

# DESIRE OF PRIVACY DROVE W. W. ASTOR TO EXILE

## Real Reasons Why the Little Understood Man Was Practically Driven Out of His Own Country

## Precluded by His American Birth and Former Citizenship from Ever Receiving a British Peerage

**By F. CUSLIFFE-GOWEN.**

NO son of old Father Knickerbocker and former servant of the United States Government has been throughout the greater part of his life more persistently assailed by American newspapers, and even reviled, than William Waldorf Astor. Indeed, they may be said to have literally driven him to seek refuge in England, where he has ever since made his home. While he has managed to enjoy a privacy, especially in connection with family matters, which he was denied in the land of his birth, the fact that he had been forced by something akin to persecution to expatriate himself has caused a certain element of the press in this country to heap a still greater amount of obloquy upon him.

No occasion was lost of denouncing him as a man who has foresworn his allegiance to the Stars and Stripes and who has no use for the United States save to export from here the millions of dollars which he spends abroad without any sense of his obligations to the country from which they are derived. The circumstance that far from shirking any such obligations he has remained one of the largest taxpayers in New York and that by his judicious and liberal management of his vast real estate interests in this city he has contributed very largely to the development and prosperity, as well as to the improvement of the conditions of the tenement house population, has been studiously ignored, a similar silence being observed with regard to his American charities, past and present, and to his work as a member of the State Legislature at Albany and as United States envoy abroad.

Among the most frequent forms of attack upon his name is that which looks him up to American editors and scribbles his name in the society of royal personages and of members of the aristocracy, and of even manœuvring to obtain a peerage for himself. Only ten days ago stories were printed here to the effect that he would be content with nothing less than a dukedom.

Now, there is no son of Uncle Sam who has shown a greater amount of independence in such matters than William Waldorf Astor and his career in England has been signalized by his going out of his way to quarrel with the late Duke of Westminster, and thus bringing down upon his head the hostility of the immensely powerful clan of Grosvenors, who may be said to share with the Hamiltons the domination of English society, and by his ordering out of his house in London a distinguished Admiral, who was a favorite member of the household of Edward VII. and Queen Alexandra, an episode which did not precisely conduce to put him in high favor at court. While this may have been impolitic on his part, it certainly cannot be construed as partaking of that servile adulation of royalty and of the nobility with which he is so constantly charged on this side of the Atlantic.

As for William Waldorf Astor's alleged manœuvres to enter the House of Lords, either as the Earl of Astor or as the Duke of Hever—Hever Castle is his favorite residence—no one knows better than himself that he is precluded by his American birth and former citizenship from ever receiving a peerage.

No one who owes his British citizenship to naturalization can ever be created a peer of Parliament. This is owing to an act of Parliament passed in the early part of the eighteenth century as the outcome of the intense popular resentment excited in England by the action of William III. and George I. in lavishing British peerages on their more or less unworthy Dutch favorites. This statute is still in existence, as the late Lord Salisbury reminded King Edward when the latter wished, at the time of his coronation, to bestow a peerage upon the German born Sir Edward Cassel, who had been so very useful to him in a variety of ways, notably in connection with the reorganization of his finances as well as of the administration of the civil list and of the royal household. In fact, Lord Salisbury's refusal to take any steps to advocate this measure is generally understood to have been one of the principal differences between the sovereign which culminated in his resignation of the Premiership.

It is well that the existence of this law should be widely known on this side of the Atlantic, so as to set at rest the rumors which are continually being circulated to the effect that rich Americans either have or are about to take out English letters of naturalization, with the object of eventually getting into the British House of Lords. Curiously enough, the Encyclopedia Britannica contains in this misapprehension that "aliens can receive peerages." But one can search history in vain for the grant of a peerage to any naturalized English citizen since the reign of George I. at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The encyclopedia is so far right that the sovereign, as the fountain of all honors, can bestow a mere title on an alien. But he cannot make him a peer of Parliament or bestow upon him a seat in the upper house of the Imperial Legislature even after naturalization.

It was this, indeed, that prevented Queen Victoria from conferring any peerage upon her favorite son-in-law, the late Prince Henry of Battenberg, who owed his naturalization to act of Parliament and upon whom she would gladly have bestowed a British dukedom had there been no statutory obstacles in the way.

I am perfectly aware that there have been and still are peers of the realm who have been born as foreigners. They may be divided into two categories. In one are those who owe their peerages to inheritance and who are invested with all the prerogatives of their rank as such on naturalization. To the other category belong those who though born as aliens have acquired British nationality through the naturalization of their fathers.

Thus the late Lord Pembroke, who was Under Secretary of State for the Colonies and English plenipotentiary at the various international sugar bounty conferences, was of Venetian birth. But his father, Solomon Worms of Vienna, had been naturalized as an Englishman when his children were still under age, and consequently there was no legal

objection to Henry Worms, who had received his education in England, being raised to the peerage as Lord Pembroke, despite his birth at Vienna as an Austrian.

A still more familiar case in point is that of Lord Channing, a native of Boston, Mass. He is a son of the celebrated Unitarian divine the Rev. W. H. Channing, who after occupying a pulpit in the Hub migrated to England, made his home at Kensington and secured English naturalization. Thanks to his father's being an Englishman, there was nothing to prevent Francis Allston Channing, a descendant of that Gen. William Channing who was one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, from being raised to the House of Lords as a reward for his excellent services in promoting agricultural, educational and labor reforms.

Some sixty years ago a Frenchman of the name of Richard Tufton succeeded to the great estates in Kent, in Westmoreland and in Yorkshire of his granduncle, the last Earl of Thanet. In compliance with the stipulations of the will he obtained English letters of naturalization, his eldest son, Henry, being seven years of age at the time. Richard Tufton was given a baronetcy in recognition of the political influence derived from his large estates, but could not, owing to his being merely a naturalized citizen, be elevated to the peerage. That was an honor reserved for his eldest son, who was created Lord Hotchfield a few years after his father's death, although born in France as a Frenchman.

There is nothing, therefore, to prevent Waldorf Astor, who for some years past has been a Unionist member of Parliament for Plymouth, from being raised at some future time to the House of Lords as a baron—but certainly not as an earl or as a duke, since there have been no instances in modern times of a commoner being raised to a dukedom without graduating from the inferior classes of the peerage. Waldorf Astor, like Lord Channing, like the late Lord Pembroke and Lord Hotchfield, is an Englishman through the naturalization of his father as a British citizen.

That young Waldorf Astor is high in favor with the reigning family has been repeatedly demonstrated in a very marked manner during the last eight or ten years. During the reign of Edward VII. when Queen Alexandra on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of her wedding gave a dance at Buckingham Palace which differing from the ordinary court balls, was officially stated to be restricted to "intimate personal friends of their Majesties," Waldorf

and secured naturalization as an Englishman. I have always considered that he made a great mistake in taking this step. For, in the first place, Americans cannot understand it when any one of their countrymen renounces his birthright as a citizen of the United States and the proud privileges attached thereto for the sake of any foreign allegiance; and secondly, William Waldorf Astor as an American and as a multimillionaire foreigner of distinction, was a personage of infinitely greater importance and social note in the United Kingdom than an English plutocrat commoner. As an American, belonging to a country where every citizen claims a share in the sovereignty of the nation, he could pretend to rank with the highest in England, whereas the moment that he became a British subject he forfeited this privileged position and had, like all other commoners, to acknowledge the social superiority and to yield the "pas" not merely to the various members of the peerage but even to those baronets whom Lord Beaconsfield was so fond of holding up to

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Mr. William Waldorf Astor.



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Mrs. Waldorf Astor.

Astor, then unmarried, figured conspicuously among the guests. It is thanks to this favor enjoyed by Waldorf Astor that the discrimination at court against divorcees was waived in the case of his wife, who, born as Miss Nannie Langhorn of Virginia, had been previously married to Robert Shaw of Boston.

With regard to the other category of foreign born peers, namely those who are indebted to inheritance for their peerages, the two best known cases are those of Lord Fairfax and of Lord Reay. Lord Fairfax was born in Virginia as an American citizen of American parents and having received all his business training in Wall Street, with which he is still identified as the London representative of one of its brokerage and banking houses, has gone through the process of securing letters of naturalization as a British subject in order to enjoy the prerogatives attached to the barony of Fairfax, which has come to him through inheritance from his ancestors.

As for Lord Reay, he is a son of the Prime Minister of King William III. of Holland, spent his early years as secretary in the diplomatic service of the Netherlands and as chamberlain of the late Queen of Holland and on inheriting the Scottish barony of Reay obtained letters of naturalization as a British citizen in order to be able to take his place as a peer of Scotland and as chief of the ancient clan of Mackay. His success in English public life has been remarkable. Winning the warm friendship of the late Mr. Gladstone and the marked favor of Queen Victoria, he became one of her lords in waiting, also Governor of Bombay, Under Secretary of State for India, president of the British Academy, &c. Having no children, his Scotch peerage will go at his death to his cousin, James Mackay, former Premier of the Netherlands and

now president of the lower house of the national Legislature at The Hague.

With regard to the final determining cause of William Waldorf Astor's expatriation so much ignorance prevails about the matter on both sides of the Atlantic, especially among those of the younger generation, that it may be worth while to give here a brief explanation thereof—an explanation which cannot fail to silence much of the criticism which is still being levelled at him for the abandonment of his home in the United States.

From the time of his father's death he was always by reason of his immense wealth an object of interminable discussion in the American press. It was difficult indeed in many years to open a newspaper without finding his name staring one in the face, just as that of Rockefeller does to-day. Thus when his mother, who was one of the most gracious women that ever wielded a social scepter in New York, passed away her only son, William Waldorf Astor, naturally claimed for his lovely wife, the beautiful Mary Paul of Philadelphia, the style and address of "Mrs. Astor" on the ground that he was the head of the entire Astor family. This right to the name of "Mrs. Astor" without any distinguishing Christian name was contested by his aunt, the late Mrs. William Astor, who as one of the all powerful matrons of New York society was unwilling to yield the "pas" to the young Philadelphia born wife of her nephew and to concede to her the precedence which she had readily accorded to her sister-in-law, William Waldorf Astor's mother.

Both nephew and aunt appealed to the postal authorities to determine the question by stating to which "Mrs. Astor" they would deliver letters thus addressed. The newspapers took sides, the majority of them championing the cause of Mrs. William Astor, converting the

entire affair from an insignificant domestic squabble into a perfect mountain of national importance. Mrs. William Waldorf Astor was deeply distressed by all the publicity in connection with the affair, while her husband was almost beside himself with irritation at being constantly called upon by the newspapers for an explanation of alleged utterances of his own, or of his aunt's, bearing on the incident.

This, however, was a mere trifle compared to what followed immediately afterward. A burglary in Bay Ridge in the later '80s resulted in the shooting and capture of several of the thieves. One of them, fatally wounded, made a more or less authentic confession before his death to the effect that he had been one of the gang that had kidnapped Charlie Ross in 1874 and that the stolen boy was no longer in the land of the living. This led to certain newspapers in New York opening their columns to the inquiry as to what would be demanded of Mr. and Mrs. William Waldorf Astor should their son Waldorf be abducted and what would they probably be willing to pay?

This was worked up into all sorts of forms of inquiry for many weeks. Articles, letters, interviews and discussions filled the columns of the press throughout the country, with the result that Mr. and Mrs. William Waldorf Astor were bombarded with letters of advice and of warning, with sensational communications from cranks, with threatening demands for money and with applications for interviews. The dissertations about the matter in the newspapers even had the effect of inciting several attempts to kidnap young Waldorf and finally the health of Mrs. William Astor completely gave way under the strain and she became a nervous and physical wreck, literally distraught by the ever haunting terror of losing her child. She had been a seventeen-year-old girl at the time when Charlie Ross was kidnapped from his home in her native town of Philadelphia and the thought that her boy might share his fate was more than she could bear.

It was because she believed that there was no safety for her children in America and because her husband was warned by her physicians that a complete change of scene and surroundings was necessary for her recovery that he transferred his home from the United States to England.

Mrs. Astor never entirely recovered. True, the change from America to Europe soothed in a measure her terrors. There was no longer the almost hysterical condition of dread for the safety of her little ones. But in its place she developed a melancholia which was infinitely pathetic, especially to those who were aware of its origin, and to which she succumbed before many years had passed.

If I write with feeling about the subject it is because I knew the William Waldorf Astors both prior and subsequent to their marriage; was present, indeed, at the Assembly ball at Philadelphia at which Mrs. Astor, as Mamie Paul, made her debut, the fairest debutante of many a year, in a city so justly renowned for the loveliness of its women.

It was the spectacle of his wife's sufferings and the sense of the cruel loss which he had sustained through her death, which he attributed to what he denounced as newspaper persecution and invasion of the privacy of his home, that embittered William Waldorf Astor, who was passionately devoted to her, so strongly against the land of his birth that he abjured his American allegiance

ridiculous in his novels as "no longer gentlemen and not yet noblemen." Astor was prompted, however, in changing his nationality by his anxiety to spare his children the sufferings which he and his wife had endured, by transforming them into English subjects. But while they are British, having been brought up wholly in the United Kingdom and among English associations, he remains, in spite of everything, much more of an American than a Briton.

No one can take him for anything else than an American, in his appearance, in his manner and in his speech. He has the American abruptness, quickness and decision. He has been in intimate contact with three civilizations, American, English and Italian. But it is the American which has left its stamp upon him, an indelible hall mark. In his entertainments, which are on a princely scale, he is an American host, with that liking for precision and straight lines which is certainly not British. In fact, he is a little bit too much of a martinet in his hospitalities to suit English tastes of the present day, and it is this peculiarity of character that has in-

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## Few of the Features in Next Sunday's Sun

**Riddle of the Shrine of Osiris**  
In next Sunday's Sun there will appear the only article authorized by the Egypt Exploration Fund, and in it you will find all the details of the discovery of the supposed Pool of Osiris at Abydos last winter.

**The Adventures of Suzanne**  
This is the first of a series of modern comedies by Orson Lowell and deals with a woman who is very much like a great many wives you know. Her frocks are the absorbing topic this week, and there is a kick in pictures and story.

**Earrings—Perfume—and Princess Zita's Luck**  
The title reads like a heading of a piece of fiction, but it isn't. They are real facts and combine to make a real fairy story in the life of the woman who may soon be the Empress of Austria.

**The Modern Dance Is the Bearer of Harmless Happiness**  
This is what Dr. Hugo Munsterberg says, and he ought to know, for he has made a deep study of the modern mania. He describes the craze which he says makes life smooth in the midst of many hardships.

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Up at Chautauqua they are celebrating the anniversary of the educational idea conceived by Bishop Vincent and Lewis Miller in 1874. Read of its tremendous growth throughout the United States.

**Uncle Sam Has a New Idea to Save Lives**  
In a bill before Congress he proposes to consolidate the Revenue Cutter and Life Saving services and call them the Coast Guard in an effort to safeguard navigation along our seaboard.

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