Canadian French voyageurs to double the roster of his original company. He was also joined by two of those wandering Englishmen, whose amateur explorations and scientific researches have thrown light on the shaded corners of the world. John Bradbury, a botanist of Liverpool, was to enrich the store of early knowledge of the West with his "Travels in America," and Thomas Nuttall later would contribute "Travels in Arkansas" and "Genera of American Plants." They appear to have been gentlemen of a very pretty spirit, a peculiar blend of the adventurer with the comic stage scientist, constantly blundering into hot water and always managing to extricate themselves—or get extricated. To make the company more representative, Dorion insisted upon bringing along his squaw and their two papooses.

The departure from St. Louis was hastier than might otherwise have been the case, because Hunt was anxious to precede Lisa up-river, convinced that the Missouri Company chief would rouse the Sioux against the Astoria brigade, if he had the opportunity. A suspicion, on the whole, unsupported by the available evidence. Lisa, like all his kind, was no saint—on the contrary, a relentless partisan. But he stands unconvicted of

persecution of the Astoria men, once they had abandoned the petty business jealousies of civilization, and he did make every decent proffer of alliance with them to resist savages who showed as much enmity to his party as to Hunt's.

I am going at length into an apparently trivial subject because the animosity which sprang from this incident—or, rather, series of incidents—poisoned the relations of the competing American companies for many years to come. In the first place, there was Astor's ignoring of Americans in organizing his brigades. This stimulated the resentment of every American trapper and trader, except the handful who were invited to join by Hunt, and several of these were not native born. The Americans, with the Missouri Fur Company as a rallying group, did what they could to make it difficult for the Astoria brigade to recruit men who would contribute to its efficiency. But—and this is decidedly to their credit—when they realized that the Astoria brigade was going up-river, they buried the hatchet, and offered to pool forces for the safety of both parties. They were experienced frontiersmen, and while willing to war against men of their own color in the absence of an Indian menace, the moment Indians appeared, all white men were friends to them, and all red men enemies. This formula the Astoria leaders refused to subscribe to. They carried ordinary trade rivalry to its utmost extreme. As a consequence, throughout the struggle for control of the Northwest, which was waged as much by the trappers of the contending nations as by their statesmen, the American fur companies were divided in effort, and never gained the results their enterprise deserved.

V

On the way back up the Missouri to the mouth of the Nadowa, Hunt's party touched at the village of Charette. Here, as their keels grounded, they were hailed by an aged giant, whose unbending frame and eagle glance gave the lie to his white hair. With an understandable pride, he invited their attention to a bale of sixty beaver pelts he had trapped upon a lone expedition from which he had just returned. He might, too, have indicated to them a stalwart brood of sons and daughters and grandchildren, all of either sex and any age above the cradle competent rifle-shots and fearless pioneers. And had he wished, sitting erect at their campfire that evening, he might have said: "Waall, strangers, ye'll go fur afore ye see what I ain't seed." For this old man was Daniel Boone, the symbol of the frontier. Ever since the day, as a younker, he had tramped through Cumberland Gap, and peered down from the last westward bulwark of the Blue Ridge at the limitless forests of Kaintuck, he had been in the van of the white man's progress. In

the twilight of life he had fixed his habitation here in the most remote settlement of the advancing frontier, roaming in summer across the prairies to within sight of the Black Hills and the Big Horn range. His envy of their mission was as honorable an accolade as these adventurers could have craved.

And in the morning before they took to their boats they were joined by another man, tanned and bearded, powerful of frame, John Colter, earliest of the individual explorers amongst the free trappers. Colter had gone to Oregon with Lewis and Clark, and upon their approach to civilization had left them to resume the wild life he preferred. He knew the recesses of the Rockies as did no other American, and was regarded with a mixture of respect and humorous derision by his contemporaries as the discoverer of what they dubbed "Colter's Hell"—the country now known as Yellowstone Park. His accounts of sulphur lakes and boiling springs and gigantic geysers were incredible to men who had no conception of what such phenomena could be, and so, for an old man's lifetime, Colter was popularly considered a clever liar, to be forgiven as such both for his ingenuity and his proved pluck in action. He was very anxious to accompany Hunt, but had recently married, and felt unable to sever his new ties. Poor fellow, he died—of all diseases for one of his hardy frame, of jaundice!—a few years later.

On April 17, Hunt's party arrived at the winter camp by the Nadowa and, so soon as the Spring rains had ceased, embarked for their adventure, making what headway they could against the swollen current. It would be fruitless and uninteresting to describe in detail their experiences during the ensuing weeks. Constantly threatened by Indians, they suffered no losses, and were chiefly concerned by the tidings that Lisa was in pursuit of them with a small brigade. They made every endeavor to keep ahead of him, their hostility accentuated by the fact that they were within the sphere of the dreaded Sioux, with whom he was reputed to exert an uncanny influence; but on the verge of the Arickara country he overhauled them, and after a number of personal disputes, which fortunately stopped short of bloodshed, at a council held with the savages, displayed a friendly impartiality which convinced all of his good intentions. Discovering that Hunt intended to abandon the river at this point, and proceed on horseback, he also helped the Astoria men by offering to buy their boats, making the trade in horseflesh, in order to accommodate them.

So heavy was the demand for horses for the Astoria party that the price per head jumped to ten dollars in trade goods, and bands of young warriors were dispatched by the Arickaras to steal stock from the Sioux and other near-by tribes. Lisa and his men, while doing all in their power to assist the Astoria brigade, didn't attempt to hide their belief that Hunt's party would

never reach the Pacific Coast; and the effect of such talk was disastrous to the morale of the more timorous recruits, some of whom would have deserted but for the strong measures Hunt initiated. It is difficult to blame them. Although the country ahead had been penetrated by numerous white men, the greater portion of its area was still unknown, and the legends circulated about it were as wild as anything included in Greek mythology. All sorts of strange, outlandish beasts were described—dragons, giants, nations of fierce, pygmy warriors. Wanderers who had glimpsed the ruins of the Cliffdwellers enlarged upon what they had seen, and spoke of castles in the sky and walled cities a man would require a day to ride around.

The height of the mountains was much exaggerated. So late as 1836 Professor James Renwick, of Columbia College, wrote Irving that he had been assured by Simon McGillivray, a partner of the Northwest Company, that the Rockies were as high as the Himalayas—one peak had been ascertained by a Mr. Thompson, by means of barometric and trigonometric measurements, to reach 25,000 feet. Irving, himself, painted a dismal portrait of the belt of territory at the eastern foot of the mountains, which, for generations yet should be dubbed "The Great American Desert"—and is today one of the richest wheat countries in the world.

"It is a land where no man permanently abides," he wrote; "for, in certain seasons of the year, there is no food either for the hunter or his steed. The herbage is parched and withered; the brooks and streams are dried up; the buffalo, the elk, and the deer have wandered to distant parts, keeping within the verge of expiring verdure, and leaving behind them a vast uninhabited solitude, seamed by ravines, the beds of former torrents, but now serving only to tantalize and increase the thirst of the traveler. . . . Such is the nature of this immense wilderness of the far West, which apparently defies cultivation, and the habitation of civilized life. Some portions of it along the rivers may partially be subdued by agriculture, others may form vast pastoral tracts, like those of the East; but it is to be feared that a great part of it will form a lawless interval between the abodes of civilized man, like the wastes of the ocean or the deserts of Arabia; and like them, be subject to the depredations of the marauder. Here may spring up new and mongrel races, like new formations in geology, the amalgamation of the 'débris' and 'abrasions' of former races, civilized and savage; the remains of broken and almost extinguished tribes; the descendants of wandering hunters and trappers; of fugitives from the Spanish and American frontiers; of adventurers and desperadoes of every class and country, yearly ejected from the bosom of society into the wilderness."

So much for the proud states of Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, the Dakotas, and eastern Colorado!

Small wonder the faint-hearts of Hunt's brigade balked at perils the very vagueness of which inspired additional terror. The bravest trappers were uneasy that day, July 18, they trotted out of the Arickara villages, and turned their faces toward the unseen rampart of the Shining Mountains. There was no merriment, no tossing of coonskin caps or shooting of rifles in the air. Every face was grim or fearful—except one. Dorion's squaw rode at the tail end of the column, a four-year-old clutching her from behind, a two-year-old in her arms, a third life stirring in her womb. Her flat, bronzed features were impassive. If she was concerned for the future, she showed it no more than the pain occasioned by her partner's periodic beatings. Humble, uncomplaining, always ready to do what she could, she earned the respect, even the liking, of these rough men, to whom an Indian woman was a beast of burden approximating the value of a good horse. Of the sixty-four souls in the brigade, she was perhaps the most attractive and interesting—and unfortunately, one of the least known, although enough of her adventures were recorded to present her in retrospect as a courageous and faithful mother, a loyal—if unwedded—wife, and a stout comrade.

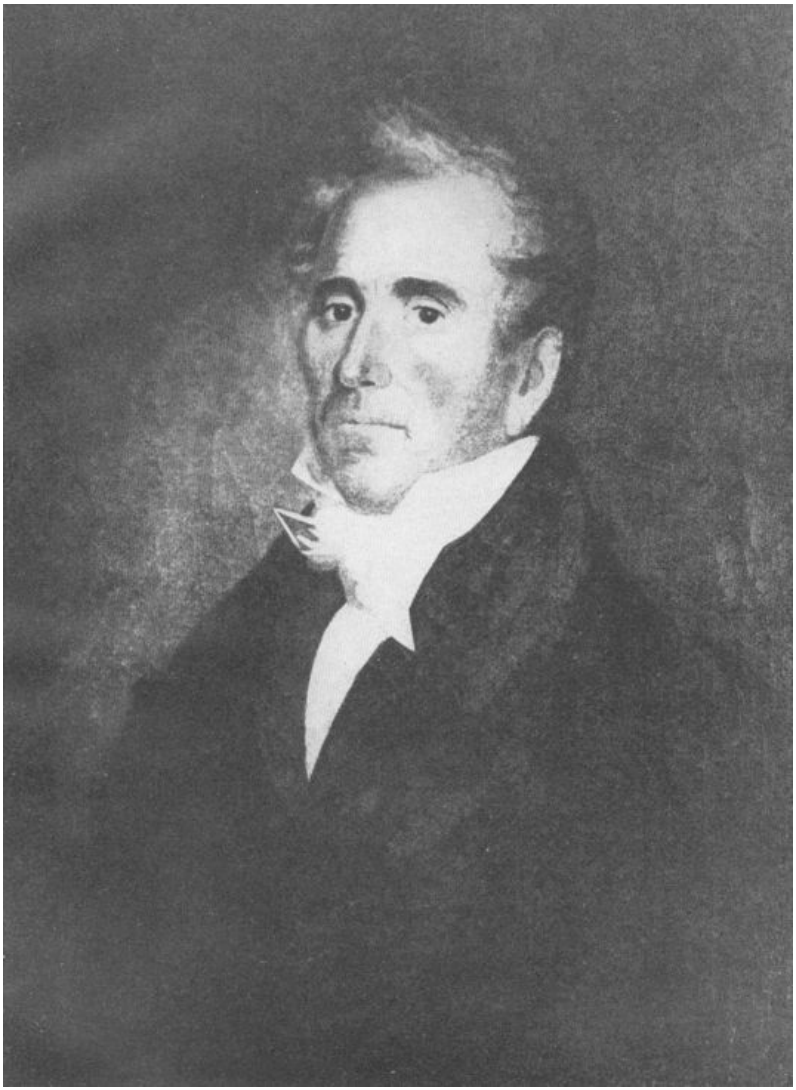
Day by day, Hunt led his column westward, sixty-one men, a woman, two children, eighty-two horses. They rode warily, scouts ahead and on either flank, camp-guards and horse-guards watching through the nights, and struck the banks of the Snake River on September 26, crossed this stream and climbed the Teton Pass, the Teton Peaks their landmark, to Henry's Fort on the Henry River, the outermost outpost of the white race, established by Major Andrew Henry, a partner of Lisa's, the preceding year. The post was deserted when the Astorians visited it, Henry and his men having gone east with their fur packs to meet Lisa at the Arickara villages; but the log huts afforded shelter for the adventurers.

Already, grave dissensions had begun in their ranks. McKenzie resented more than ever being under a commander whom he regarded as his inferior as a frontiersman. The American hunters and trappers disliked the Canadian voyageurs, who were laborers rather than fighting men; and the Canadians, in their turn, were jealous of the Americans. The Americans preferred to ride; the Canadians, boatmen by profession, naturally wanted to keep to the rivers. Miller, the newest partner, dissatisfied with his share of authority and suffering from an ailment which made riding uncomfortable for him, took sides with the Canadians in this last difference of opinion, and from the moment the expedition crossed the Divide and reached the headwaters of the streams flowing westward advocated the abandonment of the horses and a resumption of travel by water. Hunt was loath to commit himself to so radical a step, but the balance of sentiment was overwhelmingly against him, and after several weeks of campfire bickering he was driven to assent

to it. A dogged, honorable man, he lacked the spark of genius which constitutes leadership, and was never able to dominate his men or to inspire them with confidence in his judgment.

It was October 8, when the brigade reached Henry's Fort, and nearly two weeks were required to fell trees and make fifteen canoes, in which the stores and provisions were embarked. The horses were left at Henry's Fort in care of two Snake Indians, and that was the last any white man ever saw of the remuda. At first, everything went well. The Henry River carried them downstream to its junction with the Mad River, the united streams becoming the Snake, itself a confluent of one of the upper branches of the Columbia. But the Snake proved to be unnavigable. A canoe was upset, with loss of stores, one of the Canadians was drowned, and finally, on October 28, Hunt was constrained to abandon the canoes above a devastating whirlpool the party named the Caldron Linn.

Here they cached the bulk of their stores, for they could take with them only the limited quantities they were capable of carrying on their own backs; and for better convenience in securing food in a barren country, as well as to insure the selection of a practicable route, they broke up into several detachments, the principal ones commanded by Hunt and Crooks, who had forged rapidly to the front under trial of adversity. McKenzie, with five men, struck off toward the North, in hope of coming upon the main stream of the Columbia. Reading between the lines of the fragmentary records, I gather that he was disgusted with Hunt's inefficiency, and determined to complete the journey unencumbered.



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MANUEL LISA

It was November 9, when Hunt and Crooks, with their detachments, headed westward again on foot. Each man carried a twenty-pound pack, in addition to his equipment and arms, most of the contents of the packs being trade-goods which they anticipated using to procure provisions from the Indians. They were dreadfully short of food, their supplies amounting to forty pounds of Indian corn, twenty pounds of grease, five pounds of "portable" soup and five and a quarter pounds of dried meat apiece—but this

store they hoped to reserve for emergencies, expecting to shoot game and catch fish for their ordinary wants. None realized the true seriousness of their plight: lost in a wild and scantily inhabited region of untracked mountains, their only neighbors the poorest of savages, and winter coming on.

The weeks that followed were ghastly. They wandered back and forth, seeking horses to ride, seeking food to eat, sometimes seeking water to drink, at the last, seeking any practicable outlet from the mountains. Hunt's detachment took one side of the Snake, Crooks' the other. They were in trouble from the start. The few Indians they met, Snakes and Shoshonies, were so hungry, themselves, that the priceless tools and weapons the white men offered to trade for horses and dogs were more often refused than not. There wasn't any game, and very soon they knew starvation. Horse meat became something to dream of; dog meat was a delicacy. More than once they boiled old pelts for soup, chewing afterwards at the softened hide. So, weakened and discouraged, the reduced brigade stumbled over the rocky ground, buffeted by snow, drenched by rain, their garments torn, their feet bleeding. Through it all Dorion's squaw, lugging her two children, indifferent to the approach of her time, kept up with the men, helped about the cook-fires—if there was anything to cook—and was stoically cheerful under every hardship. One of the several scrawny mounts they cajoled from the Snakes was allotted to her and her offspring on the march, and no matter how voracious the company, every suggestion to consign it to the pots was promptly vetoed.

On December 30, she gave birth to a child, and the trappers and voyageurs, to whom Christmas had been no more than a date, gathered in groups, and chuckled at the anomaly of the situation, chewing at strips of hide to stay the cramps in their stomachs. It was impossible to delay the march, so Dorion was left with the horse to attend her, and the brigade pushed on. Nobody expected to see her again, but a day later she rode into camp with her infant in her arms, considering the feat quite as a matter of course. Yet, with all her stolid determination, she could not keep the waif alive in that bitter, bitter cold. It died within a week. Several of the men were dead, too, and a number of sick, including Crooks—worn out by his exertions and responsibilities—had to be abandoned along the way, wherever shelter was afforded. Other men wandered off from the line of march, desperate with hunger, and disappeared beyond the bleak horizon, never to be seen again. The whole party were on their last legs when they blundered out of the mountains, January 8, 1812, and descended into the warm valley of the Umatilla River.

Here they rested, awaiting word from Crooks and the rest of the casualties, but after two weeks had passed, and none of the sick heard from, Hunt regretfully decided they must continue down the Umatilla to the Columbia, which, in turn, they followed to a point below the Dalles, where they obtained canoes from the river tribes, who likewise gave them their first news of Astoria—after their own privations, they were prepared to hear of the failure of the *Tonquin* expedition or the destruction of whatever post had been established. The realization that comrades awaited them at the mouth of the river was all that was necessary to renew their confidence. They launched forth again with the current, and two weeks later, on February 15, saw in the distance the Stars and Stripes floating from the seaward bastion of the fortalice McDougal had built.

In the picturesque crowd—Americans, voyageurs, Hawaiians, squat, bow-legged Chinooks—that swarmed the strand to meet the newcomers were Donald McKenzie and the men who had started with him from the Caldron Linn. McKenzie had reached Astoria four weeks past, and had given up the main party for lost. It was more than a year and a half since the expedition had started from Montreal. Hunt was three hundred and forty days out from St. Louis—but of these one hundred and forty had been spent in camp—and estimated he had traveled 3,500 miles, although the direct distance by rail over the route he used is 2,300 miles. Behind him he had strewn a scattering of fugitive parties and casualties, all his stores, all his horses, all his provisions. He and the survivors of the overland brigade arrived with the ragged clothes on their backs, their arms and a little ammunition. Of the grandiose scheme for the journey, the one point actually accomplished was the transference of so many men across the Continent. No attempt had been made to erect a single one of the chain of posts by means of which Astoria was to have been linked with St. Louis.

Hunt's mission, up to this time, had been a failure.

VI

Hunt wasn't the only one of the leaders of the enterprise who had fumbled a glorious opportunity, but notwithstanding inefficiency, jealousy and tentative treason, the groundwork had been laid for a rich trade on the coast. McDougal, in the midst of his perpetual bickering and nagging with Captain Thorn, had managed to secure the erection of a fort sufficiently strong to resist Indian attacks, with magazines and storehouses, and a schooner for developing a coasting trade. When he and his men were safely housed, Thorn put to sea—June 5, 1811, this was—on a trading adventure to Nootka Sound. The instructions Astor had issued Thorn specifically

cautioned the irascible skipper to beware of the known treachery of the Vancouver Island tribes—all mishaps on that coast, Astor wrote, had been the result of over-confidence on the part of the white men. Thorn, however, was thoroughly out of temper as a consequence of his months of quarreling with his associates and a word of warning from McKay, who sailed with him as supercargo, was as good as a dare to him. He was also singularly lacking in diplomacy in his dealings with the Indians, and deliberately insulted the chief of one tribe on the *Tonquin's* deck. McKay and the Indian interpreter, who had been hired for the cruise, both advised the captain to up-anchor and away after this incident; but Thorn's acknowledgment was a taunt. He wouldn't run from a pack of thieving savages. Not he! And next morning trade was resumed as usual on the ship. More and more Indians came aboard, all wearing fur mantles which concealed the weapons they carried—and Thorn still slumbering in his bunk. When he finally appeared, in response to appeals from his officers and McKay, the waist was jammed with sullen Indians, and his order to weigh anchor and make sail was the signal for a massacre, in which he and McKay were among the first victims. Lewis, a clerk, mortally wounded, with three of the seamen, barricaded himself in the cabin, and the Indians, after killing the rest of the crew, and looting all the cargo they could get their hands on, made off.

During the following night, at Lewis's suggestion, the three seamen fled the *Tonquin* in one of the small boats. Lewis, hopeless of life, was resolved upon a revenge which should be a warning to the Coast tribes. He went on deck at dawn, and beckoned the hovering canoes to board again. Then he locked himself below, and so soon as the stamping of excited feet on the deck overhead assured him a numerous passenger-list, dropped a fuse into the powder-magazine, under the lazarette. The *Tonquin* exploded in one burst of shattered timbers, and with the wreckage went Lewis and more than a hundred of the marauders, blown to bits. But the Indians had their revenge. The three miserable sailors who had fled in the night were driven ashore down the coast, captured and tortured to death. Of the twenty-three in the *Tonquin's* company not one remained alive, except the interpreter, who, after a term of imprisonment, contrived to escape with tidings of the disaster.

This was a nasty blow, but a nastier was to fall. Not long after the *Tonquin* sailed, a couple of Indians from the upper Columbia fetched word to Astoria of the establishment of a post on the Spokane River by the Northwest Company. The tangled motives of Astor's Scotch-Canadian partners prompted them to do all they could to offset whatever commercial advantage might accrue from this move, and David Stuart, the elder, was preparing to embark with a detachment of trappers to found a rival establishment in the same neighborhood, when, on July 15, David

Thompson, one of the Northwest Company's partners, arrived at Astoria, an emissary sent expressly to checkmate the activities of the Pacific Fur Company. If Astoria hadn't been built, he would have rushed forward the balance of his brigade, and undertaken a similar structure immediately. As it was, he made the best of the situation, experiencing no difficulty in cementing relations with McDougal, who was an old friend and entertained him royally during the week he remained.

An odd and perverse character, this fellow McDougal, a master at trimming his sails to exploit the varying winds of fortune. The Pacific Fur Company, John Jacob Astor, the Northwest Company, Thompson, his partners, the United States, Great Britain, were pawns to be moved to suit his advantage. So far as I can find, he was the one person to profit concretely by the Astoria venture. In the case of Thompson's visit, for instance, he made use of the opportunity to assure himself of the Northwester's friendship; but none-the-less, he sent Stuart east with Thompson up the Columbia to establish a Pacific Fur Company post to compete with the Northwest Company—and, I take it, be a constant reminder to the Northwest Company of the advantage of throttling the opposition of the American company, and the necessity, in that connection, of offering satisfactory terms to one Duncan McDougal.

Stuart established a post on the Oakinagan River, where it falls into the Columbia, and put his men to trapping and opening trade with the Indians. In the meantime tidings of the *Tonquin's* destruction had reached the Chinook tribes dwelling on the lower Columbia, and filtered from them into the main post. The attitude of the Indians changed from deference to watchful antagonism. If the Great Canoe of the white men could be taken so easily, why not the log huts in which they stored the riches so tempting to savage appetites? McDougal, no fool, sensed the danger of the moment, and put his men to work fortifying the post, which was soon enclosed in a rectangular palisade, ninety feet square, with two bastions mounting four-pounders. And lest gunpowder should be insufficient to awe his red neighbors, he summoned a council at which he displayed a mysterious bottle, the contents of which, he assured his hearers, was the dreaded smallpox. See! He had but to draw the cork—and Death would run through the villages! The Chinooks were appalled. Better anything than the disease the Boston Northwesters had introduced to them. By the concluding week of September, when McDougal's Canadians had finished a stone barracks, the Indians asked merely to be friends.

The winter was peaceful and fairly prosperous. Alexander Ross, one of the clerks, who afterwards wrote an entertaining work, "Adventures of the First Settlers on the Oregon or Columbia River," reported that he spent one

hundred and eighty-eight days of the winter six hundred miles up-river, and in that time obtained 1,550 beaver pelts, besides other furs, which he estimated to be worth £2,250 in Canton, and which had cost the company 5½ d. each, or a total of £35 sterling. Speaking of the Indians, Ross said: "So anxious were they to trade and so fond of tobacco that one morning I obtained one hundred and ten skins for leaf tobacco at the rate of five leaves per skin, and at the last, when I had but one yard of white cotton remaining, one of the chiefs gave me twenty-nine prime beaver skins for it." It appears from this and other evidence that Astor hadn't been too optimistic in judging the probable profits of a trade direct between the Columbia and Canton.

With the arrival of the remnants of Hunt's brigade, there was reason to expect a considerable extension of the work, allowing for the questionable purposes of McDougal, McKenzie's discontent, and Hunt's failure to adapt himself to demands so entirely foreign to the methodical routine of commerce. The *Dolly* schooner had been launched the past October 2, and was available for cruises in the Columbia's estuary and along the coast; at least a beginning had been made of the task of surveying the country, establishing intercourse with the tribes, learning the peculiarities of the Indians and the probable yield of fur. There was a sufficiency of trade-goods on hand, and the partners confidently expected the early arrival of another ship from New York—a confidence not misplaced, for Astor, in October, had dispatched the *Beaver*, with a full cargo and for passengers, John Clarke, a newly recruited partner, a native American; five clerks, all American; fifteen American laborers, and six Canadian voyageurs. He had learned his lesson, and was trying desperately to give the Americans a preponderance at Astoria; but unfortunately, he was in the position of the farmer who started to lock his barn door the night after the horse thieves paid their visit.

Shortly after Hunt's arrival it was decided to send reports of the several expeditions to New York, and John Reed, one of the clerks who had attended Hunt on the westward journey, was chosen to carry them. There were seventeen in the brigade that left Astoria, enough, McDougal and Hunt thought, to assure a safe passage into the bad lands of the mountains: but at the Long Narrows, where the canoes and cargoes must be portaged, they were set upon by a thieving band, who dwelt across the river in the village of Wish-ram, and Reed was wounded and his dispatches stolen for the sake of the shiny tin box which encased them. In the circumstances, Reed abandoned his trip to New York, and continued with young Robert Stuart to Oakinagan, where Stuart's uncle had remained through the winter. The elder Stuart determined to return down-river with this party to confer with the other partners, and on the way they had the good fortune to encounter

Crooks and John Day, one of Hunt's American trappers, left behind for sickness the preceding winter. The fugitives were entirely naked, having been pilfered by practically all the Indians they encountered. Remember Crooks. The man had a destiny.

The Stuarts and Reed arrived back at Astoria on May 11 to find the *Beaver* at anchor, and the post humming with activities. Clarke brought word of the approval by Count Pahlen, Russian Minister at Washington, of Astor's suggestion of an alliance with the Russian Fur Company; and among the first decisions reached by the partners was one to send Hunt north in the *Beaver* to New Archangel, the main Russian post in Alaska, to confer with Count Baronhoff on the measures to be initiated by the two companies. But more than ever, it was felt, an attempt should be made to communicate with Astor, and Reed having failed, Robert Stuart was delegated to try. He set out on June 29, and with him went Crooks—the latter as disgusted as the other Americans who had come out with Hunt, and who plainly resented the Canadian management of the post—two Kentucky hunters, and two voyageurs.

Their journey was as exciting as Hunt's had been, their vicissitudes as dramatic; but it may be sufficient if I merely touch the high lights, reciting the loss of their horses at the hands of the Crows, their rescue of Miller and three trappers detached by Hunt, their flight before a second band of savages, and the long, wintry trek out of the mountains to the headwaters of the Platte, where, early in April of 1813, a stray Oto tribesman informed them that the Great White Father in Washington was at war with King George.

Imagine their sensations! For nine months out of touch with their own kind, for nearly two years ignorant of what went on in the civilized world, they emerged from the mountains to learn that they were enemies. Stuart and the Canadians, technically, were on one side of the fence; Crooks and the American trappers, on the other. What were their feelings? What arguments did they hold? How did they decide upon their course of action? I can't say —except that internal evidence tends to show there was no ill-feeling amongst them, while the positive fact is that they pressed on as rapidly as possible to convey their own news to Astor, curbing his impatience as best he could in New York, the thundering guns of the British blockaders off Sandy Hook a perpetual reminder of the troubles his own thoughtlessness had brought upon the enterprise.

It is pleasant to be able to record that Stuart and his uncle, regarded through the vista of a century, convey an impression of simple honesty and sincerity, traits conspicuously lacking in the other Northwest partners. Certainly, Stuart the younger was as faithful in the performance of his

mission as Hunt could have been—and a deal more efficient than the Jerseyman. After a temporary stop at Fort Osage, westernmost outpost of the United States Army, to confirm the Oto's tidings from the garrison, he continued his descent of the Missouri, arriving at St. Louis on April 30. A few days later, Astor stepped out upon the porch at 223 Broadway to read the evening paper, and the first item which struck his eye was a brief dispatch reciting the arrival of the Astorians on the Mississippi. He enjoyed his game of checkers that evening for the first time in months.

VII

A man with less phlegm than Astor possessed must have had his nerves shredded raw by the recurrent anxieties which starred the years following the sailing of the *Tonquin*. But during this interval he wasn't idle, notwithstanding he continued to display the amazing shortsightedness and deficiency of resource which had marred his launching of the Astoria scheme. Having dispatched the *Beaver*, he made no attempt to push a supporting expedition overland, salving his misgivings by continual talk of such a step throughout the crucial period of the enterprise. Had he followed up Hunt's brigade, the whole tenor of affairs might have been changed. A reasonably strong column, American in complexion, tracking Hunt, would have made better time, picking up the wreckage of the advance in its progress and establishing on the way small permanent posts to keep open communications with the upper Missouri. Thus reinforced, too, the Americans at Astoria might have blocked McDougal's machinations and constituted an element sufficiently numerous to maintain the all-important outlet on the Pacific. It is inexplicable why he didn't take this step after the declaration of war. He had every reason to do so. His information service in Canada kept him informed of the plans of the Northwest Company, and he knew almost at once of the intention of the rival concern to wrest from him control of the rich Columbia basin. And while, superficially, it was easier and cheaper to send help by sea, a force that went overland was surer to reach the destination, and could accomplish more in the course of its journey.

His conduct is incomprehensible. In part, I suppose, it was dictated by unwillingness to risk more money. In part, it was a reaction from his lack of national feeling. He couldn't, for all his protestations, look at Astoria as more than a convenient trading-post for the Pacific Fur Company. According to his own statements, he expected the Federal Government to send forty or fifty men to occupy the fort McDougal had built, and he was astonished that President Madison, in the midst of an unequal contest, should neglect to

oblige him. The Government, of course, with the best will in the world, was utterly unable to protect the population on the seaboard and the immediate frontiers. There weren't enough troops to withstand the Indians loosed by British agents, let alone detach a company for duty 3,000 miles from the center of hostilities.

In this attitude the Administration was short-sighted, if excusably so; but Astor was more short-sighted still, considering the investment he was committed to, not to have seized firm hold of the situation, spent $100,000 or so additional, and hurried off forthwith the reinforcements he had been considering so long. There was in New York at this time a lank, raw-boned, young Dutchman named Vanderbilt, working day and night ferrying stores to the harbor forts. He would never have stood by supinely, waiting on the Government to come to the rescue of a stake in which he was so heavily interested. Not he! In similar circumstances, forty-five years later, he organized a war to safeguard his property from men who would have taken it from him. But Astor's character wanted the vein of daring courage which made Cornelius Vanderbilt the most powerful financier of a generation. He was content to address memorials to the President, and the Secretary of War, and the members of Congress, and to complain mildly to his friends. I wonder if a higher blood-pressure would have helped him any.

On the eve of the declaration of hostilities, his St. Petersburg agent had returned with the approval of the Russian government of his proposition for an alliance with the Russian Fur Company in Alaska. Astor ships were to carry provisions to the Russian trading-posts, receive furs in payment for this service, and if agreeable to the Russian agents, convey their catch to Canton to be disposed of on commission. The agreement was to run four years. But there wasn't time to ratify it before war came, and Astor knew that the Russian Government, in alliance with Britain against Napoleon, would never be willing to recognize it, now. Another dream shattered!

With all his distortion of vision and perspective, there is something appealing about the steadiness with which he stuck to his purpose. From watching and comparing the two men, you can discover why he chose Hunt to lead the overland expedition. They were much alike: not clever, not chance-taking, slow-thinking, but doggedly persistent and stubborn in a rather blind way. Men who'd take the wrong turn, adopt the wrong policy, and then, realizing failure, pick up the threads of their effort and try again—with inextinguishable confidence in the course which had led them astray.

It was typical of Astor's attitude that he hesitated to venture one of his own ships in the Atlantic, and to assure the continued provisioning of Astoria, wrote by a chance letter-of-marque to Captain Sowle, of the *Beaver*—which he made sure must be heading for Canton—to load whatever was

necessary for McDougal and Hunt at that port, and ferry it across the Pacific. But then came intelligence via his underground route from Montreal of the early dispatch by the Northwest Company of an armed ship capable of battering down Astoria's walls and compelling the surrender of the post. Frantic to warn his representatives, he hastily outfitted the *Lark*, his fastest ship, and sent her to sea March 6, 1813, with a communication to Hunt, which is pathetically illustrative of his inability to comprehend the realities of the situation.

Complaining of the ungratefulness of the Northwest Company—what on earth did he expect from his chief competitors?—he wrote, in naïve fury:

"Were I on the spot, and had the management of affairs, I would defy them all; but, as it is, everything depends upon you and your friends about you. Our enterprise is grand, and deserves success, and I hope to God it will meet it. If my object was merely gain of money, I should say, think whether it is best to save what we can, and abandon the place; but the very idea is like a dagger in my heart."

And in trusting vein, added:

"I always think you are well, and that I shall see you again, which Heaven, I hope, will grant."

Two weeks after the *Lark* sailed, however, he heard again from Canada that the British Admiralty had detached the *Phoebe* frigate to escort the Northwest Company's ship *Isaac Todd*, of twenty guns, to the Columbia. He was off, hot-foot, for Washington at once, and this time, with the help of his friend Gallatin, Secretary of the Treasury, he commanded the attention of the Administration. There had been that War Loan to place in recent months, you'll recollect, and he was one of the stalwarts who rallied to its support. Something must be done for so useful a citizen, and the Navy Department promised to send the *Adams* frigate to sea, with orders to take station in the Columbia.

All possible diligence was made at the New York Navy Yard in fitting the *Adams* for her voyage, and Astor, himself, commenced loading another ship of his fleet, the *Enterprise*, to attend the frigate. While this was toward, about the middle of June, Stuart's dispatches came to hand, with a covering letter from the bearer. The dispatches and Stuart's report were rosy in tone; the *Beaver* had arrived safe; the fur catch was handsome; the Northwest Company hadn't made any trouble. True, the *Tonquin* was lost, and twenty-three men with her, not to speak of a score or so of desertions and casualties in the overland journey and local exploring and trading; but the general outlook was as promising as Astor had dared hope for.

In describing his sensations years afterward to Irving, he said:

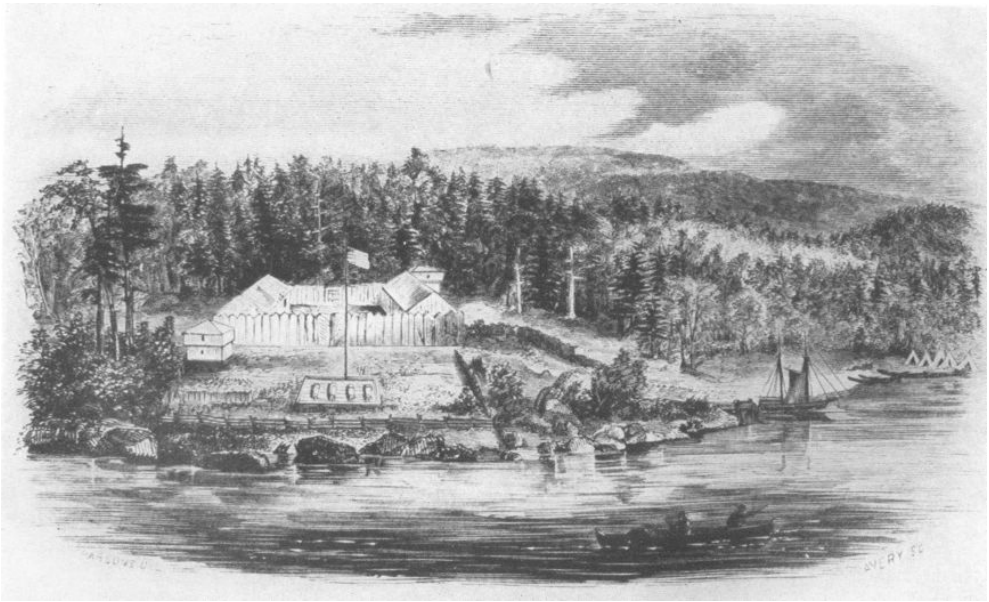
"I felt ready to fall upon my knees in a transport of gratitude."

Better than this, though, I like the remark he made to another friend who saw him at the theater the night after he received the first news of the *Tonquin's* destruction—"I'm surprised to see you here, Mr. Astor," exclaimed the friend. "You are very calm, sir." "What would you have me do?" Jacob answered a bit testily, with that guttural accent he was never able to conquer. "Stay at home, and weep for what I cannot help?"

Very soon he had ample cause to weep, for as the *Adams* lay in the stream, crew and stores aboard, awaiting a favorable wind, a hurry-call came from Commodore Chauncey, in command on Lake Ontario, for seasoned hands to man the impromptu fleet he had built. There was an emergency, and the plight of Astoria went by the board. The *Adams'* crew were sent upstate, and the frigate docked at the Navy Yard to rot the war away. Chauncey, who had been one of Astor's captains before entering the Navy, quite unintentionally blocked his former employer's last effective bid for the empire of the Northwest.

VIII

Months since, Astoria had heard of the war. The sulky McKenzie, dissatisfied with his own post on the Shahaptan River, had visited Clarke's post at the junction of the Pointed Heart and Spokane Rivers in search of company. Here, about Christmas of 1812, he met two Northwest Company men, one of whom was McTavish, a partner in the Canadian concern. McTavish had heard of the declaration of hostilities by Congress in the preceding June, and the Pacific Fur Company men decided McKenzie must carry the news to Astoria—McKenzie, disgusted with the whole business, asking nothing better than the opportunity to repeat to his compatriots downriver the swaggering boasts of McTavish as to what would happen to Americans who had dared to challenge Britain.



Astoria as it was in 1813

All for scuttling the ship, McKenzie, as he sat in the factor's room of the stone barracks inside the barricade, the winter rain drizzling on the roof, elaborated the disasters, threats, promises and gibes of the doughty McTavish. And he had a ready listener in McDougal, already sadly disturbed by the protracted absence of Hunt, who had sailed August 12, last past, to open negotiations with Count Baronhoff, expecting to return in a couple of months. Here it was January 16, 1813, five and a half months—and no word of Hunt. Had the *Beaver* gone the way of the *Tonquin*? McDougal agreed with McKenzie she must have; the two were blithe to believe any old wives' tale their fancies conjured out of McTavish's budget of hostile gossip.

What were they to do when the Northwest Company's armed ship appeared in the offing? Not later than the approaching March, McTavish asserted. Their four-pounders would be helpless against her twelve-pounders. And a husky brigade of Northwesters was coming overland, as well. The two Scots wagged their heads forebodingly—"Aye, mon, yon Dutchman's ower mim. He'll do weell tae come oot wi' the breeks he stands in." "Nae doot, nae doot. And Hunt, puir loon——" "He's nae better man nor McKay, ye'll ken. And didn't the bluidy red deevils gi' Mac a daud wad hold him tae Judgment Day?" "Aye, 'tis nae time for claverin'. Him that's pawky'll have an e'e tae what's comin'."

The result of their havers was a decision to abandon the country, not later than the approaching July 1, and McDougal gave McKenzie dispatches

to take up-river to Stuart, the elder, and Clarke, the one American partner remaining, instructing them to make arrangements to evacuate their trading-posts, and utilize their stores and peltry to obtain horses and provisions for the transportation of the united brigade eastward over the mountains during the summer. In the course of this errand, McKenzie encountered McTavish, the Northwest man, with two canoeloads of voyageurs, descending the Columbia, with the purpose of awaiting the *Isaac Todd* at Astoria. Far from making any attempt to resist this invasion of enemies—McKenzie had seventeen men—the recreant Astorian speeded McTavish on his way, and pushed forward the more zealously to disband the American trading organization in the interior. But Stuart and Clarke were not of the same mind with him; the Canadian partner, like the Americans, refused to dodge at shadows. Both had had good seasons, and obstinately declined to heed McDougal's orders to dissipate their stores in purchases for a retreat they believed unnecessary. Instead, they returned down-river with McKenzie, their canoes loaded deep with fur bales.

At Astoria they found McDougal and his Canadians fraternizing jovially with McTavish's company. The American clerks at the post, outnumbered two to one, could only stand aside and glower; the rank-and-file, hunters and voyageurs, were mainly Canadians. McTavish, out of provisions and ammunition, would have starved to death or been slain by the Indians if McDougal hadn't aided him. The Northwest man was palpably disappointed by the non-arrival of the *Isaac Todd*, but attempts by Stuart and Clarke to capitalize this as a cause for optimism were combatted by McDougal and McKenzie with the counter-fact of the *Beaver's* disappearance and the lack of any other relief ship.

The situation was a stalemate. It was too late to think of crossing the mountains before winter set in, and McTavish was so thoroughly discouraged that he determined to return up-river to the Northwest Company's post on the Spokane for further information and reinforcements. But to make this trip he required an outfit for which he applied to McDougal, who summoned a conference of the four partners present to pass upon the request. All they had to do, in the circumstances, was to refuse help to the Northwest men, and McTavish must have come to terms with them; but McDougal calmly proposed that they utilize the occasion to sell out to the Northwest Company their own post on the Oakinagan, inasmuch, he alleged, as they hadn't sufficient goods to maintain Astoria together with its interior posts. The Scot went so far as to state that the Pacific Fur Company's stock on hand was inferior to that held by the Northwest Company at Fort Spokane, which was an untruth—an untruth the more absurd because in the same breath he secured from his partners, now

beginning to lose confidence, assent to furnishing McTavish $858 worth of trade-goods for the Northwest man's up-river trip.

It is difficult to understand how Stuart and Clarke were prevailed upon to back water so completely, except on the supposition that McDougal was a rascal of strong personality and plausible speech. Certainly, he did not pause at falsehood, and in addition, he had the prestige of seniority. Stuart, himself a Canadian, must have been at least partially sympathetic with old friends like McDougal and McKenzie, however much he disagreed with them upon occasion. Clarke was the junior of all the partners, and not distinguished for good judgment. To win their case in the conference, McDougal and McKenzie had, first, to secure the alliance of Stuart, probably with pleas of national and racial ties; the next step was for the three Scots to bear down upon Clarke with gloomy representations of their common plight, abandoned on a remote and inhospitable coast. The Canadians might not dare to resist an attack by their countrymen. To do so would be treason. For the handful of Americans resistance could mean only death or captivity.

At any rate, McDougal won. The four partners, on July 1, signed a manifesto, approving the provisioning of McTavish's party and the sale to the Northwest Company of the Pacific Fur Company's Spokane post, and besides this, declaring their intention to abandon Astoria, if, by the ensuing June 1, 1814, they did not receive aid from New York. This document, if you please, was placed in the eager hands of McTavish to send east by the Northwest Company's own couriers! And the Northwest man departed, entirely satisfied, on July 5, taking with him three of the Canadian clerks from Astoria, who honorably decided to seek engagements in keeping with their allegiance.

Highly elated, the glib McDougal set about the strengthening of his position, with a weatherwise eye to the future. Despite the scantiness of trade-goods he had advanced as an excuse for relinquishing the Spokane post to the Northwest Company, he insisted that his partners must not suspend their accumulation of furs during the months ahead of them, no matter how uncertain those months should be, and dispatched three trading parties into the interior.

What was McDougal's purpose in this policy? I think it is impossible to doubt that he sought to fill up the magazines at Astoria, so that he should have a better basis for bargaining with the Northwest Company. For another thing, he was anxious to keep his partners occupied at a distance, in order that there might be none at Astoria to question his authority. Even McKenzie, who was a puppet to his will, he ordered on a hunting expedition into the "Wollamut" country. And not content with such precautions, he proceeded to strengthen his authority amongst the Indians by taking to wife

—by their own nuptial ceremony of barter and purchase—a daughter of Concomly, chief of the Chinooks. All this within the space of a few weeks following the first appearance of McTavish. It is unescapable that McDougal was striving by every means so to consolidate his position that he should be the dominant figure in any ultimate bargain which might be struck.

That he wasn't amiss in what he did was proved on August 20, when a strange ship was sighted off the bar, which might be either the *Isaac Todd* or an American relief expedition. She was neither, as it turned out; but the American ship *Albatross*, chartered by Hunt at Oahu. The *Beaver*, delayed in Alaskan waters, he had sent on direct to Canton, lest she lose the fur market's best period, staying her voyage barely long enough for Captain Sowle to put him ashore in the Sandwich Islands. Here, impatiently awaiting an opportunity to regain Astoria, he watched daily from the harbor heads, until the *Albatross* came in from Canton, with the first news to reach him of the war—news which made it all the more imperative for him to return, and likewise, to throw a fresh store of provisions into the post. So, with praiseworthy zeal, he bought all the suitable stores the islands afforded, and chartered the *Albatross* for $2,000 to make the voyage. His distress over the situation he discovered upon his arrival, nearly a year overdue, may be appreciated. But the mischief had been done. The only recourse open to him was to save Astor as much loss as possible by the removal of the accumulated peltry. This couldn't be managed in the *Albatross*, homeward-bound with a cargo of tea; but Captain Smith, her skipper, planned to stop in the Marquesas group, and agreed to carry Hunt afterward to the Sandwich Islands, where he could leave the twenty-five surviving Islanders transported to the coast in the *Tonquin* and the *Beaver*, and perhaps connect with a relief ship or some other available craft.

It is idle to discuss at this distance what might have been effected had Hunt been able to consult with Stuart and Clarke, both of them sent upcountry by McDougal. With their votes he would have had a majority in any conference of partners, but he seems not to have considered it worthwhile to await the calling in of those associated with himself and McDougal in the responsibility. Very likely he was justified in reaching this decision, for McDougal surely plied him with all the threats received from McTavish, and enlarged upon the imminence of a naval raid. In any case, Hunt, badgered and dismayed, made his decision with commendable promptness, and sailed, with the Sandwich Islanders, in the *Albatross* on August 26, six days after his arrival. The single outright mistake which might be chalked against him—although here, again, it is scarcely fair to blame a man so harried and misinformed, through no fault of his own—was his delegation to McDougal of sole authority to negotiate with McTavish

any arrangement which might seem desirable, in the event of his failure to return to the Columbia by January 1, 1814. He should have known, by this time, McDougal's general untrustworthiness. His excuse must be that he couldn't have helped himself, short of putting McDougal under arrest, and for this he lacked the requisite force.

The *Albatross* made a quick passage to the Marquesas, and a few days later was joined by the *Essex* frigate, Captain David Porter, with a squadron of English whalers, which she had made prize. Hunt tried to buy one of these, but Porter asked him the outrageous price of $25,000—why I cannot say, unless there was a prejudice in the Navy against Astor because of his wealth and unwillingness to venture capital in privateering. Then, too, men of affairs were informed of the fur trader's partiality for the Canadians, and the secret service he maintained beyond the frontier. In the tense state of public opinion, those who were his enemies were not above hinting that news of Britain's activities might be paid for in similar coin. Whatever the reason, Porter was strangely unwilling to assist the outpost on the Pacific, declining, also, to send a naval detachment in one of the prizes to bring off the American property and nationals at Astoria.

He did, though, spur Hunt's determination by passing on to him the information that the British frigate *Phoebe*, the sloops-of-war *Cherub* and *Raccoon* and a store ship mounted with heavy battering pieces had sailed from Rio de Janeiro on July 6, their objective the mouth of the Columbia. Hunt's one desire, now, was to get to the Sandwich Islands, and try for another vessel; but the crew of the *Albatross* were not to be torn from their joyance with the shapely, brown island beauties, and it was November 23 before the anchor was raised, and the voyage resumed. They reached "Owhyhee" on December 20, finding there the shipwrecked crew of the *Lark*, which had left New York the preceding March 6. Energetic as ever, Hunt bought the best available craft in the vicinity, the *Pedler* brig, for $10,000, a sum little less outrageous than that asked by Captain Porter for his whaler, shipped the *Lark's* crew in her, and by January 22, 1814, was at sea again, bound for Astoria.

However blundering Hunt may have been in the past, no criticism can be leveled at his energetic efforts during these hectic months of 1813, but he was laboring against an overwhelming concatenation of events. On October 7, McTavish had returned to Astoria with a brigade of seventy-five men. They hoisted the British ensign above their encampment under the walls of the fort, and to the disgust of the few Americans in the garrison, McDougal forbade the raising of the Stars and Stripes in defiance of this covert threat. McTavish likewise delivered to McDougal a letter from his, McDougal's, uncle, Angus Shaw, a principal partner of the Northwest Company, warning

him of the approach of the British squadron instructed "to take and destroy everything American on the Northwest Coast." This letter, or parts of it, which would suit his purpose, McDougal read to his assembled clerks, with gloating emphasis upon the dangers indicated. And later in the same day he entertained from McTavish a proposition that the Northwest Company should take over the entire stock of goods and peltry of the Pacific Fur Company.

This proposition, after some haggling back and forth, to the advantage of the Northwest Company, was embodied in a definite agreement on October 16, under the terms of which less than $40,000 was allowed for furs worth in excess of $100,000. It should be considered, in this connection, that the right conceded by Hunt to McDougal to negotiate singly an arrangement with McTavish was contingent upon Hunt's failure to return by January 1, 1814, a date two and a half months distant. Further, that the seventy-five Northwest men were confronted by sixty Pacific Fur Company men, protected by the fort and its cannon, while the Northwest brigade were too short of ammunition to fight. As against this, of course, should be arraigned the twin facts that McDougal could claim the probable imminence of the British naval squadron, and the frankly disloyal character of a majority of the fort's garrison—including himself! Most of the Astorians wanted to see the post change hands. But nevertheless, business honesty would have dictated the dispersal of the invaders, and the removal of the stores and peltry to one of the interior posts, out of reach of the guns of the men-o'-war. It is unthinkable that an American of any fighting spirit, had he been in charge, would have permitted so miserable a settlement.

McDougal afterwards claimed, and was supported by McTavish, that originally he had proposed the furs be shipped to Canton and sold there for Astor's account, but that these terms were rejected by the Northwest Company. Well, he made damned little effort to enforce his suggestion. Having salved in this manner such conscience as he possessed, he proceeded to agree to a further reduction in the terms of the counter-offer of the Northwest men; and for price for his services they gave him in secret on December 23, a certificate of partnership in their company. So he, who had left the Northwest Company to assist Astor's competition, resumed his first allegiance under circumstances which confirmed the suspicions his policies had aroused from the initiation of the venture. A tortuous, scheming knave, of the same false texture as those dark chiefs like Simon Fraser, who played both sides in the '45, and were the curse of every other phase of Scottish history.

Several weeks subsequent to this he and his fellow-plotters had a severe fright. A sail was sighted doubling Cape Disappointment on November 30,

and how sure the Northwest men were of British naval assistance is indicated by the fact that McTavish loaded two barges with the furs he had purchased, and hastened to ferry them out of reach of landing parties, while McDougal put off in a canoe, instructing his paddlers to be either English or American as the needs of the moment might warrant. However, their fears were speedily assuaged. The stranger was the *Raccoon* sloop-of-war, twenty-six guns, Captain Black, of the British squadron, and in her company was John McDonald, still another of the ubiquitous partners of the Northwest Company. Mr. McDonald had diverted the *Raccoon's* officers with tales of the prize-money they should obtain from the furs in the magazines of Astoria, and they were all vastly indignant to be appraised that the contents of the post had passed into the hands of British subjects. Captain Black was equally annoyed over the exaggerated accounts of the strength of the fortifications furnished him by the Northwest Company—"Is this the fort about which I have heard so much talking?" he exclaimed. "Damme, I could batter it down in two hours with a four-pounder."

On December 12, Black formally raised the British flag over the post, and took possession of it in the name of his King. Having done so, he departed to seek the *Raccoon's* sister ships, the *Phoebe* and *Cherub*, themselves seeking the *Essex*, which was wrecking British commerce in the South Seas; and the Northwest Company men assumed control of Astoria, although McDougal was left undisturbed as Astor's representative, and held all the Pacific Fur Company's papers and records, and the drafts drawn by McTavish and his associates in payment for the furs and goods. McKenzie, Clarke and David Stuart returned down-river about this time, definitely discouraged by the success which had attended McDougal's intrigues. You will note I include McKenzie with the other partners, for at this stage he cast in his lot with them. McDougal had used him, I take it, and when he was no longer necessary, cast him aside. They were all three for returning to the United States, but to start in the depth of winter would have been folly. So they settled down for what must have been a very dreary Christmas, and nothing more eventful happened until another ship was sighted off the bar on February 28, 1814, and the *Pedler* wore in to the anchorage.

Hunt came ashore to learn of the absolute destruction of his hope to salvage something from the wreckage of the enterprise, and if he was not a man of violent temper, still, he was pointed in his comments to McDougal—not that it did him any good. Even his indignation, after he discovered that the Scot had been a secret partner of the Northwest Company for two months, and representing Astor simultaneously, had no result beyond impelling McDougal the more quickly to yield up the papers and drafts which belonged to the defunct Pacific Fur Company. Poor Hunt swallowed

his wrath as best he could, and addressed himself with the celerity he always achieved in adversity to winding up the sorry mess. The Americans and those other employees who preferred not to take service with the Northwest Company were embarked on the *Pedler* or mustered into a small brigade, led by Clarke, McKenzie, and Stuart, to return overland.

The *Pedler* sailed April 3, and touched at Kamchatka to apprize the Russians of the turn in affairs and land Russell Farnham, one of the American clerks, who traveled across Siberia and Europe with dispatches for Astor, reaching New York well in advance of his comrades, whose voyage was prolonged and storm-tossed. The overland brigade left Astoria on April 4, and suffered the usual mishaps which had befallen the several parties that had traveled this route, already becoming a beaten path. One of their adventures deserves notice because it furnishes our last glimpse of the most singular individual concerned in these journeyings. Near the mouth of the Wallah-Wallah they were hailed in French from the shore, and in a canoe which put out to them were amazed to recognize Dorion's squaw and her children, sole survivors of an expedition sent to the Snake River the preceding summer. Of the men, all except one had been surprised and killed by the Indians in a simultaneous series of onfalls. A single voyageur, severely wounded, had escaped to tell the woman of the death of Dorion and the others. And she, undismayed, had shouldered the wounded man upon a horse, mounted her children upon a second beast, and hiding and fleeing by turns, contrived to gain a place of refuge in the mountains. The wounded man was unable to support the hardships of flight, but by incredible efforts she kept her children alive until she obtained the hospitality of the Wallah-Wallah tribe. Now, as imperturbable as ever, she rejoined the brigade, and placidly shared the toils and dangers of the long journey eastward, up the defiles of the Columbia and the Snake, over the jagged summits of the Rockies and across the burning expanse of the prairies to the lower Missouri.

A great character. She flits across the pages of history with a strangely compelling effect of individuality, the most dependable person of those who went to Astoria. Whenever she had a job to do, she did it. Two children she took out with her—and two she brought back. She had a life to bring forth, under as dreadful conditions as a woman might experience—and she brought it forth. No fault of hers that new life flickered and died. As for Dorion's death, had he been with her when the war-whoop sounded, I make no doubt she would have saved him, as she did herself and the children and the wounded man, who died finally from sheer weariness and loss of blood.

But what did she think of it all? What did it signify to her? If we only knew!

IX

Many a month should pass before Astor knew Astoria was lost to him, and during those months he'd reconstruct his financial and mercantile program, swinging his activities from a war to a peace basis; but none-the-less the blow was stinging to his pride, and he swore an unending vendetta against the Northwest Company—"after their treatment of me, I have no idea of remaining quiet and idle," he wrote to Hunt. He took steps, by the interest of his friends at Washington, to induce the Government to reassert possession of the Columbia River territory, in accordance with the terms of the Treaty of Ghent guaranteeing the *status quo ante bellum*; and the *Ontario* sloop-of-war, Captain Biddle, was duly ordered around the Horn to execute a formal cancellation of the ceremony by means of which Captain Black of the *Raccoon* had laid claim to the territory. Furthermore, as he thought, to clinch the matter, he had a law passed by Congress, forbidding British traders to operate within the dominions claimed by the United States.

But it wasn't as simple as all that. The Northwest Company had established itself securely in Oregon; Astoria, over which its flag flew, was now Fort George, and its brigades ranged at will from the Coast to the Rockies; Concomly, the one-eyed chief of the Chinooks and father-in-law of McDougal, like the other red potentates of this area, had easily switched allegiance to the organization in power. Captain Biddle, a dozen Captain Biddles, might fire a salute to the flag of the United States, and brandish his sword and recite whatever legalistic formula his superiors had devised for him; but unless he and his bluejackets were prepared to disembark and devote themselves to the unfamiliar warfare of mountains and forests they could not expect to displace the alert Canadians. And the Administration in Washington, mighty glad to have gotten out of the recent war so easily, was in no mood to bring about a resumption of hostilities, especially when the stake was so remote as the fur trade of a country separated by two thousand miles from the nearest permanent settlements. There was, indeed, a general inclination after the war to belittle the importance of the regions beyond the Rockies—the country had been badly frightened, and was in a mood to realize the immediate difficulty of colonizing the hundreds of thousands of miles of unoccupied territories adjacent to the Mississippi valley. It is to Astor's credit that he never yielded to this laissez faire conception of the public interest. When Albert Gallatin returned with the other Peace Commissioners from Europe in the Fall of 1815, Astor met him in Washington, and offered a qualified congratulation on the Treaty he had helped to negotiate.

“I’m very much pleased with what you gentlemen have accomplished,” said the merchant, “but there are some things you ought not to have left undone, Mr. Gallatin.”

“What things, Mr. Astor?” countered Gallatin.

“You should have settled more definitely the question of the Columbia territory.”

“Never mind,” Gallatin answered laughingly. “It will be time enough for our great-grandchildren to talk about that in two hundred years.”

Astor shook his head.

“If we live, Mr. Gallatin, we shall see trouble about it in less than forty years,” he predicted.[1]

Gallatin was an unusually broad-minded man, a true statesman, a great financier—and his view was the view of the best intellects in America. It says much for this blundering, wrong-headed German merchant of ours that he was right where so many, who possessed more genuine vision than he, who were more essentially patriotic, were wrong. From the very conclusion of the War of 1812 the ownership of the Northwestern coast and the country inland to the Rockies was a subject of controversy between the United States and Great Britain. Astor, undiscouraged by the news of the Northwest Company’s success, besought the Administration to send out a military force to retake Astoria and hold it. A single company would be sufficient, he declared. But President Madison continued loath to assume the responsibility for a step which might precipitate bloodshed. Astor, himself, considered the alternative of private warfare: sending a strong brigade to compete with the Northwest Company along the Columbia. There were plenty of rough condottieri on the frontier, who would have volunteered for such an expedition. But the idea of violence was repugnant to an orderly, German soul.

Despite the unwillingness of the Americans to go to extremes, there was a gradual, persistent growth of sentiment in favor of a stronger stand over our rights to the Northwest coast; and in 1818 this resulted in an agreement between the two nations providing for joint occupation for a period of ten years, which, so far as it removed the danger of hostilities and soothed American pride, was entirely satisfactory. It did not, however, serve in the slightest degree to mitigate the dominance of the Northwest Company on the Columbia, and, generally, west of the Rockies. Only by a prolonged and arduous campaign should the American fur traders be able eventually to effect a partial restoration of the American title to countries which were discovered and explored by American enterprise. But the day of this restoration was to come. The Treaty of 1818, renewed for two similar

periods of ten years each, resulted finally in a compromise of the mutual claims of Great Britain and the United States, and Astor lived to see the flag of his adopted country definitely displayed over Astoria.

He is reported to have been pathetically pleased by this realization, in extreme old age, of the dream which had animated his prime. For the failure of his essay as empire-builder was always aching in his memory. But much as he *felt* his failure, and regretted it, he never understood it. Rather, he blamed it upon Hunt for having allowed the *Beaver* to sail for Canton from Alaska, without stopping at Astoria, or upon Captain Sowle for keeping the *Beaver* at Canton instead of returning to the mouth of the Columbia, or upon nature for the shipwreck of the *Lark*, or upon the Administration for not having come to his aid. No blame, he reckoned, attached to himself. In all his pleasure over the Oregon Treaty, which President Polk unwillingly signed at the behest of the Senate, there was no room for apprehension that but for his mistakes of judgment the line of demarcation would have been much nearer the "Fifty-four, forty" of the militant faction, who alliterated with the figures the phrase "or Fight," than the Forty-ninth Parallel of latitude, which the United States was obliged to accept. Yet it wouldn't be fair to censure him too harshly. He wrought his best, according to his lights; he lost $800,000, without whimpering, a sum in excess of the fortunes of all except perhaps a score of individual Americans in 1815; nobody else saw the vision he glimpsed, however imperfectly, and nobody else was willing to undertake the job after he failed at it. But for his blind, stumbling effort our frontier north of California might conceivably have terminated at the line of the Rockies.

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[1] Astor's grandson, Charles Astor Bristed, is authority for this anecdote in his "Open Letter to Horace Mann."

BOOK FIVE

THE FIRST TRUST

THE FIRST TRUST

I

Like most phlegmatic persons, Astor refused to waste vain regrets over a dream gone wrong. He put Astoria behind him, and addressed himself to reconstituting his fur trade in the Great Lakes region so soon as the menace of redcoat and redskin was removed. But there was more than a hint of malice in the energy with which he went about the task of convincing the Administration that alien traders should be barred from the territory of the United States. One of the three or four richest men in the country, and a director of the Bank of the United States, recently established, his wishes were not to be ignored; and Congress readily enacted legislation which put the mighty Nor'west Company at his mercy. In 1816 he bought up his rivals' posts below the Lakes and on the upper Mississippi on his own terms. The first step he had projected in incorporating the American Fur Company was accomplished. The entire fur trade east of the Mississippi was in his control, and he reorganized his parent corporation, doubling its capital to $1,000,000, in order to exploit efficiently the additional facilities he had acquired.

Nobody knew it at the time—Astor himself, had no appreciation of the significance of the campaign he was about to launch; but there was being born, in embryo, a foreshadowing of those gigantic consolidations of industry which should dominate the nation's activities eighty years later, and remodel the entire fabric of American business. More than that. In the dexterity with which he linked fur with shipping, and shipping with tea, and tea again with fur, we may glimpse a conception of the pyramidal trust, which the German Stinnes brought to full fruition in the tumultuous period following the World War. On a miniature scale, to be sure. So small as to seem almost ridiculous, in light of modern values. Yet the central idea was the same: an interlinking of dependent businesses, under a single control, so as to wring from each a maximum of profits.

And as it happened—through no conscious policy of his—Astor's campaign was to produce political results out of all proportion to its economic consequences. Astoria and the Pacific Fur Company had, at best, an indirect influence upon subsequent events. But the American Fur Company and the antagonists it spurred to even greater efforts were positive, vital forces in exploring and colonizing the Far West. They furnished the driving power which made practicable the visions of those few American statesmen who saw the Republic expanding from ocean to ocean, although it is but just to add that their interest primarily was neither beneficent nor

unselfish. Undoubtedly, too, if there had never been an American Fur Company or an Astor to conceive it, some other company, conceived by some other intelligent merchant, would have performed the same functions and reaped identical rewards. Fate happened to select Astor.

What a contrast we have here! The stolid, prosaic merchant, sitting in his office in New York, speaking broken English, unable to think as an American, but equipped with a mind instinctively grasping the commercial advantages involved—and thousands of miles away, in the forests and the mountains, and remote on the headwaters of lonely rivers, the rough, fur-clad frontiersmen, who wrought his will, and whose adventurings at his behest made known the heart of a continent to eager hordes willing to outface any hardship or travel any distance if there was free arable land at the end of the journey. And none of them realized what they were doing! Driven on by love of gain or adventure, they all alike labored furiously for the immediate stake, never recking they were the spearhead of that host of farmers and mechanics, whose very presence would ruin the trade which was their mainstay, never recking that where they built their log trading posts, and in the mountain valleys where they held their rendezvous, and on the site of the Indian villages where they bought their squaws, should arise a hundred cities larger than the New York or Philadelphia of their day.

It was always so from the moment the earliest settlers shoved off from the first villages on the Atlantic coast. The trapper wandered up the river valleys into the foothills of the Appalachians. Returning with his catch of peltry, he told the stay-at-homes of the wonders he had seen, and the discontented or venturous amongst the local farmers tracked him to the nearest cove that had no landlord. Others followed, younger sons who must look to themselves for support, sturdy immigrants from overseas, short of capital but long of muscle and determination. And with them the frontier pushed westward, following the courses of the navigable rivers until the falls or rapids were reached at the point where the upland trend steepened. Here there'd be a pause, while the pioneers cleared the territory occupied and gathered their energies anew. But in a few years the zone of occupation widened—late comers, finding the choice river bottoms staked out, would branch right and left into the contiguous country paralleling the limit of navigation. Another pause—and the push would be westward once more. The trappers, the fur traders—indefatigable precursors of civilization—had entered the foothills, and reported the sheltered valleys and lofty benches along the eastern rim of the mountains. And a third generation of adventurers, bent upon securing farms for raising families, would climb out of the lowlands to the skirts of the hills that loomed mysteriously blue in the western sky.

The eve of the Revolution witnessed the definite passage of the Appalachians. The trapper was driven westward still, on the heels of the Indians, who resented blindly this, to them, cruel seizure of lands which had been theirs for centuries. Indeed, had the trappers been philosophers instead of men of action, ignorant, bigoted, narrowly set upon the one means of livelihood apparent to them, they must have perceived that their true interests chimed closer with the Indians than with the farmers who crowded after them. Any country once resigned to farming ceased to be a good prospect for peltry. The Hudson's Bay Company, the most intelligently selfish corporation which ever operated on this continent, had no illusions on this score. It was invariably opposed to farming, and subtly worked to make the intrusion of the farmer upon the countries covered by its posts as uncomfortable as unprofitable. But no American fur company—I use the term generically, you understand, not with application to Astor's organization—was either sufficiently intelligent or selfish ever to discern the historic parallel. Perhaps it would have been impossible for the American companies to check the westward drift of population, in any event. This phenomenon had continued for well over a hundred years when Astor became a figure of importance in the fur trade, and its greatest demonstration was yet to come. But speculation is idle. The fact is apparent in every phase of the frontier. The trapper blazed the way. Behind him marched the farmer and mechanic, their offspring poised atop of the meager belongings jammed into some second-hand cart or perched precariously upon broken-winded pack-ponies.

Jacob Astor, himself, had seen the flood pour west from the valley of the Mohawk below the Lakes, sweeping aside the remnants of the Iroquois with whom he had traded on his youthful travels. He had seen the Ohio valley definitely occupied, and the two streams of white emigration gradually coalesce to dominate the whole area between the Lakes and the river. And men working for him had led the continuing westward sweep that reached the Mississippi, shortly after the Louisiana Purchase, and tarried there to bide the issue of the War. Now, with the conclusion of peace, hard times were general in the East, and restless citizens turned their backs upon known poverty to dare unknown dangers, crowding thicker and faster into the Northwest, creeping in steadily increasing numbers up the lower Missouri, observing next the traditional custom of spreading right and left along that river's tributaries, as the more convenient tracts were settled. In front of them drifted the trapper, sullen as the Indians who retreated with him, compelled again to find new beaver grounds.

There was no instantaneous transition, to be sure. It was a matter of years. But the logic of events was inexorable. Astor, conning the situation in

his simply furnished office—recently moved from Pine to Vesey Street, where it was conveniently adjacent to his house at 223 Broadway—could tick the facts on his stubby fingers: first, the nearer tribes were cowed; second, the British pretense to interference with American trade was terminated; third, the destruction of the Northwest Company's American business left him no serious rival in the region of the Lakes; fourth, emigration would be stimulated anew; fifth, this meant that even if the wilder country bordering the Lakes continued to produce fur he must be prepared to replace areas which would attract settlers; sixth, he knew from the reports of the Astorians that there were innumerable beaver streams, scarcely tapped, accessible from the upper Missouri. He must expand his activities, then. But he had just had his fingers burnt, and despite his phlegm, they hurt. He wouldn't move too hastily. For one thing, the Government of the United States, in a spirit of misguided paternalism, was in business as a fur trader with the Western tribes, and he was not inclined to undertake competition with so redoubtable an antagonist. No, no! He'd wait and see what Gallatin and his other friends could do with Congress. He had plenty to occupy him, in the meantime, reorganizing his acquisitions from the Northwest Company. Ah, he'd make dem fellers sweat!

II

A baffling character, this Astor, capable at the same time of simple, straightforward vision and stubborn stupidity. You might think, for instance, that he would have learned a lesson from his experiences in the Astoria venture, that he would be disposed now to adopt a more nationalistic attitude toward his business. Not at all! He was regarded with open suspicion in the frontier districts, where his involved relationships with Canadians—product of his joint control with the Northwest Company of the Southwest Company—had placed him in a difficult position during the recent war. Matthew Irwin, factor at the trading post the United States Government operated at Green Bay, Wisconsin, had complained to Thomas L. McKenney, Superintendent of Indian Affairs at Washington, that he obtained from Secretary Gallatin an order permitting his people to transfer furs from the British post at St. Joseph to Mackinac on the outbreak of hostilities. Also, that Astor's agent, who was a British subject, had carried to the British garrison at Malden news that war would be declared by Congress—of no slight importance, this last item, since it was instrumental in the seizure by the British of a sloop which carried the official papers and baggage of unfortunate old General William Hull, commander of the American troops on that frontier, and this, in turn, led to the enemy movements which

resulted in the surrender of Hull's entire force at Detroit, a pretty opening act for an inglorious drama. Furthermore, this same agent returned to Mackinac with a detail of British troops, who promptly occupied the post in the name of the Prince Regent.[1]

To the frontier these occurrences looked very black. "Old Astor" might subscribe to the War Loan and boast the intimacy of all the prominent men from the President down, but the frontier folk thought directly, with no eye for the nuances of life, the infinite petty complications which make it well nigh impossible to judge any man in high place by the outward seeming of what he does. They heard further loose talk from the free trappers of the arrogant stand the American Fur Company assumed toward those who rebelled against its schedule of trading prices. There were rumors of gossip from the eastern seaport towns that "Astor ain't no better'n a goddam' Federalist—'got a dozen ships, and ain't sent a privateer to sea." Later, the frontier knew vaguely that he was getting news underground from Canada—I have referred to this previously, and to the contemporary question whether he didn't pay for enemy news with like coin from New York.

But, black as the indictment reads, there seems to be no proof that Astor, himself, was in any way involved in Canadian intrigues. He was merely the victim of his own blind, insensate policy of operating with alien subordinates because they were cheaper and more amenable to discipline than the rough-and-ready American trappers. He procured the transfer of his furs from the former Southwest Company post at St. Joseph, in order to save his property from seizure. The processes of his mind were such, in this as in similar matters, that he ignored the probable results of intrusting the mission to a Canadian agent. And it is likely that he was the loser by his stupidity, for his furs would have been taken over by the British troops that seized the Mackinac post. The truth appears to be that he was as surprised by the disloyalty shown by his Canadians in the Northwest Country as by the disloyalty of their brethren at Astoria. Both cases left him puzzled, sore, revengeful, and unconvinced that his fundamental policy was wrong.

That is the amazing feature of the episode. The instant he could take up operations again in the Lake country, he resumed the policy of giving Canadians preference to Americans. Brigades of trappers for his service were recruited at Montreal, and at Mackinac, which became the center of his trade on the Lakes, he stationed Ramsey Crooks as General Agent, with Robert Stuart, the younger of that ilk, as assistant. No cause for criticism attaches to either of these individuals—Crooks seems to have become a naturalized American citizen prior to his joining the Astorians, and was too disgusted with McKenzie's intrigues to remain on the Columbia, while

Stuart, although technically a British subject, had been faithful in carrying overland in wartime the only full dispatches to reach his employer from Astoria before the smash came. But their ties had been with the Nor'west Company originally, and they remained familiar with the Scotch-Canadian factors, clerks, and trappers of the posts above the Lakes. They were not, in the eyes of the frontier West, true-blue Americans: their appointments perpetuated the feeling that Astor was against his adopted countrymen.

His first importations of aliens aroused the local authorities of the Northwest to fury, and led to an attempt to construe the law he had secured from Congress, prohibiting foreign companies from trading in United States territory as likewise applying to the employment of alien subjects by American citizens. Colonel Talbot Chambers, of the Rifle Regiment, holding the military command on the Mississippi, seized two American Fur Company boats on this ground; but Astor sued him, with Thomas H. Benton, of Missouri—the future Senator and apostle of western expansion—for counsel, and won a verdict of $5,000 damages. Astor had the modern trust-builder's knack for picking the right men to work with—and there is at least a slight shadow of evidence that he wasn't above employing certain of the more questionable methods known to modern high finance. In 1909, certain old ledgers of the American Fur Company were placed on exhibition at the Anderson Galleries in New York City, prior to their sale at auction, and a curious investigator[2] discovered on one of the soiled, yellow pages an entry recording the payment of $35,000 to Governor Lewis Cass of Michigan Territory. The date was May 3, 1817, and no services were recorded as compensation for a fee which must have been considered exorbitant in that day; but it may not be without significance that about a year before the date in question strenuous objections were being made to Governor Cass against Astor's continued importations of Canadian trappers—objections which Cass ignored.[3]

Of course, the other fur companies and the host of free trappers, did all that was possible to discredit the American Fur Company. Its misdeeds and shortcomings were exaggerated and enlarged upon at every opportunity, yet with all due allowance for hostile propaganda there must have been fire underneath so much smoke. We shall find other grave charges registered against it in years to come when its power and prestige were incomparably greater, and it loomed before the country as the most potent force for good or harm west of the Mississippi, stronger in these regions than the Government of which it was a creature. And I regret to say that these charges were frequently true. It debauched and cheated the savages; it held in narrow bondage the miserable white men who worked for it; it was

ruthless toward all individuals or corporations too weak to resist its might; it was coldly, and occasionally stupidly, selfish in the policies it adopted; and on the whole, it preferred to let its more adventurous rivals do the exploring for new beaver streams—and then swallow them up, trust-fashion. For all of which that strange, baffling, preposterous fellow, Astor, was directly or indirectly responsible. To the very last he blundered clumsily along toward the goal he had set himself, stamping down wiser, more patriotic, better-informed men. Nothing could keep him from success.

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[1] Senate Document No. 60, 1st Session, 17th Congress.

[2] "History of the Great American Fortunes" by Gustavus Myers.

[3] "The History of the American Fur Trade of the Far West," Vol. I, p. 312, by Hiram M. Chittenden.

III

During the years immediately following the War, as I have said, Astor and the American Fur Company more or less marked time. Business was very bad in the East, the market for fur and tea was off, and he was not disposed to enlarge his field of operations until the Government withdrew its official trading-posts in the Indian country. He lobbied persistently at Washington to accomplish this objective, and was finally rewarded when Congress in the winter of 1821-22 abolished the Government posts, abandoning the entire fur trade to private enterprise. Well might John Jacob lick his thin lips in anticipation over this achievement. For a recent Liverpool packet had brought word that the proud Nor'west Company had given up the fight, too. Shorn of its trapping grounds in the United States, it had competed with the American Fur Company at an increasing disadvantage, and was reluctantly compelled to assent to its absorption, through Act of Parliament, by the Hudson's Bay Company, its Canadian rival.

All that stood, now, between the American Fur Company and dominion over the Far Western fur countries were the free trappers and a handful of small trading firms, which would have lacked the resources of the Trust even had they been willing to forget their mutual jealousies and combine to form an opposition group. Astor acted with celerity to develop his opportunity. To the existing headquarters of the company, Detroit and Mackinac, was added a third, St. Louis, destined to become the most

important of the three, and as a means to consolidating his power on this newest frontier he was invading—not for the first time, it is true, but with the first valid intention of permanence—and to minimize competition, he proceeded to absorb the St. Louis firm of Stone, Bostwick & Company, an enterprising trading house, with valuable connections in the Indian country.

It was as if Destiny, moving with immutable precision, deliberately had undertaken to clear his road for him. In July, 1821, Parliament had retaliated upon the exclusion of Canadian traders from American territory by excluding Americans from Canada. The American Fur Company, in consequence, had withdrawn from its few posts in the region east of Lake Huron affected; but had countered by establishing a new chain of three posts along the international boundary, recently defined on the Forty-ninth Parallel, between Lake Superior and the Lake of the Woods. The Hudson's Bay Company reluctantly evacuated the post it had only just built at Pembina on the Red River of the North, and Astor's brigades found themselves strategically situated to exploit a wide range of fur-bearing territory, with very little reason to be over-cautious as to which side of a vague geographical line they set their traps.

Detroit and Mackinac continued to be headquarters for what was known as the Northern Department, with Crooks and Stuart in charge, covering all the country contiguous to the Lakes, including the three new posts; St. Louis became the headquarters of the Western Department, in charge of Pierre Chouteau, Jr., member of an old family of Louisiana French extraction and one of the keenest traders of the frontier. It is odd to note Chouteau's selection for this, which was to be the most important subordinate post in the American Company. He was a man after Astor's own heart, adroit, fearless, dominating—and of alien extraction. Could it be possible that the German emigrant lad disliked to have Americans of the old stock in responsible positions under him?

From the first the American Fur Company encountered fierce and efficient competition. The Missouri Fur Company, Manuel Lisa's veteran organization, was constantly building new posts on the upper river; and William Henry Ashley, of St. Louis, first Lieutenant Governor of the infant state of Missouri—admitted to the Union in the preceding year—was forming a partnership with Major Andrew Henry, whose deserted fort on Henry's Fork of the Snake, used by the Astorians, you'll recall, was the earliest permanent American settlement beyond the Shining Mountains. The Ashley-Henry Outfit, as they were known, like the Missouri Fur Company, were forced far afield by the entry of the American Fur Company into the Missouri country. Their resources were trivial compared with the capital Astor could produce from coffers filled by the returns of his fur trade in the

North and his fragrant cargoes from China. The one superiority they could boast was their popularity with the free trappers, who, from the beginning, resented the Trust and its tactics, and threw in their lot with the independent companies. As a result, the independents always reached new beaver grounds first, and discovered every landmark of the West in so doing.

It was exactly because of this necessity for exploiting untouched country that Ashley and Henry in their second expedition of 1823 abandoned the headwaters of the Missouri, where the Missouri Company was better equipped to withstand the American Company, and after a stern brush with the Arickaras—which produced one of the earliest punitive expeditions sent by the Government west of the Mississippi—pushed overland to the base of the Shining Mountains, which they crossed by the South Pass, the first such crossing recorded, although one of the free trappers, Etienne Prevost, had discovered the pass some years before. Beyond the mountains, in the rich valley of the Green, the brigade encountered beaver streams which were to yield the chief of the enterprise a snug fortune in the next four years, and presently draw after him a swarm of lesser traders, unable to exist within the spheres of the American and the Missouri Companies.

So, almost at the start of his efforts in the West, Astor was driving other men to endeavors more glorious, if less profitable, than his own. With the Ashley-Henry Outfit were a score of trappers who might more justly lay claim to the title of "Pathfinder" than the insufferable coxcomb, Fremont, who, a generation hence should build his reputation upon the exploits they performed as casual episodes in their daily lives—such men as the Sublettes, Milton and Bill; Jed Smith, "the knight in buckskin," earliest American to break the overland trail to California; Jim Beckwourth, French mulatto and discoverer of Beckwourth's Pass in the High Sierras; Jim Bridger, discoverer of the Great Salt Lake and second after Coulter into Yellowstone Park, who could paint on a smooth hide a better map than most trained geographers; Tom Fitzpatrick, "Bad Hand" to the Blackfeet, one of the deadliest Indian fighters in Western lore.

By 1823 the last of the wandering Nor'west Company or Hudson's Bay brigades had cleared out of the isolated corners of the upper Missouri country; the West of the Louisiana Purchase, from the Mississippi to the mountains, was American, in fact as well as in name. But west of the mountains the situation was quite different—a direct result of Astor's bungling of his Astoria enterprise. In the vast region described as Oregon, the Hudson's Bay Company had supplanted the Nor'west Company, adding the power of limitless capital to the vigor and initiative of the rugged Scots who had snatched this prize from Astor's grasp. As you know, the tentative agreement reached with Great Britain in the Treaty of 1818 provided for

joint occupation of the area, but joint occupation for many years to come proved an empty phrase. The Nor'west Company, and its successor, the Hudson's Bay, had established an authority so absolute, had bound the tribes by ties so rigid, that American competition in the fur country west of the mountains was unpractical.

An old precedent was illustrated afresh; once the Hudson's Bay Company was definitely established in a territory from which it could not be ousted by political means, no other fur company might hope to meet it on equal terms. It maintained an iron discipline, where even the American Fur Company at best achieved a pretense to subordination; it was scrupulously fair and just in its dealings with the Indians, observing a single scale of prices, in accordance with seasonal conditions, where Astor's, and every other American, company manipulated prices at will to suit occasional needs; it trapped scientifically, never overtaxing any given area, reducing the annual take promptly at the discovery of a falling-off in yield; and courteously, coldly, with unswerving arrogance, it resisted every attempt to invade territories covered by its organization. So long as it had the power, it made conditions sufficiently uncomfortable to discourage an unduly lengthy visit. Throughout the period of the fur trade's prosperity, Astor's company and lesser American rivals never seriously threatened the supremacy of the Hudson's Bay Company in Oregon. It was the flood of settlers, following the trails the trappers had opened across the South Pass and the Bad Lands of the Snake Basin, who swamped the Hudson's Bay Company exactly as similar floods of home-makers had rolled over every fur area which became sufficiently well known between the oceans.

The first step of the Hudson's Bay Company was to remove its Oregon headquarters from Fort George, old Astoria, to a site sixty miles upstream, safe from any possible naval attack, an indication, by itself, that the Company anticipated ultimate ownership by Britain. At the junction of the Snake and the Columbia it likewise strengthened Fort Walla Walla, substantially on the site of the post David Stuart had established during the campaign of the Astorians. With these two posts it definitely controlled the trade of the Columbia Basin, and as the American free trappers and the brigades of the Missouri Fur Company and the Ashley-Henry Outfit plodded into the foothills of the Divide, it gradually extended its zone of power until it might be said to rule eastward to the headwaters of the Snake. To shake loose its clutch upon the western side of the Rockies required the united efforts of all the American fur companies, and it is by no means certain how permanent this scant measure of success would have been but for the initiation of the Oregon migration of the Splendid Forties.

From the upper Missouri southward to the Arkansas, bounding the Spanish provinces of Texas and New Mexico, was the enormous expanse, mostly rolling prairies, the earlier explorers dubbed "The Great American Desert," home of wandering Indian tribes, savage Ishmaelites, whose hands were raised against one another, if, by chance, there was no war-pipe to smoke against the white men. Here Sioux, Cheyenne, Blackfeet, Pawnee, Arapaho, Arickara, Apache, and a score of less numerous tribes rode and fought, stole and scalped and tortured, in a fantastic continuation of the Stone Age. Thousands of wild barbarians, more thousands, probably, than we can realize today, lived this life so irreconcilable with the civilization which was crowding westward on the heels of the trappers, who, in the beginning were regarded by the redskins with tolerance, but soon were assailed as unconscionable oppressors, advance-guard of the land-hungry settlers, thieves, debauchers of women, dread carriers of pestilence which destroyed not villages, but nations.

Empty, this country, save for nomadic clusters of skin tents, each with its attendant horse herds, and the shifting columns of buffalo and antelope, beasts which served the plains Indians for beef cattle, and would be so serving the white man today had his ancestors been masters of their own lust to kill for impermanent gain. The trapper who traversed these billowing seas of grassland and sagebrush hillocks moved warily, with an eye upon the horizon whenever he topped a swell in the monotonous champagne. At any moment a squadron of skin-clad riders, brandishing lance and bow, might gallop over the nearest elevation, their whooping voices as hideous as their painted, scarified features. Not much chance for the fugitive in such a race. In all those hundreds of thousands of square miles not a refuge, unless he chanced to run into a band that hated his pursuers enough to go to the trouble of plucking a white man from them.

Six hundred miles up the Arkansas, Major Stephen H. Long, of the Seventh Infantry, U. S. A., after whom Long's Peak was named, had established Fort Smith in 1817; but the handful of troops who occupied the post existed almost on sufferance. Except for the Missouri Fur Company's slenderly garrisoned trading-posts on the upper Missouri, and the posts the American Fur Company was establishing to cover them, there wasn't another permanent American post, civil or military, west of the Missouri frontier. Fort Atkinson, at Council Bluffs, on the east bank of the Missouri River above the Platte, and Fort Snelling, at the junction of the St. Peter's with the Mississippi (where St. Paul and Minneapolis lift their skyscrapers), were the two other advanced posts of the Army's frontier chain, which roughly outlined the supposed limits of civilized occupancy. West of this

barrier all was "Indian Country," and only one attempt to bridge it was to be made for a generation to come.

On June 10, 1821, the *Missouri Intelligencer*, of Franklin, Missouri—which was the frontier metropolis of the state until the Missouri River washed it out of existence in 1827—carried an advertisement by Captain William Becknell asking for "seventy men to go westward." There was a sufficient response, and a meeting of the volunteers was held at the home of Ezekiel Williams, who had made several trips to the Spanish settlements around Santa Fe, in New Mexico, beginning in 1813. A pack train was organized, and led by Becknell, reached Santa Fe that Fall, and returned to Franklin in January, 1822. In the Spring, Becknell led a second expedition overland, this time with three wagons, and broke a shorter trail than Williams had described across the fearsome wastes of the Cimarron desert. This was the Santa Fe Trail, soon to be famous in song and story, over which should travel Kit Carson as a lad, and hundreds of other sturdy adventurers, who'd make of the sleepy Indian pueblo of Taos a citadel of the free trappers, and with it for base, open up the prolific fur area of the Southwest, enabling the opponents of the Trust to stretch out their hopeless battle a decade longer than would otherwise have been the case.

IV

The battle for the fur trade was on. Astor, alone—but no, not alone—for his son, William, was home from Gottingen, striving dutiously to forget the ambition to be a writer and philosopher which had animated a studious youth, and for reward might see the style of the family's parent firm changed from "John Jacob Astor" to "Astor & Son." As baffling a figure as his father, this son. Jacob was your thorough-going German, deeply impressed with the value of learning, determined that William should enjoy all the advantages poverty had denied himself. Hence Columbia College, and Gottingen, where Schopenhauer was a fellow-student and intimate of the boy, and the great Chevalier de Bunsen was especially retained to be tutor and bear-leader. Lusty influences for intellectual development, but not calculated to stimulate a spontaneous interest in the trade-price of beaver or the best quality of Yankee gimcracks for the Canton market.

It seems probable that Jacob's praiseworthy effort to make a scholar out of William resulted not altogether happily for the son. There was a twist, a warp, somewhere in a character which was negative rather than positive, yet was governed by a mind of notable strength. The picture William's contemporaries have left us is of a tall, heavily-built man, with small, squinty eyes, a vacuous look and a sluggish expression. He is represented as

cold in demeanor, with an air which was generally abstracted. He early acquired a marked stoop, and was inclined to be slovenly in his dress, unsocial and taciturn. That genial raconteur, Philip Hone, who manages to sketch in a comprehensible impression of almost every prominent New Yorker met in his long and busy life, contents himself each time he has dined in William's company with noting the bare: "Dined with So-and-so. Among the company Mr. and Mrs. William B. Astor, etc., etc."

William, however, shared two of the elder Astor's most conspicuous traits: he was distinctively unemotional and acquisitive. He had, too, a positive genius for details, and with a plodding thoroughness soon mastered all the ramifications of what was very likely the most extensive business of the time in this country. Socially, his position was as high as anyone could have wished, his wife a lovely and distinguished woman. His children he had just cause to be proud of. His father was more than generous with him, loved him devotedly, admired him, advanced him at every opportunity. In the end he succeeded to the title of "richest man in America," and on a greater scale than Jacob, at that. But he was never really happy. For all his life he nursed a secret resentment; all his life he scribbled secretly, and secretly wished he might cast aside the crushing tasks business placed upon him to taste the zest of authorship.[1]

William B. Astor—The World's Richest Man Three-Quarters Of a Century Ago

Instead he bent his back to the burdens his father entrusted to him, burdens enough, in all conscience. He wasn't thirty when the titanic struggle for dominance of the trans-Mississippi West commenced; and before the struggle was definitely won he was in command of the Astor campaign. It was, as I started to say above, a battle between the Astors and a score of independent, squabbling firms and individual traders of varying fortunes and ability—a battle between what passed for "Big Business" in the third decade of the nineteenth century and the entire frontier West, outside the ranks of

the American Fur Company's employees. The spirit on both sides was bitter and partisan in the extreme. Subordinates, if not their overlords, were ready to go to any lengths, including murder. Indian tribes were suborned by both sides to attack rivals. And there is a strangely familiar note to students of the modern trust era in phrases iterated and reiterated in Chouteau's correspondence with his Missouri French lieutenants: "côute que côute," "écrasez toute opposition."

Had the American Fur Company boasted a crest, "écrasez toute opposition" might well have served for motto. The Trust knew but the one response to opposition of any kind: beat it down, crush it or absorb it. And in an age and a country where human conduct was tinctured by familiarity with the brutalities of savage warfare, where every man went armed, where gouging out eyes and gnawing off ears were recognized as legitimate incidents of personal combat and the average white man scalped Indians as casually as Indians scalped whites, in such conditions, I say, it is not to be wondered at that bullet and scalping-knife supplemented rate-wars. Yet there were certain rules roughly observed by the opposing sides in this struggle. An independent brigade might, for instance, bait the Blackfeet to set upon an American Fur Company brigade, but let that independent brigade be within reach of an American brigade that was undesignedly assailed by redskins, and the free trappers would leap to assist men they counted their enemies in less degree than the Indians simply because their skins were the same color. By and large, trappers of both factions preferred to keep the peace with each other. The Indians usually were dragged in only when the American Company brigades tried to penetrate to beaver countries the free trappers had discovered. Throughout this war which was not a war, in the strict sense of the word, but which involved all the stratagems and ambushes, the devices and assaults, both of business and of war, a meeting of opposing white parties was more likely to bring about an evening of yarning around the campfire, a swapping of brags and dares, than combat. After all, the plains and the mountains were so incredibly vast in area. It seemed in the beginning as though there must be room for everyone to trap with profit.

But there wasn't. The Trust made up for its ignorance of the more remote regions by greater efficiency in operation. It built up a system of supplying the Indians with whom it dealt with goods on credit, delivered in the autumn before the hunting season opened, to be paid for later with quantities of skins skilfully devised to more than compensate for the accommodation. Trappers were accorded similar terms. The system worked, of course, exactly like the credit systems employed on large cotton plantations in the South today or in the mining and industrial areas where such reactionary and impolitic measures are still tolerated. The Indians and

the trappers were kept continually in debt to the company, and were obliged to pay twice over for the credit they were always willing to abuse. The trappers, who averaged $150 apiece for ten months' work, seldom complained. The sum was enough to keep them drunk and fed during the two months a year they loafed at one of the rendezvous or some trading post. Afterward, they'd secure credit for a new outfit—and sooner or later they'd "git sculped" or "squeezed" by a grizzly or "tromped by a buff'ler herd" or "mebbe bust a leg" and freeze to death in the mountings. Comparatively few ever knew old age like Jim Bridger. They were, as a rule, social misfits, the abnormally adventurous froth of the frontier, unwilling to settle down to farming or the humdrum routine of family life with a white wife—Injun squaws were too easy to buy or carry off, anyway, if a feller craved him a woman.

So the injustices of the trading-post credit system seldom did much harm to a trapper. But it was otherwise with the Indians. No matter how wild they might be, they lived in family groups, and they rapidly became entirely dependent upon the company for the necessities of existence. They were scarcely more than serfs, bondmen of the post factors. Of course, they could go away, and sometimes they did, joining the roaming bands that refused to be tied down to one locality. But the Indian was as human as the white man. Plant a habit in him, and he found that habit difficult to break. It was an easy way of living for savages, accustomed to reliance upon the quirks of nature, to have a beneficent white man who could be relied upon to hand out so many articles, so much powder and shot, in return for a number of furs, even before the furs had been trapped. And the Indian had no sense of self-control in such unfamiliar circumstances. He'd drift along, doing as little work as possible, depending upon the white man—and when that didn't ultimately mean starvation, it meant slavery.

Witnesses appearing before a Senate Committee which investigated in 1832 the effects of the fur trade upon the tribes, testified that in 1829 the Winnebagoes, Sacs and Foxes owed Astor's agents $40,000; two years later their debts had swollen to nearly $60,000. Similar conditions prevailed amongst the Pawnees, Cherokees, Chickasaws, Sioux, and other tribes westward to the mountains. In the same year the Senate Committee sat, Thomas Forsyth, an Indian agent, charged to Lewis Cass—to whom Astor had paid $35,000 for unspecified services in 1817 when he was Governor of Michigan—now Secretary of War, that the fur traders consistently used short weight in dealing with the Indians. McKenney, the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, who was a determined advocate of his charges' rights, told Senator Henry Johnson, Chairman of the Investigating Committee, that the only way the traders could cheat the Indians was to make them drunk.

Alcohol, indeed, was the wickedest blight the fur trade brought upon the savages, worse than smallpox and venereal diseases even, which, at their worst, only ruined the bodies of the red people. Alcohol killed the Indian's soul, making him a slave more surely than the easy credit the post factors allowed. He was as unsalted to it as he was to the white man's diseases. It paralyzed every virtue barbarism had inculcated in him, accentuated every vice and lust he knew or could learn from the white trappers who were only too willing to teach him. For a jug of it many a brave would sell his squaw or daughter, and after a few drinks, as McKenney told Senator Johnson, he cared little how the post factor weighed his pelts so long as they'd fetch him more "fire-water"—an apt name, for the liquor the traders sold the Indians was generally pure alcohol, diluted with plain river water as liberally as the cheaters dared.

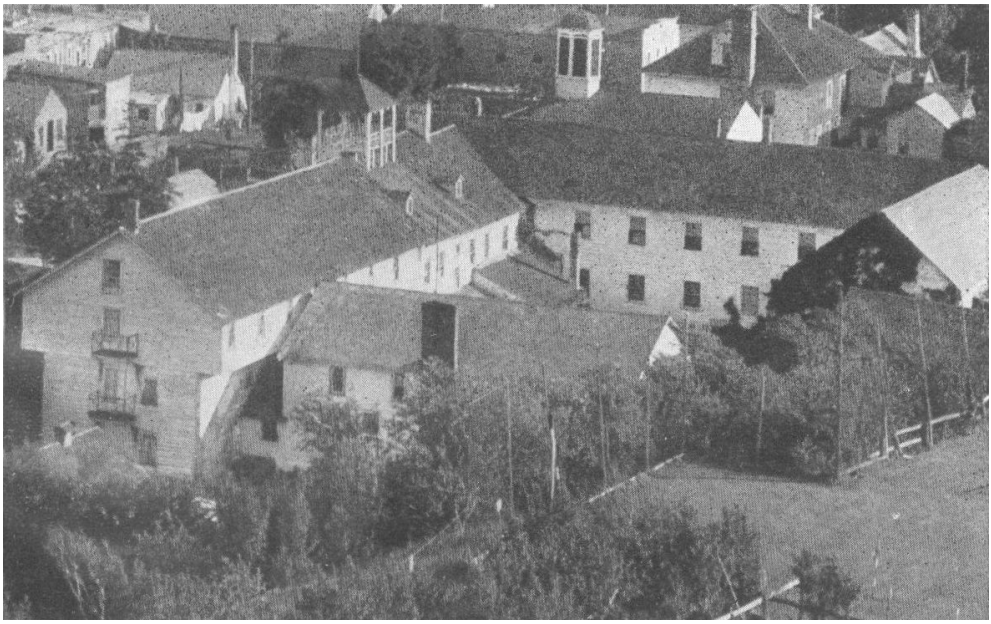
A sad, humiliating tale! It discredits Astor, it discredits his son, it discredits their rivals, it discredits the American people, who tolerated the situation, then legislated against it, and afterward, in blithe American fashion, winked at evasions as open as those which Prohibition has wished upon the nation. Nor can the Hudson's Bay Company, usually more intelligent in its policies than the American traders, escape blame. In the beginning, the Canadian Company refused to use liquor in any way to influence the Indians, whose sobriety it considered an asset to business. On the American side of the frontier, too, after the Government trading-posts were abandoned in 1822 the introduction of liquor was required to be confined to quantities sufficient to satisfy the wants of the white employees of the posts. But this law was a farce from the day it was drawn. All that the traders had to do to evade it was to pad the lists of their employees, and the tricks resorted to by them were so apparent that the Government agents on the frontier cannot be acquitted of responsibility. For example, you find Bill Sublette, the free trapper, coolly applying for whiskey for the "boatmen" who were to transport his brigade across the Rocky Mountains to Pierre's Hole. And Astor's subordinate at St. Louis, Chouteau, shamelessly adding so many mouths to his roster of trappers as would have ruined the American Fur Company to feed, rich as it was.

Then, in 1832, as a consequence of the Senate investigation, Congress forbade altogether the transportation of liquor into the Indian Country, and the Hudson's Bay Company, hoping to profit from the quandary in which this placed the several American companies, reversed its policy, and started to employ liquor as a bait to lure the tribes to its posts in Oregon west of the mountains. A pity, for had all the companies joined forces, and mutually engaged to refrain from debauching the Indians it would have made for conditions healthier for red men and white men alike, for the fur trade and

for the future development of the West. But the Americans flouted the positive Law of 1832 as carelessly as they had its limited predecessor. Carried in flat kegs, adjustable to pack-saddles and readily concealed beneath wagon-loads of lawful goods, alcohol remained a staple of the fur trade to the very last. Rufus Sage detected twenty-four barrels in the wagons of the caravan with which he crossed the Plains in 1841—it was, he said, "put into the wagons, at Westport or Independence *in open daylight*, and taken into the (Indian) territory *in open daylight*."

The profits from alcohol were enormous, for the dilution was increased by the traders as the Indians became more intoxicated. Four gallons of water to a gallon of the raw spirits was considered an ideal mixture,[2] and Jim Beckwourth, the mulatto mountain man and scout, himself an honorary chief of the Crows, recounts in his somewhat apocryphal memoirs how upon one occasion he turned six kegs into eighteen horses and 1,100 buffalo robes, worth $6,000—which was forty times the average trapper's annual earnings. But this was an extreme case, and in view of the tenor of Beckwourth's narrative, may be suspected of exaggeration. Andrew S. Hughes, writing Secretary of War Cass from St. Louis, October 31, 1831, charged that the American Fur Company had made $50,000 on alcohol in one year at its posts along the Missouri, selling the stuff at the rate of $25 to $50 a gallon. Of the company's attitude he said: "They entertain, as I know to be the fact, no sort of respect for our citizens, agents, officers or the Government, or its laws or general policy."

Photo by Underwood & Underwood



Wide World Photos

The American Fur Company's Trading Post at Mackinac. The Lower View Shows the Fort-like Plan of the Building

Astor, to be sure, was so widely hated on the frontier, where radicalism was gaining in strength from year to year, that charges against him must be scanned closely for bias. But notwithstanding all allowances it is permissible to make, the evidence of the American Company's guilt is unescapable. Colonel Snelling, military commander at Detroit, complained to James Barbour, Secretary of War, August 23, 1825: "He who has the most whiskey generally carries off the most furs. . . . The neighborhood of the trading houses where whiskey is sold presents a disgusting scene of drunkenness, debauchery and misery; it is the fruitful source of all our difficulties, and of nearly all the murders committed in the Indian Country. . . . For the accommodation of my family I have taken a house three miles from town, and in passing to and from it I have daily opportunities of seeing the road strewn with the bodies of men, women and children, in the last stages of brutal intoxication. It is true there are laws in this territory to restrain the sale of liquor, but they are not regarded."

How familiar!

Colonel Snelling also charged that in that year, 1825, there had been delivered, under contract, to the American Fur Company's agent at Mackinac, 3,300 gallons of whiskey and 2,500 gallons of high wines. He concluded his protest: "I will venture to add that an inquiry into the manner

in which the Indian trade is conducted, especially by the American Fur Company, is a matter of no small importance to the tranquillity of the border."[3]

In the following year, McKenney, the Superintendent of Indian Affairs whom I have quoted previously, reported to the Secretary of War that General Tipton, the Indian Agent at Fort Wayne, had seized a shipment of whiskey, owned in part by the American Fur Company. He remarked: "There are many honorable and high-minded citizens in this trade, but expediency overcomes their objections and reconciles them for the sake of the profits of the trade."

Even after the passage of the Law of 1832, the American Company flagrantly defied the Government. Kenneth McKenzie, its superintendent at Fort Union, who posed as the baron of the upper river, imported a still and manufactured his own corn liquor. He got along beautifully until Nathaniel J. Wyeth, the Massachusetts ice-man, homeward-bound from his disastrous pilgrimage to Oregon, happened by and asked to purchase a quantity of whiskey for trading purposes on his journey. McKenzie refused, and Wyeth stopped off at Fort Leavenworth to report a violation of the law I can only suppose he would otherwise have condoned. The military were prompt to take action against the offender, whose plea that the law merely stipulated that liquor must not *be brought in* was bootless to save him. The American Fur Company barely missed having its trading license revoked for this offense; but Senator Benton and Astor's other powerful friends at Washington managed to dispose of the Army busy-bodies who assailed him.

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[1] It is amusing to observe that two of his descendants played at authorship—the first Lord Astor and the namesake of the family's founder who perished in the Titanic disaster.

[2] It is evident that the aborigines were less hardy drinkers than the modern American, whose formula for Prohibition gin requires a proportion of forty per cent of alcohol.

[3] Senate Document No. 58, 1st Session, 19th Congress.

V

During the ten years between 1822 and 1832 the United States was in the condition of a man who has eaten too heartily, if not too well. Six new

states—Indiana, Mississippi, Illinois, Alabama, Maine, and Missouri—had been admitted within six years, providing, for the time being, sufficient opportunities for the restless elements of the population that were perpetually shifting westward in the track of the trappers. The country, speaking relatively, was prosperous. Like the rest of the world, it was recovering from the dislocation of commerce and industry consequent upon the termination of the Napoleonic Wars. The second Bank of the United States, of which Astor was a director, was functioning with an efficiency which intelligent business men should presently look back upon with longing eyes. The tone of the country was healthier than it had yet been; credit conditions were sounder and easier. The beginnings of a national transportation system were being laid—in 1824 John Marshall would hand down his decision in the case of Gibbons vs. Ogden, breaking the Fulton-Livingston steamboat monopoly and stimulating steam navigation upon the rivers; in 1825 the Erie Canal would be finished, furnishing a vent for the agricultural products of the Middle West; in 1830 the first fourteen miles of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad would be opened.

So, for a decade, the people suspended the emigration across the Mississippi.[1] It was as if the nation stopped to catch its breath after the series of gigantic strides which had carried the inhabited area of the Republic from the Appalachians to the lower reaches of the Missouri, from contact with the forest-running Shawnees, Miamis, and Creeks to contact with the more barbarous and independent horse Indians of the Plains. The pause gave the fur trade a respite it would not otherwise have enjoyed. For this decade the only pressure on the traders was the competition between themselves. The West was theirs from the Missouri frontier village of Franklin to the Rockies—and beyond. For the relentless assaults of the American Company drove its rivals farther and farther into the wilderness. The line of the Missouri river it soon made its own, extending its definite sway to the Yellowstone. By 1831 you find Joshua Pilcher, who had been American Company agent at Council Bluffs and later turned against Astor, reporting to Secretary Cass that during the period from 1823 to 1827 the company had monopolized the whole fur trade of the Missouri Basin—"and I have but little doubt will continue to do so for years to come, as it would be rather a hazardous business for small adventurers to rise in opposition to it."

Never, in the economic history of this country, has a corporation marched more ruthlessly across the prostrate corpses of opponents to attainment of monopoly. General Ashley, having acquired the respectable fortune, for those days, of $100,000 in two or three expeditions to the

mountains, retired from the contest to devote his few remaining years to politics. The Missouri Fur Company, Manuel Lisa's old firm, about the same time threw up the sponge and abandoned the river to Astor. Bernard Pratte & Company, a St. Louis trading firm, he absorbed as he had Stone, Bostwick & Company—mainly for the purpose of employing Pratte and his expert personnel. I ought to say that he preferred to take in competitors who knew their jobs rather than drive them from business; but he took them in at his own terms, which, you will see, were not particularly generous.

In 1826 he clashed with the Columbia Fur Company, a highly competent concern which worked on as big a scale as the old Northwest Company. The Columbia was known legally as Tilton & Company, and was organized by a group of Canadians, who dodged the law forbidding aliens to operate in United States territory, by placing dummies in ostensible control of their corporation. These Canadians, as a matter of fact, were too competent, too well-established, to be downed except at a wasteful cost, and Astor bought them over on better terms than he usually proffered. The Columbia Fur Company was welded with the American Fur Company, which now took the name of the North American Fur Company—although, throughout its career, it was commonly referred to as the American Company, and, in a few years, shared with the Hudson's Bay Company the proud distinction of calling itself merely The Company. The deal was more of a union of two corporations than an absorption of one by the other, providing, as it did, that the Columbia men should withdraw from the Lakes and the Upper Mississippi, in exchange for which concession their organization was to operate exclusively on the Upper Missouri above the mouth of the Big Sioux as a subdepartment of the American Company. The Canadians were proprietors of this subdepartment, and as such practically independent of Astor, despite the fact that the subdepartment was a part of his parent company. They were called the Upper Missouri Outfit, and considered themselves—and were so regarded by their compeers of the West—as feudal barons, of whom their overlord might demand, at most, a certain measure of limited service. It was one of them, McKenzie, who undertook to manufacture his own whiskey after the Government had forbidden fire-water to the Indians, and came close to forfeiting the American Company's trading license.

After the Columbia Fur Company had been disposed of, Astor encountered the French Fur Company, another St. Louis partnership formed by three local Frenchmen. They were short of capital, like all the independent traders, but, again like most of the independent traders, they had close connections with the tribes and the friendship of the free trappers. They gave Astor a sturdy battle, but were willing to sell out at the end of

three years, they and their followers merging with the swelling ranks of the Trust's employees. You might think the Louisiana French would have seen the light after this, but they were a belligerent, self-confident breed, and there was no lack of recruits when Narcisse Leclerc, who had been an employee of the Company, in a fit of petulance resolved to set up an opposition. Leclerc was a shrewd fellow, and what was more he played in luck his first year. Chouteau consulted the younger Astor in New York—Jacob was paying less and less attention to details—and was instructed to buy him out. But the representative of the Company who was sent to obtain Leclerc's terms found a quantity of alcohol in the Frenchman's possession, and took it upon himself to arrest Leclerc and confiscate the alcohol, thinking to crush the opposition without any cost to Astor. The step was ill-advised. Leclerc returned to St. Louis, and brought suit against the American Company, which, of course, had neither jurisdiction over him nor right to confiscate his property, however illegally held. He won a verdict of $9,200 damages, and satisfied with this sop disappeared from the scene. Perhaps he figured the suit as one way of mulcting the Company, the end he apparently had in view in his enterprise.

Long before these latter attempts at opposition, however, the American Company reigned unchallenged along the Missouri. From its three bases on the upper river—Fort Union, at the confluence of the Missouri and the Yellowstone; Fort McKenzie, near the mouth of the Maria; and Fort Cass, on the Yellowstone at the mouth of the Big Horn—it dominated the Black Hills country and the entire region up to the eastern slopes of the Rockies. The lower Missouri, below the mouth of the Big Sioux, was not less effectively covered. An elaborate system of keelboats conveyed supplies upstream to the traders, and fetched down-river the fur bales taken in exchange. It is odd that no attempt was made to use a steamboat for this purpose until the end of the period, especially as Major Long, of the Army, had employed the cranky little *Western Engineer* to transport his exploring expedition from Pittsburgh, via the Ohio, Mississippi and Missouri to the mouth of the Platte in 1819. From 1825 on steamboats increased rapidly on the Mississippi, and to some extent, on the lower Missouri; but it was 1831 before the Trust purchased the *Yellowstone*. She ventured only a little way above Council Bluffs that Spring. In the following year she reached Fort Union, and there-afterward the upper river posts were supplied by an annual steamer, in place of the keelboats. Once more a splendid desolation mantled the yellow current of the stream for all save a few weeks of open water, but during those weeks the savages, who always had been willing to lie in wait to ambush the strings of keelboats, shivered in awe as they listened to the racketing exhaust of the white man's latest wonder.

The profits of the Company were immense. Statistics compiled by an Indian agent of the expenses and receipts of the fur trade on the Missouri and its contributory waters during the fifteen years between 1815-30 tell the story. He estimated that the expenses of the trade during this period were $2,100,000, of which total $1,500,000 represented merchandise; $450,000 went for wages for 200 trappers at $150 a year; and $150,000 went for wages to twenty clerks at $500 a year. The returns he estimated at $3,750,000:

26,000	buffalo skins per year, at $3	$1,170,000
25,000	lbs. beaver skins per year, at $4 per lb.	1,500,000
4,000	otter skins per year, at $3	180,000
12,000	coon skins per year, at $.25	45,000
150,000	lbs. of deer skins per year, at $.33 per lb.	742,500
37,000	muskrat skins per year, at $.20 per lb.	112,500
	Total[2]	$3,750,000

The profits of the trade, then, were $1,650,000 for fifteen years, or $110,000 annually—the returns being $250,000 annually upon an overhead of $140,000. But the figures do not begin to represent Astor's profits from the Missouri Basin. They are simply the immediate profits earned by the individual traders on the furs they forwarded to St. Louis, for Astor's scheme of operations threw upon his traders all the responsibility of earning anything for themselves. He furnished them with trade goods at a fixed advance upon costs of 81½ per cent as allowance for transportation and immediate profit to himself. So he couldn't possibly lose, in so far as his marketing of trade-goods was concerned. As for the furs which the traders returned to St. Louis, he paid for these in accordance with the standard quotations of the day, which were more likely to be fixed at London and Montreal than at St. Louis and New York. The truth is that none of his traders or subordinates—except Crooks, Chouteau and Pratte—grew rich from their association with him. *All* the profits, under this system, went to himself and his son, who succeeded him as President. The traders and factors were as dependent upon him, as rigorously obligated to accept whatever terms he might see fit to fix, as the trappers and Indians were dependent upon them. And a natural consequence was a tendency toward extreme measures. His lieutenants were autocrats, their sensibilities toughened by the life they lived, and few of them were inclined to stop short of fraud, force, or bloodshed if their own interests were at stake. They knew

they had a hard taskmaster in the impersonal employer they called The Company. No excuses would be tolerated for failure, no additional facilities granted. They had stipulated terms to meet, and they must meet them.

Nor were the fur barons of the Missouri the only feudal contributors to the Astor exchequer. Rich as it was, the Missouri Basin was but one of many areas in which the American Fur Company operated. We have seen how its ramifications spread during the years after the War of 1812. From the dwindling country of the Iroquois south along the shores of the Lakes, through the still heavily forested states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and the immense raw territory of Michigan, sprawling west to the Missouri, his trading-posts were situated at every point of strategic importance, and farmers gladly eked out the precarious livelihoods they wrung from the soil by trapping in the winter months on his account. Four dollars a pound for beaver, the price mentioned in the schedule cited previously, was remarkably cheap. Before 1830 prime beaver was good for $6 a pound in St. Louis, and as much as $8 occasionally. There are records of $12 a pound having been paid for large quantities in the New Mexican settlements, which the free trappers used as an outlet for their takings to avoid the long overland trip to Missouri. And year by year, as the American Company drove the free trappers deeper into the mountains, and pushed its own brigades after them, the revenue of the Astors increased. Exactly how much it is difficult to say, but William B. Astor, in a letter to the Secretary of War on November 25, 1831, replying to a request for information as to the extent of the Company's business, remarked: "You may estimate our annual returns at half a million dollars."

The only material opposition to the Company was maintained by a loosely organized partnership of leaders of the free trappers, or mountain men, as they began to be termed, in recognition of the fact that the harrying of the Trust had restricted their operations to the more inaccessible regions of the Rockies, where, a few years before, men were afraid to venture, lest they be destroyed by fabulous beasts or giants or the myriads of ferocious pygmy folk who were reputed to lurk in monstrous caverns and ravines, such as the Grand Canyon. Ironically enough, the most valuable result of Astor's participation in the fur trade was the involuntary work of exploration carried on by the mountain men, work of a value which has seldom been adequately recognized by historians and is unknown to the general public. The profits of the trade flowed inexorably into his coffers; the glory of it went to the free trappers. In the words of one of the keenest students[3] of his career: "Not only did the company throw the risks upon individuals, but it has been said, with a certain amount of justice, that it left to other men and

other companies the task of opening up new regions, which it could afterward enter with perfect assurance that its superior resources would eventually enable it to take the field."

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[1] Except into Missouri, of course.

[2] Senate Document No. 90, First Session, Twenty-second Congress.

[3] Anna Youngman, Ph. D., in "The Economic Causes of Great Fortunes"; Bankers Publishing Company, New York, 1909.

VI

The opposition of the free trappers was first conducted under the leadership of the firm of Ashley & Henry, which was dissolved in 1826 because Ashley had made his pile and set his thoughts upon entering Congress, an ambition he later attained. The goodwill of the firm and whatever trapping information and equipment it possessed were sold to the new partnership of Smith, Jackson & Sublette—Jedediah S. Smith, two-fisted Christian, dauntless explorer, who "carried beaver to the British and the Bible to the Flatheads," first American to cross the Nevada desert to California and to traverse longitudinally the Pacific coast from San Diego to Fort Vancouver on the Columbia; David E. Jackson, who discovered Jackson's Hole and blazed a new southerly trail from Santa Fe to San Diego; William L. Sublette, "Cutface" to the Blackfeet, perhaps the most successful captain of the mountain men, certainly the ablest of four hard-fighting, reckless Kentucky brothers. A notable trio. Around them rapidly gathered the pick of the trappers who had followed Ashley and Henry, and the more daring of the recruits who quit the rivers of the plains for the uplands and independence of the Trust.

Not all the free trappers, however, were immediate followers of the partners. Several brigades under partisan leaders of repute roamed abroad on their own account, meeting the chieftains only at the summer rendezvous, which usually was held in the valley of the Green, but sometimes in Pierre's Hole or on the Sweetwater. The business relations of the free trappers and the independent trading partnerships were entirely informal. Contracts were verbal undertakings on the part of the trappers to sell their catch to the independent traders and a corresponding pledge from the traders to accept the trappers' peltry. As a rule, no money changed hands in these

transactions. Indeed, money would have been useless to the mountain men. All they required to exist was food, ammunition, traps, and trade-goods to exchange with the Indians for clothing and horses.

Taos, an Indian pueblo in New Mexico, was a favorite headquarters of these independent brigades after the opening of the Santa Fe Trail. From it started one of the most famous of the ventures of the mountain men, the journey of Ewing Young's brigade overland to California in 1829. Young's trip was notable for several reasons. It was the first invasion of California by Americans in any number;[1] it discovered many untouched beaver streams; and it marked the entry into frontier history of a tow-headed, snub-nosed youth named Kit Carson, whose name was destined to be enshrined beside Daniel Boone's in the roster of the pioneers. From the contemporary point of view of the free trappers, the greatest of Young's achievements was the opening up of new beaver country, always a prime requisite in their struggle for existence. Viewed historically, it stands out as a milestone in the series of episodes which turned the nation's eyes toward California. Forty men went with Young, and they trapped north as far as the Sacramento. The stories of the survivors were repeated at every campfire, retold again and again, and by word of mouth, if not by letter, crossed mountains and plains to the frontier settlements.

The increasing attention paid to the Southwest by the free trappers led to the establishment of several trading posts adjacent to the Mexican frontier by St. Louis firms technically unallied with either of the contending factions in the fur war. The best known of these, probably the best-known landmark of the plains, was Bent's Fort, built in 1829 on the north bank of the Arkansas, fourteen miles above the mouth of the Purgatoire—or Picketwire, as the Americans twisted the word—by William Bent, senior partner of Bent, St. Vrain & Company. No business house of the day played a weightier part in the conquest of the West than this combination of Massachusetts Yankees and Louisiana Frenchmen of the *haute noblesse*. The Bent brothers, Charles, William, and George, were grandsons of Captain Silas Bent, who commanded the Boston Tea Party. Charles was the diplomat of the family; first Governor of New Mexico under the Stars and Stripes, he was murdered in the Pueblo revolt at Taos, in January, 1847, dying as bravely as he had lived. William was the trading genius; he made a fortune out of trading and freighting, enjoying the friendship and confidence of the hardy Cheyenne, Arapaho, and Kiowas, who named him "Roman Nose"; in 1852 he blew up the historic post which bore his name because the Government would not pay him the $16,000 he asked for it; and unlike most

of the pioneer generation, he died well-to-do. George, the least distinguished of the trio, was post commander.

The St. Vrain brothers, Ceran and Marcelin, were equally prominent. Their father was Don Jacques Marcelin Ceran de Hault de Lassus de St. Vrain. A relative, very likely, an uncle, had been Don Carlos de Hault de Lassus, last Spanish Governor of Louisiana. Of the two, Marcelin seems to have been the stay-at-home member; Ceran was as much afield as the Bents, ultimately settled in New Mexico and waxed prosperous as a miller, became a prominent and useful citizen, a leader in the Indian fighting of the late Forties and Fifties and first colonel of the First New Mexican Volunteers in the Civil War. He was an intimate of Kit Carson, which is a recommendation for any man.

Bent, St. Vrain & Company were stout friends and supporters of the free trappers; they survived, where other firms crashed in competition with the Trust, because they exploited intelligently a general trade with the plains tribes. Besides Bent's Fort, they established in 1837 Fort St. Vrain, at the junction of St. Vrain's Creek with the South Platte; and in 1848 the post of Adobe Walls—where some people think Kit Carson fought the greatest Indian battle in the annals of the West—on the Canadian River in the Texas Panhandle. After blowing up the first Bent's Fort, William Bent, in 1854, built a second fort of stone at the Big Timbers, thirty miles down the Arkansas, which the Government finally purchased in 1859, renaming it Fort Wise, and afterwards, Fort Lyon.

About the time William Bent was shaping the adobe walls of old Bent's Fort, the Robidoux brothers—Antoine, Joseph, and Louis—who operated a trading firm with branches at St. Jo and Taos, were erecting Fort Uintah below the confluence of the Uncompahgre and the Denison. As salty and picturesque characters in their way as either the Bents or the St. Vrains, these brothers. Several pegs below the St. Vrains socially, to be sure, but equally canny and commercially alert. Good Americans, too, despite their undiluted French blood and broken speech. Joseph seems to have bided home at St. Jo; Antoine was the first fur trader to operate out of Taos; and Louis went to California in '44 and became *alcalde* and *juez de paz* of San Bernardino, but notwithstanding, joined Fremont's column, with which Louis was serving as guide and interpreter, and was wounded by a lance thrust at San Pasqual, where the Mexican resistance crumbled. Both Antoine and Louis were explorers and pathfinders—Antoine first user of Mosca Pass through the Sangre de Christo range in Colorado.

Their post, if not so pretentious a place as Bent's Fort, was a favorite resort of the free trappers. In fact, these two posts were the only fixed resorts available for shelter or relief to the free trappers until William Sublette built

Fort John where the Laramie Creek flows into the North Platte in 1836. This third post, taken over by the Government when the necessity arose of safe-guarding the trail to Oregon, was renamed Fort Laramie, and became the subject of more lore and legend than any post on the Army list. On the threshold of the open range favored by the Sioux, there wasn't a campaign in the next thirty years in which it didn't figure. And similarly, during the struggle for mastery of the fur trade, not a season passed that the traders' forts weren't key-points in the battles of wilderness craft, rate-cuts and trading intrigues. But their period of greatest usefulness was reserved for the future. When the next wave of emigration burst across the Mississippi these isolated dots of civilization were so many ports of supply, so many goals of endeavor, potential strongholds against Indian attacks, for the weary trains that plodded the trails to Oregon and California.

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[1] Richard Campbell had taken a pack train from Santa Fe to San Diego in 1826; and Sylvester and James Pattie had reached Lower California overland in 1828.

VII

Smith, Jackson, and Sublette made an odd combination. Smith was a unique personality, a man of education, intelligently curious, with a profound grasp of the science of geography and more than a casual appreciation of the kindred sciences; a broad-minded Christian, into the bargain. He kept journals of his travels, some of which are still in existence, and contemplated an exhaustive work on the terrain of the Rocky Mountains and the country west of them, with corrected maps in place of the imaginative cartography then prevailing; but unfortunately a considerable portion of his records was destroyed in a warehouse fire in St. Louis on the eve of his departure for Santa Fe—and in the course of his journey he was doomed to perish under the lances of the Comanches. Had Smith lived—he was thirty-three when he died—he must have become a leader in national thought, quite possibly a distinguished statesman, for he possessed a striking gift of leadership over the wild free trappers, men almost as dissimilar to himself as the Indians who killed him. And in addition to his intellectual gifts, he was blessed with a business acumen which won the respect of his associates.

Jackson we know very little about. He seems to have been typical of the small group of mountain men who rose to some measure of distinction, able, resourceful, aggressive, but scarcely remarkable. Aside from his partnership

with Smith and Sublette, he is remembered for having introduced the first slave to California with a herd of mules he drove over the southerly route, originally blazed by the Spanish Padres and recently rediscovered by William Wolfskill, a mountain man who was seeking to emulate the exploits of Ewing Young's brigade. He achieved no outstanding success, and retraced his steps to St. Louis to die poor and almost unrecognized.

Of Sublette I have written, so it is unnecessary to detail his character. His contribution to the partnership must have been his skill as teamster and freighter. None like him in all the West to fetch heavily laden wagons and pack trains through the perils of travel across the plains: the constant threat of Indian assault, the dangers from quicksand and swift rivers, the hardships of the mountains.

Of the three, I assume that Smith was the planner, Jackson executive officer and technical man, and Sublette responsible for transmogrifying peltry into ammunition, stores and trade-goods. They hung together for four years, which would indicate that they inclined to sympathy with one another; and they must have made some money out of their enterprise, else they could never have lasted that long. Jackson and Sublette were actuated by ordinary, everyday commercial instincts, but it appears from internal evidence that Smith's ulterior motive in entering the mountains and committing himself to the struggle with the American Fur Company was the acquisition of sufficient knowledge of the Far West to afford him material for the work he had in mind. He left Missouri, in the beginning, with Ashley's expedition of 1823. In the succeeding years he was indefatigable in his journeys and investigations, and by 1830 had obtained the material he desired. He *knew* the Northwest. But he didn't know the Southwest, and as a first step in the direction of filling that gap decided upon undertaking a journey to Santa Fe. It was impossible, however, for him to abandon his partners in this manner, and inasmuch as they were tiring of the constant anxiety of the struggle with the Trust they came to an agreement with him to sell out the business.

This occurred at the mountain rendezvous held in August, 1830, and Smith, Jackson & Sublette were succeeded by the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, formed by five of the ablest leaders of the free trappers, as representative a group as could have been assembled: Jim Bridger, who'd outlive most of his friends; Milton G. Sublette, William's younger brother and equally daring; Tom Fitzpatrick, as worthwhile as either Bridger or the Sublettes, but hardly remembered today; Jean Baptiste Gervais, of whom I can say merely that his inclusion in such a company must speak for his standing with his fellows; and Henry Fraeb, called Frapp, a German-American, very likely a Pennsylvanian, who had been a partner with Gervais

in the mountains, and was to die in a battle with the Sioux and Cheyenne where Battle Creek flows into the Little Snake in northern Colorado, in August, 1841.

The new company was popular with the mountain men—the French Canadians, who formed so numerous an element in the American Company's brigades and were regarded somewhat contemptuously by the free trappers of native birth, were placated by the inclusion of Gervais in the partnership. Each of the other partners had his lieutenants, who could muster small brigades of their own, and recruits trickled in from outlying parties all that summer, as the word was carried over plains and mountains that a stronger opposition to The Company had been organized. The Blackfeet heard of it from the Flatheads, and passed the news to the Sioux, whose signal fires carried it to the Cheyenne. A captured Cheyenne squaw told the Utes, and the Utes told a band of trappers from Taos, who hastened to give the tidings to their comrades who hadn't troubled to ride North to the rendezvous. And now there were fewer Americans spending money for whiskey in the Robidoux store at the pueblo, but the Robidoux brothers weren't bothered by that—the more free trappers who took to the mountains, the more trade would come to Taos, for not all the peltry the Rocky Mountain Company bought could be transported by its limited annual train, and many a bale would lurch south on pony-back to Fort Uintah or Bent's Fort or Taos.

To tell the truth, the Rocky Mountain Company needed every man it could muster, for the Trust was learning the tricks of the game by experience. Strong, well-organized brigades were penetrating deeper into the ranges of the Divide. There was a different brand of leadership to counter. No longer did the American Company rely upon Canadians, French or Scotch, to harry the opposition; but I doubt whether the Astors, father and son, were really responsible for this shift in policy. Jacob and William, both, were paying less attention to the details of management; Jacob was often abroad, nowadays, and William had to busy himself with the details of investments of various kinds. The actual conduct of the American Company's campaign was left to Chouteau and Pratte.

And it is noticeable that the retirement of Jacob from active participation in the struggle was attended by the employment of leaders of a much higher, more independent type. Lucien Fontenelle, without a drop of Anglo-Saxon-Celtic blood, was a New Orleans Frenchman of the same aristocratic strain as the St. Vrains, vigorous, taciturn, and morose in personality, characterized by the strong individuality of the Louisiana Creoles. Andy Drips, with whom Fontenelle was first associated on the upper river, was a Pennsylvanian, who had served with the Missouri Fur Company, and was

trusted by the Indians and respected by the free trappers. He was credited with honest opposition to the use of liquor in the trade. William Henry Vanderburgh, the third in the trio of leaders who carried the fur war into the mountains, was a graduate of West Point, an Indian fighter of prestige, a soldier and a gentleman. All three were honorable by the standards of their day and the society in which they moved. If occasionally they roused the Indians to ambush their opponents, in order to cut off a supply train or clear a rich beaver stream, they were doing only what any one of the Rocky Mountain chiefs would have considered reasonable in the same circumstances. Jed Smith, whose probity won him the nickname of "The Knight in Buckskin," wasn't above tricking a Hudson's Bay brigade out of a pack train of peltry. And as a matter of fact, Vanderburgh met his end a couple of years later in a Blackfoot ambush, into which he and his men were probably steered by a Rocky Mountain brigade that didn't want to be followed by their rivals into a secret valley, where the beaver hadn't yet been annihilated in the thoughtless fashion which was common to all the trappers.

So, from 1830 on, the fur war waxed fiercer. The market for beaver had reached a peak. The number of trappers involved was at the maximum—although it is estimated that there were never more than 200 west of the Rockies at one time. And the epic nature of the struggle had lured into the opposing ranks the picked fighters of the frontier. Hugh Glass, whose hand-to-hand fight with a grizzly won him immortal fame; Joe Meek, first sheriff of Oregon and a spinner of tall yarns; Bill Sinclair, the Arkansan, killed in the fight with the Blackfeet in Pierre's Hole; Jim Baker, the future guide; Robert Campbell, soon to climb to prominence—and keep it; Bob Newell, "Doc," a newcomer, speaker of the Oregon Assembly before he died; Michel Cerre, another Missouri Creole, who, luckier than many of his brethren, survived the times of the mountain men to sample political triumphs in his native State; Joe Warren, who, on his deathbed, asked that the only inscription on his tombstone be: "Discoverer of the Yosemite Valley"; "Old Bill" Williams, perhaps the most striking of his kind, who stuck to the mountains after the mountain men had gone, and is remembered, as many are not, by place-names recognizing his discoveries; Tom Smith, known as "Pegleg" after he lost a limb in a skirmish with the Blackfeet, whose pet diversion was to clean out a raucous barroom with his artificial member.

I could go on forever. There was scarcely a man in all the hundreds on both sides who wasn't worthy of memory, who didn't perform some feat which served to familiarize Americans with the country which should be theirs, that country which Senator Benton, Astor's henchman, had cast away with a phrase: "The ridge of the Rocky Mountains may be named without offense as presenting a convenient, natural, and everlasting boundary." But

give him his due; Benton should live to regret his words, and beg President Polk to appoint him General-in-chief of the armies that were wresting California and New Mexico and Arizona from Mexico. And likewise give the unnamed mountain men their due. But for them it would have taken Americans many years longer to become sufficiently interested in such incredibly far-off regions as to consider the possibility of emigrating there.

That is the fascinating thing about this basically sordid endeavor of Astor's to dominate the fur trade. Without meaning to, he unleashed or stimulated forces of whose incalculable effects he had not the slightest comprehension. Thinking in terms of ledger accounts and dividends, hungry for more cash to turn into New York real estate, he'd urge Chouteau and Crooks to advance their brigades farther and farther, to push these insolent free trappers off the map—and Chouteau and Crooks, loyal subordinates, whose incomes were proportionate to their success, urged Fontenelle, Drips, and Vanderburgh to more determined efforts. No longer were The Company's brigades satisfied with the peltry of the upper Missouri, the Black Hills, and the Laramie Plains. They must tread on the heels of the Rocky Mountain men, laying their trap-lines on the tributaries of the Seedskeedee, the Sweetwater, and the Green, plumbing the lush recesses of Colorado's gorgeous parks, taking their places at the Spring rendezvous, where Hudson's Bay men, too, appeared, scouting warily the continuous aggression of the American companies. And all this restless display of energy, which was to win eleven states for the Union—New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, Utah, Nevada, Arizona, California, Oregon, and Washington—and train a legion of guides, explorers, and pathfinders for the migrations presently to be unleashed, all this sprang from the spontaneously acquisitive instincts of the square-shouldered, stumpy, old gentleman in Vesey Street, to whom a map of the continent was interesting principally for the beaver areas it disclosed.

The offensive spirit of the Trust was demonstrated at the rendezvous of 1831, held in the valley of the Green. Tom Fitzpatrick, dispatched by his partners to fetch a supply train out from St. Louis, failed to arrive, and after months of waiting the assembled trappers dispersed, the stouthearts disgruntled, a few dissidents going over to The Company, others joining a free-lance outfit of St. Louis and Pennsylvania men, under two leaders named Gant and Blackwell, seventy in all, that had recently secured a precarious lodgment in the Laramie Plains. So redoubtable a fellow as Kit Carson was amongst those who joined Gant and Blackwell, which would seem to indicate a strong dissatisfaction with the Rocky Mountain Company's efforts up to this point. It was a poor year for beaver, however, and the accessible streams were usually pre-empted either by the Rocky

Mountain or the American Company brigades. The Gant and Blackwell partnership was dissolved in the Spring of '32, and their company split apart, some, including Carson, striking off for themselves, some going to the Rocky Mountain Company, some to the Trust.

The rendezvous of 1832 was held in Pierre's Hole, and was sufficiently dramatic to satisfy any juvenile admirer of Mr. Beadle's more purple novelettes. Here, at last, appeared Fitzpatrick, his hair turned white as a result of a dreadful and protracted chase by the Blackfeet—whose *nomme de guerre* for him was accordingly changed from "Bad Hand" to "White Head." Of course, he had no supply train with him, but this defect was remedied by William Sublette, who was able to accommodate the needs of the mountain men. With Sublette came the battered, but undaunted, remnants of the company of seventy-one New England tenderfeet Nathaniel J. Wyeth was leading overland to develop the salmon fisheries of Oregon—a generation ahead of his time, poor Wyeth. Here, too, was an American Company brigade, led by Drips and Vanderburgh, exploiting the truce which was informally declared for the duration of the rendezvous. Here were friendly bands of Nez Perces and Flatheads, and lurking on the outskirts, scavengers of whatever loot might fall to them, a party of fifty Blackfeet, eternal enemies of the white men. The *dénouement* was what might have been expected. At the conclusion of the rendezvous, some 400 trappers and their Indian allies, all primed with liquor, undertook to wipe out the Blackfeet, who sought shelter in a swamp and manfully stood off the attackers until night, retiring then with the honors of the fray, while the trappers of both factions licked their wounds, buried their dead and resumed automatically the mutual hostility they had suspended.

Pierre's Hole was a fitting exclamation point for the year which was to mark the crisis of the fur war. The Rocky Mountain Company, despite mishaps and disadvantages, was holding the Trust level; the demand for beaver was undiminished. But forces were at work beneath the surface of events which should drastically influence the fortunes of the mountain men. If you had told Pierre Chouteau or the Sublettes or any leader of either side that the days of the fur trade were numbered, they would have laughed at you—"Hell," they'd have said, "thar's allus beaver into the mountings—and allus gentryfolk to wear high hats." And they would have been right, no less than wrong.

VIII

For ten years, you will recall, the frontier had been reasonably stable; but 1832 saw a renewed restlessness, the ganglions of which reached back East

across the Mississippi Valley and the Appalachians into the cities and communities of the Atlantic Coast. Andrew Jackson had been elected President in 1828—the frontier, itself, had elected him; he was the idol of its people, embodying their rugged virtues as he did the petulance and economic ignorance which were their worst defects. Narrow-minded, intolerant, egotistical, he couldn't see why the United States Bank, as a national institution, shouldn't dismiss trained employees who happened to be Federalists to make room for any Democratic workers lacking jobs. When the Bank refused to play politics he turned against it, as only he could turn, in a breath believing that there was nothing good in the institution which had, albeit blunderingly, maneuvered the country out of the depression following the last war. The frontier, always suspicious of the East and the rich, was easily persuaded that the Bank's past policy of deflation had caused all the trouble. The Bank applied for a renewal of its charter, soon due, and Congress voted approval; but Jackson vetoed the bill, and Congress, subservient to his dragooning, upheld him.

A shudder passed through the financial centers of the East, apprehension more pronounced because men of affairs had foreseen the President's action. Business had become increasingly unsettled since he was elected. And almost coincident with the Jacksonian decision to kill the Bank came the dispute with South Carolina over the tariff, the state's Nullification Ordinance, the President's Proclamation denouncing Nullification, Calhoun's resignation as Vice President, and a seething, blistering outburst of sectional hatred which clearly presaged the episodes of 1855-61. By the dawn of 1833 the country was on the verge of civil war; it was Henry Clay, not Andrew Jackson, who averted the break a generation before it actually happened. But if Clay averted an armed conflict, neither he nor any other man could avert the financial cataclysm which impended. There'd be a comparatively mild panic in 1833; there'd be a "hell-buster" in 1837. And throughout this period credit would be tight, business unhealthy, poverty and suffering on a scale worse than ever. But the Administration wasn't particularly concerned. So many ruined Americans were emigrating into the new border states that the revenue from the Public Lands sales cancelled the last of the Public Debt in 1834, and after that piled up a dangerous surplus in the Treasury. Everything was for the best in the best of American worlds—Andrew Jackson was satisfied; the frontier was satisfied, without exactly knowing why. It didn't particularly matter what the rest of the country thought. Men who couldn't do anything else might always go West, and buy Government land for $1.25 an acre. Or, if they weren't satisfied with such terms, they might go a couple of thousand miles farther, where land was

theirs for the taking. It is worth noting that so early as 1832 a substantial number of people were entertaining this highly radical idea.

In Boston and Washington, Hall Kelly, Harvard graduate, teacher and author, was agitating feverishly for an American occupation of Oregon; and the first fruits of his propaganda appeared at Independence on the Missouri frontier in this Spring of 1832: Wyeth and the New England salmon-fishers. Camped a short distance from them was a party of more than one hundred, led by Captain Benjamin L. E. Bonneville, an officer of the Regular Army on leave of absence for the purpose of conducting a private trapping and exploring expedition to the Columbia. With Bonneville as guide and Indian interpreter was no less a person than Jim Bridger, of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company, who must have believed Bonneville could be used as an ally in the war with the Trust—a miscalculation. And not far off Bill Sublette was organizing the supply train which would relieve the wants of the mountain men at the rendezvous in Pierre's Hole, while a hundred and fifty miles southwest at the Council Grove in what should come to be Kansas, a young man named Josiah Gregg was preparing for his second trip to Santa Fe with the largest wagon train which had yet attempted the seven-hundred-miles journey across the Great American Desert—and framing in his mind's eye a book to be called "The Commerce of the Prairies." The American Fur Company was represented in all this plethora of activity by its new steamer *Yellowstone*, puffing up the lower Missouri on the first leg of an epochal journey to the mouth of the river after which it was named.

Never since the white man reached the Mississippi had there been such a bustle and din on the frontier. For in addition to the extraordinary efforts I have mentioned, the usual seasonal supply trains were heading west into the Indian country on behalf of Bent, St. Vrain & Company and the Robidoux brothers. The Indians were aghast; the smoke of their signal fires stained the sky in advance of the several columns; there was a noticeable trend toward hostility. From the range of the Pawnee to the foothills where the Blackfeet pitched their tepees the word passed from tribe to tribe. More of the Long Rifles come. How infinitely sardonic that the most crucial development of this year, 1832, was the result of action taken by the red men, themselves! For in the summer of 1832 four Flatheads from the Columbia River arrived in St. Louis with an appeal which the sentiment of that age could not ignore. Some years before, Jed Smith had visited them, and preached the Christianity of the Bible. He must have made a great impression, since a previous delegation had visited St. Louis in 1830, without securing the missionary aid they requested. The second delegation were more successful, but a year passed before the plea reached the East, and awoke an answering spark in religious circles, and still another year before four Methodist

missionaries were equipped to ride West with the supply trains bound for the rendezvous of 1834, as a first step on their journey to that vanished Astoria, which Astor was beseeching Washington Irving to chronicle at this very time.

I can find no evidence that he ever heard of the Flatheads' plea. Certainly, he did nothing to assist those who responded to it; the Sublettes, free trappers and foes to his company, shepherded the Methodist divines. And as for Jed Smith, who was molding now in an unmarked grave beside the Cimarron, if Astor ever heard of "the Knight in Buckskin," it was as a troublesome opponent who had been disposed of by Chouteau's lieutenants, an unusual character of no particular importance. But Smith's impromptu mission to the Flatheads gave impetus to a stream of events which won back the American position in Oregon Astor had frittered away, for the missionaries were the entering wedge of American penetration. American trappers could not hold their own against the disciplined policy of the Hudson's Bay Company, autocratically administered by the great factor, Dr. John McLoughlin; but American missionaries, hewing themselves farmlands and tilling their fields, could subsist quite easily and furnished an object-lesson for Americans who preferred free land to Government land at $1.25 an acre.

So 1832 led up to 1834—and 1834 led to 1842, when the question of Oregon's final disposition was brought to a head by the appointment of Dr. Elijah White as Indian Agent for the United States and the departure with him from Independence of a train of 130 settlers, men and women, who intended, not to trap or preach, but to make farms and build homes on the banks of the Columbia and the Willamette. White's caravan followed the trails the free trappers had blazed, and the settlers were moved to go at all by the tales the free trappers had told, and the geographical knowledge the free trappers had disseminated. Very likely, but for Jed Smith, White's caravan wouldn't have started for many years yet. It was a direct consequence of the operations of the free trappers in opposition to Astor's Trust. And surely, a more ironical situation couldn't be imagined than this of the men Astor harried effecting the recovery of the domain he lost—largely through operations he had compelled them to by his attempts to crush them.

Nobody, in 1832, could have foreseen this, of course. Nobody could have known that the pioneer work of the free trappers plus Jackson's economic fallacies would pull the plug that released the greatest of all the migrations. But everybody on the frontier in 1832 knew that the Far West was astir, that the fur war was entering its final phase, and that more and more people were becoming interested in the resources of the mountain country. It was as apparent to the Indians as to the white men, and south in

New Mexico the local authorities tightened their jealous supervision of the dreaded Gringos, both those who came in over the Santa Fe trail and those who followed the north-and-south trails along the eastern base of the Divide and through its foothills.

The winter of 1832-33 was one of the hardest the mountain men ever had experienced. For weeks they were storm-bound. But conversely, severe weather made for prime pelts, and there was a splendid catch. The competition was stiffer, but this was good for the individual trappers. With Wyeth and Bonneville bidding for men and fur, the rates of the American and Rocky Mountain Companies went up. Any trapper, however raw, was assured of a good year. Wyeth, to be sure, spent the winter in Oregon, where Dr. McLoughlin gave him a suave reception; but the New Englander came east for the rendezvous on the Green that summer, the best-attended the mountain men had ever seen, and afterwards hastened on across the Plains to Independence, St. Louis, and Boston, there to embark upon an ambitious program of colonization, which should come to grief and have practically no influence upon the future course of empire. Bonneville, futilely inquisitive, was disrupting the fight against the Trust and picking the brains of the men who had combed the wilderness for geographical data for his Journals, which that Prince of Bores, Washington Irving, would edit as pompously as he had the records of Astoria.

Outwardly, the prospect must have seemed promising for the Rocky Mountain Company and the cause of the free trappers. On the contrary, the American Company had turned the corner, thanks to the disruption of the opposition by the intervention of Wyeth and Bonneville and the preponderant weight of its resources. True, Vanderburgh was dead, but its brigades, under Drips and Fontenelle, were learning the mountains month by month. Scarcely a stream in hundreds of thousands of square miles of rugged territory that did not hear the click of traps. Ill-feeling sprang up, was intensified in the winter of 1833-34. The dispersion of the trappers had accentuated the hostility of the Indians of all tribes, and charges were not lacking that one faction or another was responsible for ambush or attack. Bonneville, the West Pointer, class-conscious, of a radically different stripe from his fellow leaders, played a strange, almost a sinister, rôle. Wherever he went, dissensions occurred, and when the time came for the summer rendezvous, again held in the Valley of the Green, he stayed apart, conducting his own gathering in the Valley of the Bear, whither he lured the free trappers by offers of more pay and free liquor. Could he, perhaps, have been subsidized by the Trust to destroy the fine solidarity of the mountain men? It seems fantastic, but more fantastic exploits have occurred in American industrial warfare.

Yet without Bonneville there was sufficient cause for trouble. Tom Fitzpatrick, who had barely escaped the Blackfeet a couple of years since, had lost a supply train to the Crows, and was blaming the American Company for it. Wyeth, on his way East the year before had made a verbal contract with Milton Sublette to convoy out when he returned another train for the New Englander's outfit; but in the meantime Bill Sublette had brought West a train on his own account, and the Rocky Mountain Company decided to use his goods, Milton Sublette joining with his brother's partners to disown Wyeth's claim to a share. Accusations and counter-accusations flew back and forth. Wyeth was justifiably sore, gathered together his goods and followers, and rode on West to build Fort Hall as a depot for surplus equipment and a headquarters for his trappers on the upper Snake. Bonneville, taking advantage of the divisions the Sublettes had precipitated, strengthened his campaign to seduce men from the Rocky Mountain Company; and the American Fur Company let it be known that all competent mountain men need never fear for employment if they signed on with Drips and Fontenelle.

A few days of this, and the Rocky Mountain Company split apart, Gervais and Fraeb withdrawing from the partnership—Gervais in consideration of "twenty head of horse beast, thirty beaver traps and $500 worth of merchandise," Fraeb for "forty head of horse beast, forty traps, eight guns and $1,000 worth of merchandise"—and the three remaining partners posted the following notice for the benefit of those trappers who could read:

> "The public are hereby notified that the business will in future be conducted by Thomas Fitzpatrick, Milton G. Sublette & James Bridger, under the style and firm of Fitzpatrick, Sublette & Bridger.
>
> "Ham's Fork, June 20, 1834.
>
> Thos. Fitzpatrick.
> M. G. Sublette.
> James Bridger (His mark)
>
> Wit.: W. L. Sublette."

IX

Four years would appear to have been the average life of a commercial dynasty amongst the free trappers—that was the tenure of Ashley & Henry

and of Smith, Jackson & Sublette as well as of the Rocky Mountain Fur Company. The reorganized Rocky Mountain Fur Company, Fitzpatrick, Sublette & Bridger, wouldn't last even so long; but Bill Sublette, whose signature was attached to the notice of dissolution as witness, had organized a partnership which would prove the longest-lived of all the independent fur companies. This was the firm of Sublette & Campbell, formed December 20, 1832, with Robert Campbell, an Irishman, as junior partner. Campbell was more of a trader than a trapper and adventurer, although he possessed the manliness and physical prowess necessary to command the respect of the frontiersmen. He lived to become one of the prominent citizens of St. Louis, and died wealthy and respected.

Sublette & Campbell really started out as a trading and transportation firm rather than a fur company. They broadened their field of activities to fill the hole created by the decay of the Rocky Mountain Company and the general disruption of the free trappers which came to a head in the summer of 1834. Establishing posts at the junction of the Laramie with the North Platte—here, two years later, they built Fort John, afterwards Fort Laramie—and near the American Fur Company's Fort Union, where the Yellowstone flows into the Missouri, they made such rapid progress that in this year, 1834, they forced the American Company to agree to withdraw from the mountains for one year in consideration of a free hand on the river. This was more than any of their predecessors had been able to accomplish, and won a breathing-space for Fitzpatrick, Sublette & Bridger no less than for themselves.

Both the independent companies were heartened by the respite, believing that victory was in sight. But the bitter truth was that their enemies had been temporarily disorganized by a series of occurrences of which they were ignorant. Astor, long-headed, cautious, had written his lieutenants from London the year before this: "I much fear beaver will not sell well very soon unless it is very fine. It appears that they make hats of silk instead of beaver." He was disturbed, too, by the reports of his more intelligent agents regarding the depletion of the beaver due to the reckless and unrestrained methods of trapping practised by all the companies, his own included. Two hundred thousand pelts a year were being sent east to St. Louis, and no attempt was made to preserve breeding-stock in the villages trapped. For example, a Kit Carson brigade took 3,000 pelts out of one village. No wonder that trappers grumbled because areas where once beaver had swarmed were now depopulated.

The inevitable consequence of such tactics was an increase in the operating expenses of the companies, which the Trust could better afford than the independents. Even so, the prospective curtailment of his profits

irked Astor, and he returned from Europe early in 1834 in a state of acute dissatisfaction—intensified, it is true, by his concern over the financial situation which had been precipitated by Jackson's veto of the bill renewing the charter of the Bank of the United States. The news of his wife's death met him at the pier, and was a profound shock to him. And before he had recovered from this domestic tragedy, *Silliman's Journal*, the organ of the fur trade, predicted in its June issue: "It appears that the fur trade must henceforward decline. The advanced state of geographical science shows that no new countries remain to be explored. In North America the animals are slowly decreasing from the persevering efforts and indiscriminate slaughter practised by the hunters and by the appropriation to the uses of man of those forests and rivers which have afforded them food and protection. They recede with the aborigines before the tide of civilization, but a diminished supply will remain in the mountains and uncultivated tracts of this and other countries, if the avidity of the hunter can be restrained within proper limitations."

His mind was made up. In a question of commercial significance he had ample vision to foresee the future, and what he foresaw in the fur trade was a gradual decline in profits, due as much to the mounting costs of obtaining furs as to the discovery that hats made of silk were cheaper and more comfortable than hats of beaver. As it turned out, indeed, the abandonment of beaver by the hatters awakened the interest of the furriers, who proceeded to put it to uses unknown in the past. There was an initial decline in prices, which reacted severely upon the companies, as we shall see, and the poorer grades never were worth anything like what they had been to the hatters; but prime pelts, well-dressed, snapped back to values as good as or exceeding the old scale. After all, they were harder to obtain. And the other expensive furs, in demand for tippets, scarves and coats, and trimming for robes and dresses, rapidly forged to the front in value as their relative rarity became appreciated in the world of fashion. But the great days of the fur trade were approaching their end. Soon it should cease to be a dominant factor in American civilization. The Indian trader, men like Jim Bridger, the Bents, the St. Vrains, the Robidoux, the Sublettes, would supplant it in the public eye. They could be of value to the emigrating home-makers, who spelled the fur trade's doom.

I cannot find that Astor was in any degree regretful as he summoned Crooks and Chouteau to New York for the conference which would terminate his active interest in the industry of which he had been so long the leading figure. From 1784 to 1834—fifty years! A long lifetime in those days. But he was seventy-one, lonely without his Sarah, beginning to feel the burden of age, although his physical vigor was outwardly unimpaired

and he continued his horseback rides in fair weather through the dwindling fringe of countryside that stretched between the city limits and the Harlem. Linked with his other reasons for retirement was the feeling that the fur trade no longer merited his attention, a sentiment shared by his son. They'd take the Astor name out of business, devoting themselves henceforth to conservation of their enormous real estate and financial investments. With an Andrew Jackson in the Presidency and the national banking system gone to pot, the tool of any smart Alec who could get a State charter and find a printer to run off shin-plasters for him, there was need for the richest man in America to look to his fences.

So the American Fur Company was dissolved—or, rather, hewn asunder. Ramsey Crooks "and associates" took over the Northern Department, of which he had been the head, together with the corporation name; the Western Department went to the firm of Pratte, Chouteau & Company, which was formed for that purpose. Naturally, Astor continued to be heavily interested in the two companies, the notes of which he held; and his voice—or his son's voice—was heard whenever an issue was raised in the operations of either one of them. But none-the-less the present ceased to concern him; he was preoccupied with Washington Irving's attempt to salvage his fame from the wreckage of Astoria. The West, however, refused to forget him. He persisted in the minds of the men who had fought him as the arch demon of the fur trade, and they paid him the high compliment of ignoring the new title of the Western Department. Pratte, Chouteau & Company were as much the American Fur Company as ever, to their own employees and to the lingering free trappers, if not to the invading settlers, who had no apprehension of what the opposing forces in the fur trade had done to make settlement possible.

His methods persisted, too. Having effected their reorganization, Pratte, Chouteau & Company refused to renew the year's truce with Sublette & Campbell, and pushed the war against the independent companies with an access of ferocity. Wyeth, burdened with bad luck and not so adaptable as the mountain men, made a consistent failure of all his enterprises—whether salmon-fishing in Oregon or trapping in the valleys of the Rockies. Fitzpatrick, Sublette & Bridger weren't as successful as they might have been, if Sublette & Campbell hadn't been competing for the catch of the free trappers. It was the old story of division of forces in face of a superior enemy. The rendezvous of 1835, in the Valley of the Green, which was by way of becoming the capital of the fur country, was almost as cantankerous as the previous year's. The single noteworthy incident was the appearance of two more missionaries, Samuel Parker and Marcus Whitman, both of whom should do yeoman service to win Oregon for the Union. Except for that, the

item of greatest interest to the trappers was the rumor that Bonneville was through—news which caused none of them to repine.

Next year Wyeth gave up the struggle, and arranged to transfer his Fort Hall to the Hudson's Bay Company. With the best intentions in the world, he had achieved next to nothing by all his labors. His biggest contribution was the erection of this post on the upper Snake, and it helped the Canadians, not the Americans, constituting the easternmost point of occupation of the Hudson's Bay Company, as such figuring substantially in the British counter-claims which secured a compromise of the Oregon title some ten years later. The rendezvous of '36 was made notable by the presence of the first white women to pass the Rockies, worthy successors of Dorion's squaw—Mrs. Marcus Whitman and Mrs. Henry H. Spalding, faithful missionary wives and helpmates. There were rumors that the Rocky Mountain Company's successors, Fitzpatrick, Sublette & Bridger, were financially shaky, and the free trappers showed a listlessness toward the contest with the Trust which was an indication of its early termination. There was no more of the old-time bitterness and rivalry. American Fur Company and independent brigades chummed together friendlywise—perhaps, in part, because of the common dread of the Hudson's Bay Company, which had consolidated its position in the mountains by building Fort Boise on the lower Snake. McLeod, a Hudson's Bay factor, appeared at the rendezvous with a Canadian brigade, taking his place in the festivities as by right. Nobody was surprised, at the breakup of the gathering, to see Bridger and Fontenelle lead their joint brigades in company to the North, the free trappers switching ultimately to the headwaters of the Snake, the American Company men devoting their efforts to the tributaries of the Yellowstone.

For all ordinary purposes, the fur war was ended. But if there had remained any germ of conflict to menace the Trust it was dissipated by Milton Sublette's untimely death in December of 1836 at his brother's Fort John. The firm of Fitzpatrick, Sublette & Bridger was dissolved immediately, Fitzpatrick and Bridger going over to the American Fur Company with most of their trappers, the few who persisted in recalcitrance casting in their fortunes with Sublette & Campbell, who continued in the field until 1842. But Sublette & Campbell no longer constituted an opposition to the Trust in the former sense of the word. They were once more a firm of traders and wagoners, who dealt in peltry as the occasion arose, and were able to stand up to the Trust for this very reason: they weren't dependent upon fur to fight off competition. Still, there is no gainsaying the fact that after a fashion they did compete with the American Fur Company, and were able to do so without being crushed; although here, again, you must consider the changed circumstances of the fur trade. The

hectic period of high prices and a wide market, with an unlimited supply of peltry, was over. There wasn't the incentive to cut-throat competition there had been—no longer need Pierre Chouteau instruct his factors and superintendents to "écrasez toute opposition."

Sublette & Campbell ultimately dissolved by mutual consent on January 12, 1842, just as the tide of emigration to Oregon was beginning to flow. Bill Sublette, like Ashley before him, had his attention fixed upon a seat in Congress. He was rich, and wanted to play the gentleman; but fate was unkind to him. Not only did he fail to secure the prefix "Hon." in place of the frontier title of "Captain" his exploits had earned, but he died in 1845—in his bed like his brother Milton—while on his way to Washington to press his claim to appointment as Superintendent of Indian Affairs at St. Louis, a post for which he was better fitted than a seat in the House of Representatives. So passed a man who had shown himself not unworthy of matching spears with John Jacob Astor. His partner, Campbell, continued the trading business, under the old firm name.

The Trust was too tempting a mark for blackmail, of course, to be passed over by those gentry, who, in any age and country, undertake to make themselves a nuisance serious enough to warrant being bought off. Half a dozen little fur trading firms sprang up to give Pratte, Chouteau & Company something to worry about; but the Trust spiked their efforts by securing from the Government officials on the frontier a rigid enforcement of the law forbidding the introduction of liquor into the Indian country—and without liquor no firm could hope to break the strangle-hold the Trust had secured on the trade of the plains and mountains. The last attempt at competition, the Union Fur Company, was sold out to Pratte, Chouteau & Company in 1845.

Indeed, the fur trade was operating upon an entirely different basis. Buffalo robes had taken the place of beaver pelts as the prime requisite. The generation of mountain men who had torn the veils from the mysteries of the West had held their last rendezvous in 1839 at Fort Nonsense, built by Bonneville on Horse Creek, a tributary of the Green. Here, sitting melancholy about their fires, counting the gaps in their ranks, they had agreed that the brave days belonged to the past. Their fellowship was shattered. Very well, then, they'd call a term to the present. And that summer they separated never to meet again. Most of them were absurdly young—Jim Bridger, one of the oldest, "Old Gabe" they called him lovingly, or "Old Man of the Mountains," was thirty-eight. They weren't too downhearted as they swung off on the new trails necessity had blazed for them—some to swallow their resentment, and accept the sure pay and servitude of the Trust's service; some to go in for Indian trading and transportation; some to

try their luck in New Mexico; some to join the farmer folk who were heading for Oregon.

So completely did they disappear that when Fremont came to Fort St. Vrain in the summer of 1843 he couldn't find one of them to guide him to the foothills of the Rockies—"The race of trappers who formerly lived in their recesses had almost entirely disappeared," he recorded.

A transition as essentially typical of American life as Astor's methods of wringing the life-blood out of a marketable commodity.

BOOK SIX

THE LANDLORD OF NEW YORK

THE LANDLORD OF NEW YORK

I

Intensely conservative in his reactions to life, it wasn't astonishing that Astor should have possessed to a striking degree the European peasant's respect for the value of land as an investment. Indeed, all other investments he considered secondary in importance in the long run, although he acquired considerable amounts of bank stocks and Government securities. Even in the years of his early prosperity he seems to have confined his shipping commitments to vessels of which he was the sole owner—and this was a time when the merchants of the Eastern seaboard almost invariably subscribed to adventures in ships owned jointly by groups of men. Such later newfangled devices as canal stocks, mill shares, and railroad bonds he regarded askance. Land was his fetish from the day in 1789, five years after his arrival in America, he purchased two lots on the Bowery Lane for $625 cash—always he preferred to pay cash, usually, however, exploiting another buyer's misfortune by taking over a foreclosed mortgage or offering assistance cannily to settle an encumbered estate. And unlike other rich Americans, who flattered their vanity by purchasing great areas of farm lands, with rent-rolls like an English squire's, he preferred to sink his money in property within the confines of Manhattan island, assured, as were few of his contemporaries, of the city to be.

He was fortunate in that his prosperity increased in direct ratio to the growth of the city. When he landed New York was "a snug, leafy town of 25,000," which had been half-destroyed by two disastrous fires and was economically prostrated by the evacuation of the influential Royalist element who had maintained its commerce during the years of British occupation. By 1800, when his wealth permitted him to speculate almost at will, it had doubled in population, and expanded a mile northward; houses were going up on streets which had been wasteland when he sold cakes for George Diederich; and this rate of growth was held consistently, despite the close rivalry of Philadelphia and Boston. He, himself, lost no opportunity of announcing his conviction that the city would continue to grow, nor would he be deterred by the doubts of men who couldn't foresee that the country would develop to a point where a world metropolis would be required to house the nerve-centers of commerce, finance, and business. On the contrary, he refused to commit his capital to dwellings, warehouses or stores. For his purpose—the ultimate intrenchment of the Astor name—he wanted farm and pasture land, which could be bought cheap, and offered a prospect of mounting valuation.

To the despair of his friends, who insisted they would never be worth anything, he was forever buying up swamps and rocky fields, without so much as a lane percolating through their wilds; and occasionally, in order to finance purchases of this character, he would sell perfectly sound residence lots in the settled portion of the city. For instance, he once sold a house in Wall Street for $8,000. The purchaser was very pleased with the deal, and fancied he'd gotten the better of the adroit Mr. Astor, who was reputed to be so invincible at a bargain.

"Why," he exulted as the ink was blotted on the deed of sale, "in a few years this lot will bring half as much again as its present value."

"Very true," assented Astor, a faint twinkle in his deep-set eyes, "but now, sir, you shall see what I'll do with the money you have paid me. With $8,000 I'll buy eighty lots above Canal Street. By the time your lot is worth $12,000, my lots will be worth $80,000."

Which was exactly what happened.

The Junction of Broadway and Bowery Road, about 1828

This anecdote is doubly interesting because it points the fallacy of the popular belief, cherished now for a century, that Astor never sold a piece of property. He often sold and traded lots for purposes similar to those actuating him in the Wall Street deal, that is, whenever his instinct for values told him he could better an investment; but again and again he carried wastelands or farms for years, in face of recurrent chances for a swifter turnover, because he believed the city would reach out and embrace his property in its network of streets. One of the earlier instances of this tendency was his purchase of the Bayards' hay fields on lower Broadway at

from $200 to $300 a lot, a price which men of business intelligence considered outrageous, and over which the Bayards heartily congratulated themselves. But not many years had passed when the original owners were wishing they hadn't chuckled so at Astor's relieving them of a few hay-stacks.

One reason, probably, for the belief that he never sold property was that he wouldn't part with land he regarded as assured of permanent value, and to this policy more than any other may be attributed the enormous accretion of the Astor fortune. He had brought from Germany the idea of giving twenty-one year leases on very low terms to tenants, who would be expected to erect all buildings and improvements and pay all taxes, the buildings and improvements reverting to the owner at the lease's expiration. This was a novel idea of estate management in America, and was certainly the cause of most of the popular dislike of Astor and his descendants. He was a hard landlord, and while willing to renew a lease on revised terms to a satisfactory tenant, wasn't above squeezing the tenant as opportunity served. It is only fair to remark that his system is the universal practice in all big cities today; in New York, especially, practically no valuable property is sold outright.

The bargains he picked up were phenomenal. No Aladdin's lamp could have produced more out of contact between thumb and brass than he did out of the rugged acres of Medeef Eden's farm, which extended from the old Bloomingdale Road (Broadway), diagonally between what are now Forty-second and Forty-sixth Streets, to the Hudson shore—practically the vicinity of Times Square. Eden had inherited the farm, with its quaint, gambrel-roofed, Dutch homestead, in 1797. The young Dutchman promptly got himself into financial difficulties, of which Astor heard, and passing that way one day on his afternoon ride, was struck by the prospective value of the spacious fields, and moved to purchase a third-interest in the mortgage Eden secured. Subsequently, Astor purchased the remaining two-thirds, and when the inevitable foreclosure came discovered himself possessed of the Eden farm for an investment of $25,000. It is worth today perhaps $50,000,000, and its value must increase prodigiously as the westside blocks included in it are converted to higher-class uses.

The farm of John Cosine, reaching from Broadway to the Hudson, and from Fifty-third to Fifty-seventh Streets, which Cosine inherited in 1809, Astor bought in chancery proceedings for $23,000. Twenty years ago it was held to be worth $6,000,000, and has very likely tripled in value since then. Of his great-grandfather's real estate deals, the first Lord Astor wrote in a vainglorious article in the Pall Mall Magazine, from which I have previously quoted: "One of the farms purchased in 1811 for $900 is now worth, with its

improvements, $1,500,000." Lord Astor doesn't remark that most of the improvements, if not all of them, would have been the contributions of the tenants of the property, which, in the generation since he wrote, must have profited by the rise in New York values brought about by forces over which the Astors, either as a family or as individuals, had no control.

The East Side farm and ropewalk of John Semlar and his wife was bought for $20,000. It represents the bulk of the family's East Side holdings at this date, and should be worth in the neighborhood of from $16,000,000 to $20,000,000. A block he bought in Harlem, which was then an utter wilderness, for $2,000, is now held at something like $2,000,000. Another coup of his was to purchase one-half of Governor Clinton's country place in Greenwich Village for $75,000. Clinton's son-in-law, who had inherited the Governor's remaining portion, borrowed from Astor, using this as security. Unable to pay off the mortgage, the unfortunate man settled on terms which gave the fur merchant two-thirds of the entire vast property—which should be paying his heirs an annual income of $1,000,000.

It is no small tribute to Astor's sagacity that that wily person, Aaron Burr, made notable contributions to his estate. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, the people of New York, taking their new-won liberties very seriously, began to chafe at the weight of the dead hand which the Corporation of Trinity Church extended over their heads. This feeling definitely found expression in a reiterated curiosity as to how the church spent its income, then restricted by law to $12,000 a year. Burr, the shrewd predecessor of a long line of shrewd leaders of Tammany Hall, smelled an opportunity for feathering his own nest at the expense of the unpopular Trinity Corporation, which stood for the lingering Episcopal aristocracy, and could claim few friends amongst the mass of Democratic voters. He initiated, in 1797, a legislative investigation of the church's business activities, and secured for himself the chairmanship of the committee appointed to undertake it. But nothing happened; nothing ever happened—unless there is significance in the fact that presently Burr secured for himself the transfer of what was known as the Mortier Lease.

The Mortier Lease had been made by the Trinity Corporation to Abraham Mortier, Paymaster General of the British Forces in North America and hence a wealthy and powerful gentleman, in the year 1768, when it still meant something—the Stamp Act to the contrary—to wear a red coat. The term of the lease was ninety-nine years, at the rate of $269 a year, and it covered 456 lots, one-third of Annetje Jans' famous farm, which so many people earnestly think they own, in the region of Greenwich Village. It was a tract of hills, swamps and commons, picturesque in a rough way, and Mortier built a rather handsome house on it, which he called

Richmond Hill and used for a country place. Here he lived swankily until the Revolution came along, and upset the applecarts of the gentry who had labored for the King—and here Burr, in time, by dint of devious means such as I have indicated, supplanted Paymaster General Mortier, and lived quite as swankily, indeed, more so, for Aaron Burr was a bigger figure in the opening years of the nineteenth century than ever Mortier had been in the decade preceding Lexington and Bunker Hill.

A spendthrift, Aaron Burr, a man whose mind was invariably probing possibilities of riches, whose tastes for material splendor led him to maintain the standards of a great nobleman. His first thought, after securing the Mortier Lease, was to turn it to active account, and he proceeded to obtain a loan of $38,000 from the Bank of the Manhattan Company—in which, please note, John Jacob Astor owned 1,000 shares. That was a lot of money in those days, but not enough for Aaron Burr, continually in hot water, although in the eyes of patient, hard-working Jacob Astor, bent on changing furs into tea and tea into dollars, the slim, nervous figure of the Vice President of the United States must have seemed remote from all touch of misfortune. But there came the duel with Hamilton, and the smoke of the pistols drifted from Weehawken Heights to the shabby Capitol at Washington, obscuring that graceful figure, very soon obliterating it from popular interest. And afterwards there was the mysterious venture down the Mississippi, and the trial for treason in Richmond, Jefferson hammering at the man of whom he'd always been jealous, and John Marshall, granitelike, refusing to play the hangman for political expediency.

Acquitted, but disgraced, outcast by the party he had led, Burr sought exile until time should have blunted people's memories; and more than ever in want of money, he turned to Astor, with whom he had maintained a courteously patronizing acquaintance for some years. Astor knew Richmond Hill, knew it better than its owner. The fur merchant saw streets threading its rocky surface, blocks of houses rising on filled-in swamps; and he took the Mortier Lease off Burr's hands for $32,000, subject to the Bank of the Manhattan Company's mortgage, which he satisfied at once. First and last, the lease cost him $160,000, or less than $300 a lot, and Burr had scarcely sailed when he commenced to sublease the area, taking care that these subleases were drawn so as to expire in 1866, a year before the ninety-nine year master lease ran out, which had the effect of giving him the reversion of the buildings and improvements put in by the subtenants, and the right to a renewal of his own lease from the Trinity Corporation on better terms than would otherwise have been the case.

Burr was dismayed by the profits Astor obtained from property which had been no more than a source of satisfaction for his social vanity, and

upon his return from self-imposed exile tried to break the transfer he had negotiated. His attempt, however, was unsuccessful, and far from manifesting any further resentment in the matter, he proceeded to lend his secret advice in the waging of the most ruthless coup of Astor's career—a coup which was perhaps more cold-bloodedly selfish, more directly antisocial, than any undertaken by any American, of Astor's time or since. A coup, too, for which it is fairly certain that Burr was fundamentally responsible—through the whole texture of the Morris Case runs the vein of legalistic cynicism typical of Burr's attitude toward life and scarcely less repellent than Astor's impersonal hunger for acquiring wealth, regardless of the primary injustice of methods tolerated by the mechanism of the law.

The Morris Case came about in this wise. Roger and Mary Morris were owners of an estate comprising 51,102 acres, or nearly one-third, of the area of Putnam County, New York, which Mary Morris had inherited from an ancestor named Adolphus Phillips. The property originally had been purchased by the father of Adolphus, Frederick Phillips, with funds obtained from financing two cruises of Captain Samuel Burgess, who was sent to Madagascar to trade with the pirates using that island as their headquarters for raids upon the commerce of the East Indies. Burgess turned pirate, himself, but vindicated his personal honesty by rendering just account of his spoliations to his backers in New York! The profit of his first voyage was £5,000, of his second £10,000 and 300 slaves. Phillips, with his share, set up as a country gentleman in what was then a remote corner of the Province. The land was never fully developed by him or his descendants, but, of course, its value increased with the extension of settlement and the recession of the Indian frontier.

Lith. G. Hayward 120 Water St. N.Y.

BROADWAY FROM THE BOWLING GREEN, 1828

Roger and Mary Morris had done little more with the property than their predecessors when the Revolution came. They were Royalists, like so many of the great land-owners, and as Tories, were obliged to flee the country after the success of the Patriot cause. In the meantime, their estate had been sequestrated and declared forfeited by the State of New York, which sold off the land in small blocks to some seven hundred farmers, giving titles to each individual purchaser. So far, so good. An immense tract of pleasant country, which had been managed with a narrow regard for the comfort of one family, was now serving the wants of 3,500 individuals, at a moderate estimate. A dent had been made in the system of feudalism, which had been strongly established in New York under the Crown, and should fight to preserve its rights until the last of the Patroon estates was dissipated—several generations off yet. But the State had been betrayed into a technical error in its forfeiture proceedings. Someone in London, a lawyer, about the time Burr was there, told the Morrises that they—Roger and Mary—had possessed only a life interest in the property, which, with all its improvements, under the deed conveying it to Mary, belonged in fee to their heirs.

Here was a pretty kettle of fish! The State had acted honestly, if mistakenly. It had treated the Morrises no worse than such arrant Royalists as the Johnsons and DeLanceys. The Morrises, themselves, in fact, didn't realize their claim until it was pointed out to them—and by that time Roger

was dead; Mary lived on until 1815. But whoever discovered the flaw in the State's proceedings, whether Burr or someone else, looked upon it simply as an opportunity to make money, regardless of the consequences. The natural course, in the circumstances, would have been for the heirs to bring suit, a tedious proceeding, to be sure, and expensive; but reputable lawyers would have eagerly assumed the case. The actual proceedings bore a sinister cast. An agent of the heirs—was he Burr? brought their claim to Astor's attention in 1809, after Roger's death, and sold it to him for $100,000.

Astor was powerless to move before Mary's death, when he brought suit for recovery of the 51,102 acres, the seven hundred farms, the hearthstones and chimneycorners and barnyards of the 3,500 people, who had gone into the Morris estate, and made an American community out of it. He regarded himself as absolutely justified in so doing, and was provoked, if undismayed, by the vituperation which was poured upon him. He hadn't the slightest sense of wrong-doing. He had paid his $100,000 to the heirs, who, by a code as legalistic as that which he adopted, were traitors to the country which had furnished him his opportunity to rise from a peasant's hut to wealth. It was merely a speculation in land, and he was indifferent whether the profits of it were wrung from the people of the State of New York or the 700 farmers who had taken the place of the Morrises. That was business, to him. A state, the people—and I can only suppose his country, as well—must pay for an oversight in judgment equally with an individual.

The State, say this for it, acted with honorable dispatch. Commissioners were appointed by the Legislature, who heard the evidence, and found Astor's claim legal. They asked him to name a redemption price, and he offered to take one-half the estimated value of the land, which was $667,000. This the State considered extortionate, and refused to agree to. So the case dragged along, with Burr, I suspect, in the background, advising Astor. In 1819 he repeated his offer, with interest added; but the State again declined it. There was much uneasiness, suffering even, amongst the titleholders under the State throughout these years of delay—a farmer couldn't secure a mortgage or sell his land; there was uncertainty about wills and successions. All the 3,500 individuals settled on the Morris tract were miserable while Astor bickered and wrangled to obtain the profit he sought.

At last, in 1827, it was felt that the case must be definitely determined, and the Legislature enacted a law providing that Astor's claim should be satisfied, if he first obtained judgment from the Supreme Court of the United States in favor of the legality of his title. Five suits should be brought; if three of the five were decided in his favor he would receive $450,000 for his rights, subject to a deduction of $200,000 in the event that the Court held the buildings and improvements did not go with the ownership of the land, and

with any award he was to have, in addition, interest on the sum of it from April, 1827. On his part, he must, within thirty days of the Court's decision, execute a deed of conveyance in fee simple to the State, with a warranty against any future claims from the Morris heirs.

This offer Astor accepted. Emmet & Ogden were his attorneys—with Burr's slender, black form lurking in the background. For the State of New York appeared Daniel Webster and Martin Van Buren—the one to be Secretary of State, the other to reach the White House. Two abler or more distinguished counselors couldn't have been found. But the case of the Morris heirs, which Astor had made his own was impregnable against the lore and the oratory of its opponents. In June, 1830, the Supreme Court decided the third case against the State, and there was authorized in favor of Astor a special issue of five per cent State Stock. After twenty-one years, the lifetime of an Astor lease, the men and women who had made the Morris tract by this time worth in excess of $1,500,000 might go about their work secure in the knowledge that their homes and crops belonged to them. As for Astor, it is perhaps sufficient to remark that in 1830 he had been the only man in New York worth as much as $1,000,000. Now, he was worth a half a million more. He slept as well as he had before, ate as heartily and his conscience was untroubled. So much for the advantages of the single-track mind!

It is singular that a man as generous and kindly as he was in his family relations should have been so merciless in taking advantage of the troubles of others. Trinity Corporation, which was land-poor, sold him many small lots at various times, lots which have been lucrative rent-producers for scores of his descendants. In the panic of 1837, when real estate and securities values crashed, he bought a relatively immense quantity of land at bottom prices. It was said of him that at this time he appeared as complainant in sixty different suits, winning most of them, and usually ruining those he defeated. The man was indefatigable in making money. Not that scoundrel, Daniel Drew, had a keener eye for a sure profit. In 1832, when Eighth Avenue between Thirteenth and Twenty-third Streets, was being graded, the earth removed was sold to a contractor by the city for $3,049.44. Astor, with Stephen D. Beekman and Jacob Taylor, petitioned the Board of Aldermen for those portions of the sum representing the earth taken from in front of their lots!

He was always asking favors of the city, title to a closed country road, the grading or improvement of streets on his properties, sewers. And he wasn't above taking a leaf from the book of Trinity Corporation and its favored members in seeking grants of city land. In 1806, he obtained two such grants on Mangin Street, between Stanton and Houston, and on South

Street, between Peck Slip and Dover Street; May 30, 1808, he received a grant along Hudson Street, bounding Burr's estate, which he had recently acquired; in 1810 he received three water grants in the vicinity of Hubert, Laight, Charlton, Hammersly, and Clarkson Streets; April 28, 1828, three on Tenth Avenue, from Twelfth to Fifteenth Streets. Of course, he fared in this wise no better than other rich merchants, who took advantage of the city's desire to promote the extension of available land, the grantees bearing the expense of filling in or draining, and reaping whatever profit was involved. But in this, as in all similar enterprises in the history of every big city, there was a constant swirl of corruption and graft under the surface of what passed for praiseworthy civic projects.

His son, William, was equally pertinacious in search of wealth. It was William who bought one of the most valuable Astor holdings, the Thompson farm, east and west of Fifth Avenue, between Thirty-second and Thirty-sixth Street, on which, amongst hundreds of other structures, stands the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel. And William continued to buy likely properties after his father had ceased to. But after all, the bulk of the Astor fortune, a fortune worth today close to half a billion dollars, is based upon the total of $2,000,000 which John Jacob Astor invested in New York real estate.

II

It was inevitable that Astor's character should be affected by so pronounced a habit of soulless acquisitiveness as he developed. His punishment was as severe as his bitterest enemy could have wished, involving the life and happiness of his youngest and favorite daughter, Eliza, whom he compelled into a marriage with a man she didn't love: an episode which contains all the stock requirements of the school of fiction dear to Eliza's generation—and not entirely out of favor in this sophisticated era. She was a romantically inclined girl, the least robust of the three surviving daughters, when, in 1823 or '24, she met and fell in love with a handsome young dentist, Eleazar Parmly, native of Vermont, who conducted a fashionable and lucrative practice at 297½ Broadway, at the corner of Duane Street.

Eleazar and his brother, Levi, who was then established in New Orleans, have a secure place in the history of American—or, indeed, European, dentistry. They were men of culture, charm, probity and extraordinary skill, who were largely responsible for lifting their profession to its present level; and they are likewise notable for the fact that no less than sixteen of their descendants followed in their professional footsteps. Eleazar died worth $3,000,000, and possessed an international reputation rivaled only by that of

Dr. Thomas W. Evans, of Paris, the American who assisted the Empress Eugenie to escape from France after the downfall of the Second Empire. According to a descendant[1] of Solymon Brown, one of Eleazar's partners: "It cannot be questioned that Eleazar Parmly stood at the head of the dental profession in this country for some thirty years, and that no dentist before or since has occupied such a prominent position here, reputation with the laity and professional brethren being taken into account."

A dentist, however, in 1824, had no social position whatsoever. He was regarded as perhaps a peg or two higher in the scale than a barber and much inferior to a surgeon. There were no colleges of dentistry, no recognized degrees, no professional societies or publications, and very naturally, dentistry was a prey to hordes of quacks, who blurred the really magnificent work a number of honest men of scientific bent were doing to lay the groundwork for the modern conception of care of the teeth—Eleazar, himself, stated in a public address a quarter of a century afterward that when he was a beginner in New York it was the custom for patients not to recognize their dentists on the street. But Eleazar was by no means an ordinary young man. Existing portraits represent him as big-framed, with finely proportioned head and thoughtful face. He had pretensions to being a poet, read widely outside the bounds of surgery, was a good speaker and lay preacher and could take care of himself physically in an emergency—he thrashed a Middle Western bully in 1818, when gouging and biting were the accepted rites of the frontier.

So here were all the materials for a romance: the rich merchant's daughter, gentle, affectionate, refined; the poor young man of talent, worthy, struggling to improve himself. More, you have the sympathetic mother of the rich girl, secretly assisting the lovers, for Mrs. Astor is represented in the traditions of the Parmly family as having been in favor of the affair and assisting to conceal the engagement which was entered into. But one other person, Eleazar's partner, Solymon Brown, was privy to it, and the secret was kept until Astor announced to his family that he wished Eliza to marry Count Vincent Rumpff, a Swiss, who had been minister of the German Free Cities at Paris and later represented them at Washington. Both Mrs. Astor and Eliza objected to this project, but Astor, for once, was stubbornly dogmatic. His other children had made excellent marriages with commoners; he wished now to have a title in the family, an entrée, very probably, into diplomatic and aristocratic circles abroad. He had spent the years 1820-22 in Europe, and was persuaded of the advantages of a son-in-law of Rumpff's position.

Hitherto a benevolent tyrant to his children, he was nevertheless a tyrant, and when Eliza moaned and pleaded and her mother supported her he silenced them as curtly as a business competitor. His daughter marry a dentist! A common fellow, whom nobody of standing greeted on the street! Nein, nein! Ach, nein! And his guttural voice lapsed into German, as it did in the rare moments of temper which assailed him. The stupid girl must get over her craziness, and as for Sarah, it was not for a loyal wife and a good mother to support such an intrigue. Sarah, being Sarah, didn't bow her head, and admit wrong-doing. What, after all, she wanted to know, had Jacob boasted when she married him? Hadn't he sold cakes in the street, himself? Did he recollect receiving bows from the great ones of the town when he staggered along Broadway with a pack of furs on his back?

Jacob was constrained to subterfuge. He sputtered out his anger, and presently announced that they would all go abroad. There was no need for hurrying the marriage. Go abroad, and show the girl Paris. Let her see what she was giving up. Sarah assented, and Eliza perforce yielded with her mother. They sailed in one of those blunt-bowed packet-ships that clop-clopped through the waves for six weeks or so to Havre—and when they reached Paris, there was Count Rumpff to receive them. What Eliza said or did I don't know, but her mother is reported to have sat down and written Eleazar Parmly in New York to come to Paris and snatch his sweetheart away. Eleazar came—sailing in the fall of 1825, probably, as there is in existence a manuscript poem of his addressed to his friend, Solymon Brown, dated July of that year, in which he refers to his imminent departure for "far-distant countries."

He arrived too late. Eliza and her Count had been married, December 10, and all the satisfaction he had for his voyage was the sour pleasure of bidding the weeping bride farewell as she started for Switzerland with her husband. But Mrs. Astor consoled him, and after her return to New York sent him a check for $1,000 to reimburse him for the expense he had been to and the professional fees he had lost. His acceptance of the money was mainly an appreciation of the goodness of heart of the friend from whom it came. Eleazar Parmly was no sycophant. Neither was he incurably damaged in heart, for, a year and a half after Astor had out-maneuvered him, he married a charming, accomplished lady—who was also an heiress—who rejoiced in the name of Anna Maria Valk Smith, with whom he lived happily for many years, but not too happily to make him forget Eliza. In 1854, and again in 1862, he made pilgrimages to the Swiss villa where she had died, and to the grave in a churchyard near Rolle where she was buried. If several of his manuscript poems mean what they say, he was inclined to the belief that she died, as much as anything, from a broken heart.

And perhaps she did. She only lived eight years after her marriage, and I gather that her health was failing during most of that time. Her father spent the last five years principally with her, and personally, I don't believe his interest was solely in the opportunities to meet nobles and royalties his son-in-law helped him to. Good German that he was, Jacob Astor loved a title, a trait inherited by several of his descendants. He made several tours of Germany, visiting and revisiting his birthplace, and pensioning the surviving relatives he could find; and with introductions from William to friends of the Gottingen days or from Rumpff to Grand Ducal notables, he enjoyed himself thoroughly at the stuffy little Courts, where all the pretense of Paris and Vienna was imitated, and the Opera Houses satisfied his honest craving for decent music. He was presented to Charles X and Louis Philippe, and attended the coronation of Ferdinand II at Naples; and his genuine respect for learning and accomplishment enabled him to appreciate meeting Guizot and Metternich.

Two of his winters he passed in Italy, and he purchased a villa on the shores of Lake Geneva for summer residence—Italy in winter and Switzerland in summer were becoming necessary for that fading flower, Eliza. Whatever pleasure her father derived from their ramblings amongst the great of the earth, her joys were shortly limited. Late in the year 1833 she gave up the battle for existence; and Astor, sadly broken and disheartened, worried, too, by the financial storm gathering at home and the sequence of events threatening the prosperity of the fur trade, took ship for New York, where worse news awaited him, had he but known it. He was able to embark on the crowded packet *Utica* only because her master, formerly in his employ, yielded up the captain's cabin to him; but so rough were the seas encountered after leaving Havre that the distracted old man besought the Captain to land him at the nearest English port.

The *Utica's* skipper, perhaps maliciously, took pleasure in repeating in New York the debate which ensued—"I gife you t'ousandt dollars, Cabptain, to put me aboardt a pilot-boat." "I'll be glad to in the morning, Mr. Astor, if the storm continues. It may blow over in the night." But the storm increased so in the night that the ship was blown far west of Ireland, and Astor was more frightened than ever. "I gife you fife t'ousandt dollars, Cabptain. Nein? I gife you ten t'ousandt!" "But Mr. Astor, I should forfeit my insurance if I put back." "Can't I insure your shibp?" "I don't see how, sir. And there are the rights of the other passengers to be considered. I can't inconvenience them by breaking the voyage."

Later that day the gale abated, and the Captain went to Astor and offered to put back, if the other passengers consented to the stop. Astor seemed surprised, mumbled something indistinctly and finally indicated his assent.

“I must have a draft from you for the amount you promised, Mr. Astor,” returned the Captain, who had had experience with his former employer’s peculiarities. And presently, while the *Utica’s* skipper was discussing the proposition with the other passengers, who were inclined to yield to an old man’s terror, Astor came up and offered him a paper on which there was an illegible scrawl. “What is this, Mr. Astor?” asked the Captain. “A draft on my son.” “But nobody could read it, sir!” the seaman protested. “That’s not a signature. Here, let me write it out for you, and then you sign.” “Nein,” denied Astor. “Dot draft you take or none.”

The voyage was resumed.

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[1] Lawrence Parmly Brown, D. D. S., of Peekskill, N. Y., in “The Greatest Dental Family,” *Dental Cosmos* for March, April, and May, 1923, to whom I am indebted for this information.

III

On April 4, 1834, Philip Hone made this entry in his diary:

“Mr. John Jacob Astor arrived yesterday in the packet-ship *Utica* from Havre. The news of his wife’s death will be the first to meet him. He comes in time to witness the pulling down of the block of houses next to that on which I live—the whole front from Barclay to Vesey Streets, on Broadway—where he is going to erect a New York *palais royal*, which will cost him five or six hundred thousand dollars.”

Photo by International Newsreel Corp.

The Astor House. The Building on Broadway Between Vesey and Barclay Streets Was Started in 1834

Poor Sarah! Poor Jacob! They had agreed rather better than most married couples, disagreed less, too. And not once had there been an intrusion of jealousy or infidelity in their relations. If, by reason of her disposition and the social ideas of the day, she was content to live in retirement, while he brushed wits with the nabobs and pundits, still she had the satisfaction of knowing that her help had made him what he was. Without her, his career must have been different, possibly devoid of conspicuous success, for she was as good as a partner to him in the beginning of his independence. He owed her all that a man could owe to a woman, and it is to his credit that he gave evidence of missing her in the years of loneliness that stretched ahead of him.

He was stunned when William climbed aboard the *Utica*, pale and uneasy, and nervously twitched him aside from the group of passengers to administer the blow. Sarah dead! It didn't seem possible. Sarah, who had always been at hand when he needed her. Sarah, who had worked so loyally in the meagre years. Sarah, who had borne so gracefully, so unostentatiously, the fruits of wealth she had helped him acquire. It couldn't be! He, himself, was stout and strong—seventy-one, but able to keep up with men twenty years younger, as fond as ever of a good horse, a rousing song or a glass of beer. The tears trickled from his blue eyes that had lost none of their

youthful brightness, and the ship's officers and the passengers, who had been inclined to laugh at "the stingy old Dutchman" behind his back, were suddenly sorry for him, realizing poignantly that millions could buy no insurance against grief, whatever their power at Lloyds. But their sorrow couldn't help him, any more than William's grave condolences. The fact was that this was one affliction he must bear unaided, the first such experience since he'd married Sarah, and set up housekeeping under Mrs. Todd's roof.

Even the sting of Eliza's death had been modified by the expectation of Sarah's support, without which he was lost, although he stubbornly refused to bend his back or accept an arm to lean on. Grimly, determinedly, he plunged into the innumerable details of business awaiting him after his absence, seeking an anodyne for his heartache in the mental fatigue which followed grinding days spent in studying the reorganization of the American Fur Company, and the winding up of his interests in it; in conferring with bankers and merchants upon means to check the industrial depression the President had brought about—and in noting opportunities for personal profit in the current welter of bankruptcies and tight money; and finally, in supervising the construction of the big hotel he designed to be a monument to his name.

The indefatigable Mr. Hone duly chronicled the inception of the pile, which was to be a landmark of the growing city for the next three generations:

"May 1, 1834—Mr. Astor commenced this morning the demolition of the valuable buildings on the block fronting Broadway from Barclay to Vesey Streets, on which ground his great hotel is to be erected. The dust and rubbish will be almost intolerable; but the establishment will be a great public advantage, and the edifice an ornament to the city, *and for centuries to come will serve*, as it was probably intended, as a monument of its wealthy proprietor. I am sorry to observe since Mr. Astor's return from Europe that his health is declining. He appears sickly and feeble, and I have some doubt if he will live to witness the completion of his splendid edifice."

The italics are mine. Mr. Hone was wrong in his judgment of the building's permanence as he was in his estimation of its builder's health. "Sickly and feeble" Astor was, sore in soul and body. Why not? In a few months he had lost the wife who'd given him fifty years of happiness and a favorite daughter—a daughter for whose early death, perhaps, he somewhat blamed himself. And if Sarah's loss obliterated the pang of Eliza's, he couldn't avoid being reminded of his daughter's early romance whenever he passed the handsome new quarters of Eleazar Parmly at 11 Park Place or read in the newspapers the dentist's denunciations of the Crawcour brothers, who were recently arrived from London, and cutting into the business of the

local practitioners with their Royal Mineral Succedaneum, as they called amalgam. He had a right to be "sickly and feeble"; but there was steel in the old German's backbone. Not for many years yet would he be content to yield the life he enjoyed so tenaciously. Soon, as the summer heats warmed his vitality, his squat, heavy figure would appear on horseback again, bouncing along through the dust of the country roads beyond Greenwich Village, eyes alert for a "For Sale" sign on some likely patch of farmland.

The building of the new hotel helped more than anything else to divert his mind. He had projected it ever since his City Hotel, at the corner of Broadway above Trinity Church, the town's fashionable hostelry, famous for its political and militia dinners, had been destroyed by fire. But he was determined to build the new hotel in a certain spot: the blockfront on Broadway, between Vesey and Barclay Streets, occupied by the row of houses in which he had dwelt for thirty-four years, and to acquire the other plots in the row required considerable negotiating and bargaining, extending over a period of several years. An inkling to the difficulties he outfaced is given by our gossipy friend, "Walter Barrett," in "The Old Merchants of New York":

"His neighbors who occupied houses facing upon Broadway, where the Astor House now stands, were all prominent men. I think the numbers were 213 to 227. Mr. Astor . . . lived at 223—north of him, on that corner of Barclay, was 227. That house was owned and occupied by John G. Coster. It was the last property purchased by Mr. Astor to give him all the land required upon which to build his contemplated hotel. He had purchased all the other portions at very low prices. Not over $15,000 a lot and house of 25 by 100 feet. Mr. Coster would not sell at any price. There was no chance of his ever wanting money or of being forced to sell. Mr. Astor, while he was making the purchase of other property, had let no one into his secret intentions. Finally he went to Mr. Coster, and told him frankly: 'Coster, I am going to build a hotel. I want the ground upon which your house stands. It is of no particular use to you; you can go up Broadway, above Canal Street, and build a palace with the money I will pay you. Now I wish you to name two friends, and I will name one. The three shall fix the value of No. 227. When they have done so add $20,000 to it, and I will give you a check for the total amount, and you can give me the deed of that property.'

"The proposition, so fair, and so much more than Mr. Coster expected, was accepted at once. Mr. Coster immediately made his arrangements to build the house—palace it was—No. 517 Broadway. There he lived until he died. Then it was rented to the famous Chinese Museum, brought from Canton here. The house was finally called the Chinese building, and still stands, a portion of it let to model artists, or some similar amusement, that

would horrify the worthy old gentleman could he return from the spirit world.

"Between the house of Mr. Astor at 223 and of Coster, 227, lived at 225 the celebrated David Lydig. I do not know what price Mr. Astor paid him. He moved out of the house preparatory to its being torn down in 1830, to No. 34 Laight Street, and there he lived until he died in 1840. . . . In 219, old Michael Paff had his celebrated picture gallery. Who among old New Yorkers does not remember the famous 'Old Paff'?"

There's humor for you, emerging all unconsciously out of the musty past! Coster's palace at 517 Broadway, "the famous Chinese Museum," which New Yorkers of today have never heard of—unless they happen to be addicted to Valentine's Manual. And who among "old New Yorkers" *does* remember Michael Paff and his "celebrated picture gallery?" Gone! Gone, the lot of 'em. Wealth and ease and culture, great names, great distinction. Respected and envied for a moment, then the homes that sheltered them furnishing dubious shelter to "model artists" and their wares. And all that's left today is the shadow of their names. Costers on Park Avenue, to be sure; but not even a memory of "old Michael Paff" who was a gay and stately buck when Canal Street was "uptown."

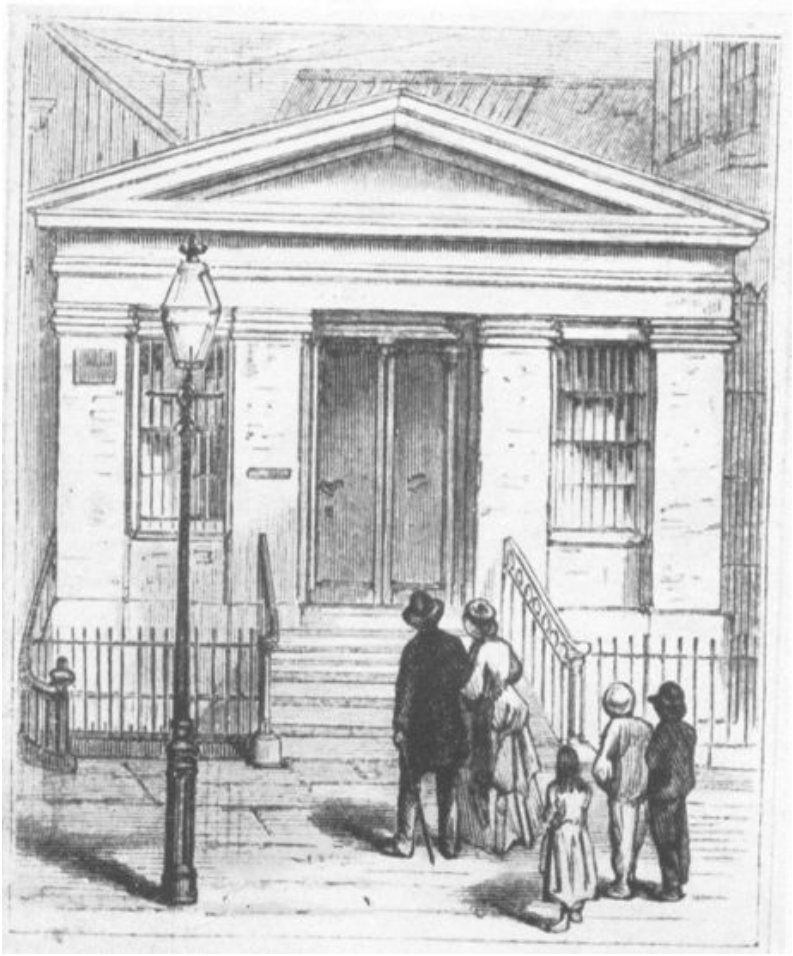
"Walter Barrett" was ignorant of another version of the deal with Coster, who, by the way, was one of the five wealthiest men in the city at this time. According to this story, Coster refused to sell on the ground that his wife didn't want to leave their house, with all its memories; but after Astor had argued with him a while, pointing out that he must have the lot to round out his plans, Coster finally said: "Well, Astor, you'd better stop around and talk to Mrs. Coster, yourself." Astor accepted, and reiterated his argument to her, adding that he was willing to let her and her husband fix their own price. She snapped up the offer with a promptness which must have amused him —"Very well, Mr. Astor, we are such old friends that I'm willing to part with the house for your sake." The price he paid was $60,000, from two to three times what the property was worth at a fair premium!

Once the blockfront had been acquired Astor's driving power sped the work. Demolition was finished in a month, and the corner-stone was laid, with formal ceremonies, on July 4. From then on the building rose rapidly, a solid, towering heap of bricks and masonry, constructed with the permanence of the Old World. It was, in truth, as Hone had written, a veritable *Palais Royal*, the most luxurious building of its kind on the continent, and inferior to no hostelry in Europe. It was opened as the Park Hotel, but the public commonly referred to it as "Mr. Astor's house" and "Astor's Hotel," so that presently the name was changed to that by which it became famous.

A few days after it had been completed, Astor stood with William across the way in City Hall Park—which then stretched downtown to the peak now occupied by the atrocious old Post Office Building—admiring this product of his commercial genius. “What do you think of it, William?” he asked. “It’s a splendid building, father,” answered the son. The old man let his eyes wander lovingly again over the massive grey façade, the innumerable flashing windows, the bristle of chimneypots above the roof. “Well, William, it’s yours,” he said mildly. It was conveyed from father to son for “one Spanish milled dollar, and love and affection.”

IV

William Astor lived at this time in a house on the “unfashionable side of Broadway below Canal Street,” and after the demolition of 223 Broadway, Jacob followed his son uptown. The new house the fur merchant built was on the fashionable east side of Broadway, however, between Prince and Spring Streets, and behind it, on Prince Street, he erected likewise a one-story office building of masonry, with barred windows, which became the headquarters of all the Astor interests. Through the uncurtained windows passersby might see “the richest man in America” bending over his desk, as absorbed in the papers occupying his attention as a young clerk.



BUSINESS OFFICE OF THE LATE WILLIAM B. ASTOR, NO. 85 PRINCE STREET, BETWEEN BROADWAY AND MERCER STREET.
THE HEADQUARTERS OF ALL THE ASTOR INTERESTS IN THE TIME OF JOHN JACOB ASTOR

William, of course, was relieving him of details; but the final word on any matter of importance must come from the father, whose devotion to the minutiae of business required him to master the intricacies of every proposition even after William had reviewed it and expressed general satisfaction. William, I might add, had become a rich man on his own account, probably second only to his father. Old butcher Heinrich had died in 1831,[1] and left his nephew half a million made out of the profits of that butcher-stall in the Fly Market; and William had profited, too, by every opening his father had given him. Fur and tea, plus Heinrich's savings and

as keen an eye for real estate as Jacob's, had netted William $5,000,000 long prior to Jacob's departure from the scene—some compensation for inability to woo the Muses.

Father and son were all-powerful in the world of finance. Their withdrawal from active participation in the fur trade and overseas commerce left them with relatively unlimited resources available for the opportunities for liquid capital which were frequent during the concluding years of Jackson's Administration. While there are no definite figures to go upon, it seems likely from internal evidence that the Astor wealth was doubled in the period between Jacob's return from Europe and his death in 1848. Stephen Girard, of Philadelphia, had died in 1831, leaving $10,000,000—all of it to the undenominational college which bears his name, the greatest philanthropy the country was to know for many years—and certainly, Astor's fortune was regarded as no greater than Girard's, if, indeed, it approximated the Swiss emigrant's. But before long the Astor millions had outrun Girard's, an achievement for which there were two separate, yet interlinking, causes: the immense growth of New York, brought on by the traffic pouring in from the West over the Erie Canal and the railroads which began to be built; and the merciless efficiency with which the Astors exploited the misfortunes of others.

New York City grew from a population of 123,700 in 1820—less than 150,000 in 1825, the year Governor Clinton wedded the Lakes to the Atlantic—to 515,300 in 1850. Property values rose from $83,070,000 in 1824 to $286,080,000 in 1850. In the '30's the growth came more or less naturally from spontaneous national causes; but ten years later a great wave of European emigration set in, impelled by living conditions infinitely worse than the miseries urging American families to leave the Eastern states for the West beyond the Indian frontier. Sixty thousand immigrants landed in New York in 1843, 129,000 in 1847, and under the impetus of the dreadful Irish famine the stupendous total of 300,000 came in 1848. All too many of these people, mostly Irish and Germans, lacked the means to travel farther, and added their feckless thousands to the population of the hideous slums which centered around the Five Points, slums which rapidly surpassed in depravity the stews of London and Paris. The story is told in the population figures. The city required twenty years to grow from the 127,000 of 1820 to 317,000 in 1840; but in the single decade between 1840 and 1850 it increased by 198,000 to a total of 515,000.

Inevitably, and despite prevailing hard times, owners of real estate reaped the profit of such a growth; and no family in the city could have matched the money the Astors were taking in. Jacob and William profited, not alone by their rentals, but by the purchases they were able to make at

bargain prices, first, in an era of national depression, and later, when over-extension and the influx of cheap alien labor made difficulties for property-owners who were either unwise or deficient in capital. Their profits during the Panic of 1837, the worst the country's loose-hung credit machinery had known, were indicated in an article, "Reminiscences of John Jacob Astor," published in the *New York Herald* of March 31, 1848, after Jacob's death:

"He added immensely to his riches by purchases of State stocks, bonds, and mortgages in the financial crisis of 1836-37. He was a willing purchaser of mortgages from needy holders at less than their face; and when they became due, he foreclosed on them, and purchased the mortgaged property at the ruinous prices which ranged at that time."

I should hesitate to estimate his profits during the Panic. They probably ran into the millions, for the complete collapse of the banking system put practically anyone at his mercy. Eight hundred banks suspended, refusing to pay a dollar of Government deposits of $30,000,000 and public deposits of $120,000,000. The New York banks, holding $5,500,000 of Government money, filled their buildings with armed guards to stand off the frantic depositors and the Government's own officers. Of the consequences a Committee of the New York State Senate reported: "Thousands of manufacturing, mercantile, and other useful establishments in the United States have been paralyzed or broken down by the existing crises. . . . In all our great cities numerous individuals, who, by a long course of regular business, have acquired a competence, have suddenly been reduced, with their families, to beggary." In the next year one-third of the manual laborers in the city were unemployed, and 10,000 were in utter poverty throughout the winter of 1837-38. The effect of such conditions on the people was illustrated in the report on the penitentiary systems of four states—New York, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania, with one-third of the country's population—by De Toqueville and De Beaumont, which showed that, on the average, 91 per cent of all crimes were against property. In New York the figure was 93.5 per cent. And if the figures of another student are to be credited, the city about this time and for years afterward had one pauper to every 125 inhabitants, and one in every 83 persons was supported at the public expense. Yet on February 17, 1838, *The New Yorker* complained that rents were higher than in any other great city in the world.

Philip Hone, a man of substantial means, conservatively invested, was one of hundreds of the same sort, who suffered a shrinkage of their fortunes, which, falling short of ruin, left them crippled, embarrassed and disturbed for the rest of their lives. Few, very few, even of the men of wealth, were in the position of Astor, who demonstrated his resources by lending Gerrit Smith, son of his early partner in the fur trade up-state, $250,000, without

waiting for the delivery of security, a piece of generosity unparalleled in his career.

But the anxieties of these years exacted a price of their own for the millions they gave him. He was never the same man again after he emerged from the nightmare of the Panic. His weight fell off, and the skin that had been ruddy and healthy sagged in pouches and wrinkles upon his devastated face. No longer might he ride up Broadway afternoons to survey the spreading acres of his domain. He was seventy-five, and felt it; yet he declined to give up the fight. Life was still worth clinging to, and he contrived to wring pleasures from it as pertinaciously as he wrung profits from his tenants.

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[1] Heinrich was as much of a character as his brother. Denied children of their own, he and his wife adopted several poor young girls, educated them, provided them jointures and saw that they secured good marriages. One, Eliza Astor, who must have been named for the unfortunate flame of Eleazar Parmly, married Constant, a rich oil merchant.

V

As his physical vigor decreased, Astor turned more often to purely intellectual diversions. Always he had possessed a genuine fondness for men of learning, and in these latter years he delighted to gather around him a group of familiars who included Henry Clay, Fitzgreene Halleck, the poet; Washington Irving, Joseph Green Cogswell, editor of *The New York Review*; James C. King, Henry Brevoort, Samuel Ward—father of Julia Ward Howe, one of whose brothers married Emily Astor, a daughter of William; Daniel Webster, Samuel B. Ruggles, Daniel Lord, and Peter Cooper, who, as a little boy, had plucked the rabbitskins Astor sold his father, the hatter. In his house on upper Broadway or on his thirteen-acre farm overlooking Hell Gate—about where Eighty-eighth Street and Second Avenue meet today—he offered a bountiful hospitality to all whose wits could furbish up his own. He was a good raconteur and enjoyed as much to hear others talk as to dip down into his store of reminiscences and entertain a genial company clustered around the mahogany to crack nuts and sip prime port.

It speaks well for his personality that men who were regarded as leaders of American life, political and literary, were eager to be with him. Irving was particularly fond of him, establishing a basis of intimacy through the

writing of "Astoria." This came about in the fall of 1834, when the old fur merchant was casting about for mental occupations to take his mind off Sarah's death, and approached the author of "The Sketch Book" with the offer to place at his disposition all the letters, diaries, journals, reports, etc., dealing with the venture. Irving accepted the proposition, delegating to his nephew, Pierre Irving, the preliminary task of sorting and arranging the papers. A clue to Astor's state of mind is conveyed in Irving's letter to his nephew broaching the project: "Mr. Astor is a strong-minded man, and one from whose conversation much curious information can be devised. He feels the want of occupation and amusement, and thinks he may find something of both in the progress of the work."

The result was that Pierre Irving spent the winter of 1834-35 as a member of Astor's household in the new home on Broadway. In the summer of 1835, Washington Irving went to visit Astor at Hell Gate, and commenced the actual writing of the book, which occupied him nearly a year. Of this visit the author reported:

"I have not had so quiet and delightful a rest since I have been in America. Mr. Astor has a spacious, well-built house, with a lawn in front of it, and a garden in the rear. The lawn sweeps to the water's edge, and full in front of the house is the little strait of Hell Gate, which forms a constantly moving picture. Here the old gentleman keeps a kind of bachelor hall. Halleck, the poet, lives with him, but goes to town every morning. The only other member of the family is Charles Astor Bristed, one of his grandchildren, a very fine boy of fourteen years of age."

Later, Halleck was supplanted by Cogswell, who, in the pungent phrase of Philip Hone, became "train-bearer and prime minister." No man, except Jacob's son, exerted more impersonal influence over him than Cogswell did. The editor was a personality; it was at his suggestion that Astor determined to found a public library to provide poor young men, such as he had been, with the books poverty had denied him. The idea had been more or less vaguely in discussion for a long time, but it came to a head in the spring of 1842, when Washington Irving, recently appointed Minister to Spain, offered Cogswell the post of secretary of legation. What followed Hone entered in his diary:

"But Mr. Cogswell . . . does not go. Mr. Astor, who enjoys his society, has bribed him to remain. He is willing to pay as much for the velvet cushions on which it is his pleasure to rest his head as the secretaryship would have produced, and it comes in the shape of a permanent salary to Mr. Cogswell as librarian of a great public library which Mr. Astor has signified his intention to establish and endow in this city, which he proposes now to anticipate. Cogswell wisely determines to receive his equivalent and stay at

home, write articles for *The New York Review* and accompany his patron in his daily drives from Broadway to Hell Gate. Maecenas keeps Horace with him, and Horace knows when he has a good thing."[1]

The salary Hone mentions was $1,500 a year, together with a "convenient office in town," and was supplemented with the sum of $60,000, which Cogswell was authorized to expend for "curious, rare, and beautiful books," an authorization presently extended to include the purchase of any suitable books. Astor also added a codicil to his will, bequeathing $350,000 for the building and maintenance of the library, and some time afterward increased the amount by $50,000. In his declining years Cogswell was with him constantly, and a favorite diversion of the old man was the planning of the library building—architects were consulted, builders' estimates were obtained, plans were drawn; but the red-brick edifice which still stands on Lafayette Street wasn't completed until six years after its founder had died.

It was, for some years, a pleasant old age which Jacob passed. If the sensational press assailed him for a miser and an oppressor of the poor, he had the respect and friendship of better-class citizens, while a large and attractive family of grandchildren and great-grandchildren amused his idle hours. His social position was as high as anyone's, had been so at least since William married beautiful Margaret Armstrong, and he took a naive satisfaction in the attentions he received at the hands of well-known families. Society in New York was still permeated with the aristocratic tradition of the eighteenth century; gentility was the vogue; the leading merchants and lawyers were men of taste and culture; dinners were formal; gatherings were distinguished by a courtliness reminiscent of the days of the minuet; the Code Duelo hadn't yet been relegated to the South. And a gracious simplicity characterized the functions at which men and women met, always in their own homes—the first fancy dress ball, to which all the Astor tribe were invited, was given in 1830 by Madame Charles Brugiere, whose husband was an émigré from Haiti, in her house at 30 Broadway, and was the talk of the town for years to come.

The general background pleased Jacob; his ingrained German feeling for the niceties of social intercourse was conciliated by it. Without being at all pompous or self-important, he enjoyed the power which had come to him, socially as well as financially. He liked to go calling on New Year's Day in his yellow coach, liked the little crowds that gathered on the icy sidewalks to watch him come in and out, liked the murmur of comment, liked the deference with which he was received in the firelit parlors where the punchbowl promptly was abandoned by young people anxious to do him

honor. In his horny, old heart there was a strange and vibrant streak of boyishness. He preferred the company of young people when he might have it, was never happy to be long without them. And he was never averse to music. Julia Ward Howe, in her "Reminiscences," tells how he would engage a professional pianist of an evening, and then lure a bevy of his grandchildren and their friends to join with him in singing the music of the day. Julia Ward, as she was then, and her sister-in-law, lovely Emily Astor, he called "his singing birds," and stout and infirm though he was, he'd stand with them by the piano and chant lustily in chorus. He could jest and pun with the young people, too; he was never sedate or severe when they were with him. Mrs. Howe remembered an occasion when she and her sister-in-law were singing "Am Rhein," and as they came to the line "Am Rhein, am Rhein, da wachsen unsere Reben," he sang it "da wachset susses Leben."

But his acquisitiveness, his craving to continue heaping wealth on top of that which had bent his broad shoulders and was bending William's lower, never left him. The jolly, old gentleman, who tweaked a pretty girl's ear, tootled gayly on his flute or sang an excellent, if slightly quavering, baritone, would next day be intent upon some new device to increase rents or buy bonds cheap. His eye was invariably on the point of economy. To Cogswell, dining with him at a hotel, he growled: "This man will never succeed." "Why not, Mr. Astor?" "Don't you see what large lumps of sugar he puts in the bowl?" Another time, walking down to a dock with his librarian-companion to board a pilot-boat he had chartered for a sail in the harbor, Cogswell, for devilment, figured aloud that every minute he kept the boat cost him twenty-five cents—and he broke into a worried trot. He had some glimmerings of understanding of his own character, for he said to a clergyman, who congratulated him upon the increased ability to do good which great wealth brought: "Ah, sir, but the disposition to do good does not always increase with the means."

A man, in many ways, to be sorry for; his worst misfortune that he lived too long. At eighty he commenced to crumble, the body that had withstood innumerable hardships succumbing to the dissolution of age. But his mind remained undimmed, and the indomitable will, which had driven him from a butcher's hut in Wald-Dorf to mercantile supremacy in the New World, refused to quit the struggle for existence. That was the real tragedy of it. Broken, shattered, physically a shell of tortured flesh and bones, he *wouldn't* die. Hadn't he always fought for something? Food, shelter, furs, tea, real estate, wealth, power? And now, having won a sufficiency of all these, the one thing left important enough to fight for was the bare thread of mortality that lingered in his worn-out hulk. If ever a man paid for his sins, John Jacob

Astor did in the sufferings, the humiliations, the frustrations, of the last five years he lived.

On October 8, 1844, Philip Hone went to dine with Robert M. Blatchford, a prominent Whig lawyer and a neighbor of Astor's at Hell Gate. Next day he wrote in his diary a pitiful account of the condition of "the richest man in America":

"October 9, 1844—I went yesterday to dine at Mr. Blatchford's at Hell Gate. The party at dinner consisted of old Mr. J. J. Astor and his train-bearer and prime minister, Mr. Cogswell; Mr. Jaudon,[2] Ole Bull, the celebrated Norwegian violinist (we used to call it fiddler); and myself. In the evening the party were increased by the addition of Mr. Webster, his brother-in-law, Mr. Page, and Mr. and Mrs. Curtis. . . . Mr. Astor . . . presented a painful example of the insufficiency of wealth to prolong the life of man. This old gentleman, with his fifteen millions of dollars, would give it all to have my strength and physical ability; and yet, with all this example . . . I, with a good conscience and in possession of my bodily faculties, sometimes repine at my lot. He would pay all my debts if I could insure him one year of my health and strength,[3] but nothing else would extort so much from him. His life has been spent in amassing money, and he loves it as much as ever. He sat at the dinner table with his head down upon his breast, saying very little, and in a voice almost unintelligible, the saliva dropping from his mouth, and a servant behind him to guide the victuals which he was eating, and to watch him as an infant is watched. His mind is good, his observation acute, and he seems to know everything that is going on. But the machinery is all broken up, and there are some people, no doubt, who think he has lived long enough."

Besides a partial paralysis or palsy, he had insomnia, and many nights Cogswell and his coachman, William, who was a favorite servant, would sit up with him. He usually preferred to talk on these occasions, and a frequent topic, as was natural, was immortality, of which he seemed doubtful. One night, after Cogswell had learnedly expounded the arguments in favor of a future life, the old man turned upon the coachman. "William," he demanded sternly, "where do you expect to go when you die?" "Why, sir," answered William, "I always expected to go where the other people went." It was a highly satisfactory answer to Astor.

Toward the end he was unable to take exercise, and his physician directed that Cogswell and William should toss his decrepit frame in a blanket so many minutes a day. An extraordinary prescription, which Parton in his "Life"—a work I am disposed to eye askance—utilizes in an equally

extraordinary anecdote, reciting an argument between the millionaire and a rent-collector:

"The old man cried out from the middle of his blanket:

'Has Mrs. Blank paid that rent yet?'

'No,' replied the agent.

'Well, but she must pay it,' said the poor old man.

'Mr. Astor,' rejoined the agent, 'she can't pay it now she has had misfortunes, and we must give her time.'

'No, no,' said Astor; 'I tell you she can pay it, and she will pay it. You don't go the right way to work with her.'

The agent took leave, and mentioned the anxiety of the old man with regard to this unpaid rent to his son, who counted out the requisite sum, and told the agent to give it to the old man, as if he had received it from the tenant.

'There,' exclaimed Mr. Astor, when he received the money. 'I told you that she would pay it if you went the right way to work with her.' "

The mind that had conceived the first trust, that could see New York stretching north to the Harlem, retained a grip upon reality, despite a childish preoccupation with the acquisitiveness which had controlled his character; but his stomach failed entirely, and the last few weeks of his existence—it scarcely deserves to be thought of as life—he was unable to retain any food except breastmilk. And it furnishes a key to his character that under such conditions he should have battled on, clinging to the breath that animated him as he had to the millions which soon must go to his son. It must have been a relief to others, if not to himself, when he finally owned defeat, not because he was willing to, but because he couldn't help it.

That day Philip Hone sat down to his desk, fashioned a new quill and carefully traced what might well have served the dead man for an epitaph:

"March 29, 1848—John Jacob Astor died this morning, at nine o'clock, in the eighty-fifth year of his age; sensible to the last, but the material of life exhausted, the machinery worn out, the lamp extinguished for want of oil. Bowed down with bodily infirmity for a long time, he has gone at last, and left reluctantly his unbounded wealth. His property is estimated at $20,000,000, some judicious persons say $30,000,000; but, at any rate, he was the richest man in the United States in productive and valuable property; and this immense, gigantic fortune was the fruit of his own labor, unerring sagacity and far-seeing penetration. He came to this country at twenty years of age; penniless, friendless, without inheritance, without education, and having no example before him of the art of money-making, but with a determination to be rich, and ability to carry it into effect."

The comfortable members of the community honestly mourned him; in the Five Points and the bestial slums along the waterfronts human beings who lived more sordidly than the horses in his stable snarled exultantly—the devil had got the old hunks. Those of them who were aware that he had landed in America as penniless as any starving Irisher from barren Donegal were disposed to condemn him the more for having turned his back upon his own class. A turn-coat, ould Astor. There was flaming talk in the Bowery bars; men said there were no less than twenty-five other millionaires in the city, nine more o' the bloody scuts in Philadelphy. What was the counthry comin' to? Well, there'd be a revolution, and to hell wid the aristocrats. Hang 'em to their doorsteps.

The elder Bennett spoke moderately for this element when he wrote in *The Herald* April 5:

"We give in our columns an authentic copy of one of the greatest curiosities of the age—the will of John Jacob Astor, disposing of property amounting to about twenty million dollars, among his various descendants of the first, second, third, and fourth degrees. . . . If we had been an associate of John Jacob Astor . . . the first idea that we should have put into his head would have been that one-half of his immense property—ten millions, at least—belongs to the people of the city of New York. During the last fifty years of the life of John Jacob Astor, his property had been augmented and increased in value by the aggregate intelligence, industry, enterprise, and commerce of New York, fully to the amount of one-half its value. The farms and lots of ground which he bought forty, twenty, and ten and five years ago, have all increased in value entirely by the industry of the citizens of New York. Of course, it is plain as that two and two make four that the half of his immense estate, in its actual value, has accrued to him by the industry of the community."

That would never be considered radical doctrine today, and in light of the modern rich American's conception of his social obligations Astor's bequests were undeniably slim—besides the $460,000 for the Library, they included $50,000 to found a poorhouse in Wald-Dorf; $30,000 to the German Society of New York to be used in helping immigrants; $30,000 to the Home for Aged Ladies, and minor gifts to the Blind Asylum, Half-orphan Asylum, and German Reformed Church—but they did constitute recognition of a measure of responsibility to the community. Very few public behests up to that time had exceeded them in amount, although the striking exception of Girard—who, it must be remembered, was childless and left no immediate family—was cited by Horace Mann in a bitter denunciation of Astor contained in the publicist's "Thoughts for a Young

Man." Mann drew a hot and intemperate reply from Astor's grandson, that young Bristed, Irving had met and liked on his visit to Hell Gate.

"Girard," Bristed argued, "left the greater part of his fortune to establish a college for orphans, into which no minister of any religious denomination was ever to set foot . . . which always struck me as a very ingenious diabolical contrivance for the increase of knowledge without virtue." Mann had asserted that Astor left but one-sixteenth of his fortune for public purposes, and upon this Bristed commented that his grandfather really had left, according to the executors, "a little less than $8,000,000." The youngster meant well, and he should have known what he was talking about; but the available facts were all against him. It has always been typical of the Astor strain to resent criticism and to regard their interests as aloof from those of the public. Long years after John Jacob and William and young Bristed were dead, William Waldorf Astor, who deserted his country and bought a British peerage, tried to excuse himself in print by quoting his father as saying of the hostile comments upon the founder of their fortune:

"It is enough to make one wish to abandon such a country."

But hostile criticism, no more than stones and bullets, would have persuaded old John Jacob Astor to "abandon such a country." He didn't concern himself over-much with what other people thought of him. An arrant individualist, selfish, narrow-minded, quite blandly antisocial, he went after whatever he sought and took it by fair means or foul—and whoever didn't like it was welcome to a battle. There was something bafflingly attractive about him. He was surely the essence of humanity, contradictory in disposition, a whimsical blend of faults and virtues, capable at the same time of the loftiest affection and the pettiest meanness. In his features you might trace meditation, courage, and masterful resolve—and coldness, indifference, and acquisitiveness. But never brutality, intolerance, or stupidity. In the final analysis, he was simply the product of a period and an environment. On the life of America he had an influence almost incalculable, vastly greater, probably, than most of the ranting politicians whose absurdities are still quoted in party platforms—he was the first man to say: "The first hundred thousand—that was hard to get, but afterwards it was easy to make more." And add this for him: At his most detestable, he was no hypocrite, but rather his own worst enemy, prey to a moral blindness which was instinctive rather than reasoned. How he would have hated himself had he been able to view some of his acts objectively, as we can, through the perspective of time!

[1] This entry does not appear in the published version of the Hone Diary, the manuscript of which is in the possession of the New York Historical Society.

[2] Samuel Jaudon, who was cashier of the Bank of the United States.

[3] The material from this point on is not included in the published version of the Diary.

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Transcriber's Notes

Hyphenation and some spelling have been changed silently to achieve consistency. However, dialect speech has been left as in the original.

[The end of *John Jacob Astor--Landlord of New York* by Arthur Douglas Howden Smith]