MINUTE TALKS WITH MANY MEN

By Solemn Swain

VINCENT ASTOR
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Vincent Astor Is Just Like Anyone Else, Only More So

"GIVEN a pint of money and a pack of clothes, we find, too oft, the rich man's child," is the enfeebled warbling, as I learned it somewhere. Probably it is messed up. The sense of the thing is there, anyway. The longer I think of it the less I remember.

And, pretty generally, the more money the more the mess—just the same with my hunchbacked quotation. What?

Out in Indiana, where I was "raised"—oh, yes, we still "raise" children, and some corn—the richest fellow I ever knew or can recollect was Milt Sommers, who used to grind shears for mother. He ran one of those wagons all loaded up with grindstones and wheels, and his spavined old horse had a series of little cowbells over its collar. When Milt would take the quarter mother offered in payment for her newly ground shears and Milt would fish down in his jeens and dig up a handful of change and nonchalantly give mother 15 cents back—well, the sight of that change and Milt's manner constituted worldly pelf to me then. It pictured what Dr. Buchtel used to say was stuff that you should "lay not up." Milt and his handful of silver was my visional Croesus. Milt's dead now. They buried him eight years ago with county honors. No matter—when he had it he had me.

As some of my good readers may have found out ere now, I've got the healthiest respect for any kind of money. I don't want to push the statement over the edge of repetition, but I just want it generally known that money and myself are on speaking terms only. And when I see money—represented by humans or otherwise—I naturally have to bow low and step wide.

I've observed during these-not-too-many years, however, that if a fellow don't dig up his own money out of the garden he's been put at the chances are that he won't amount to much.

His assay will generally run about 2 per cent pay and 98 per cent hope-so. There was a fellow out home who lived across the street from me. His father was a wholesale plumber. And before they got to making plumber jokes libelous that fellow's father was making a pile that would stagger a burro. Well, father sort of petered out after a while, lost his business; and son was up against it. Son had been coming on for a number of years right well. He had acquired a north side accent and two white vests. Besides that, when he moulted he engaged a wife. She was a fine girl in her way—one of the "favrile brand." That's a good one—favrile. It's Tiffany idea, see? This wife was a good sort of a girl, but helpless—she couldn't boil water for tea.

When father, the plumber, caved in, son was put to it, as the better ones write, to get by. Working and son were not even first cousins. The struggle that lad had to live down his father's bust-up and his attempts to keep a shelter over the little wife's head would fill another "Trow directory." You see, son had been "expecting." He had expected that father would die and fix it easy for son and wife. But he made his bets cross, and—well, I saw the son last year. He looked like the last verse of the last chapter of Revelation, and that's some verse.

It all goes to show that you can't expect, or that you can't even hope to expect if you don't get out and hustle yourself.

Do you believe that when rich men are plugging along about the last two laps in life they don't look around for a likely sprout on the family tree on which to center their attention? Don't you suppose those men watch and nurse that sprout—sort of care-take that particular branch and see that "so the twig is bent so the tree will incline"? I do.

Of course, some of these rich men miss their guess, just like "Old Doc" Anthony out home used to do about those race horses down in Brown county. But he always had a dandy alibi.

From the misguesses in and about New York, some of the old-time rich men must have been playing blind man's buff, if later day form has anything to do with it. What?

It doesn't take any sweet water philosopher to point out that unless a young fellow goes out in the garden and does his own tending and harvesting he'll reap a heap of vain regrets and lamentations.

So it can be sort of sized up that when I meet a fellow who despite handicaps that money and forefathers bring about stands on two legs and shows me he is somewhat of a man I've simply got to take off my hat to him.

About three weeks ago I was wandering up around Newport. I always figured that if I could see Newport "in season," as they put it at the head of the menu, I'd die content. I figured out that Newport was just about what my brand of respect for money called for. If there was an after-dinner drink needed when I saluted Money, Newport was that drink.

Newport, when I was there, had the Horse Show in progress. I noted after I got back that several other things were in progress—one about a near-count who stole a horseshoe pin—but as I didn't go in those circles I missed that doings.

I looked at pretty horses—and they were pretty, too. I saw lots of quality in that oval.

I stayed around the horse ring about as long as I dared—the way I was given the "out and out" was some way—and finally I wandered outside.

I started to talk to a fellow who drove a hand-painted automobile and he was tipping me off to who's who. I saw every one, if his story holds. Whether he was right or not I don't care. Only John D. Rockefeller was missing, and they say he don't go out much after 3 o'clock nowadays.

This automobile driver must have exhausted the possibilities and sort of got down to the "unclassified" in the blue book list, for I noticed his conversation petering out. He was down to one syllable names by now and I got him repeating himself more than once. Tiresome on a fellow who doesn't know what he's hearing, anyway.

I was watching a Newport officer, badge and club and all. The way he was herding grocery boys and delivery wagons around was tremendous. He was all duty. He saw every lad within five blocks before the lad saw him. And the way he upheld Newport law was a criterion, let me tell you. He did not notice anybody who had one million or over. You could almost see him consult his Bradstreet before holding up his brawny traffic mallet.

After the policeman had put in a good 15 minutes on his work and I had mentally tabbed him as a possibility in the argument of what makes a man, I got a sideways view of a young fellow sitting all alone, over to the side in an automobile.

"Oh, yes," said old faithful, the information gusher, "that's Vincent Astor."

Well, all I can say is he didn't look it.

Ever since I used to snitch the Morning Telegraph from my sister, whose beau brought it out to our home every Monday, in Indiana, where the Telegraph is still considered among the deleted subjects of conversation, I had read of the Astors doing this or that. Either one of the family was getting divorced or the other was getting married. The Astors always filled a large job in my "Moneyed America" book. The name always made me think of the old story of "Every Boy Has a Chance to Be President." Isn't it an awful chance these days, though? To be an Astor was absolutely impossible. The Presidency was a mere office-holding job at the side of it. And to see pretty near the last of the line, sitting just like a fellow would sit, in a regular automobile and all—well, I had a pretty swift mental readjustment of things. What?

All I could think of for a minute was, "Well, you'd never suspect it." It kept roaming around under my hat like a homeless ant.

And I made up my mind that I'd like to talk to Vincent Astor. I wanted to see what sort of conversation Vincent Astor and I could cook up.

So I crossed the road. The automobile driver, Old Information, looked shocked. He was hired to look bored, I guess. But he wasn't earning his salary when I told him I was going to talk to Vincent Astor. No, indeed.

Vincent Astor said "Howdye" pretty nearly as well as I can myself when I'm in good Hoosier form. If he didn't say "Howdye" he nearly said it. He ought to have said it. He looks like he knew what "Howdye" meant, anyway.

Somewhere I'd read that Vincent Astor had recently been putting some of his money which was left to him in public markets, and wondered if Mr. Astor conceived the idea of public markets himself or whether his business managers had just found a place for profitable investment, minus any humanitarian motive. Public markets, if you don't happen to know it, bridge the gap often between the poor man and the producer. If there were more public markets there might be less "high cost of living," no matter how much Lew Shank, ertswhile Mayor of Indianapolis, tried his best to ruin the chances.

Remembering that Vincent Astor's money at least was going into public markets, and knowing what I believe I know of the human value of public markets, I thought I'd try a little conversation along that line.

"Mr. Astor," says I, "these public markets your estate is building—are they your ideas or are they just a place to put some money? You'll overlook this inquiry, I hope. You see, I know you—in the newspapers—but you don't know me. And, because I know you in the newspapers, I want to tell some people who know you probably less than I do just what sort of man you are. See?"

"Well," said Mr. Astor, "I guess, in answering your first question, the matter of building public markets has my fullest sanction. I believe that if the buying public can be brought into closer relationship with the producer of foodstuffs mutual benefit will undoubtedly accrue. Now, as to your knowing me, that's all very nice, but I don't see why you wish to see what sort of man I am. I'm quite sure there has been enough said already—and too much. After all, I'm quite human—like the same sort of things that you probably do, I'm very keen on legitimate sports and try to do my best at what sports I follow closest. I try to live as close as possible to the things that are worth while, and if a man does that he cannot go very far wrong, can he?"

"All of that, Mr. Astor," says I, "is just about what I guessed before we started talking."

"So?" says he.

"Yes," says I.

Then we both grinned.

"I like all this," says I, pointing to the beautiful views in and around, where they were holding the horse show.

"So do I," says he, looking around at about the same places I took in with my arm gesture.

"Great air up here, what?" says I.

"It surely is," says he.

"Hope you'll overlook my getting acquainted unintroduced," says I.

"It's no matter," says he.

Then I wandered back to Old Information.

And Vincent Astor just sat there.

What do you think he was waiting for?

His wife!

And may I say that out of all of them Mrs. Vincent Astor is nearest to what I'd call sterling? And I mean it.

Just a simple young lady, with light hair and a very sweet manner, the type of girl that makes a good wife. You'd be proud to know her. You'd be proud to be related to her. She's that sort.

Vincent Astor, to my way of thinking, was born with a handicap. But he's bravely outgrown it. He's made good with a vengeance. He's clean American strain. And while he hasn't had to get out and dig his own path to wealth, he's taken what has been given to him and turned it to good purposes. When he's called upon to tell what became of his original ten talents' he'll not have to stutter in replying.

I like him a whole lot. He's the sort of young man you'd instinctively like whether he were Vincent Astor or Mike O'Shea. Speaking of those public markets Vincent Astor is building, New York housewives are looking forward to the opening of the one at Ninety-fifth street and Broadway. Experts have pronounced the plans of this fruit, vegetable, meat and fish center the best so far designed for any city in America, and they are of the opinion that Europe has no market superior in any way.

As a member of the Mayor's market committee for Manhattan and the Bronx, Mr. Astor has long felt a keen interest in the conditions under which food is bought and sold here. He has carried on extensive investigations of existing markets and has devoted much study to the markets of Europe. Through his architects, Tracy & Swartwout, of 244 Fifth avenue, he has had this big market, which will be ready October 1, designed after the markets in Northern Italy.

The interior will be lined with white tile, with thick glass counters, and when all commodities have been removed a hose can be turned on and the place thoroughly cleaned. Most meat market owners provide only the floor space and the counter supports, but this market will be completely equipped, so that all departments will be equally sanitary and uniform in appearance.

The main floor will have 20,000 square feet of space, and below there will be space for the fish market. The main floor will be filled with stalls and booths.

In the basement are to be large cold storage rooms with a temperature of 36 degrees, and the freezer with a temperature of 20 degrees. There will be two 40-ton refrigerating machines to cool these rooms and there will also be ice boxes and glass display cases in the market proper.

Huge meat automobile vans will drive directly into the building and ample provision has been made for shipping and receiving goods.

While the interior will be complete in every detail, the exterior will be as attractive as art can design it. The market will be buff color, with an attractive frieze done in an Italian method of overlaying colored cement and afterward carving it to produce pictures in colors. The frieze will shade from buff to a rich brown. It was designed by William Mackay and has foodstuffs for the motive. There are sheep, cattle pigs, chickens, ducks and fish arranged in a decorative ensemble, and all held in composition by garlands of vegetables and fruits.

The other decorative motive will be a procession of market transports beginning with the earliest market boats and continuing through an evolution of vehicles, ending with a giant automobile truck. This decorative design was suggested to the architects by the Italian markets. They have made a careful study of foreign markets and have adapted the most useful and practical features to the needs of markets here.

Mr. Astor recently received a medal from the American Institute of Architects for the most attractive apartment building of the year. This was awarded to him for the new apartment building in West Forty-fifth street, recently completed, which also was designed by Tracy & Swartwout.

You can see that Mr. Astor has something more at stake than a mere return on dollars invested when he puts heart and mind into the construction of even a public market.

And then to see Mr. Astor, the youthful fountain head of such a humanitarian propaganda, see him as I saw him, and talk to him for the moments that I held his attention, you will be forced to acknowledge with me that I was taught wrong. "Sometimes a pint of money makes a man."

WAR ZEST IN BRITISH RURAL LIFE

THE coming of the military has added a new value and fresh zest to country life in Great Britain. It is not only that their field days and maneuvers, their flag signalling in the hedge rows, their trenches and route marching divert bucolic monotony, but these light-hearted lads from the towns, these irrepressible jesters, these whistling, singing, good humored comrades, to whom nothing comes amiss, have brought with them a real optimism which is infectious.

The "Tommies" have been giving concerts in aid of some of the war funds in every village schoolroom round about—quite a new thing in concerts, by the way. A born pianist among them sits at the instrument from start to finish, rattling off chorus after chorus with his clumsy fingers, while his khaki pals seated around the platform roll the refrains out—from "Tipperary" to the latest sentimental—with a swing and gayety and many a prank of comradeship thrown in that is irresistible and holds the crowded room spellbound while the leader, a dark-haired lad with merriest eyes, who was a pierrot in civil life, will from time to time get upon his legs and throw in a song as his fancy takes him with an artistic action suited to the words that is never a loss, and then he will beckon to another pal in the khaki group at the back of the room, but all in vain until he has swung down the gangway to fetch him up. Then a fair, curly headed lad with a pensive, thoughtful face, caressing a silver trumpet under his arm as if he loved it, leaps to the platform and gives the bugle call with his face turned sideways to the audience as if half shy at facing them, sounding "The Last Post" with exquisite pathos. That concert will stick in village memories.

The spirit of comradeship, the esprit de corps displayed upon that platform was another object-lesson to country folk, for they have nothing to answer to it in their own community, where petty jealousies, old standing feuds, and party animosities spoil most of their joint local endeavors.

The small boys of the village have taken up a war movement of their own and, dinked out in wonderful martial trappings, they lay deep plans of scouting, sniping, patrolling and surprise attacks—likely as not round some unexpected corner a crouching imp will salute you with the snap of his toy pistol. Indeed, a promising seedbed of future recruits has been sown by billeting the military in country districts.

In every village hereabouts local wiseacres are registered ready to act as intelligence guides, invaluable pilots for the disposition of our troops in the event of foreign invasion, men who know their district every inch and the lay of the land, with its natural secrets and cunning devices, where concealment can be schemed and traps laid. But if their services should be called for one some dark, foggy night even the knowing blind can't lead the blind and the wisest geographist would be lost across country.

The hunting season has been in full swing, but the usually gay spectacle of a meet of hounds on the village green has been a dejected affair, for beyond the acting master and the hunt servants none are in scarlet, and the field is composed mostly of women and perhaps a few children home for the holidays; there is no attendant concourse of onlookers; people have not the heart to go to the meet, and it is almost a pity for the hunts to advertise their place of meeting, as if inviting people to come out when a few postcards would serve the purpose required, for this advertisement gives the man in the street a wrong impression, who, accordingly, puts the hunting folk in the same category as the football players, against whom there has been such an outcry in this hour of national distress; whereas, if the truth were to be told it might be said to the credit of the sport of hunting that the superb valor of our army at the front is in no small measure due to the bold following of the hounds, just as it was said of old that the battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton. Even in this exceptional year hunting has to be carried on, but as a business, not as a recreation; the less parade made about it the better.

To sum up, the war is touching the dweller in the country directly, as well as indirectly, in many ways, and is bound to be teaching him, as, indeed, all of us, that valuable lesson which counts so much in a man's outlook and judgments, and which we call a sense of proportion, and no one needs it more than the countryman dwelling in his backwater of life, so far from the main stream of affairs, a condition of things which naturally limits Hodge's imagination and therefore his sense of proportion, making his own and his neighbor's comings and goings newsings, tattlings, higglings and haggling assume mammoth proportions, while all the rest of the world is a pigmy affair.

For the first few months after the outbreak of hostilities it was difficult to understand the attitude that pervaded both farm and cottage toward the war. It almost seemed as if the countryman felt that the war was no concern of his. It did not touch him personally. Everything went on as usual. Beyond the excitement of reading what the papers manufactured for him out of the scanty official news, and his bewilderment over the foreign names of places which made it all seem very distant and beyond his ken, he disturbed himself very little about it. Were there not much more important things on hand for him?

The annual November killing of the family pig to supply the household with the staple Winter meat and the fat stock show at Christmas market! Why, the rural mind would march these two historical events in safe conduct through all the alarms of war.

No; war was a rich man's game—some astute move, perhaps, on the part of great financiers and trusts to make capital out of the public misfortune, or, as Hodge put it more simply, "there's a lot o' dicky going on somewhere." No, he didn't believe in the righteousness of going to war. And so recruiting made but slow-footed progress in country districts. "Why should I let my son go and get killed? I want him at home. Let them go as can afford it."

Such was their talk, and all the shouting for recruits fell mostly on deaf ears—in fact, the whole enlistment campaign failed. The valiant posters of duty, reproachful posters, the confidential posters which were plastered on every wall, the squire's heroics at the public meeting in the school all were in vain, for in whatever key the tune was pitched the music failed to charm because the deaf adder had stopped her ear on purpose.

The whole business was looked upon as mere bluff to get up a scare among ignorant folk, a trick to exploit poor folk in the interests of the well-to-do. Moreover, when the threepenny tax on tea was announced the struggling and careful Martha thought it a shame that "they should pay for the war out of such as us." Besides, as the village roadman remarked, "The Germans don't hinder me from sleep; they'd never get here, and they dursn't try, nowther."

Use for Obsolete Guns.

Many unmilitary things are made of obsolete guns, and in England especially are to be found a number of objects of interest in this line, says the Marine Journal. The Victoria Cross, for instance, has always been manufactured from the guns captured at Sebastopol. Many things in the British Isles are named for Waterloo in consequence of the great victory that was won there over Napoleon on June 18, 1815, one in particular being the Waterloo Bridge, the gas brackets on which were fashioned many years ago from cannon used at Waterloo. Another instance is the ornamental capital of the monument to Nelson, the hero of Trafalgar, which was made from old cannon, and at Aldershot there is an effigy of Wellington and his charger Copenhagen, also made from wornout guns. In the crypt of St. Paul's there is the funeral car which bore the remains of Wellington to his last resting place, made entirely of enemy guns.

CHINESE BANK SITUATION IS SERIOUS

THE situation in Chineses commercial circles generally with respect to banking facilities offered the native dealers by the native Chinese banks is becoming more and more serious in its effects upon trade of all kinds. It is becoming more evident that before trade matters in China can resume their accustomed course something will have to be done to rehabilitate the native banks and aid them in again performing their usual functions in Chinese trade.

There are in Chinese commercial affairs four varieties of banking institutions which have their special part in Chinese business. The first are the large foreign banking institutions in the open ports, some of which are among the most powerful banking institutions in the world. The second are the national banking institutions established directly or indirectly by the Chinese government for its own fiscal purposes and serving as an adjunct in some ways to the Chinese treasury on the one hand and foreign banking and financial interests on the other, the chief of such institutions now being the Bank of China, which was established by Presidential mandate in 1913.

There are, then, two further classes of native banks proper, one of which embraces the larger institutions, which do a proper banking business, i. e., deal in loans and discounts and handle exchange as a more or less secondary matter and the smaller native banks which do some business in loans but whose chief business consists in dealing in dollars, silver and subsidiary coins, and in buying and selling exchange in small amounts on interior points.

The foreign banks, while not doing their accustomed volume of business, are still in position to serve what business is offered them under normal conditions. The large Chinese government bank continues to serve the Chinese government and allied interests. The two classes of native banks proper, however, are badly crippled and are not performing their usual functions. This is partly due to general war conditions the world over, one result of which has been to cause the large foreign banks to be unable to supply the native banks with facilities they usually have had in advance of silver and credit, and partly due to business conditions in China itself. The trouble, in fact, has been coming on for some time, and the native bank system has not been operating in its usual way since before the revolution of 1911. Of the general situation in native banking circles during the last year the annual report of the Chinese Maritime Customs for 1914, just published, says:

"In the first place, banking facilities, upon which the whole trade, both domestic and foreign, has been built up, were greatly restricted. The famous Shansi banks, through which nearly all government funds formerly passed and which were the chief agents for all interprovincial remittances, were compelled to close their doors when the Manchu government lost power, while all other banks, with a few notable exceptions, being unable to collect money due them on account of advances, ceased doing business. The few that remained showed extreme caution and engaged only in transactions involving no risk whatever. The foreign banks, upon which the Chinese banks at the ports are chiefly dependent for their supply of silver, were compelled to abstain from giving to the Chinese banks the facilities customary before the revolution. Chinese dealers, therefore, found many impediments to their business; more especially was it difficult to arrange for remittances and for sending money into the interior to buy produce. But, while the restriction of banking facilities greatly hampered trade, it is generally felt that the disappearance of so many mushroom banks, engaged rather in speculation than in legitimate banking transactions, has placed business on a safer and sounder basis."

With the outbreak of the war in Europe last Summer the situation in South China became acute and for a time nearly all the native banks in Canton and Honkong closed their doors. Gradually there has been something of a readjustment, but the situation is far from satisfactory. There are in Hongkong 23 of the larger class of native banks, as compared with 35 before the outbreak of the war. This class of bank usually advances money to the Chinese traders, but since the war they have restricted credit so greatly that advances are now made upon gilt edge securities only.

Battleships to Stay.

Charlton Bates Strayer in Leslie's.

Notwithstanding the high cost of the modern battleship and the danger it is exposed to from the rapidly developing submarine, Rear Admiral Caspar F. Goodrich, U. S. N., does not agree with Admiral Scott, of the British navy, that the day of the battleship is about to end. Indeed, in the pages of the North American Review he terms the battleship "the real monarch of the seas," and discusses, not its abolition, but the design of vessels of that type which is best adapted both to attack and to stand punishment. Admiral Goodrich concedes the value of the submarine and admits that it "has brought new problems into naval tactics which must gravely influence the handling of the battleship. But the latter, constructed on, say, the U. S. S. Michigan's lines, he regards as an indispensable and the principal factor in any fleet. The Michigan type can carry eight 12-inch guns on a moderate displacement. In our latest designs, though the big guns are larger and more numerous, there has been a reversion to the Michigan type, the additional guns being placed three in one turret and undue length of vessel avoided. The Admiral would place chief dependence on size and range of guns, and secondary reliance on thickness of armor and speed. There are those who declare it a useless waste of money to build battleships and dreadnoughts, as they claim these gigantic warships are at the mercy of submarines.