

The New York World
November 25, 1894

How A Bowery Tramp Got Into Society

***Nellie Bly Has a Talk with Mr. John Garvey,
The Knight of the Road Who Slept in Mr. Astor's Bed***

A Mystery as to What He was Doing There

***John Jacob Astor Believes that There Was Some Scheme of Burglary on Hand and He Means
to Find Out About It
---Garvey's Pedigree***

No millionaire ever gained such a unique addition to his vast possessions as did John Jacob Astor a few days ago.

People have talked about the Astor millions, the Astor real estate, the Astor mansions, the Astor diamonds, the Astor receptions, and now they are talking about the Astor tramp.

The Astor tramp, so far as the Astors are concerned, is not a desirable possession. He is not a curio for which they sought, but having once possessed him they are anxious to put him where they know he'll be safe.

So far as the public can understand, the case is a peculiar one, and one of unsolved mystery.

A man with the appearance of a tramp, and said to be unknown to the household domestics, was found asleep, or pretending to be, in a servant's room at 11 o'clock a week ago last Friday night. The door was locked, and had to be forced, but the tramp slept, or pretended to, through the whole affair.

He quietly submits to arrest, and goes without protest to the station-house; from there to the court early the next morning, where the officer charges him with disorderly conduct, to which he pleads guilty and is fined \$5 by the judge. The tramp being penniless cannot pay his fine, but it is promptly paid by some unknown person through a law firm and—the Astor tramp goes free.

But the Astors are not satisfied with the proceedings any more than a poor family whose home had been invaded by a tramp would have been. They had sent a servant over to the station-house the next morning to appear against the tramp only to find the officer had already taken the invader to court.

Thither the servant hurried only to find the case had been heard and the fine imposed without a member of the Astor household being called to confirm or deny the charge.

He Couldn't Keep Away

As the night of his arrest was not the first time the tramp had been caught in the Astor house, gaining entrance by means known only to himself, nor the sixth, seventh or eighth time he had been loitering around and watching the house, the Astors were nervous, just as poor people would have been, and they felt anxious to know the tramp's motives, or to put him where he could do no harm. So they swear out a warrant, institute a search, and the tramp, found in a Bowery lodging-house, is taken back to Jefferson Market.

What did the tramp want? That is the question of the hour. All sorts of theories have been advanced, but they are all guesswork.

It has been suggested that the man was hired to gain some family secrets or important papers. Another theory is that the tramp is a thief working alone, with a servant or another thief, and managed to get into the house and hide himself in bed to wait until everybody was asleep, when he could undisturbed rob the house else alone or by getting the confederates.

A ring of his clothes and going to bed was merely a clever plan, so that he would look less like hiding and could give some trifling excuse for his presence. Another theory is that the man was hired by a fine museum to do the act.

Really, the whole thing is a very great mystery.

I had some curiosity to see the Astor tramp, so I went to Jefferson Market Court and confided my wish to Justice Hogan. The justice expressed himself very plainly on the subject.

"The longer I am on the bench the more pity I have for the poor and unfortunate," he said, "but because I pity the poor is no reason why I should be unjust to the rich. Because John Jacob Astor has millions is no reason for freeing this man. He had entered the Astor house not once, but twice. He had been put out by the butler once before, and had made them all anxious for days by hanging about the entrances. Not only that, but the officer who made the arrest had no right to prefer the charge. Some member of the Astor household should have been called to do that, and others should have been called as witnesses. You will find that there is more in this case than appears on the face of it."

Nellie Bly Sees The Tramp

I waited in the Judge's private room until court was over and everybody gone. Then Justice Hogan's clerk brought the tramp in.

He seemed a little, undersized fellow, scarcely five feet five, and as he entered the room he looked at me furtively, as if wondering what was coming now. The clerk told him to sit down and he did so, taking the chair farthest from me.

I was sitting before a flat-top desk in the middle of the room. It was dark and two gas jets had been lighted, but "the tramp," sitting almost on one hip, with one leg crossed over the other succeeded in keeping his face in the shadow.

"Would you mind sitting here by the desk, so I can see your face?" I asked.

"Certainly not," he answered promptly and lifting his chair he placed it where I indicated. I looked him over carefully. He did not resemble the tough-looking "bum," as they call them, that I had been led to believe, nor was he like the highly imaginative pictures of him in the news papers.

He was, as I have said, an undersized man, of medium build, being neither fat nor thin, rather like a man who always had enough to eat and who worked a certain number of hours a day.

There is not the slightest trace of dissipation upon his face. A close observer would say the man does not drink, unless perhaps a glass of beer occasionally on a warm day.

His hair is brown, and had been out not later than two weeks ago. It was, of course, uncombed, but then it was not like a tramp's hair trimmed at the edges or, at best, cut in uneven steps.

He wore a beard and mustache. The beard looked as if it had been worn closely trimmed, but had been neglected for—say a week. The beard was reddish in color. The man's eyes are hazel in color. They are large clear, bright and intelligent. I mean by that the eyes show the man is no fool, as has been said, some asserting that he is a simpleton.

His face was dirty, but I could see that naturally it was a healthy and clear white. His mouth is hidden by his mustache, but a man who examined it says the tramp's teeth are filled with gold.

I asked him to let me see his hand, and he laid it upon the desk. It was plump and did not look as if it had over done any hard labor, being rather soft-palmed.

He wore a blue shirt, such as men wore in the summer. It was filthy dirty about the collar, was unstarched, but perfectly whole, which is rather a remarkable shirt for a tramp. Their shirts are always frayed about the collar. The man also wore a blue satin four-in-hand, soiled, but it had been a good one not so very long ago.

His suit was poor and thin. The coat was whole, but the trousers were torn.

I noticed his shoes particularly. They were small, fitted perfectly and, though unshined, were thoroughly good. They were laced carefully and the laces were unbroken. Another strange thing for a tramp.

He held his hat, a soft alpine, in his hand. It was brown, quite greasy inside and bore no firm's name.

If brevity is wit, then the Astor tramp is the soul of wit. He never refused to reply, but his answers were as short as he could make them and as cautious.

"What is your name?" I asked, and he replied promptly;

"John Garvey."

"The newspapers call you Garvin," I said.

"That's a mistake," he said.

I asked him to spell it; he did so.

"Can you read and write?" I asked.

"I can," he answered quietly.

"Will you kindly write your name for me?"

"Certainly," and, taking my pen, he promptly and easily wrote his name upon my paper.

It was not a labored effort or the writing of a man who handles a pen once a year, but the work of a man who writes almost daily.

"Where were you born?"

"Ireland."

"And yet you speak more like an Englishman," I observed.

"Do you think so?" he asked, and smiled as if amused.

His brogue for a little while after was decided, but before the interview was over it was forgotten and unnoticed.

"Where were you born in Ireland?"

"North."

"Will you spell the name of the place for me?"

“Dungelnon.”
“How long have you been in America?”
“Six years.”
“Any relatives?”
“None here.”
“Parents in Ireland?”
“Father.”
“Where’s your mother?”
“Dead.”
“Any brothers and sisters?”
“I don’t know.”
“Why?”
“They may be all dead.”
“How many had you?”
“One brother and three or four sisters.”
“Don’t you know which; three or four?”
“No; some or all may be dead.”
“What was your father and mother’s names?”
“Patrick and Mary Garvey.”
“Your brother’s?”
“Patrick.”
“Your sisters’?”
“Mary, Susan and Katherine.”
“You said you had four,” I reminded him.
“Did I? I was mistaken. I have only three.”

A Voter, But Doesn't Vote

“Are you naturalized?”
“Yes.”
“How long since?”
“I’ve forgot.”
“Where did you get your papers?”
“At City Hall,”
“What judge?”
“I’ve forgot.”
“Where are your papers?”
“I don’t know.”
I asked him where he bought his shoes, hat and suit. He said he had forgotten.
“Are you a Republican or a Democrat?”
“I don’t see what that has to do with this,” he answered evasively.
“Ever voted?” I persisted.
“No,” he said shortly, but without ill humor.
“Have you ever worked?”
“Yes.”
“What did you do in Ireland?”

“Tended bar.”
“Ever drink?”
“No.”
“Smoke?”
“Yes; some.”
“What did you work at in America?”
“Grocery.”
“Where?”
“No. 381 Grove Street.”
“In Jersey City?”
“Yes.”

Worked In A Shooting Gallery

“How long since?”
“I’ve forgotten.”
”Where else did you work?”
“No. 103 Bowery.”
“At what?”
“Shooting gallery.”
“How much were you paid?”
“I worked on shares.”
“How long is it since you worked anywhere?”
“I dunno.”

“Are you a Catholic?” I asked, and he looked at me keenly for a few moments before he replied that he was. I asked where he had attended church, and he said in Sixteenth Street. The name of the church he had forgotten.

“Have you confessed lately?” I inquired.

“No.” he answered, and a smile shot across his face as he looked at me wonderingly.

“Would you tell a lie?” I asked.

“Yes,” he said, promptly and frankly.

“Then you’d better go to confession at once,” I added.

“It’s no harm to lie,” he asserted, calmly, still smiling, and that is the only voluntary remark he made during the interview.

First Visit To The House

“When did you first go to the Astor house?” I asked.

“I think I went in first on the 4th.”

“Of November?”

“Yes, Oh, now I forget, I don’t know. I was in once.”

“What did you go for?”

“To ask for something to eat.”

“What door did you enter?”

“Thirty-fourth street.”

“Then you knew there were two entrances.”

“Yes.”
“How?”
“I was walking about there.”
“For what purpose?”
“Just to take a walk.”
“Do you think tramps who live on the Bowery usually go in that locality to walk?”
“I dunno.”
“How did you get in the first time?”
“The door was ajar and I pushed it open.”
“Whom did you see?”
“The butler and two women.”
“What did you say to them?”
“I asked for something to eat.”
“Did you get it?”
“No; they said they had nothing.”
“What did you do then?”
“Walked out.”
“Didn’t the butler put you out?”
“No.”
“Didn’t he once find you sneaking through the hall?”
“No.”

The Second Visit.

“Then, if you got nothing to eat, why did you go back a second time?”
“Why, that’s nothing!” he exclaimed quickly.
“It looks like a great deal. You lived on the Bowery, you say, and you go up to Fifth Avenue and Thirty-fourth Street to take a walk. You ask at Astor’s for something to eat and are refused. Then some days later, although it is several miles from the Bowery, and there are several hundred thousand houses in New York, you go back to the same house where you were once refused, for what?”
He looked up and a nervous smile twitched his cheeks.
“To take a sleep,” he answered.
“Where did you sleep the night previous?”
“No. 06 Bowery.”
“You’d been sleeping there for some time, I believe. Why, then, did you go to Astor’s for a bed?”
“I dunno.”
“What time in the evening was it?”
“Six o’clock.”
“What were you doing up there; looking for work?”
“No; taking a walk.”
“Then, why did you go into Astor’s?”
“I heard some men who were working in the streets say to go in there and take a sleep.”

Is He Crazy?

I looked at him a moment after he made this ridiculous assertion. I wondered if, finding himself in the clutches of the law, he meant to play crazy.

He agreed very quickly to my examining his eyes. The iris contracted and dilated readily to the light and dark.

“Any of your family ever been insane?” I demanded.

“No,” he replied, questioningly.

“Have you ever heard voices before?”

“No.”

“Did you know the men who were working in the street?”

“No.”

“Did they speak your name and say John Garvey, go in there and sleep?”

“No; just said go in and sleep.”

“You’re not crazy and you’re not a simpleton, as some have suggested?” I asked him.

“Why, who says so” he demanded, with a show of interest.

“Your lawyers said you were a simpleton, half idiot,” I told him.

“I have no lawyers,” he asserted promptly and decidedly.

“Well, the lawyers some unknown person has retained in your behalf.” I corrected myself. “But to go back to the story. You were walking along Thirty-Fourth street about 6 o’clock in the evening and you saw a door ajar, and, pushing it open, you walked into the house. Was there any one inside?”

Just Walked Upstairs

“Yes, a servant girl stood in the kitchen.”

“Did she see you?”

“Yes, she looked straight at me.”

“What did she say to you?”

“Nothing.”

“How was she dressed?”

“In dark clothes.”

“Wore an apron?”

“No.”

“What was the color of her hair?”

“I did not notice.”

“Then what did you do next?”

“I walked past her and opened a glass door on the other side of the kitchen and walked up the servants’ stairs to the top floor.”

“Why did you go to the top floor?”

“I dunno.”

“What did you do when you got up to the top?”

“I saw a door open and I went in to bed.”

“Weren’t you hungry at 6 in the evening?”

“No; I had just eaten in a restaurant.”

“Where?”

“I’ve forgotten.”

“Were you sleepy, that you went to bed at 6 in the evening?”

“No.”

“Then your object in going up to the room was not because you wanted to sleep or felt sleepy?”

“I dunno,” and he would give no other answer.

“Why did you lock the door?” I asked.

“I dunno.”

Then The Policeman Came

“Do you usually lock your room in the Bowery lodging-house?”

“No!”

“What happened next?”

“The policeman took me out about a quarter to eight.”

“Why didn’t you open the door when they pounded upon it, if you merely wanted to sleep, and went there with no evil purpose?”

“I dunno.”

“What was your intention in going there? Did you know one of the servant girls or did you go there to steal?”

“I didn’t know any servants there and nothing was found on me,” was the cautions reply.

“I suppose you know things look pretty dark for you now?”

“I didn’t do nothing,” he asserted.

“But you were found in a man’s house and can give no explanation of your conduct.”

“I haven’t been there since I was found.” He reminded me.

“What has that to do with it?” I asked.

“My fine has been paid for that and I can’t be tried again for the same thing,” he said sharply.

“Who told you that?” I asked.

“No one,” he replied.

John Garvey says he reads the newspapers, but he refused to accept two evening papers from me. He said there was nothing he wanted, and that he had no fear of the outcome of his case. He was perfectly easy and composed, answered all questions briefly and cautiously, but without the faintest show of impatience or displeasure. He says he was never in trouble before and so far as can be seen he has no uneasiness about this.

I pressed him for a name of some friend and he evaded, saying he hadn’t seen any of his friends during the last two or three years. At last he mentioned one, a James McGrath, a cab driver for Denton’s stables, Thirty-sixth Street and Sixth Avenue. Is it surprising that John Jacob Astor wants to know something about the Astor tramp?