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Nellie Bly and Young Astor

The Youthful Millionaire Chats Cheerfully About His Personal Fads and Fancies.

No Business Theories

And His Head Not Bothered by the Management of the Vast Financial Interests of the Astor Estate

A Mechanical Turn of Mind

He Believes in Woman Suffrage, Canadian Annexation and Asphalt Pavements for This City.

Mr. Astor's Astronomical Researches

The Young Millionaire's Time Devoted to Outdoor Sports, Electrical Experiments and Travel

"Mr. Astor said to show you up to his study, miss," said the man at the door when I handed him my card.

He led the way up the softly carpeted stairs, and, pushing a door open at the front of the hall, waited for me to enter. I did so promptly, and found myself in the presence of a tall young man in his shirt-sleeves, who was evidently taken as much by surprise as I was. For an instant we looked at each other, both in confusion, and then we both smiled. Then he put on his coat and we both began making excuses.

"I just came in," he said," "and was going to change my coat. Won't you have a drink?" he asked, going to the mantel and taking down a bottle and a small glass.

"This won't hurt you," he explained. "It is unfermented grape juice and I use it all the time."

There was only one glass, and I offered it to him, but he insisted upon my taking it.

"I'll drink out of my tooth-mug," he said, and much to my amusement he did so.

"I'll drink to the success of your book," I observed. He thanked me and looked pleased.

That was my first meeting with John Jacob Astor, the young millionaire.

"I suppose you have an idea of what I want?" I remarked, thinking that the easiest way of approaching the subject.

"You want to know something about my book?" he guessed promptly.

"No," I replied, "not exactly. I want to know a great many things about you. I want to write an interview with you."

Mr. Astor sat down thoughtfully and tilted his chair back as he gazed at me. "I don't know," he hesitated. "I have never given an interview yet. I think it looks rather conceited, don't you?"

Mr. Astor's Study

"No, I don't think it looks conceited," I replied, "Man of great wealth are somehow considered public property, so far as the way of writing and talking about them goes."

We were in his study, the room in which he wrote his book, "A Journey in other Worlds." It is a plain and modest room, such as even a poorly paid clerk might possess, not such a room as one would expect to belong to a young man whose income amounts to nobody knows how many dollars an hour.

The room is square, with three windows, two facing Fifth Avenue and one facing Forty-third Street. The walls are covered with a dark red cloth and heavy red portieres hang over the simple mull curtains at the windows. Over the floor is spread a rich rug, blue and red in color.

This room is half study, half bedroom. Between the Fifth Avenue windows stands an oak roll-top desk, such as one sees in any business office. In the corner, by the inside wall, is a modest little single iron bedstead with plain white pillows and spread. In the middle of the room is a round table covered with books and papers, and against the other wall is a good-sized flat-topped bookcase, with blue silk curtains drawn closely to either end.

The shelves are crowded with books that plainly show constant use. I might more properly say the room is bedroom, study and gymnasium combined, for at either end of the bookcase are exercising apparatuses, such as chest weights, swinging rings, &c.

And the man! Well he is unlike everything one would imagine.

His Personality

He is tall and slender, but withal has a look of health and strength. I should say he is 6 feet in height at least. He has very large, full eyes, bluish-gray in color, high nose such as have all successful men, good teeth, a straw-colored mustache and light brown hair that is met at the ears by just a suspicion of side whiskers. Mr. Astor is modest in dress. His clothes are dark, and there is not a suspicion of jewelry, except a rather curious ring that he wears on his left hand.

His manners are perfection so far as I can judge from my experience with him. And not only that, but he possesses that indefinable something that must make people like him. He is the kind of a man that one feels one can get on with under any circumstances.

"What do you intend to ask me?" he said, with a little apprehensive smile, "Couldn't you write the questions out on paper and let me answer them, then say what you please about me?"

"That would be stupid," I replied. "If my interview lacked your personality it would not be worth writing."

He resigned himself to my mercy, but he did it so gracefully that I was charmed. And, I will add here, Mr. Astor read my interview in manuscript the day before he sailed for Paris, and gave it his approval.

"I suppose I will ask you some questions that sound foolish, but I want to know about you, all the things we don't know," I said hurriedly. "Suppose you had been poor," I continued, "What do you think you would have done for a living?"

"I think I should have been a locomotive engineer," he answered promptly, putting his feet back on either side of the chair and catching them on the rungs. "I always had a mechanical taste. I often run my own boats. When in Canada not long ago I ran a train from Ottawa to Montreal, about one hundred and fifty miles, making all the stops and water-tanks. There was an engineer on board, of course."

"Weren't you tired from the unusual exertion?" I inquired.

"Not a bit," he answered, decidedly. "I enjoyed it."

"Supposing," I began again, "you had been born poor, do you think you would have had any ambition to become rich?"

"Decidedly. I think everybody would." He answered as if it were impossible to believe that people would be content with being poor.

"What do you think of charity-that is, charities?" I asked the young millionaire.

"I believe in prevention rather than cure. I think if more aid were given for prevention there would gradually become less use for cure. That is, begin with children. Do all that is possible for them. There is more to be accomplished there, I believe, than in working for incurables, for instance."

I am inclined to think if Mr. John Jacob Astor has a hobby—that is, one besides electricity – it is this "prevention" idea. I know from outside sources that he gives largely to all fresh-air funds for children and to other charities that tend to the betterment of poor children. Last summer he bought a plot of ground at Bath Beach and built on it a $5000 cottage for the benefit of poor children who could not otherwise get away from the city.

"What do you think is the best way of benefiting the poor?"I asked.

"I think," he replied, thoughtfully, "by increasing nature's production of the necessaries of life and comforts."

"As I say in my book," he continued, "and you can quote it if you wish, 'I think after a while machinery will do all hard work. Then life will be better for everybody.' "

"But it machinery is introduced for everything, where will all the people find work?" I argued anxiously.

"The supply will increase the demand," he answered. "The labor-saving appliances came all at once. They might produce hardships, but as they are introduced gradually, I don't believe they will work any change except for the better. When sewing-machines came in a great cry was raised that all sewing women would be cut out of employment, but the demand has increased and women have more sewing than before."

A Woman Suffragist

"Why don't you ask me, what I think of woman suffrage?" he asked rather teasingly.

"I don't know," I laughed. "Probably because I don't think much of it myself." And I was much surprised when he continued:

"I believe in suffrage for women. I believe they are as intelligent as men and should have all the rights accorded to men. So far in every position women have filled they have proved their capabilities and worth. The time has passed to consider woman man's property just as his horse is. She needs and deserves equal rights. I say take suffrage away from non-readers and give it to

women who can read. Let women have the right to any position. Their influence always betters their surroundings."

"What is your politics?" I asked curiously.

"Well, I don't mind saying that I was a Republican, became a Mugwump and shall next autumn vote the Republican ticket," was his reply. Then he added thoughtfully, "I think independent voters are needed."

He would say no more on the subject of politics except that the Democrats had a great chance and lost it. Mr. Astor belongs to the City Club and regularly attends the meetings there.

"Yes, but very much restricted; perhaps to those that understand our institutions and language."

"You hardly believe in free trade?" I queried.

"I don't think it advisable just yet," was the careful reply. "There is no doubt that the tariff raises wages. Free trade would also postpone the consolidation of Canada and the United States. When I was in Canada I heard several speeches on annexation. Sir Richard Cartwright is outspoken for it. The Liberals have one plank for annexation and I fear our tariff complication will greatly retard its consummation."

"You believe in annexation, then?" I asked.

"Our ancestors did, and I think they were right," was the firm reply. "I believe unequivocally in the consolidation of all North America and the neighboring islands."

He rose, and going across the room, came back with a geography.

"Look at that beautiful continent," he said, enthusiastically, showing me a map of North America. "It should all be one country. And, by the way, I think by all means we must have and control the Nicaragua Canal."

The more he spoke the more my wonder grew. I watched him in amazement. He is only twenty-nine, with millions of dollars at his command. And he takes time to think seriously on such questions.

"As you have decided opinions" I observed, "tell me would consider it your duty to serve on a jury."

"I have served," he replied, smiling. "Not that it was a pleasant or entertaining task, but because I thought it was my duty as a citizen."

"And if the United States were ever engaged in war would you serve as a soldier?"I questioned further this very original young millionaire.

"Certainly," emphatically, "I think almost anybody would."

"What do you think of our city government?"

"I wish someone in the departments would show more taste in laying out our streets. Of course, the old streets cannot be changed easily, but the new ones should be looked after. There should be more wide streets and some attention paid to beautifying them. I believe in giving the city's decoration into some artist's control, just as Napoleon the Third put Paris in charge of Baron Haussmann.

"And I believe," he continued emphatically, "there should be a law made at once that flat rails, flat-grooved, should be used entirely for street cars. In laying tracks no other rails should be used, and in repairing old tracks they should be compelled to put in the flat rail. The rails they use now are needlessly obstructive."

"I do not know what you mean by flat rails," I confessed.

Mr. Astor took a pencil and on a bit of paper drew a simple design.

"The one rail, such as is used now," he explained, "is convex. The rail they should use, and which is used in Paris, is concave. If you look at the rails at Forty-second Street, where they cross Fifth Avenue, you will see the kind I mean."

Having once started on the subject of city improvements, Mr. Astor did not need to be questioned. He has given the subject a great deal of thought, and when woman suffrage comes around, and in its train the many other good things we are to have, I shall propose that John Jacob Astor shall be New York's Baron Haussmann, and have no doubts as to the wisdom of my choice.

"There has been some talk against asphalt pavements, but I think every street should be asphalt. The wear and tear that it saves on wagons and carriages is simply enormous, to say nothing of the comfort," he added.

"But some people claim that asphalt paving is very hard on horses," I suggested.

His Horses Shod with Rubber

"Not if rubber pads are used in the hoofs. I use them on my horses."

"That may be too much of an expense for poor men."

"Oh, no: the pads are very cheap. Their cost is nothing compared to the wear of wagons on our rough streets."

Mr. Astor seemed amused when I asked if he thought there would ever be a division of wealth.

"No," he said, laughing, "because it would have to be redistributed every few days and idleness would be at a premium."

"How do you think a millionaire should leave his money?"

"As he sees fit," was the decided and emphatic reply.

"There was one thing that I was anxious to find out. I know all sorts and conditions of people, and I confess the majority of them have spells of despondency during which life is a bleak and dreary desert. It all arises, so far as I can ascertain, from thwarted ambitions—all leading towards one goal—money! Now, I was curious to know if a man who had never known the want of money, who could gratify every earthly desire, was ever blue.

"Will you tell me," I began rather timidly, "did you ever get blue and despondent?"

"I have," he replied, much to my surprise. "I imagine everybody does. I am naturally, however, rather sanguine and greatly enjoy life, especially out of doors."

When I made bold to ask what had been the cause of his blueness, he said he thought it was the weather, that bad weather often had a depressing effect upon him.

"Have you ever thought life wasn't worth the living?"

"No," he answered emphatically, and he looked at me gravely, as if he wondered how anyone could think that.

"I suppose you enjoy the theatres?"

"Yes, moderately,"

"What do you like best?"

"I like Italian opera and all really good plays, I was thinking of going to see 'Utopia, Limited.' Have you seen it?"

"Yes, and it's dreadful. Don't go if you don't want to be bored. Go to see 'Cinderella' instead. It is very pleasing-to the eye, at least."

"Good ballet?" he said, his eyes twinkling.

"I think you will be a little disappointed in the girls," was my cautious reply.

Not Much of a Reader

"I suppose I should know something about your reading." I observed. "Do you read many novels?"

"Not a great many. In fact, I haven't as much time to read as I should like to have. I spend a great deal of time on my boats, and I am busy all the while at something."

Mr. Astor is not superstitious. Nor has the young millionaire one lazy bone in his body. Every day when he is in town he goes to the Astor office in Twenty-sixth Street. He is up early every morning and he rides and drives every day. Naturally he is fond of horses and dogs. He is very fond of outdoor life and spends a great deal of time on his yachts. His hobby is electricity, and his electric cruising launch is said to be a gem. Mr. Astor is an inventor, too in a modest way, having improved upon a great many patented appliances for his yachts.

Being an advanced thinker, Mr. Astor dreads the criticism his remarks would occasion, so I may not publish, as I desire, his ideas on many pertinent subjects. What he thinks of the income tax and the single tax he would not say, but he did say that he thought baby incubators are wrong.

Many of the cares which afflict rich people are kept from Mr. Astor by four men, who have been in the Astor employ for forty years. All the crank letters addressed to Mr. Astor are intercepted by these men and destroyed, and unknown visitors are decidedly but politely sent away.

Even in business these trusted men take much control. When the land was bought on Madison Avenue (the plot the stable was to be erected upon, and which raised such a turmoil) Mr. Astor was in Florida, and knew nothing about it. As the property was his mother's the stable also, he knew nothing about it until the trouble began.

As everyone knows now, Mr. Astor is an author. His first book, "A Journey in Other Worlds," has just been published. "What gave you the first idea of writing a book?" I asked him.

"I don't know how it came to me first, but after it came it remained," he said pleasantly. "Ideas became so plenty that I began to put them, writing them hastily, on envelopes or in notebooks, or anything that offered. After a while I began my book in earnest. I wrote only when the inspiration seized me. Sometimes I would write regularly every day; again, I would not write a word for weeks at a time. Once I went two months without writing. Very often I used to wake up at night with some new idea, and I would get up and write. It took me two years to write my book, and during that time I read over one hundred books on astronomy. No matter what else the critics may say of my book"—and here he smiled happily, and put his feet back on the rung of his chair, a habit he has—"they cannot say my astronomical facts are wrong.

"I don't believe," he added thoughtfully, "in authors doing a certain amount of writing every day, I find the mind is like a well—you take all the water out, and go back in the morning to find that nature has filled it again. I believe in working when the inspiration is on, and only then."

"I suppose you did not experience any of the trials of a young author in looking for a publisher?"

"No, I knew a member of the publishing firm very intimately. He and my wife were the only ones who knew anything about it until the book was in type. I submitted my manuscript to the firm's readers only on condition that I should not be known. I took the name of Jones, and

whenever I had to telephone to my publishers I said Mr. Jones wished to speak to them. The proofs were always sent to Mr. Jones, and even when the first copy of my book was printed it bore only my initials—J. J. A."

"How did you like the name of Jones?" I asked with pretended gravity.

"I liked it immensely," was the hearty reply.

In his desk Mr. Astor has stored away the manuscript of his book. It is not written on loose sheets of paper, but in good-sized ledgers. He wrote with a pencil in a very small and indistinct handwriting. He showed me these books rather proudly, and some long strips of proofs addressed to "Mr. Jones."

"I'll wager that you were very proud when you received your first proof," I said to him.

"Indeed I was," he answered just as might any poor author on nothing a year but expectations. "When I first saw my own writing in print I felt very proud."

"A Journey to Other Worlds" contains 476 pages, but as it has already been discussed, I will not enter into any explanation of its plot. Its author's object is to interest people through it in the sciences. Upon the sciences he believes our great future depends.

"Tell me," I said, "what is your greatest ambition?"

The smile that is almost constantly in his eyes and on his lips faded into a look of grave earnestness. In his low, distinct voice he replied slowly:

"I should like to leave the world a little better than I found it. That should be everybody's ambition, I think."