

DENATIONALIZED AMERICANS.

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One of the most interesting studies for the thoughtful American who spends time enough abroad to think of what he has opportunity to see, is the various classes of his countrymen who have actually or practically disavowed their nationality. The recent action of Mr. Wil-
William Waldorf Astor in renouncing his allegiance to the United States and formally asking naturalization as a British subject has *received* called particular attention abroad as well as at home, ~~to this subject~~ *on account of his wealth but also perhaps the* not only because of the fact that he represents a ~~very small class~~ *very smallest class* of denationalized Americans, to wit: Men who formally renounce American citizenship and seek to become bona fide subjects of a foreign ~~power~~ *power*, because of fixed and declared antagonism to the principle of self-government and equality of rights and privileges on which the republic is based, and without any charge of crime or misconduct of any sort on his part. As a rule, the American who ~~asks~~ is most clamorous to cast off the chains of American citizenship and become

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an allegiant of another power has some thing in his past that leads him to court oblivion. With Mr Astor it is entirely different. He has sought political and literary renown in his native land with indifferent success but in an entirely creditable manner. The disappointment attending his efforts seems to have embittered him against the country which he thought held his wealth ~~to be~~ equivalent to a disqualification for the highest political positions--a detriment rather than an advantage to one of his ambition.

Whether this were true or not, or whether if true it is a political evil or a political blessing so far as the republic is concerned, Mr Astor had an absolute right to regard it ^{as} unjust to himself or obnoxious to the interests and welfare of his descendants and renounce his allegiance on that account. Nay, he had a perfect right ^{to do so} for any reason, good or bad. That is ^{the} true American doctrine; ^{an} a man has an absolute right to renounce ~~his~~ ^{or adoption} allegiance of birth and assume allegiance to any country that is willing to grant him naturalization, ^{just} as often as it pleases him to do so. ^{if he has obeyed, the laws and} even half-discharged his duty to the state, we give him always

the ends off of good will (3)

In this exchange of allegiants, the United States has hitherto been immensely the winner as compared with other countries. The roll of noted names--the list of invaluable citizens who have come from other countries and sought with eagerness citizenship in the United States, is too long for any man to attempt to recite. Of those who have renounced American citizenship and assumed another allegiance with credit to themselves or honor to the land of adoption, the list is astonishingly--one may say, lamentably brief. Will Mr Astor add another name to this ^{short} ~~brief~~ category? So far as he is personally concerned, there seems little reason to believe that he will. The qualities requisite for personal, literary or political success in the two countries are not dissimilar. It will be hard for him to convince his English friends that his objections to the institutions of his native country, are well-founded. He is much more apt to be regarded as a traitor by those to whom he has turned for sympathy, than by the American people who are too busy and too tolerant to indulge in malice or resentment. Indeed, it is not unlikely that they may regard with a

sort of pride the one man who has left our shores, not from shame or for the country's good, but from express antagonism to democratic institutions and a desire to gratify his own political ambition. He is, at least more likely to be the subject of good-natured railery than of that malignant comment which he seems to have expected and one feels almost irresistibly inclined to say, to have invited and desired.

No doubt, Mr Astor's more or less sincere belief in the fictitious pedigree he has invented for his ancestors has come to have a sort of verity in his eyes and links him with the army of title-hungry respectabilities which constitutes by far the largest class of denationalized Americans. This rage for ^a titled ^e ancestry is by no means so rare as one might suppose, even among those who do not seek to sell a daughter into ~~titled~~ ^{with a more or less aristocratically descended foreigner} wedlock. The number of those who are to-day engaged in a search for an aristocratic pedigree, can hardly be estimated by one who has not had experience in connection with our consular service in certain European countries. The most hard-headed and practical Americans, judged by other standards, become the most vision-

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ancestral titles.

ary and absurd in their search for a pedigree. The matter of a lapse of several hundred years, without any evidence at all, ~~as~~ in the Astor's

-Astor pedigree, counts for nothing when put in contrast with a pet

- a self-evolved theory.

assumption. Not long since an American of high scientific repute besought the aid of one of our Consuls in France to trace his descent

from Charlemagne, ~~as~~ He had no doubt whatever of the fact. It had been

two or three at least.

a family tradition for some generations, and was said to be supported

It was strengthened by some faintly recurring
by more or less reliable historical facts. The only difficulty was a

nomenclature
lapse of some 700 years during which there was not a shred of a hint

of the channel in which the royal blood had flowed. The two ends of the

pedigree were all right;--the first three generations from Charle-

mange and the last four generations of the seeker's ancestral line,

were beyond doubt or question. The difficulty was to bridge over the

intervening chasm. The same trouble confronts Mr Astor in his heroic

efforts to foist himself on the aristocracy of England as the lineal

descendant of the Spanish family which he has adopted as his ances-

tral line. The European nobility know exactly what such pedigrees

are worth. They have thousand of such themselves--ancestral lines with fatal gaps or discreditable bars. It is possible they may take Mr Astor's estimate of his ancestral dignity at par. Since the Lord Mayor of London introduced Mr Bayard as a lineal descendant of the Chevalier Bayard, in spite of the fact that the Chevalier's family name was not Bayard at all, but Terrail; that he was called the "chevalier de Bayard," merely because that was the name of his family; *that* there is said to be no record that he left any descendants and if he

did he could not have legally transmitted to those the name of Bayard

after English aristocracy has swallowed this family
The claim of the gallant Kentuckian Gen. Terrell, who fell at Perryville

visionary ancestral romance, there is no question
to be descended from the "Chevalier sans peur and sans reproche" was

to what extent their complaisance may not extend
infinitely better and stronger than that of Mr Bayard. He at least,

had the family name. But neither had any basis worthy of serious con-

sideration. It is more than probable that Mr Astor's desperate ~~attemp~~

effort to ally himself with Spanish nobility will have a ~~like~~ disastr-

ous ending. The Spanish family records are admittedly the fullest

and most reliable in Europe and the angry *repudiation* representation of the self

expatriated American by the head of the family with which he claimed alliance, is likely to cling to him and prove a greater stumbling block in his way than his undoubted descent from the John Jacob Astor who had certain indubitable claims to recognition as one of the most astute of the merchant princes of the American Republic which is just taking her place as one of the dominant powers of the earth.

As Mr Astor has hit upon a bad time ^{too,} for renouncing American allegiance *if Mr. Astor had possessed the shrewdness of his grandfather, he would have conciliated* For the first time in the history of the Republic, her repute is second to none among the nations of the earth. As a military and naval *the Don before claim a right to share his own* power and as an economic factor of the future, it is universally admitted that she holds a first place. For the first time it is admitted *might not have been negotiated - a liberal* that the ^{positive} rank of an American citizen is both fortunate and honorable because of the unquestioned rank of the nation as a world-power *fixed relationship kinship to the Spanish grandees!* whose future cannot fail to be one of an exampled brilliancy. The bad luck which attended Mr Astor's political and literary efforts in the land of his birth, seem to have attended his effort to punish the country by depriving it of his presence and approval. If he had gone

a really noble feat.

away when the international novel was at its zenith and depreciation of the American was at its height, he would probably have had no trouble in securing that place in ^{the} aristocracy of England which his great wealth might serve to purchase. But to-day, it really seems as if he had failed both in securing a welcome in England and causing any sensible chagrin among the people of the United States. His action seems to be more remarkable as discrediting the foresight and sagacity of his really great ancestor, than anything else.

In the writer's young days he had a boyish familiarity with two men who had a personal knowledge of John Jacob Astor. One had been in his employ when he was making his fight with the great British fur monopoly on the Pacific slope; the other had had personal relations of a still more important character with the great fur-trader whose sagacity foresaw the immense ~~future~~ future of New York. Once being asked if John Jacob Astor was really a great man, the former replied impatiently:

"A great man! Why, sir, he knew to a hair the value of every bit

of peltry--even a skunk-skin--in every market of the world!"

The latter said with a sigh, "He was certainly a very remarkable man--the only man of his time who foresaw the greatness of the United States and realized that every citizen of the republic must always pay tribute to the man who owned real estate on the island of Manhattan!"

To-day, when the wisdom of this actual ancestor is more than ever apparent, is a bad time for his descendants to throw him over for the hypothetical nobility of a dubious and unknown possible or perhaps discreditable progenitor. The "Autocrat of the Breakfast Table" declared that the most important thing for a man to do who desired to assure himself long-life, was to "choose a few generations of long-lived ancestors." It is quite possible that Mr Astor may demonstrate to the entertainment of all the world that the choice of ^{an} ancestry is very ticklish business.

There are some other denationalized Americans, whom I shall with the consent of the editor of the Independent, consider in a future

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number, who are just awakening to the fact that "the times are out of joint," for people of their peculiar type and are likely to become still worse.

Albion W. Tourgee.