

Mark Twain, a Biography — Volume III, Part 1: 1900-1907 eBook

Mark Twain, a Biography — Volume III, Part 1: 1900-1907 by Albert Bigelow Paine

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.

Contents

Mark Twain, a Biography — Volume III, Part 1: 1900-1907 eBook.....	1
Contents.....	2
Table of Contents.....	9
Page 1.....	11
Page 2.....	13
Page 3.....	15
Page 4.....	17
Page 5.....	18
Page 6.....	19
Page 7.....	21
Page 8.....	22
Page 9.....	23
Page 10.....	24
Page 11.....	25
Page 12.....	26
Page 13.....	28
Page 14.....	30
Page 15.....	32
Page 16.....	34
Page 17.....	35
Page 18.....	36
Page 19.....	38
Page 20.....	40
Page 21.....	42
Page 22.....	43

Page 23.....	45
Page 24.....	47
Page 25.....	49
Page 26.....	51
Page 27.....	53
Page 28.....	54
Page 29.....	56
Page 30.....	58
Page 31.....	61
Page 32.....	63
Page 33.....	65
Page 34.....	67
Page 35.....	69
Page 36.....	71
Page 37.....	72
Page 38.....	74
Page 39.....	75
Page 40.....	77
Page 41.....	78
Page 42.....	79
Page 43.....	81
Page 44.....	83
Page 45.....	84
Page 46.....	86
Page 47.....	87
Page 48.....	89

Page 49.....	90
Page 50.....	91
Page 51.....	93
Page 52.....	95
Page 53.....	97
Page 54.....	99
Page 55.....	101
Page 56.....	102
Page 57.....	104
Page 58.....	106
Page 59.....	108
Page 60.....	110
Page 61.....	111
Page 62.....	112
Page 63.....	113
Page 64.....	115
Page 65.....	117
Page 66.....	119
Page 67.....	121
Page 68.....	123
Page 69.....	125
Page 70.....	127
Page 71.....	128
Page 72.....	129
Page 73.....	131
Page 74.....	133

Page 75.....	135
Page 76.....	136
Page 77.....	138
Page 78.....	140
Page 79.....	142
Page 80.....	144
Page 81.....	146
Page 82.....	148
Page 83.....	150
Page 84.....	151
Page 85.....	152
Page 86.....	154
Page 87.....	156
Page 88.....	157
Page 89.....	159
Page 90.....	160
Page 91.....	161
Page 92.....	163
Page 93.....	165
Page 94.....	166
Page 95.....	167
Page 96.....	169
Page 97.....	171
Page 98.....	173
Page 99.....	175
Page 100.....	176

Page 101.....	178
Page 102.....	179
Page 103.....	181
Page 104.....	183
Page 105.....	185
Page 106.....	187
Page 107.....	189
Page 108.....	191
Page 109.....	192
Page 110.....	194
Page 111.....	195
Page 112.....	197
Page 113.....	198
Page 114.....	199
Page 115.....	200
Page 116.....	202
Page 117.....	203
Page 118.....	204
Page 119.....	205
Page 120.....	207
Page 121.....	208
Page 122.....	209
Page 123.....	210
Page 124.....	212
Page 125.....	214
Page 126.....	216

Page 127.....	218
Page 128.....	220
Page 129.....	222
Page 130.....	223
Page 131.....	224
Page 132.....	226
Page 133.....	228
Page 134.....	230
Page 135.....	232
Page 136.....	234
Page 137.....	236
Page 138.....	238
Page 139.....	239
Page 140.....	241
Page 141.....	243
Page 142.....	244
Page 143.....	246
Page 144.....	248
Page 145.....	250
Page 146.....	252
Page 147.....	253
Page 148.....	254
Page 149.....	256
Page 150.....	257
Page 151.....	258
Page 152.....	260

Page 153.....	261
Page 154.....	263
Page 155.....	265
Page 156.....	266

Table of Contents

Section	Page
Start of eBook	1
THE RETURN OF THE CONQUEROR	1
CCXIII	6
CCXIV	9
CCXV	15
CCXVI	20
CCXVII	22
CCXVIII	24
CCXIX	28
CCXX	33
CCXXI	34
CCXXII	37
CCXXIII	39
CCXXIV	43
CCXXV	45
CCXXVI	47
CCXXVII	50
CCXXVIII	54
CCXXXIX	57
CCXXX	59
CCXXXI	63
CCXXXII	65
CCXXXIII	67
CCXXXIV	69
CCXXXV	75
CCXXXVI	82
CCXXXVII	85
CCXXXVIII	87
CCXXXIX	92
CCXL	96
CCXLI	100
CCXLII	105
CCXLIII	107
CCXLIV	109
CCXLV	111
CCXLVI	116
CCXLVI	121
CCXLVIII	124
CCXLIX	126

CCL	131
CCLI	135
CCLII	142
CCLIII	150
CCLIV	151
CCLV	154

Page 1

THE RETURN OF THE CONQUEROR

It would be hard to exaggerate the stir which the newspapers and the public generally made over the homecoming of Mark Twain. He had left America, staggering under heavy obligation and set out on a pilgrimage of redemption. At the moment when this Mecca, was in view a great sorrow had befallen him and, stirred a world-wide and soul-deep tide of human sympathy. Then there had followed such ovation as has seldom been conferred upon a private citizen, and now approaching old age, still in the fullness of his mental vigor, he had returned to his native soil with the prestige of these honors upon him and the vast added glory of having made his financial fight single-handed-and won.

He was heralded literally as a conquering hero. Every paper in the land had an editorial telling the story of his debts, his sorrow, and his triumphs.

“He had behaved like Walter Scott,” says Howells, “as millions rejoiced to know who had not known how Walter Scott had behaved till they knew it was like Clemens.”

Howells acknowledges that he had some doubts as to the permanency of the vast acclaim of the American public, remembering, or perhaps assuming, a national fickleness. Says Howells:

He had hitherto been more intelligently accepted or more largely imagined in Europe, and I suppose it was my sense of this that inspired the stupidity of my saying to him when we came to consider “the state of polite learning” among us, “You mustn’t expect people to keep it up here as they do in England.” But it appeared that his countrymen were only wanting the chance, and they kept it up in honor of him past all precedent.

Clemens went to the Earlington Hotel and began search for a furnished house in New York. They would not return to Hartford—at least not yet. The associations there were still too sad, and they immediately became more so. Five days after Mark Twain’s return to America, his old friend and co-worker, Charles Dudley Warner, died. Clemens went to Hartford to act as a pall-bearer and while there looked into the old home. To Sylvester Baxter, of Boston, who had been present, he wrote a few days later:

It was a great pleasure to me to renew the other days with you, & there was a pathetic pleasure in seeing Hartford & the house again; but I realized that if we ever enter the house again to live our hearts will break. I am not sure that we shall ever be strong enough to endure that strain.

Even if the surroundings had been less sorrowful it is not likely that Clemens would have returned to Hartford at this time. He had become a world-character, a dweller in capitals. Everywhere he moved a world revolved about him. Such a figure in Germany

would live naturally in Berlin; in England London; in France, Paris; in Austria, Vienna; in America his headquarters could only be New York.

Page 2

Clemens empowered certain of his friends to find a home for him, and Mr. Frank N. Doubleday discovered an attractive and handsomely furnished residence at 14 West Tenth Street, which was promptly approved. Doubleday, who was going to Boston, left orders with the agent to draw the lease and take it up to the new tenant for signature. To Clemens he said:

“The house is as good as yours. All you’ve got to do is to sign the lease. You can consider it all settled.”

When Doubleday returned from Boston a few days later the agent called on him and complained that he couldn’t find Mark Twain anywhere. It was reported at his hotel that he had gone and left no address. Doubleday was mystified; then, reflecting, he had an inspiration. He walked over to 14 West Tenth Street and found what he had suspected—Mark Twain had moved in. He had convinced the caretaker that everything was all right and he was quite at home. Doubleday said:

“Why, you haven’t executed the lease yet.”

“No,” said Clemens, “but you said the house was as good as mine,” to which Doubleday agreed, but suggested that they go up to the real-estate office and give the agent notice that he was in possession of the premises.

Doubleday’s troubles were not quite over, however. Clemens began to find defects in his new home and assumed to hold Doubleday responsible for them. He sent a daily postal card complaining of the windows, furnace, the range, the water-whatever he thought might lend interest to Doubleday’s life. As a matter of fact, he was pleased with the place. To MacAlister he wrote:

We were very lucky to get this big house furnished. There was not another one in town procurable that would answer us, but this one is all right-space enough in it for several families, the rooms all old-fashioned, great size.

The house at 14 West Tenth Street became suddenly one of the most conspicuous residences in New York. The papers immediately made its appearance familiar. Many people passed down that usually quiet street, stopping to observe or point out where Mark Twain lived. There was a constant procession of callers of every kind. Many were friends, old and new, but there was a multitude of strangers. Hundreds came merely to express their appreciation of his work, hoping for a personal word or a hand-shake or an autograph; but there were other hundreds who came with this thing and that thing—axes to grind—and there were newspaper reporters to ask his opinion on politics, or polygamy, or woman’s suffrage; on heaven and hell and happiness; on the latest novel; on the war in Africa, the troubles in China; on anything under the sun, important or unimportant, interesting or inane, concerning which one might possibly hold an opinion. He was unfailing “copy” if they could but get a word with him. Anything that he might

choose to say upon any subject whatever was seized upon and magnified and printed with head-lines. Sometimes opinions were invented for him. If he let fall a few words they were multiplied into a column interview.

Page 3

“That reporter worked a miracle equal to the loaves and fishes,” he said of one such performance.

Many men would have become annoyed and irritable as these things continued; but Mark Twain was greater than that. Eventually he employed a secretary to stand between him and the wash of the tide, as a sort of breakwater; but he seldom lost his temper no matter what was the request which was laid before him, for he recognized underneath it the great tribute of a great nation.

Of course his literary valuation would be affected by the noise of the general applause. Magazines and syndicates besought him for manuscripts. He was offered fifty cents and even a dollar a word for whatever he might give them. He felt a child-like gratification in these evidences of his market advancement, but he was not demoralized by them. He confined his work to a few magazines, and in November concluded an arrangement with the new management of Harper & Brothers, by which that firm was to have the exclusive serial privilege of whatever he might write at a fixed rate of twenty cents per word—a rate increased to thirty cents by a later contract, which also provided an increased royalty for the publication of his books.

The United States, as a nation, does not confer any special honors upon private citizens. We do not have decorations and titles, even though there are times when it seems that such things might be not inappropriately conferred. Certain of the newspapers, more lavish in their enthusiasm than others, were inclined to propose, as one paper phrased it, “Some peculiar recognition—something that should appeal to Samuel L. Clemens, the man, rather than to Mark Twain, the literate. Just what form this recognition should take is doubtful, for the case has no exact precedent.”

Perhaps the paper thought that Mark Twain was entitled—as he himself once humorously suggested—to the “thanks of Congress” for having come home alive and out of debt, but it is just as well that nothing of the sort was ever seriously considered. The thanks of the public at large contained more substance, and was a tribute much more to his mind. The paper above quoted ended by suggesting a very large dinner and memorial of welcome as being more in keeping with the republican idea and the American expression of good-will.

But this was an unneeded suggestion. If he had eaten all the dinners proposed he would not have lived to enjoy his public honors a month. As it was, he accepted many more dinners than he could eat, and presently fell into the habit of arriving when the banqueting was about over and the after-dinner speaking about to begin. Even so the strain told on him.

“His friends saw that he was wearing himself out,” says Howells, and perhaps this was true, for he grew thin and pale and contracted a hacking cough. He did not spare

himself as often as he should have done. Once to Richard Watson Gilder he sent this line of regrets:

Page 4

In bed with a chest cold and other company—Wednesday. *Dear Gilder*,—I can't. If I were a well man I could explain with this pencil, but in the cir—ces I will leave it all to your imagination.

Was it Grady who killed himself trying to do all the dining and speeching?

No, old man, no, no! Ever yours, *Mark*.

He became again the guest of honor at the Lotos Club, which had dined him so lavishly seven years before, just previous to his financial collapse. That former dinner had been a distinguished occasion, but never before had the Lotos Club been so brimming with eager hospitality as on the second great occasion. In closing his introductory speech President Frank Lawrence said, "We hail him as one who has borne great burdens with manliness and courage, who has emerged from great struggles victorious," and the assembled diners roared out their applause. Clemens in his reply said:

Your president has referred to certain burdens which I was weighted with. I am glad he did, as it gives me an opportunity which I wanted—to speak of those debts. You all knew what he meant when he referred to it, & of the poor bankrupt firm of C. L. Webster & Co. No one has said a word about those creditors. There were ninety-six creditors in all, & not by a finger's weight did ninety-five out of the ninety-six add to the burden of that time. They treated me well; they treated me handsomely. I never knew I owed them anything; not a sign came from them.

It was like him to make that public acknowledgment. He could not let an unfair impression remain that any man or any set of men had laid an unnecessary burden upon him—his sense of justice would not consent to it. He also spoke on that occasion of certain national changes.

How many things have happened in the seven years I have been away from home! We have fought a righteous war, and a righteous war is a rare thing in history. We have turned aside from our own comfort and seen to it that freedom should exist, not only within our own gates, but in our own neighborhood. We have set Cuba free and placed her among the galaxy of free nations of the world. We started out to set those poor Filipinos free, but why that righteous plan miscarried perhaps I shall never know. We have also been making a creditable showing in China, and that is more than all the other powers can say. The "Yellow Terror" is threatening the world, but no matter what happens the United States says that it has had no part in it. Since I have been away we have been nursing free silver. We have watched by its cradle, we have done our best to raise that child, but every time it seemed to be getting along nicely along came some pestiferous Republican and gave it the measles or something. I fear we will never raise that child. We've done more than that.

Page 5

We elected a President four years ago. We've found fault and criticized him, and here a day or two ago we go and elect him for another four years, with votes enough to spare to do it over again.

One club followed another in honoring Mark Twain—the Aldine, the St. Nicholas, the Press clubs, and other associations and societies. His old friends were at these dinners—Howells, Aldrich, Depew, Rogers, ex-Speaker Reed—and they praised him and gibed him to his and their hearts' content.

It was a political year, and he generally had something to say on matters municipal, national, or international; and he spoke out more and more freely, as with each opportunity he warmed more righteously to his subject.

At the dinner given to him by the St. Nicholas Club he said, with deep irony:

Gentlemen, you have here the best municipal government in the world, and the most fragrant and the purest. The very angels of heaven envy you and wish they had a government like it up there. You got it by your noble fidelity to civic duty; by the stern and ever watchful exercise of the great powers lodged in you as lovers and guardians of your city; by your manly refusal to sit inert when base men would have invaded her high places and possessed them; by your instant retaliation when any insult was offered you in her person, or any assault was made upon her fair fame. It is you who have made this government what it is, it is you who have made it the envy and despair of the other capitals of the world—and God bless you for it, gentlemen, God bless you! And when you get to heaven at last they'll say with joy, "Oh, there they come, the representatives of the perfectest citizenship in the universe show them the archangel's box and turn on the limelight!"

Those hearers who in former years had been indifferent to Mark Twain's more serious purpose began to realize that, whatever he may have been formerly, he was by no means now a mere fun-maker, but a man of deep and grave convictions, able to give them the fullest and most forcible expression. He still might make them laugh, but he also made them think, and he stirred them to a truer gospel of patriotism. He did not preach a patriotism that meant a boisterous cheering of the Stars and Stripes right or wrong, but a patriotism that proposed to keep the Stars and Stripes clean and worth shouting for. In an article, perhaps it was a speech, begun at this time he wrote:

We teach the boys to atrophy their independence. We teach them to take their patriotism at second-hand; to shout with the largest crowd without examining into the right or wrong of the matter—exactly as boys under monarchies are taught and have always been taught. We teach them to regard as traitors, and hold in aversion and contempt, such as do not shout with the crowd, & so here in our democracy we are cheering a thing which of all things is most foreign to it & out of place—the delivery

Page 6

of our political conscience into somebody else's keeping. This is patriotism on the Russian plan.

Howells tells of discussing these vital matters with him in "an upper room, looking south over a quiet, open space of back yards where," he says, "we fought our battles in behalf of the Filipinos and Boers, and he carried on his campaign against the missionaries in China."

Howells at the time expressed an amused fear that Mark Twain's countrymen, who in former years had expected him to be merely a humorist, should now, in the light of his wider acceptance abroad, demand that he be mainly serious.

But the American people were quite ready to accept him in any of his phases, fully realizing that whatever his philosophy or doctrine it would have somewhat of the humorous form, and whatever his humor, there would somewhere be wisdom in it. He had in reality changed little; for a generation he had thought the sort of things which he now, with advanced years and a different audience, felt warranted in uttering openly. The man who in '64 had written against corruption in San Francisco, who a few years later had defended the emigrant Chinese against persecution, who at the meetings of the Monday Evening Club had denounced hypocrisy in politics, morals, and national issues, did not need to change to be able to speak out against similar abuses now. And a newer generation as willing to herald Mark Twain as a sage as well as a humorist, and on occasion to quite overlook the absence of the cap and bells.

CCXIII

MARK TWAIN—GENERAL SPOKESMAN

Clemens did not confine his speeches altogether to matters of reform. At a dinner given by the Nineteenth Century Club in November, 1900, he spoke on the "Disappearance of Literature," and at the close of the discussion of that subject, referring to Milton and Scott, he said:

Professor Winchester also said something about there being no modern epics like "Paradise Lost." I guess he's right. He talked as if he was pretty familiar with that piece of literary work, and nobody would suppose that he never had read it. I don't believe any of you have ever read "Paradise Lost," and you don't want to. That's something that you just want to take on trust. It's a classic, just as Professor Winchester says, and it meets his definition of a classic—something that everybody wants to have read and nobody wants to read. Professor Trent also had a good deal to say about the disappearance of literature. He said that Scott would outlive all his critics. I guess that's true. That fact of the business is you've got to be one of two ages to appreciate

Scott. When you're eighteen you can read Ivanhoe, and you want to wait until you're ninety to read some of the rest. It takes a pretty well-regulated abstemious critic to live ninety years.

But a few days later he was back again in the forefront of reform, preaching at the Berkeley Lyceum against foreign occupation in China. It was there that he declared himself a Boxer.

Page 7

Why should not China be free from the foreigners, who are only making trouble on her soil? If they would only all go home what a pleasant place China would be for the Chinese! We do not allow Chinamen to come here, and I say, in all seriousness, that it would be a graceful thing to let China decide who shall go there. China never wanted foreigners any more than foreigners wanted Chinamen, and on this question I am with the Boxers every time. The Boxer is a patriot. He loves his country better than he does the countries of other people. I wish him success. We drive the Chinaman out of our country; the Boxer believes in driving us out of his country. I am a Boxer, too, on those terms.

Introducing Winston Churchill, of England, at a dinner some weeks later, he explained how generous England and America had been in not requiring fancy rates for “extinguished missionaries” in China as Germany had done. Germany had required territory and cash, he said, in payment for her missionaries, while the United States and England had been willing to settle for produce—firecrackers and tea.

The Churchill introduction would seem to have been his last speech for the year 1900, and he expected it, with one exception, to be the last for a long time. He realized that he was tired and that the strain upon him made any other sort of work out of the question. Writing to MacAlister at the end of the year, he said, “I seem to have made many speeches, but it is not so. It is not more than ten, I think.” Still, a respectable number in the space of two months, considering that each was carefully written and committed to memory, and all amid crushing social pressure. Again to MacAlister:

I declined 7 banquets yesterday (which is double the daily average) & answered 29 letters. I have slaved at my mail every day since we arrived in mid-October, but Jean is learning to typewrite & presently I'll dictate & thereby save some scraps of time.

He added that after January 4th he did not intend to speak again for a year—that he would not speak then only that the matter concerned the reform of city government.

The occasion of January 4, 1901, was a rather important one. It was a meeting of the City Club, then engaged in the crusade for municipal reform. Wheeler H. Peckham presided, and Bishop Potter made the opening address. It all seems like ancient history now, and perhaps is not very vital any more; but the movement was making a great stir then, and Mark Twain's declaration that he believed forty-nine men out of fifty were honest, and that the forty-nine only needed to organize to disqualify the fiftieth man (always organized for crime), was quoted as a sort of slogan for reform.

Clemens was not permitted to keep his resolution that he wouldn't speak again that year. He had become a sort of general spokesman on public matters, and demands were made upon him which could not be denied. He declined a Yale alumni dinner, but he could not refuse to preside at the Lincoln Birthday celebration at Carnegie Hall, February 11th, where he must introduce Watterson as the speaker of the evening.

Page 8

“Think of it!” he wrote Twichell. “Two old rebels functioning there: I as president and Watterson as orator of the day! Things have changed somewhat in these forty years, thank God!”

The Watterson introduction is one of the choicest of Mark Twain’s speeches—a pure and perfect example of simple eloquence, worthy of the occasion which gave it utterance, worthy in spite of its playful paragraphs (or even because of them, for Lincoln would have loved them), to become the matrix of that imperishable Gettysburg phrase with which he makes his climax. He opened by dwelling for a moment on Colonel Watterson as a soldier, journalist, orator, statesman, and patriot; then he said:

It is a curious circumstance that without collusion of any kind, but merely in obedience to a strange and pleasant and dramatic freak of destiny, he and I, kinsmen by blood—[Colonel Watterson’s forebears had intermarried with the Lamptons.]—for we are that—and one-time rebels—for we were that—should be chosen out of a million surviving quondam rebels to come here and bare our heads in reverence and love of that noble soul whom 40 years ago we tried with all our hearts and all our strength to defeat and dispossess —Abraham Lincoln! Is the Rebellion ended and forgotten? Are the Blue and the Gray one to-day? By authority of this sign we may answer yes; there was a Rebellion—that incident is closed. I was born and reared in a slave State, my father was a slaveowner; and in the Civil War I was a second lieutenant in the Confederate service. For a while. This second cousin of mine, Colonel Watterson, the orator of this present occasion, was born and reared in a slave State, was a colonel in the Confederate service, and rendered me such assistance as he could in my self-appointed great task of annihilating the Federal armies and breaking up the Union. I laid my plans with wisdom and foresight, and if Colonel Watterson had obeyed my orders I should have succeeded in my giant undertaking. It was my intention to drive General Grant into the Pacific—if I could get transportation—and I told Colonel Watterson to surround the Eastern armies and wait till I came. But he was insubordinate, and stood upon a punctilio of military etiquette; he refused to take orders from a second lieutenant—and the Union was saved. This is the first time that this secret has been revealed. Until now no one outside the family has known the facts. But there they stand: Watterson saved the Union. Yet to this day that man gets no pension. Those were great days, splendid days. What an uprising it was! For the hearts of the whole nation, North and South, were in the war. We of the South were not ashamed; for, like the men of the North, we were fighting for ’flags we loved; and when men fight for these things, and under these convictions, with nothing sordid to tarnish their cause, that cause is holy, the blood spilt for it is sacred, the life that is laid down

Page 9

for it is consecrated. To-day we no longer regret the result, to-day we are glad it came out as it did, but we are not ashamed that we did our endeavor; we did our bravest best, against despairing odds, for the cause which was precious to us and which our consciences approved; and we are proud—and you are proud—the kindred blood in your veins answers when I say it—you are proud of the record we made in those mighty collisions in the fields. What an uprising it was! We did not have to supplicate for soldiers on either side. “We are coming, Father Abraham, three hundred thousand strong!” That was the music North and South. The very choicest young blood and brawn and brain rose up from Maine to the Gulf and flocked to the standards—just as men always do when in their eyes their cause is great and fine and their hearts are in it; just as men flocked to the Crusades, sacrificing all they possessed to the cause, and entering cheerfully upon hardships which we cannot even imagine in this age, and upon toilsome and wasting journeys which in our time would be the equivalent of circumnavigating the globe five times over. North and South we put our hearts into that colossal struggle, and out of it came the blessed fulfilment of the prophecy of the immortal Gettysburg speech which said: “We here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that a government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.” We are here to honor the birthday of the greatest citizen, and the noblest and the best, after Washington, that this land or any other has yet produced. The old wounds are healed, you and we are brothers again; you testify it by honoring two of us, once soldiers of the Lost Cause, and foes of your great and good leader—with the privilege of assisting here; and we testify it by laying our honest homage at the feet of Abraham Lincoln, and in forgetting that you of the North and we of the South were ever enemies, and remembering only that we are now indistinguishably fused together and nameable by one common great name—Americans!

CCXIV

MARK TWAIN AND THE MISSIONARIES

Mark Twain had really begun his crusade for reform soon after his arrival in America in a practical hand-to-hand manner. His housekeeper, Katie Leary, one night employed a cabman to drive her from the Grand Central Station to the house at 14 West Tenth Street. No contract had been made as to price, and when she arrived there the cabman's extortionate charge was refused. He persisted in it, and she sent into the house for her employer. Of all men, Mark Twain was the last one to countenance an extortion. He reasoned with the man kindly enough at first; when the driver at last became abusive Clemens demanded his number, which was at first refused. In the end he paid the legal fare, and in the morning entered a formal complaint, something altogether unexpected, for the American public is accustomed to suffering almost any sort of imposition to avoid trouble and publicity.

Page 10

In some notes which Clemens had made in London four years earlier he wrote:

If you call a policeman to settle the dispute you can depend on one thing—he will decide it against you every time. And so will the New York policeman. In London if you carry your case into court the man that is entitled to win it will win it. In New York—but no one carries a cab case into court there. It is my impression that it is now more than thirty years since any one has carried a cab case into court there.

Nevertheless, he was promptly on hand when the case was called to sustain the charge and to read the cabdrivers' union and the public in general a lesson in good-citizenship. At the end of the hearing, to a representative of the union he said:

"This is not a matter of sentiment, my dear sir. It is simply practical business. You cannot imagine that I am making money wasting an hour or two of my time prosecuting a case in which I can have no personal interest whatever. I am doing this just as any citizen should do. He has no choice. He has a distinct duty. He is a non-classified policeman. Every citizen is, a policeman, and it is his duty to assist the police and the magistracy in every way he can, and give his time, if necessary, to do so. Here is a man who is a perfectly natural product of an infamous system in this city—a charge upon the lax patriotism in this city of New York that this thing can exist. You have encouraged him, in every way you know how to overcharge. He is not the criminal here at all. The criminal is the citizen of New York and the absence of patriotism. I am not here to avenge myself on him. I have no quarrel with him. My quarrel is with the citizens of New York, who have encouraged him, and who created him by encouraging him to overcharge in this way."

The driver's license was suspended. The case made a stir in the newspapers, and it is not likely that any one incident ever contributed more to cab-driving morals in New York City.

But Clemens had larger matters than this in prospect. His many speeches on municipal and national abuses he felt were more or less ephemeral. He proposed now to write himself down more substantially and for a wider hearing. The human race was behaving very badly: unspeakable corruption was rampant in the city; the Boers were being oppressed in South Africa; the natives were being murdered in the Philippines; Leopold of Belgium was massacring and mutilating the blacks in the Congo, and the allied powers, in the cause of Christ, were slaughtering the Chinese. In his letters he had more than once boiled over touching these matters, and for New-Year's Eve, 1900, had written:

A greeting from the nineteenth to the twentieth century

Page 11

I bring you the stately nation named Christendom, returning, bedraggled, besmirched, and dishonored, from pirate raids in Kiao- Chou, Manchuria, South Africa, and the Philippines, with her soul full of meanness, her pocket full of boodle, and her mouth full of pious hypocrisies. Give her soap and towel, but hide the looking- glass.—[Prepared for Red Cross Society watch-meeting, which was postponed until March. Clemens recalled his “Greeting” for that reason and for one other, which he expressed thus: “The list of greeters thus far issued by you contains only vague generalities and one definite name—mine: ‘Some kings and queens and Mark Twain.’ Now I am not enjoying this sparkling solitude and distinction. It makes me feel like a circus-poster in a graveyard.”]

This was a sort of preliminary. Then, restraining himself no longer, he embodied his sentiments in an article for the North American Review entitled, “To the Person Sitting in Darkness.” There was crying need for some one to speak the right word. He was about the only one who could do it and be certain of a universal audience. He took as his text some Christmas Eve clippings from the New York Tribune and Sun which he had been saving for this purpose. The Tribune clipping said:

Christmas will dawn in the United States over a people full of hope and aspiration and good cheer. Such a condition means contentment and happiness. The carping grumbler who may here and there go forth will find few to listen to him. The majority will wonder what is the matter with him, and pass on.

A Sun clipping depicted the “terrible offenses against humanity committed in the name of politics in some of the most notorious East Side districts”—the unmissionaried, unpoliced darker New York. The Sun declared that they could not be pictured even verbally. But it suggested enough to make the reader shudder at the hideous depths of vice in the sections named. Another clipping from the same paper reported the “Rev. Mr. Ament, of the American Board of Foreign Missions,” as having collected indemnities for Boxer damages in China at the rate of three hundred taels for each murder, “full payment for all destroyed property belonging to Christians, and national fines amounting to thirteen times the indemnity.” It quoted Mr. Ament as saying that the money so obtained was used for the propagation of the Gospel, and that the amount so collected was moderate when compared with the amount secured by the Catholics, who had demanded, in addition to money, life for life, that is to say, “head for head”—in one district six hundred and eighty heads having been so collected.

The despatch made Mr. Ament say a great deal more than this, but the gist here is enough. Mark Twain, of course, was fiercely stirred. The missionary idea had seldom appealed to him, and coupled with this business of bloodshed, it was less attractive than usual. He printed the clippings in full, one following the other; then he said:

Page 12

By happy luck we get all these glad tidings on Christmas Eve—just the time to enable us to celebrate the day with proper gaiety and enthusiasm. Our spirits soar and we find we can even make jokes; tael I win, heads you lose.

He went on to score Ament, to compare the missionary policy in China to that of the Pawnee Indians, and to propose for him a monument—subscriptions to be sent to the American Board. He denounced the national policies in Africa, China, and the Philippines, and showed by the reports and by the private letters of soldiers home, how cruel and barbarous and fiendish had been the warfare made by those whose avowed purpose was to carry the blessed light of civilization and Gospel “to the benighted native”—how in very truth these priceless blessings had been handed on the point of a bayonet to the “Person Sitting in Darkness.”

Mark Twain never wrote anything more scorching, more penetrating in its sarcasm, more fearful in its revelation of injustice and hypocrisy, than his article “To the Person Sitting in Darkness.” He put aquafortis on all the raw places, and when it was finished he himself doubted the wisdom of printing it. Howells, however, agreed that it should be published, and “it ought to be illustrated by Dan Beard,” he added, “with such pictures as he made for the Yankee in King Arthur’s Court, but you’d better hang yourself afterward.”

Meeting Beard a few days later, Clemens mentioned the matter and said:

“So if you make the pictures, you hang with me.”

But pictures were not required. It was published in the North American Review for February, 1901, as the opening article; after which the cyclone. Two storms moving in opposite directions produce a cyclone, and the storms immediately developed; one all for Mark Twain and his principles, the other all against him. Every paper in England and America commented on it editorially, with bitter denunciations or with eager praise, according to their lights and convictions.

At 14 West Tenth Street letters, newspaper clippings, documents poured in by the bushel—laudations, vituperations, denunciations, vindications; no such tumult ever occurred in a peaceful literary home. It was really as if he had thrown a great missile into the human hive, one-half of which regarded it as a ball of honey and the remainder as a cobblestone. Whatever other effect it may have had, it left no thinking person unawakened.

Clemens reveled in it. W. A. Rogers, in Harper’s Weekly, caricatured him as Tom Sawyer in a snow fort, assailed by the shower of snowballs, “having the time of his life.” Another artist, Fred Lewis, pictured him as Huck Finn with a gun.

The American Board was naturally disturbed. The Ament clipping which Clemens had used had been public property for more than a month—its authenticity never denied; but it was immediately denied now, and the cable kept hot with inquiries.

Page 13

The Rev. Judson Smith, one of the board, took up the defense of Dr. Ament, declaring him to be one who had suffered for the cause, and asked Mark Twain, whose “brilliant article,” he said, “would produce an effect quite beyond the reach of plain argument,” not to do an innocent man an injustice. Clemens in the same paper replied that such was not his intent, that Mr. Ament in his report had simply arraigned himself.

Then it suddenly developed that the cable report had “grossly exaggerated” the amount of Mr. Ament’s collections. Instead of thirteen times the indemnity it should have read “one and a third times” the indemnity; whereupon, in another open letter, the board demanded retraction and apology. Clemens would not fail to make the apology—at least he would explain. It was precisely the kind of thing that would appeal to him—the delicate moral difference between a demand thirteen times as great as it should be and a demand that was only one and a third times the correct amount. “To My Missionary Critics,” in the *North American Review* for April (1901), was his formal and somewhat lengthy reply.

“I have no prejudice against apologies,” he wrote. “I trust I shall never withhold one when it is due.”

He then proceeded to make out his case categorically. Touching the exaggerated indemnity, he said:

To Dr. Smith the “thirteen-fold-extra” clearly stood for “theft and extortion,” and he was right, distinctly right, indisputably right. He manifestly thinks that when it got scaled away down to a mere “one-third” a little thing like that was some other than “theft and extortion.” Why, only the board knows!

I will try to explain this difficult problem so that the board can get an idea of it. If a pauper owes me a dollar and I catch him unprotected and make him pay me fourteen dollars thirteen of it is “theft and extortion.” If I make him pay only one dollar thirty-three and a third cents the thirty-three and a third cents are “theft and extortion,” just the same.

I will put it in another way still simpler. If a man owes me one dog —any kind of a dog, the breed is of no consequence—and I—but let it go; the board would never understand it. It can’t understand these involved and difficult things.

He offered some further illustrations, including the “Tale of a King and His Treasure” and another tale entitled “The Watermelons.”

I have it now. Many years ago, when I was studying for the gallows, I had a dear comrade, a youth who was not in my line, but still a scrupulously good fellow though devious. He was preparing to qualify for a place on the board, for there was going to be a vacancy by superannuation in about five years. This was down South, in the slavery

days. It was the nature of the negro then, as now, to steal watermelons. They stole three of the melons of an adoptive brother of mine, the only good ones he had. I suspected

Page 14

three of a neighbor's negroes, but there was no proof, and, besides, the watermelons in those negroes' private patches were all green and small and not up to indemnity standard. But in the private patches of three other negroes there was a number of competent melons. I consulted with my comrade, the understudy of the board. He said that if I would approve his arrangements he would arrange. I said, "Consider me the board; I approve; arrange." So he took a gun and went and collected three large melons for my brother-on-the-halfshell, and one over. I was greatly pleased and asked:

"Who gets the extra one?"

"Widows and orphans."

"A good idea, too. Why didn't you take thirteen?"

"It would have been wrong; a crime, in fact-theft and extortion."

"What is the one-third extra—the odd melon—the same?"

It caused him to reflect. But there was no result.

The justice of the peace was a stern man. On the trial he found fault with the scheme and required us to explain upon what we based our strange conduct—as he called it. The understudy said:

"On the custom of the niggers. They all do it."—[The point had been made by the board that it was the Chinese custom to make the inhabitants of a village responsible for individual crimes; and custom, likewise, to collect a third in excess of the damage, such surplus having been applied to the support of widows and orphans of the slain converts.]

The justice forgot his dignity and descended to sarcasm.

"Custom of the niggers! Are our morals so inadequate that we have to borrow of niggers?"

Then he said to the jury: "Three melons were owing; they were collected from persons not proven to owe them: this is theft; they were collected by compulsion: this is extortion. A melon was added for the widows and orphans. It was owed by no one. It is another theft, another extortion. Return it whence it came, with the others. It is not permissible here to apply to any purpose goods dishonestly obtained; not even to the feeding of widows and orphans, for this would be to put a shame upon charity and dishonor it."

He said it in open court, before everybody, and to me it did not seem very kind.

It was in the midst of the tumult that Clemens, perhaps feeling the need of sacred melody, wrote to Andrew Carnegie:

Dear sir & friend,—You seem to be in prosperity. Could you lend an admirer \$1.50 to buy a hymn-book with? God will bless you. I feel it; I know it.

N. B.—If there should be other applications, this one not to count.
Yours, *Mark*.

P. S.—Don't send the hymn-book; send the money; I want to make the selection myself.

Carnegie answered:

Nothing less than a two-dollar & a half hymn-book gilt will do for you. Your place in the choir (celestial) demands that & you shall have it.

Page 15

There's a new Gospel of Saint Mark in the North American which I like better than anything I've read for many a day.

I am willing to borrow a thousand dollars to distribute that sacred message in proper form, & if the author don't object may I send that sum, when I can raise it, to the Anti-Imperialist League, Boston, to which I am a contributor, the only missionary work I am responsible for. Just tell me you are willing & many thousands of the holy little missals will go forth. This inimitable satire is to become a classic. I count among my privileges in life that I know you, the author.

Perhaps a few more of the letters invited by Mark Twain's criticism of missionary work in China may still be of interest to the reader: Frederick T. Cook, of the Hospital Saturday and Sunday Association, wrote: "I hail you as the Voltaire of America. It is a noble distinction. God bless you and see that you weary not in well-doing in this noblest, sublimest of crusades."

Ministers were by no means all against him. The associate pastor of the Every-day Church, in Boston, sent this line: "I want to thank you for your matchless article in the current North American. It must make converts of well-nigh all who read it."

But a Boston school-teacher was angry. "I have been reading the North American," she wrote, "and I am filled with shame and remorse that I have dreamed of asking you to come to Boston to talk to the teachers."

On the outside of the envelope Clemens made this pencil note:

"Now, I suppose I offended that young lady by having an opinion of my own, instead of waiting and copying hers. I never thought. I suppose she must be as much as twenty-five, and probably the only patriot in the country."

A critic with a sense of humor asked: "Please excuse seeming impertinence, but were you ever adjudged insane? Be honest. How much money does the devil give you for arrainging Christianity and missionary causes?"

But there were more of the better sort. Edward S. Martin, in a grateful letter, said: "How gratifying it is to feel that we have a man among us who understands the rarity of the plain truth, and who delights to utter it, and has the gift of doing so without cant and with not too much seriousness."

Sir Hiram Maxim wrote: "I give you my candid opinion that what you have done is of very great value to the civilization of the world. There is no man living whose words carry greater weight than your own, as no one's writings are so eagerly sought after by all classes."

Clemens himself in his note-book set down this aphorism:

“Do right and you will be conspicuous.”

CCXV

Summer at “The Lair”

Page 16

In June Clemens took the family to Saranac Lake, to Ampersand. They occupied a log cabin which he called “The Lair,” on the south shore, near the water’s edge, a remote and beautiful place where, as had happened before, they were so comfortable and satisfied that they hoped to return another summer. There were swimming and boating and long walks in the woods; the worry and noise of the world were far away. They gave little enough attention to the mails. They took only a weekly paper, and were likely to allow it to lie in the postoffice uncalled for. Clemens, especially, loved the place, and wrote to Twichell:

I am on the front porch (lower one-main deck) of our little bijou of a dwelling-house. The lake edge (Lower Saranac) is so nearly under me that I can’t see the shore, but only the water, small-poxed with rain splashes—for there is a heavy down pour. It is charmingly like sitting snuggled up on a ship’s deck with the stretching sea all around but very much more satisfactory, for at sea a rainstorm is depressing, while here of course the effect engendered is just a deep sense of comfort & contentment. The heavy forest shuts us solidly in on three sides—there are no neighbors. There are beautiful little tan-colored impudent squirrels about. They take tea 5 P.M. (not invited) at the table in the woods where Jean does my typewriting, & one of them has been brave enough to sit upon Jean’s knee with his tail curved over his back & munch his food. They come to dinner 7 P.M. on the front porch (not invited), but Clara drives them away. It is an occupation which requires some industry & attention to business. They all have the one name —Blennerhasset, from Burr’s friend—& none of them answers to it except when hungry.

Clemens could work at “The Lair,” often writing in shady seclusions along the shore, and he finished there the two-part serial,—[Published in Harper’s Magazine for January and February, 1902.]—“The Double-Barrelled Detective Story,” intended originally as a burlesque on Sherlock Holmes. It did not altogether fulfil its purpose, and is hardly to be ranked as one of Mark Twain’s successes. It contains, however, one paragraph at least by which it is likely to be remembered, a hoax—his last one—on the reader. It runs as follows:

It was a crisp and spicy morning in early October. The lilacs and laburnums, lit with the glory-fires of autumn, hung burning and flashing in the upper air, a fairy bridge provided by kind nature for the wingless wild things that have their home in the tree-tops and would visit together; the larch and the pomegranate flung their purple and yellow flames in brilliant broad splashes along the slanting sweep of woodland, the sensuous fragrance of innumerable deciduous flowers rose upon the swooning atmosphere, far in the empty sky a solitary oesophagus slept upon motionless wing; everywhere brooded stillness, serenity, and the peace of God.

Page 17

The warm light and luxury of this paragraph are factitious. The careful reader will, note that its various accessories are ridiculously associated, and only the most careless reader will accept the oesophagus as a bird. But it disturbed a great many admirers, and numerous letters of inquiry came wanting to know what it was all about. Some suspected the joke and taunted him with it; one such correspondent wrote:

My dear Mark Twain,—Reading your “Double-Barrelled Detective Story” in the January Harper’s late one night I came to the paragraph where you so beautifully describe “a crisp and spicy morning in early October.” I read along down the paragraph, conscious only of its woozy sound, until I brought up with a start against your oesophagus in the empty sky. Then I read the paragraph again. Oh, Mark Twain! Mark Twain! How could you do it? Put a trap like that into the midst of a tragical story? Do serenity and peace brood over you after you have done such a thing? Who lit the lilacs, and which end up do they hang? When did larches begin to flame, and who set out the pomegranates in that canyon? What are deciduous flowers, and do they always “bloom in the fall, tra la”? I have been making myself obnoxious to various people by demanding their opinion of that paragraph without telling them the name of the author. They say, “Very well done.” “The alliteration is so pretty.” “What’s an oesophagus, a bird?” “What’s it all mean, anyway?” I tell them it means Mark Twain, and that an oesophagus is a kind of swallow. Am I right? Or is it a gull? Or a gullet?

Hereafter if you must write such things won’t you please be so kind as to label them?
Very sincerely yours,
ALLETTA F. Dean.

Mark Twain to Miss Dean:

Don’t you give that oesophagus away again or I’ll never trust you with another privacy!

So many wrote, that Clemens finally felt called upon to make public confession, and as one searching letter had been mailed from Springfield, Massachusetts, he made his reply through the Republican of that city. After some opening comment he said:

I published a short story lately & it was in that that I put the oesophagus. I will say privately that I expected it to bother some people—in fact, that was the intention—but the harvest has been larger than I was calculating upon. The oesophagus has gathered in the guilty and the innocent alike, whereas I was only fishing for the innocent—the innocent and confiding.

He quoted a letter from a schoolmaster in the Philippines who thought the passage beautiful with the exception of the curious creature which “slept upon motionless wings.” Said Clemens:

Page 18

Do you notice? Nothing in the paragraph disturbed him but that one word. It shows that that paragraph was most ably constructed for the deception it was intended to put upon the reader. It was my intention that it should read plausibly, and it is now plain that it does; it was my intention that it should be emotional and touching, and you see yourself that it fetched this public instructor. Alas! if I had but left that one treacherous word out I should have scored, scored everywhere, and the paragraph would have slidden through every reader's sensibilities like oil and left not a suspicion behind. The other sample inquiry is from a professor in a New England university. It contains one naughty word (which I cannot bear to suppress), but he is not in the theological department, so it is no harm:

*"Dear Mr. Clemens,—'Far in the empty sky a solitary oesophagus
slept upon motionless wing.'*

"It is not often I get a chance to read much periodical literature, but I have just gone through at this belated period, with much gratification and edification, your 'Double-Barrelled Detective Story.' "But what in hell is an oesophagus? I keep one myself, but it never sleeps in the air or anywhere else. My profession is to deal with words, and oesophagus interested me the moment I lighted upon it. But, as a companion of my youth used to say, 'I'll be eternally, co-eternally cussed' if I can make it out. Is it a joke or am I an ignoramus?" Between you and me, I was almost ashamed of having fooled that man, but for pride's sake I was not going to say so. I wrote and told him it was a joke—and that is what I am now saying to my Springfield inquirer. And I told him to carefully read the whole paragraph and he would find not a vestige of sense in any detail of it. This also I recommend to my Springfield inquirer.

I have confessed. I am sorry—partially. I will not do so any more—for the present. Don't ask me any more questions; let the oesophagus have a rest—on his same old motionless wing.

He wrote Twichell that the story had been a six-day 'tour de force', twenty-five thousand words, and he adds:

How long it takes a literary seed to sprout sometimes! This seed was planted in your house many years ago when you sent me to bed with a book not heard of by me until then—Sherlock Holmes I've done a grist of writing here this summer, but not for publication soon, if ever. I did write two satisfactory articles for early print, but I've burned one of them & have buried the other in my large box of posthumous stuff. I've got stacks of literary remains piled up there.

Early in August Clemens went with H. H. Rogers in his yacht Kanawha on a cruise to New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. Rogers had made up a party, including ex-Speaker Reed, Dr. Rice, and Col. A. G. Paine. Young Harry Rogers also made one of the party.

Clemens kept a log of the cruise, certain entries of which convey something of its spirit. On the 11th, at Yarmouth, he wrote:

Page 19

Fog-bound. The garrison went ashore. Officers visited the yacht in the evening & said an anvil had been missed. Mr. Rogers paid for the anvil.

August 13th. There is a fine picture-gallery here; the sheriff photographed the garrison, with the exception of Harry (Rogers) and Mr. Clemens.

August 14th. Upon complaint of Mr. Reed another dog was procured. He said he had been a sailor all his life, and considered it dangerous to trust a ship to a dog-watch with only one dog in it.

Poker, for a change.

August 15th. To Rockland, Maine, in the afternoon, arriving about 6 P.M. In the night Dr. Rice baited the anchor with his winnings & caught a whale 90 feet long. He said so himself. It is thought that if there had been another witness like Dr. Rice the whale would have been longer.

August 16th. We could have had a happy time in Bath but for the interruptions caused by people who wanted Mr. Reed to explain votes of the olden time or give back the money. Mr. Rogers recouped them.

Another anvil missed. The descendant of Captain Kidd is the only person who does not blush for these incidents. Harry and Mr. Clemens blush continually. It is believed that if the rest of the garrison were like these two the yacht would be welcome everywhere instead of being quarantined by the police in all the ports. Mr. Clemens & Harry have attracted a great deal of attention, & men have expressed a resolve to turn over a new leaf & copy after them from this out.Evening. Judge Cohen came over from another yacht to pay his respects to Harry and Mr. Clemens, he having heard of their reputation from the clergy of these coasts. He was invited by the gang to play poker apparently as a courtesy & in a spirit of seeming hospitality, he not knowing them & taking it all at par. Mr. Rogers lent him clothes to go home in.August 17th. The Reformed Statesman growling and complaining again—not in a frank, straightforward way, but talking at the Commodore, while letting on to be talking to himself. This time he was dissatisfied about the anchor watch; said it was out of date, untrustworthy, & for real efficiency didn't begin with the Waterbury, & was going on to reiterate, as usual, that he had been a pilot all his life & blamed if he ever saw, *etc.*, *etc.*, *etc.*

But he was not allowed to finish. We put him ashore at Portland.

That is to say, Reed landed at Portland, the rest of the party returning with the yacht.

“We had a noble good time in the yacht,” Clemens wrote Twichell on their return. “We caught a Chineese missionary and drowned him.”

Twichell had been invited to make one of the party, and this letter was to make him feel sorry he had not accepted.

Page 20

CCXVI

RIVERDALE—A YALE DEGREE

The Clemens household did not return to 14 West Tenth Street. They spent a week in Elmira at the end of September, and after a brief stop in New York took up their residence on the northern metropolitan boundary, at Riverdale-on-the-Hudson, in the old Appleton home. They had permanently concluded not to return to Hartford. They had put the property there into an agent's hands for sale. Mrs. Clemens never felt that she had the strength to enter the house again.

They had selected the Riverdale place with due consideration. They decided that they must have easy access to the New York center, but they wished also to have the advantage of space and spreading lawn and trees, large rooms, and light. The Appleton homestead provided these things. It was a house built in the first third of the last century by one of the Morris family, so long prominent in New York history. On passing into the Appleton ownership it had been enlarged and beautified and named "Holbrook Hall." It overlooked the Hudson and the Palisades. It had associations: the Roosevelt family had once lived there, Huxley, Darwin, Tyndall, and others of their intellectual rank had been entertained there during its occupation by the first Appleton, the founder of the publishing firm. The great hall of the added wing was its chief feature. Clemens once remembered:

"We drifted from room to room on our tour of inspection, always with a growing doubt as to whether we wanted that house or not; but at last, when we arrived in a dining-room that was 60 feet long, 30 feet wide, and had two great fireplaces in it, that settled it."

There were pleasant neighbors at Riverdale, and had it not been for the illnesses that seemed always ready to seize upon that household the home there might have been ideal. They loved the place presently, so much so that they contemplated buying it, but decided that it was too costly. They began to prospect for other places along the Hudson shore. They were anxious to have a home again—one that they could call their own.

Among the many pleasant neighbors at Riverdale were the Dodges, the Quincy Adamses, and the Rev. Mr. Carstensen, a liberal-minded minister with whom Clemens easily affiliated. Clemens and Carstensen visited back and forth and exchanged views. Once Mr. Carstensen told him that he was going to town to dine with a party which included the Reverend Gottheil, a Catholic bishop, an Indian Buddhist, and a Chinese scholar of the Confucian faith, after which they were all going to a Yiddish theater. Clemens said:

“Well, there’s only one more thing you need to make the party complete —that is, either Satan or me.”

Howells often came to Riverdale. He was living in a New York apartment, and it was handy and made an easy and pleasant outing for him. He says:

Page 21

"I began to see them again on something like the sweet old terms. They lived far more unpretentiously than they used, and I think with a notion of economy, which they had never very successfully practised. I recall that at the end of a certain year in Hartford, when they had been saving and paying cash for everything, Clemens wrote, reminding me of their avowed experiment, and asking me to guess how many bills they had at New-Year's; he hastened to say that a horse-car would not have held them. At Riverdale they kept no carriage, and there was a snowy night when I drove up to their handsome old mansion in the station carryall, which was crusted with mud, as from the going down of the Deluge after transporting Noah and his family from the Ark to whatever point they decided to settle provisionally. But the good talk, the rich talk, the talk that could never suffer poverty of mind or soul was there, and we jubilantly found ourselves again in our middle youth."

Both Howells and Clemens were made doctors of letters by Yale that year and went over in October to receive their degrees. It was Mark Twain's second Yale degree, and it was the highest rank that an American institution of learning could confer.

Twichell wrote:

I want you to understand, old fellow, that it will be in its intention the highest public compliment, and emphatically so in your case, for it will be tendered you by a corporation of gentlemen, the majority of whom do not at all agree with the views on important questions which you have lately promulgated in speech and in writing, and with which you are identified to the public mind. They grant, of course, your right to hold and express those views, though for themselves they don't like 'em; but in awarding you the proposed laurel they will make no count of that whatever. Their action will appropriately signify simply and solely their estimate of your merit and rank as a man of letters, and so, as I say, the compliment of it will be of the pure, unadulterated quality.

Howells was not especially eager to go, and tried to conspire with Clemens to arrange some excuse which would keep them at home.

I remember with satisfaction [he wrote] our joint success in keeping away from the Concord Centennial in 1875, and I have been thinking we might help each other in this matter of the Yale Anniversary. What are your plans for getting left, or shall you trust to inspiration?

Their plans did not avail. Both Howells and Clemens went to New Haven to receive their honors.

When they had returned, Howells wrote formally, as became the new rank:



Page 22

Dear sir,—I have long been an admirer of your complete works, several of which I have read, and I am with you shoulder to shoulder in the cause of foreign missions. I would respectfully request a personal interview, and if you will appoint some day and hour most inconvenient to you I will call at your baronial hall. I cannot doubt, from the account of your courtesy given me by the Twelve Apostles, who once visited you in your Hartford home and were mistaken for a syndicate of lightning-rod men, that our meeting will be mutually agreeable.

*Yours truly,
W. D. Howells.
Dr. Clemens.*

CCXVII

MARK TWAIN IN POLITICS

There was a campaign for the mayoralty of New York City that fall, with Seth Low on the Fusion ticket against Edward M. Shepard as the Tammany candidate. Mark Twain entered the arena to try to defeat Tammany Hall. He wrote and he spoke in favor of clean city government and police reform. He was savagely in earnest and openly denounced the clan of Croker, individually and collectively. He joined a society called 'The Acorns'; and on the 17th of October, at a dinner given by the order at the Waldorf-Astoria, delivered a fierce arraignment, in which he characterized Croker as the Warren Hastings of New York. His speech was really a set of extracts from Edmund Burke's great impeachment of Hastings, substituting always the name of Croker, and paralleling his career with that of the ancient boss of the East India Company.

It was not a humorous speech. It was too denunciatory for that. It probably contained less comic phrasing than any former effort. There is hardly even a suggestion of humor from beginning to end. It concluded with this paraphrase of Burke's impeachment:

I impeach Richard Croker of high crimes and misdemeanors. I impeach him in the name of the people, whose trust he has betrayed.

I impeach him in the name of all the people of America, whose national character he has dishonored.

I impeach him in the name and by virtue of those eternal laws of justice which he has violated.

I impeach him in the name of human nature itself, which he has cruelly outraged, injured, and oppressed, in both sexes, in every age, rank, situation, and condition of life.

The Acorn speech was greatly relied upon for damage to the Tammany ranks, and hundreds of thousands of copies of it were printed and circulated. —[The “Edmund Burke on Croker and Tammany” speech had originally been written as an article for the North American Review.]

Clemens was really heart and soul in the campaign. He even joined a procession that marched up Broadway, and he made a speech to a great assemblage at Broadway and Leonard Street, when, as he said, he had been sick abed two days and, according to the doctor, should be in bed then.

Page 23

But I would not stay at home for a nursery disease, and that's what I've got. Now, don't let this leak out all over town, but I've been doing some indiscreet eating—that's all. It wasn't drinking. If it had been I shouldn't have said anything about it. I ate a banana. I bought it just to clinch the Italian vote for fusion, but I got hold of a Tammany banana by mistake. Just one little nub of it on the end was nice and white. That was the Shepard end. The other nine-tenths were rotten. Now that little white end won't make the rest of the banana good. The nine-tenths will make that little nub rotten, too. We must get rid of the whole banana, and our Acorn Society is going to do its share, for it is pledged to nothing but the support of good government all over the United States. We will elect the President next time.

It won't be I, for I have ruined my chances by joining the Acorns,
and there can be no office-holders among us.

There was a movement which Clemens early nipped in the bud—to name a political party after him.

"I should be far from willing to have a political party named after me," he wrote, "and I would not be willing to belong to a party which allowed its members to have political aspirations or push friends forward for political preferment."

In other words, he was a knight-errant; his sole purpose for being in politics at all—something he always detested—was to do what he could for the betterment of his people.

He had his reward, for when Election Day came, and the returns were in, the Fusion ticket had triumphed and Tammany had fallen. Clemens received his share of the credit. One paper celebrated him in verse:

Who killed Croker?
I, said Mark Twain,
I killed Croker,
I, the jolly joker!

Among Samuel Clemens's literary remains there is an outline plan for a "Casting-Vote party," whose main object was "to compel the two great parties to nominate their best man always." It was to be an organization of an infinite number of clubs throughout the nation, no member of which should seek or accept a nomination for office in any political appointment, but in each case should cast its vote as a unit for the candidate of one of the two great political parties, requiring that the man be of clean record and honest purpose.

From constable up to President [runs his final clause] there is no office for which the two great parties cannot furnish able, clean, and acceptable men. Whenever the balance of

power shall be lodged in a permanent third party, with no candidate of its own and no function but to cast its whole vote for the best man put forward by the Republicans and Democrats, these two parties will select the best man they have in their ranks. Good and clean government will follow, let its party complexion be what it may, and the country will be quite content.

It was a Utopian idea, very likely, as human nature is made; full of that native optimism which was always overflowing and drowning his gloomier logic. Clearly he forgot his despair of humanity when he formulated that document, and there is a world of unselfish hope in these closing lines:

Page 24

If in the hands of men who regard their citizenship as a high trust this scheme shall fail upon trial a better must be sought, a better must be invented; for it cannot be well or safe to let the present political conditions continue indefinitely. They can be improved, and American citizenship should arouse up from its disheartenment and see that it is done.

Had this document been put into type and circulated it might have founded a true Mark Twain party.

Clemens made not many more speeches that autumn, closing the year at last with the "Founder's Night" speech at The Players, the short address which, ending on the stroke of midnight, dedicates each passing year to the memory of Edwin Booth, and pledges each new year in a loving-cup passed in his honor.

CCXVIII

NEW INTERESTS AND INVESTMENTS

The spirit which a year earlier had prompted Mark Twain to prepare his "Salutation from the Nineteenth to the Twentieth Century" inspired him now to conceive the "Stupendous International Procession," a gruesome pageant described in a document (unpublished) of twenty-two typewritten pages which begin:

The stupendous procession

At the appointed hour it moved across the world in following order:

The Twentieth Century

A fair young creature, drunk and disorderly, borne in the arms of Satan. Banner with motto, "Get What You Can, Keep What You Get."

Guard of Honor—Monarchs, Presidents, Tammany Bosses, Burglars, Land Thieves, Convicts, *etc.*, appropriately clothed and bearing the symbols of their several trades.

Christendom

A majestic matron in flowing robes drenched with blood. On her head a golden crown of thorns; impaled on its spines the bleeding heads of patriots who died for their countries Boers, Boxers, Filipinos; in one hand a slung-shot, in the other a Bible, open at the text "Do unto others," *etc.* Protruding from pocket bottle labeled "We bring you the blessings of civilization." Necklace-handcuffs and a burglar's jimmy. Supporters—At one elbow Slaughter, at the other Hypocrisy. Banner with motto—"Love Your Neighbor's Goods as

Yourself.” Ensign—The Black Flag. Guard of Honor—Missionaries and German, French, Russian, and British soldiers laden with loot.

And so on, with a section for each nation of the earth, headed each by the black flag, each bearing horrid emblems, instruments of torture, mutilated prisoners, broken hearts, floats piled with bloody corpses. At the end of all, banners inscribed:

“All White Men are Born Free and Equal.”

“Christ died to make men holy,
Christ died to make men free.”

with the American flag furled and draped in crepe, and the shade of Lincoln towering vast and dim toward the sky, brooding with sorrowful aspect over the far-reaching pageant. With much more of the same sort. It is a fearful document, too fearful, we may believe, for Mrs. Clemens ever to consent to its publication.

Page 25

Advancing years did little toward destroying Mark Twain's interest in human affairs. At no time in his life was he more variously concerned and employed than in his sixty-seventh year—matters social, literary, political, religious, financial, scientific. He was always alive, young, actively cultivating or devising interests—valuable and otherwise, though never less than important to him.

He had plenty of money again, for one thing, and he liked to find dazzlingly new ways for investing it. As in the old days, he was always putting "twenty-five or forty thousand dollars," as he said, into something that promised multiplied returns. Howells tells how he found him looking wonderfully well, and when he asked the name of his elixir he learned that it was plasmon.

I did not immediately understand that plasmon was one of the investments which he had made from "the substance of things hoped for," and in the destiny of a disastrous disappointment. But after paying off the creditors of his late publishing firm he had to do something with his money, and it was not his fault if he did not make a fortune out of plasmon.

It was just at this period (the beginning of 1902) that he was promoting with his capital and enthusiasm the plasmon interests in America, investing in it one of the "usual amounts," promising to make Howells over again body and soul with the life-giving albuminate. Once he wrote him explicit instructions:

Yes—take it as a medicine—there is nothing better, nothing surer of desired results. If you wish to be elaborate—which isn't necessary—put a couple of heaping teaspoonfuls of the powder in an inch of milk & stir until it is a paste; put in some more milk and stir the paste to a thin gruel; then fill up the glass and drink.

Or, stir it into your soup.

Or, into your oatmeal.

Or, use any method you like, so's you get it down—that is the only essential.

He put another "usual sum" about this time in a patent cash register which was acknowledged to be "a promise rather than a performance," and remains so until this day.

He capitalized a patent spiral hat-pin, warranted to hold the hat on in any weather, and he had a number of the pins handsomely made to present to visitors of the sex naturally requiring that sort of adornment and protection. It was a pretty and ingenious device and apparently effective enough, though it failed to secure his invested thousands.

He invested a lesser sum in shares of the Booklover's Library, which was going to revolutionize the reading world, and which at least paid a few dividends. Even the old Tennessee land will-o'-the-wisp-long since repudiated and forgotten—when it appeared again in the form of a possible equity in some overlooked fragment, kindled a gentle interest, and was added to his list of ventures.

Page 26

He made one substantial investment at this period. They became more and more in love with the Hudson environment, its beauty and its easy access to New York. Their house was what they liked it to be—a gathering —place for friends and the world's notables, who could reach it easily and quickly from New York. They had a steady procession of company when Mrs. Clemens's health would permit, and during a single week in the early part of this year entertained guests at no less than seventeen out of their twenty-one meals, and for three out of the seven nights—not an unusual week. Their plan for buying a home on the Hudson ended with the purchase of what was known as Hillcrest, or the Casey place, at Tarrytown, overlooking that beautiful stretch of river, the Tappan Zee, close to the Washington Irving home. The beauty of its outlook and surroundings appealed to them all. The house was handsome and finely placed, and they planned to make certain changes that would adapt it to their needs. The price, which was less than fifty thousand dollars, made it an attractive purchase; and without doubt it would have made them a suitable and happy home had it been written in the future that they should so inherit it.

Clemens was writing pretty steadily these days. The human race was furnishing him with ever so many inspiring subjects, and he found time to touch more or less on most of them. He wreaked his indignation upon the things which exasperated him often—even usually—without the expectation of print; and he delivered himself even more inclusively at such times as he walked the floor between the luncheon or dinner courses, amplifying on the poverty of an invention that had produced mankind as a supreme handiwork. In a letter to Howells he wrote:

Your comments on that idiot's "Ideals" letter reminds me that I preached a good sermon to my family yesterday on his particular layer of the human race, that grotesque of all the inventions of the Creator. It was a good sermon, but coldly received, & it seemed best not to try to take up a collection.

He once told Howells, with the wild joy of his boyish heart, how Mrs. Clemens found some compensation, when kept to her room by illness, in the reflection that now she would not hear so much about the "damned human race."

Yet he was always the first man to champion that race, and the more unpromising the specimen the surer it was of his protection, and he never invited, never expected gratitude.

One wonders how he found time to do all the things that he did. Besides his legitimate literary labors and his preachments, he was always writing letters to this one and that, long letters on a variety of subjects, carefully and picturesquely phrased, and to people of every sort. He even formed a curious society, whose members were young girls—one in each country of the earth. They were supposed to write to him at intervals on some subject likely to be of mutual interest, to which letters he agreed to reply. He furnished each member with a typewritten copy of the constitution and by-laws of the

juggernaut Club, as he called it, and he apprised each of her election, usually after this fashion:

Page 27

I have a club—a private club, which is all my own. I appoint the members myself, & they can't help themselves, because I don't allow them to vote on their own appointment & I don't allow them to resign! They are all friends whom I have never seen (save one), but who have written friendly letters to me. By the laws of my club there can be only one member in each country, & there can be no male member but myself. Some day I may admit males, but I don't know—they are capricious & inharmonious, & their ways provoke me a good deal. It is a matter, which the club shall decide. I have made four appointments in the past three or four months: You as a member for Scotland—oh, this good while! a young citizeness of Joan of Arc's home region as a member for France; a Mohammedan girl as member for Bengal; & a dear & bright young niece of mine as member for the United States—for I do not represent a country myself, but am merely member-at-large for the human race. You must not try to resign, for the laws of the club do not allow that. You must console yourself by remembering that you are in the best company; that nobody knows of your membership except yourself; that no member knows another's name, but only her country; that no taxes are levied and no meetings held (but how dearly I should like to attend one!). One of my members is a princess of a royal house, another is the daughter of a village bookseller on the continent of Europe, for the only qualification for membership is intellect & the spirit of good- will; other distinctions, hereditary or acquired, do not count. May I send you the constitution & laws of the club? I shall be so glad if I may.

It was just one of his many fancies, and most of the active memberships would not long be maintained; though some continued faithful in their reports, as he did in his replies, to the end.

One of the more fantastic of his conceptions was a plan to advertise for ante-mortem obituaries of himself—in order, as he said, that he might look them over and enjoy them and make certain corrections in the matter of detail. Some of them he thought might be appropriate to read from the platform.

I will correct them—not the facts, but the verdicts—striking out such clauses as could have a deleterious influence on the other side, and replacing them with clauses of a more judicious character.

He was much taken with the new idea, and his request for such obituaries, with an offer of a prize for the best—a portrait of himself drawn by his own hand—really appeared in Harper's Weekly later in the year. Naturally he got a shower of responses—serious, playful, burlesque. Some of them were quite worth while.

The obvious "Death loves a shining Mark" was of course numerous duplicated, and some varied it "Death loves an Easy Mark," and there was "Mark, the perfect man."

The two that follow gave him especial pleasure.

Page 28

Obituary for "Mark Twain"

Worthy of his portrait, a place on his monument, as well as a place among his "perennial-consolation heirlooms":

"Got up; washed; went to bed."

The subject's own words (see *Innocents Abroad*). Can't go back on your own words, Mark Twain. There's nothing "to strike out"; nothing "to replace." What more could be said of any one?

"Got up!"—Think of the fullness of meaning! The possibilities of life, its achievements—physical, intellectual, spiritual. Got up to the top!—the climax of human aspiration on earth!

"Washed"—Every whit clean; purified—body, soul, thoughts, purposes.

"Went to bed"—Work all done—to rest, to sleep. The culmination of the day well spent!

God looks after the awakening.

Mrs. S. A. Oren-Haynes.

Mark Twain was the only man who ever lived, so far as we know, whose lies were so innocent, and withal so helpful, as to make them worth more than a whole lot of fossilized priests' eternal truths.

D. H. Kenner.

CCXIX

YACHTING AND THEOLOGY

Clemens made fewer speeches during the Riverdale period. He was as frequently demanded, but he had a better excuse for refusing, especially the evening functions. He attended a good many luncheons with friendly spirits like Howells, Matthews, James L. Ford, and Hamlin Garland. At the end of February he came down to the Mayor's dinner given to Prince Henry of Prussia, but he did not speak. Clemens used to say afterward that he had not been asked to speak, and that it was probably because of his supposed breach of etiquette at the Kaiser's dinner in Berlin; but the fact that Prince Henry sought him out, and was most cordially and humanly attentive during a considerable portion of the evening, is against the supposition.

Clemens attended a Yale alumni dinner that winter and incidentally visited Twichell in Hartford. The old question of moral responsibility came up and Twichell lent his visitor a copy of Jonathan Edwards's 'Freedom of the Will' for train perusal. Clemens found it absorbing. Later he wrote Twichell his views.

Dear Joe,—(After compliments.)—[Meaning “What a good time you gave me; what a happiness it was to be under your roof again,” etc. See opening sentence of all translations of letters passing between Lord Roberts and Indian princes and rulers.]—
From Bridgeport to New York, thence to home, & continuously until near midnight I wallowed & reeked with Jonathan in his insane debauch; rose immensely refreshed & fine at ten this morning, but with a strange & haunting sense of having been on a three days' tear with a drunken lunatic. It is years since I have known these sensations. All through the

Page 29

book is the glare of a resplendent intellect gone mad—a marvelous spectacle. No, not all through the book—the drunk does not come on till the last third, where what I take to be Calvinism & its God begins to show up & shine red & hideous in the glow from the fires of hell, their only right and proper adornment.

Jonathan seems to hold (as against the Armenian position) that the man (or his soul or his will) never creates an impulse itself, but is moved to action by an impulse back of it. That's sound!

Also, that of two or more things offered it, it infallibly chooses the one which for the moment is most pleasing to *itself*. Perfectly correct! An immense admission for a man not otherwise sane.

Up to that point he could have written Chapters III & IV of my suppressed Gospel. But there we seem to separate. He seems to concede the indisputable & unshaken dominion of Motive & Necessity (call them what he may, these are exterior forces & not under the man's authority, guidance, or even suggestion); then he suddenly flies the logical track & (to all seeming) makes the man & not those exterior forces responsible to God for the man's thoughts, words, & acts. It is frank insanity. I think that when he concedes the autocratic dominion of Motive and Necessity he grants a third position of mine—that a man's mind is a mere machine—an automatic machine—which is handled entirely from the outside, the man himself furnishing it absolutely nothing; not an ounce of its fuel, & not so much as a bare suggestion to that exterior engineer as to what the machine shall do nor how it shall do it nor when.

After that concession it was time for him to get alarmed & shirk—for he was pointed straight for the only rational & possible next station on that piece of road—the irresponsibility of man to God.

And so he shirked. Shirked, and arrived at this handsome result:

Man is commanded to do so & so.

It has been ordained from the beginning of time that some men sha'n't & others can't.

These are to blame: let them be damned.

I enjoy the Colonel very much, & shall enjoy the rest of him with an obscene delight.

Joe, the whole tribe shout love to you & yours!
Mark.

Clemens was moved to set down some theology of his own, and did so in a manuscript which he entitled, "If I Could Be There." It is in the dialogue form he often adopted for polemic writing. It is a colloquy between the Master of the Universe and a Stranger. It begins: I

If I could be there, hidden under the steps of the throne, I should hear conversations like this:

A stranger. Lord, there is one who needs to be punished, and has been overlooked. It is in the record. I have found it.

Lord. By searching?



Page 30

S. Yes, Lord.

L. Who is it? What is it?

S. A man.

L. Proceed.

S. He died in sin. Sin committed by his great-grandfather.

L. When was this?

S. Eleven million years ago.

L. Do you know what a microbe is?

S. Yes, Lord. It is a creature too small to be detected by my eye.

L. He commits depredations upon your blood?

S. Yes, Lord.

L. I give you leave to subject him to a billion years of misery for this offense. Go! Work your will upon him.

S. But, Lord, I have nothing against him; I am indifferent to him.

L. Why?

S. He is so infinitely small and contemptible. I am to him as is a mountain-range to a grain of sand.

L. What am I to man?

S. (Silent.)

L. Am I not, to a man, as is a billion solar systems to a grain of sand?

S. It is true, Lord.

L. Some microbes are larger than others. Does man regard the difference?

S. No, Lord. To him there is no difference of consequence. To him they are all microbes, all infinitely little and equally inconsequential.



L. To me there is no difference of consequence between a man & a microbe. Man looks down upon the speck at his feet called a microbe from an altitude of a thousand miles, so to speak, and regards him with indifference; I look down upon the specks called a man and a microbe from an altitude of a billion leagues, so to speak, and to me they are of a size. To me both are inconsequential. Man kills the microbes when he can?

S. Yes, Lord.

L. Then what? Does he keep him in mind years and years and go on contriving miseries for him?

S. No, Lord.

L. Does he forget him?

S. Yes, Lord.

L. Why?

S. He cares nothing more about him.

L. Employs himself with more important matters?

S. Yes, Lord.

L. Apparently man is quite a rational and dignified person, and can divorce his mind from uninteresting trivialities. Why does he affront me with the fancy that I interest Myself in trivialities—like men and microbes? II

L. Is it true the human race thinks the universe was created for its convenience?

S. Yes, Lord.

L. The human race is modest. Speaking as a member of it, what do you think the other animals are for?

S. To furnish food and labor for man.

L. What is the sea for?

S. To furnish food for man. Fishes.

L. And the air?

S. To furnish sustenance for man. Birds and breath.

L. How many men are there?

S. Fifteen hundred millions.



L. (Referring to notes.) Take your pencil and set down some statistics. In a healthy man's lower intestine 28,000,000 microbes are born daily and die daily. In the rest of a man's body 122,000,000 microbes are born daily and die daily. The two sums aggregate-what?

Page 31

S. About 150,000,000.

L. In ten days the aggregate reaches what?

S. Fifteen hundred millions.

L. It is for one person. What would it be for the whole human population?

S. Alas, Lord, it is beyond the power of figures to set down that multitude. It is billions of billions multiplied by billions of billions, and these multiplied again and again by billions of billions. The figures would stretch across the universe and hang over into space on both sides.

L. To what intent are these uncountable microbes introduced into the human race?

S. That they may eat.

L. Now then, according to man's own reasoning, what is man for?

S. Alas-alas!

L. What is he for?

S. To-to-furnish food for microbes.

L. Manifestly. A child could see it. Now then, with this common-sense light to aid your perceptions, what are the air, the land, and the ocean for?

S. To furnish food for man so that he may nourish, support, and multiply and replenish the microbes.

L. Manifestly. Does one build a boarding-house for the sake of the boarding-house itself or for the sake of the boarders?

S. Certainly for the sake of the boarders.

L. Man's a boarding-house.

S. I perceive it, Lord.

L. He is a boarding-house. He was never intended for anything else. If he had had less vanity and a clearer insight into the great truths that lie embedded in statistics he would have found it out early. As concerns the man who has gone unpunished eleven million years, is it your belief that in life he did his duty by his microbes?

S. Undoubtedly, Lord. He could not help it.

L. Then why punish him? He had no other duty to perform.

Whatever else may be said of this kind of doctrine, it is at least original and has a conclusive sound. Mark Twain had very little use for orthodoxy and conservatism. When it was announced that Dr. Jacques Loeb, of the University of California, had demonstrated the creation of life by chemical agencies he was deeply interested. When a newspaper writer commented that a "consensus of opinion among biologists" would probably rate Dr. Loeb as a man of lively imagination rather than an inerrant investigator of natural phenomena, he felt called to chaff the consensus idea.

I wish I could be as young as that again. Although I seem so old now I was once as young as that. I remember, as if it were but thirty or forty years ago, how a paralyzing consensus of opinion accumulated from experts a-setting around about brother experts who had patiently and laboriously cold-chiseled their way into one or another of nature's safe-deposit vaults and were reporting that they had found something valuable was plenty for me. It settled it.

But it isn't so now-no. Because in the drift of the years I by and by found out that a Consensus examines a new thing with its feelings rather oftener than with its mind.

Page 32

There was that primitive steam-engine-ages back, in Greek times: a Consensus made fun of it. There was the Marquis of Worcester's steam-engine 250 years ago: a Consensus made fun of it. There was Fulton's steamboat of a century ago: a French Consensus, including the great Napoleon, made fun of it. There was Priestley, with his oxygen: a Consensus scoffed at him, mobbed him, burned him out, banished him. While a Consensus was proving, by statistics and things, that a steamship could not cross the Atlantic, a steamship did it.

And so on through a dozen pages or more of lively satire, ending with an extract from Adam's Diary.

Then there was a Consensus about it. It was the very first one. It sat six days and nights. It was then delivered of the verdict that a world could not be made out of nothing; that such small things as sun and moon and stars might, maybe, but it would take years and years if there was considerable many of them. Then the Consensus got up and looked out of the window, and there was the whole outfit, spinning and sparkling in space! You never saw such a disappointed lot.

Adam.

He was writing much at this time, mainly for his own amusement, though now and then he offered one of his reflections for print. That beautiful fairy tale, "The Five Boons of Life," of which the most precious is "Death," was written at this period. Maeterlinck's lovely story of the bee interested him; he wrote about that. Somebody proposed a Martyrs' Day; he wrote a paper ridiculing the suggestion. In his note-book, too, there is a memorandum for a love-story of the Quarternary Epoch which would begin, "On a soft October afternoon 2,000,000 years ago." John Fiske's Discovery of America, Volume I, he said, was to furnish the animals and scenery, civilization and conversation to be the same as to-day; but apparently this idea was carried no further. He ranged through every subject from protoplasm to infinity, exalting, condemning, ridiculing, explaining; his brain was always busy—a dynamo that rested neither night nor day.

In April Clemens received notice of another yachting trip on the Kanawha, which this time would sail for the Bahama and West India islands. The guests were to be about the same.—[The invited ones of the party were Hon. T. B. Reed, A. G. Paine, Laurence Hutton, Dr. C. C. Rice, W. T. Foote, and S. L. Clemens. "Owners of the yacht," Mr. Rogers called them, signing himself as "Their Guest."]

He sent this telegram:

H. H. Rogers, Fairhaven, Mass.



Can't get away this week. I have company here from tonight till middle of next week. Will Kanawha be sailing after that & can I go as Sunday-school superintendent at half rate? Answer and prepay.

Dr. Clemens.

Page 33

The sailing date was conveniently arranged and there followed a happy cruise among those balmy islands. Mark Twain was particularly fond of “Tom” Reed, who had been known as “Czar” Reed in Congress, but was delightfully human in his personal life. They argued politics a good deal, and Reed, with all his training and intimate practical knowledge of the subject, confessed that he “couldn’t argue with a man like that.”

“Do you believe the things you say?” he asked once, in his thin, falsetto voice.

“Yes,” said Clemens. “Some of them.”

“Well, you want to look out. If you go on this way, by and by you’ll get to believing nearly everything you say.”

Draw poker appears to have been their favorite diversion. Clemens in his notes reports that off the coast of Florida Reed won twenty-three pots in succession. It was said afterward that they made no stops at any harbor; that when the chief officer approached the poker-table and told them they were about to enter some important port he received peremptory orders to “sail on and not interrupt the game.” This, however, may be regarded as more or less founded on fiction.

CCXX

MARK TWAIN AND THE PHILIPPINES

Among the completed manuscripts of the early part of 1902 was a North American Review article (published in April)—“Does the Race of Man Love a Lord?”—a most interesting treatise on snobbery as a universal weakness. There were also some papers on the Philippine situation. In one of these Clemens wrote:

We have bought some islands from a party who did not own them; with real smartness and a good counterfeit of disinterested friendliness we coaxed a confiding weak nation into a trap and closed it upon them; we went back on an honored guest of the Stars and Stripes when we had no further use for him and chased him to the mountains; we are as indisputably in possession of a wide-spreading archipelago as if it were our property; we have pacified some thousands of the islanders and buried them; destroyed their fields; burned their villages, and turned their widows and orphans out-of-doors; furnished heartbreak by exile to some dozens of disagreeable patriots; subjugated the remaining ten millions by Benevolent Assimilation, which is the pious new name of the musket; we have acquired property in the three hundred concubines and other slaves of our business partner, the Sultan of Sulu, and hoisted our protecting flag over that swag. And so, by these Providences of God—the phrase is the government’s, not mine—we are a World Power; and are glad and proud, and have a back seat in the family. With tacks in it. At least we are letting on to be glad and proud; it is the best way. Indeed, it is the

only way. We must maintain our dignity, for people are looking. We are a World Power; we cannot get out of it now, and we must make the best of it.

And again he wrote:

Page 34

I am not finding fault with this use of our flag, for in order not to seem eccentric I have swung around now and joined the nation in the conviction that nothing can sully a flag. I was not properly reared, and had the illusion that a flag was a thing which must be sacredly guarded against shameful uses and unclean contacts lest it suffer pollution; and so when it was sent out to the Philippines to float over a wanton war and a robbing expedition I supposed it was polluted, and in an ignorant moment I said so. But I stand corrected. I concede and acknowledge that it was only the government that sent it on such an errand that was polluted. Let us compromise on that. I am glad to have it that way. For our flag could not well stand pollution, never having been used to it, but it is different with the administration.

But a much more conspicuous comment on the Philippine policy was the so-called “Defense of General Funston” for what Funston himself referred to as a “dirty Irish trick”; that is to say, deception in the capture of Aguinaldo. Clemens, who found it hard enough to reconcile himself to any form of warfare, was especially bitter concerning this particular campaign. The article appeared in the *North American Review* for May, 1902, and stirred up a good deal of a storm. He wrote much more on the subject—very much more—but it is still unpublished.

CCXXI

THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE

One day in April, 1902, Samuel Clemens received the following letter from the president of the University of Missouri:

My dear Mr. Clemens, Although you received the degree of doctor of literature last fall from Yale, and have had other honors conferred upon you by other great universities, we want to adopt you here as a son of the University of Missouri. In asking your permission to confer upon you the degree of LL.D. the University of Missouri does not aim to confer an honor upon you so much as to show her appreciation of you. The rules of the University forbid us to confer the degree upon any one in absentia. I hope very much that you can so arrange your plans as to be with us on the fourth day of next June, when we shall hold our Annual Commencement.

Very truly yours,
R. H. Jesse.

Clemens had not expected to make another trip to the West, but a proffered honor such as this from one's native State was not a thing to be declined.

It was at the end of May when he arrived in St. Louis, and he was met at the train there by his old river instructor and friend, Horace Bixby—as fresh, wiry, and capable as he had been forty-five years before.

“I have become an old man. You are still thirty-five,” Clemens said.

They went to the Planters Hotel, and the news presently got around that Mark Twain was there. There followed a sort of reception in the hotel lobby, after which Bixby took him across to the rooms of the Pilots Association, where the rivermen gathered in force to celebrate his return. A few of his old comrades were still alive, among them Beck Jolly. The same afternoon he took the train for Hannibal.

Page 35

It was a busy five days that he had in Hannibal. High-school commencement day came first. He attended, and willingly, or at least patiently, sat through the various recitals and orations and orchestrations, dreaming and remembering, no doubt, other high-school commencements of more than half a century before, seeing in some of those young people the boys and girls he had known in that vanished time. A few friends of his youth were still there, but they were among the audience now, and no longer fresh and looking into the future. Their heads were white, and, like him, they were looking down the recorded years. Laura Hawkins was there and Helen Kercheval (Mrs. Frazer and Mrs. Garth now), and there were others, but they were few and scattering.

He was added to the program, and he made himself as one of the graduates, and told them some things of the young people of that earlier time that brought their laughter and their tears.

He was asked to distribute the diplomas, and he undertook the work in his own way. He took an armful of them and said to the graduates:

“Take one. Pick out a good one. Don’t take two, but be sure you get a good one.”

So each took one “unsight and unseen” aid made the more exact distributions among themselves later.

Next morning it was Saturday—he visited the old home on Hill Street, and stood in the doorway all dressed in white while a battalion of photographers made pictures of “this return of the native” to the threshold of his youth.

“It all seems so small to me,” he said, as he looked through the house; “a boy’s home is a big place to him. I suppose if I should come back again ten years from now it would be the size of a birdhouse.”

He went through the rooms and up-stairs where he had slept and looked out the window down in the back yard where, nearly sixty years before, Tom Sawyer, Huck Finn, Joe Harper, and the rest—that is to say, Tom Blankenship, John Briggs, Will Pitts, and the Bowen boys—set out on their nightly escapades. Of that lightsome band Will Pitts and John Briggs still remained, with half a dozen others—schoolmates of the less adventurous sort. Buck Brown, who had been his rival in the spelling contests, was still there, and John Robards, who had worn golden curls and the medal for good conduct, and Ed Pierce. And while these were assembled in a little group on the pavement outside the home a small old man came up and put out his hand, and it was Jimmy MacDaniel, to whom so long before, sitting on the river-bank and eating gingerbread, he had first told the story of Jim Wolfe and the cats.

They put him into a carriage, drove him far and wide, and showed the hills and resorts and rendezvous of Tom Sawyer and his marauding band.

He was entertained that evening by the Labinnah Club (whose name was achieved by a backward spelling of Hannibal), where he found most of the survivors of his youth. The news report of that occasion states that he was introduced by Father McLoughlin, and that he “responded in a very humorous and touchingly pathetic way, breaking down in tears at the conclusion. Commenting on his boyhood days and referring to his mother was too much for the great humorist. Before him as he spoke were sitting seven of his boyhood friends.”

Page 36

On Sunday morning Col. John Robards escorted him to the various churches and Sunday-schools. They were all new churches to Samuel Clemens, but he pretended not to recognize this fact. In each one he was asked to speak a few words, and he began by saying how good it was to be back in the old home Sunday-school again, which as a boy he had always so loved, and he would go on and point out the very place he had sat, and his escort hardly knew whether or not to enjoy the proceedings. At one place he told a moral story. He said:

Little boys and girls, I want to tell you a story which illustrates the value of perseverance—of sticking to your work, as it were. It is a story very proper for a Sunday-school. When I was a little boy in Hannibal I used to play a good deal up here on Holliday's Hill, which of course you all know. John Briggs and I played up there. I don't suppose there are any little boys as good as we were then, but of course that is not to be expected. Little boys in those days were 'most always good little boys, because those were the good old times when everything was better than it is now, but never mind that. Well, once upon a time, on Holliday's Hill, they were blasting out rock, and a man was drilling for a blast. He sat there and drilled and drilled and drilled perseveringly until he had a hole down deep enough for the blast. Then he put in the powder and tamped and tamped it down, but maybe he tamped it a little too hard, for the blast went off and he went up into the air, and we watched him. He went up higher and higher and got smaller and smaller. First he looked as big as a child, then as big as a dog, then as big as a kitten, then as big as a bird, and finally he went out of sight. John Briggs was with me, and we watched the place where he went out of sight, and by and by we saw him coming down first as big as a bird, then as big as a kitten, then as big as a dog, then as big as a child, and then he was a man again, and landed right in his seat and went to drilling just persevering, you see, and sticking to his work. Little boys and girls, that's the secret of success, just like that poor but honest workman on Holliday's Hill. Of course you won't always be appreciated. He wasn't. His employer was a hard man, and on Saturday night when he paid him he docked him fifteen minutes for the time he was up in the air—but never mind, he had his reward.

He told all this in his solemn, grave way, though the Sunday-school was in a storm of enjoyment when he finished. There still remains a doubt in Hannibal as to its perfect suitability, but there is no doubt as to its acceptability.

That Sunday afternoon, with John Briggs, he walked over Holliday's Hill—the Cardiff Hill of Tom Sawyer. It was just such a Sunday as that one when they had so nearly demolished the negro driver and had damaged a cooper-shop. They calculated that nearly three thousand Sundays had passed since then, and now here they were once more, two old men with the hills still fresh and green, the river still sweeping by and rippling in the sun. Standing there together and looking across to the low-lying Illinois shore, and to the green islands where they had played, and to Lover's Leap on the south, the man who had been Sam Clemens said:

Page 37

“John, that is one of the loveliest sights I ever saw. Down there by the island is the place we used to swim, and yonder is where a man was drowned, and there’s where the steamboat sank. Down there on Lover’s Leap is where the Millerites put on their robes one night to go to heaven. None of them went that night, but I suppose most of them have gone now.”

John Briggs said:

“Sam, do you remember the day we stole the peaches from old man Price and one of his bow-legged niggers came after us with the dogs, and how we made up our minds that we’d catch that nigger and drown him?”

They came to the place where they had pried out the great rock that had so nearly brought them to grief. Sam Clemens said:

“John, if we had killed that man we’d have had a dead nigger on our hands without a cent to pay for him.”

And so they talked on of this thing and that, and by and by they drove along the river, and Sam Clemens pointed out the place where he swam it and was taken with a cramp on the return swim, and believed for a while that his career was about to close.

“Once, near the shore, I thought I would let down,” he said, “but was afraid to, knowing that if the water was deep I was a goner, but finally my knees struck the sand and I crawled out. That was the closest call I ever had.”

They drove by the place where the haunted house had stood. They drank from a well they had always known, and from the bucket as they had always drunk, talking and always talking, fondling lovingly and lingeringly that most beautiful of all our possessions, the past.

“Sam,” said John, when they parted, “this is probably the last time we shall meet on this earth. God bless you. Perhaps somewhere we shall renew our friendship.”

“John,” was the answer, “this day has been worth thousands of dollars to me. We were like brothers once, and I feel that we are the same now. Good-by, John. I’ll try to meet you—somewhere.”

CCXXII

A PROPHET HONORED IN HIS COUNTRY

Clemens left next day for Columbia. Committees met him at Rensselaer, Monroe City, Clapper, Stoutsville, Paris, Madison, Moberly—at every station along the line of his

travel. At each place crowds were gathered when the train pulled in, to cheer and wave and to present him with flowers. Sometimes he spoke a few words; but oftener his eyes were full of tears—his voice would not come.

There is something essentially dramatic in official recognition by one's native State—the return of the lad who has set out unknown to battle with life, and who, having conquered, is invited back to be crowned. No other honor, however great and spectacular, is quite like that, for there is in it a pathos and a completeness that are elemental and stir emotions as old as life itself.

Page 38

It was on the 4th of June, 1902, that Mark Twain received his doctor of laws degree from the State University at Columbia, Missouri. James Wilson, Secretary of Agriculture, and Ethan Allen Hitchcock, Secretary of the Interior, were among those similarly honored. Mark Twain was naturally the chief attraction. Dressed in his Yale scholastic gown he led the procession of graduating students, and, as in Hannibal, awarded them their diplomas. The regular exercises were made purposely brief in order that some time might be allowed for the conferring of the degrees. This ceremony was a peculiarly impressive one. Gardner Lathrop read a brief statement introducing "America's foremost author and best-loved citizen, Samuel Langhorne Clemens—Mark Twain."

Clemens rose, stepped out to the center of the stage, and paused. He seemed to be in doubt as to whether he should make a speech or simply express his thanks and retire. Suddenly, and without a signal, the great audience rose as one man and stood in silence at his feet. He bowed, but he could not speak. Then that vast assembly began a peculiar chant, spelling out slowly the word Missouri, with a pause between each letter. It was dramatic; it was tremendous in its impressiveness. He had recovered himself when they finished. He said he didn't know whether he was expected to make a speech or not. They did not leave him in doubt. They cheered and demanded a speech, a speech, and he made them one—one of the speeches he could make best, full of quaint phrasing, happy humor, gentle and dramatic pathos. He closed by telling the watermelon story for its "moral effect."

He was the guest of E. W. Stevens in Columbia, and a dinner was given in his honor. They would have liked to keep him longer, but he was due in St. Louis again to join in the dedication of the grounds, where was to be held a World's Fair, to celebrate the Louisiana Purchase. Another ceremony he attended was the christening of the St. Louis harbor-boat, or rather the rechristening, for it had been decided to change its name from the St. Louis—[Originally the *Elon G. Smith*, built in 1873.]—to the Mark Twain. A short trip was made on it for the ceremony. Governor Francis and Mayor Wells were of the party, and Count and Countess Rochambeau and Marquis de Lafayette, with the rest of the French group that had come over for the dedication of the World's Fair grounds.

Mark Twain himself was invited to pilot the harbor boat, and so returned for the last time to his old place at the wheel. They all collected in the pilot-house behind him, feeling that it was a memorable occasion. They were going along well enough when he saw a little ripple running out from the shore across the bow. In the old days he could have told whether it indicated a bar there or was only caused by the wind, but he could not be sure any more. Turning to the pilot languidly, he said: "I feel a little tired. I guess you had better take the wheel."

Page 39

Luncheon was served aboard, and Mayor Wells made the christening speech; then the Countess Rochambeau took a bottle of champagne from the hand of Governor Francis and smashed it on the deck, saying, "I christen thee, good boat, Mark Twain." So it was, the Mississippi joined in according him honors. In his speech of reply he paid tribute to those illustrious visitors from France and recounted something of the story of French exploration along that great river.

"The name of La Salle will last as long as the river itself," he said; "will last until commerce is dead. We have allowed the commerce of the river to die, but it was to accommodate the railroads, and we must be grateful."

Carriages were waiting for them when the boat landed in the afternoon, and the party got in and were driven to a house which had been identified as Eugene Field's birthplace. A bronze tablet recording this fact had been installed, and this was to be the unveiling. The place was not in an inviting quarter of the town. It stood in what is known as Walsh's Row—was fashionable enough once, perhaps, but long since fallen into disrepute. Ragged children played in the doorways, and thirsty lodgers were making trips with tin pails to convenient bar-rooms. A curious nondescript audience assembled around the little group of dedicators, wondering what it was all about. The tablet was concealed by the American flag, which could be easily pulled away by an attached cord. Governor Francis spoke a few words, to the effect that they had gathered here to unveil a tablet to an American poet, and that it was fitting that Mark Twain should do this. They removed their hats, and Clemens, his white hair blowing in the wind, said:

"My friends; we are here with reverence and respect to commemorate and enshrine in memory the house where was born a man who, by his life, made bright the lives of all who knew him, and by his literary efforts cheered the thoughts of thousands who never knew him. I take pleasure in unveiling the tablet of Eugene Field."

The flag fell and the bronze inscription was revealed. By this time the crowd, generally, had recognized who it was that was speaking. A working-man proposed three cheers for Mark Twain, and they were heartily given. Then the little party drove away, while the neighborhood collected to regard the old house with a new interest.

It was reported to Clemens later that there was some dispute as to the identity of the Field birthplace. He said:

"Never mind. It is of no real consequence whether it is his birthplace or not. A rose in any other garden will bloom as sweet."

CCXXIII

AT YORK HARBOR

They decided to spend the summer at York Harbor, Maine. They engaged a cottage, there, and about the end of June Mr. Rogers brought his yacht Kanawha to their waterfront at Riverdale, and in perfect weather took them to Maine by sea. They landed at York Harbor and took possession of their cottage, The Pines, one of their many attractive summer lodges. Howells, at Kittery Point, was not far away, and everything promised a happy summer.

Page 40

Mrs. Clemens wrote to Mrs. Crane:

We are in the midst of pines. They come up right about us, and the house is so high and the roots of the trees are so far below the veranda that we are right in the branches. We drove over to call on Mr. and Mrs. Howells. The drive was most beautiful, and never in my life have I seen such a variety of wild flowers in so short a space.

Howells tells us of the wide, low cottage in a pine grove overlooking York River, and how he used to sit with Clemens that summer at a corner of the veranda farthest away from Mrs. Clemens's window, where they could read their manuscripts to each other, and tell their stories and laugh their hearts out without disturbing her.

Clemens, as was his habit, had taken a work-room in a separate cottage "in the house of a friend and neighbor, a fisherman and a boatman":

There was a table where he could write, and a bed where he could lie down and read; and there, unless my memory has played me one of those constructive tricks that people's memories indulge in, he read me the first chapters of an admirable story. The scene was laid in a Missouri town, and the characters such as he had known in boyhood; but often as I tried to make him own it, he denied having written any such story; it is possible that I dreamed it, but I hope the *Ms.* will yet be found.

Howells did not dream it; but in one way his memory misled him. The story was one which Clemens had heard in Hannibal, and he doubtless related it in his vivid way. Howells, writing at a later time, quite naturally included it among the several manuscripts which Clemens read aloud to him. Clemens may have intended to write the tale, may even have begun it, though this is unlikely. The incidents were too well known and too notorious in his old home for fiction.

Among the stories that Clemens did show, or read, to Howells that summer was "The Belated Passport," a strong, intensely interesting story with what Howells in a letter calls a "goat's tail ending," perhaps meaning that it stopped with a brief and sudden shake—with a joke, in fact, altogether unimportant, and on the whole disappointing to the reader. A far more notable literary work of that summer grew out of a true incident which Howells related to Clemens as they sat chatting together on the veranda overlooking the river one summer afternoon. It was a pathetic episode in the life of some former occupants of The Pines—the tale of a double illness in the household, where a righteous deception was carried on during several weeks for the benefit of a life that was about to slip away. Out of this grew the story, "Was it Heaven? or Hell?" a heartbreaking history which probes the very depths of the human soul. Next to "Hadleyburg," it is Mark Twain's greatest fictional sermon.

Page 41

Clemens that summer wrote, or rather finished, his most pretentious poem. One day at Riverdale, when Mrs. Clemens had been with him on the lawn, they had remembered together the time when their family of little folks had filled their lives so full, conjuring up dream-like glimpses of them in the years of play and short frocks and hair-plaits down their backs. It was pathetic, heart-wringing fancying; and later in the day Clemens conceived and began the poem which now he brought to conclusion. It was built on the idea of a mother who imagines her dead child still living, and describes to any listener the pictures of her fancy. It is an impressive piece of work; but the author, for some reason, did not offer it for publication.—[This poem was completed on the anniversary of Susy's death and is of considerable length. Some selections from it will be found under Appendix U, at the end of this work.]

Mrs. Clemens, whose health earlier in the year had been delicate, became very seriously ill at York Harbor. Howells writes:

At first she had been about the house, and there was one gentle afternoon when she made tea for us in the parlor, but that was the last time I spoke with her. After that it was really a question of how soonest and easiest she could be got back to Riverdale.

She had seemed to be in fairly good health and spirits for several weeks after the arrival at York. Then, early in August, there came a great celebration of some municipal anniversary, and for two or three days there were processions, mass-meetings, and so on by day, with fireworks at night. Mrs. Clemens, always young in spirit, was greatly interested. She went about more than her strength warranted, seeing and hearing and enjoying all that was going on. She was finally persuaded to forego the remaining ceremonies and rest quietly on the pleasant veranda at home; but she had overtaxed herself and a collapse was inevitable. Howells and two friends called one afternoon, and a friend of the Queen of Rumania, a Madame Hartwig, who had brought from that gracious sovereign a letter which closed in this simple and modest fashion:

I beg your pardon for being a bore to one I so deeply love and admire, to whom I owe days and days of forgetfulness of self and troubles, and the intensest of all joys-hero-worship! People don't always realize what a happiness that is! God bless you for every beautiful thought you poured into my tired heart, and for every smile on a weary way.
Carmen Sylva.

This was the occasion mentioned by Howells when Mrs. Clemens made tea for them in the parlor for the last time. Her social life may be said to have ended that afternoon. Next morning the break came. Clemens, in his notebook for that day, writes:

Tuesday, August 12, 1902. At 7 A.M. Livy taken violently ill. Telephoned and Dr. Lambert was here in 1/2 hour. She could not breathe—was likely to stifle. Also she had severe palpitation. She believed she was dying. I also believed it.

Page 42

Nurses were summoned, and Mrs. Crane and others came from Elmira. Clara Clemens took charge of the household and matters generally, and the patient was secluded and guarded from every disturbing influence. Clemens slipped about with warnings of silence. A visitor found notices in Mark Twain's writing pinned to the trees near Mrs. Clemens's window warning the birds not to sing too loudly.

The patient rallied, but she remained very much debilitated. On September 3d the notebook says:

Always Mr. Rogers keeps his yacht Kanawha in commission & ready to fly here and take us to Riverdale on telegraphic notice.

But Mrs. Clemens was unable to return by sea. When it was decided at last, in October, that she could be removed to Riverdale, Clemens and Howells went to Boston and engaged an invalid car to make the journey from York Harbor to Riverdale without change. Howells tells us that Clemens gave his strictest personal attention to the arrangement of these details, and that they absorbed him.

There was no particular of the business which he did not scrutinize and master With the inertness that grows upon an aging man he had been used to delegate more and more things, but of that thing I perceived that he would not delegate the least detail.

They made the journey on the 16th, in nine and a half hours. With the exception of the natural weariness due to such a trip, the invalid was apparently no worse on their arrival. The stout English butler carried her to her room. It would be many months before she would leave it again. In one of his memoranda Clemens wrote:

Our dear prisoner is where she is through overwork-day & night devotion to the children & me. We did not know how to value it. We know now.

And in a notation, on a letter praising him for what he had done for the world's enjoyment, and for his splendid triumph over debt, he said:

Livy never gets her share of these applauses, but it is because the people do not know. Yet she is entitled to the lion's share.

He wrote Twichell at the end of October:

Livy drags along drearily. It must be hard times for that turbulent spirit. It will be a long time before she is on her feet again. It is a most pathetic case. I wish I could transfer it to myself. Between ripping & raging & smoking & reading I could get a good deal of holiday out of it. Clara runs the house smoothly & capitally.

Heavy as was the cloud of illness, he could not help pestering Twichell a little about a recent mishap—a sprained shoulder:

Page 43

I should like to know how & where it happened. In the pulpit, as like as not, otherwise you would not be taking so much pains to conceal it. This is not a malicious suggestion, & not a personally invented one: you told me yourself once that you threw artificial power & impressiveness in your sermons where needed by “banging the Bible”—(your own words). You have reached a time of life when it is not wise to take these risks. You would better jump around. We all have to change our methods as the infirmities of age creep upon us. Jumping around will be impressive now, whereas before you were gray it would have excited remark.

Mrs. Clemens seemed to improve as the weeks passed, and they had great hopes of her complete recovery. Clemens took up some work—a new Huck Finn story, inspired by his trip to Hannibal. It was to have two parts —Huck and Tom in youth, and then their return in old age. He did some chapters quite in the old vein, and wrote to Howells of his plan. Howells answered:

It is a great lay-out: what I shall enjoy most will be the return of the old fellows to the scene and their tall lying. There is a matchless chance there. I suppose you will put in plenty of pegs in this prefatory part.

But the new story did not reach completion. Huck and Tom would not come back, even to go over the old scenes.

CCXXIV

THE SIXTY-SEVENTH BIRTHDAY DINNER

It was on the evening of the 27th of November, 1902, I at the Metropolitan Club, New York City, that Col. George Harvey, president of the Harper Company, gave Mark Twain a dinner in celebration of his sixty-seventh birthday. The actual date fell three days later; but that would bring it on Sunday, and to give it on Saturday night would be more than likely to carry it into Sabbath morning, and so the 27th was chosen. Colonel Harvey himself presided, and Howells led the speakers with a poem, “A Double-Barreled Sonnet to Mark Twain,” which closed:

Still, to have everything beyond cavil right,
We will dine with you here till Sunday night.

Thomas Brackett Reed followed with what proved to be the last speech he would ever make, as it was also one of his best. All the speakers did well that night, and they included some of the country’s foremost in oratory: Chauncey Depew, St. Clair McKelway, Hamilton Mabie, and Wayne MacVeagh. Dr. Henry van Dyke and John Kendrick Bangs read poems. The chairman constantly kept the occasion from becoming too serious by maintaining an attitude of “thinking ambassador” for the guest

of the evening, gently pushing Clemens back in his seat when he attempted to rise and expressing for him an opinion of each of the various tributes.

“The limit has been reached,” he announced at the close of Dr. van Dyke’s poem.
“More that is better could not be said. Gentlemen, Mr. Clemens.”

Page 44

It is seldom that Mark Twain has made a better after-dinner speech than he delivered then. He was surrounded by some of the best minds of the nation, men assembled to do him honor. They expected much of him—to Mark Twain always an inspiring circumstance. He was greeted with cheers and hand-clapping that came volley after volley, and seemed never ready to end. When it had died away at last he stood waiting a little in the stillness for his voice; then he said, “I think I ought to be allowed to talk as long as I want to,” and again the storm broke.

It is a speech not easy to abridge—a finished and perfect piece of after-dinner eloquence,—[The “Sixty-seventh Birthday Speech” entire is included in the volume Mark Twain’s Speeches.]—full of humorous stories and moving references to old friends—to Hay; and Reed, and Twichell, and Howells, and Rogers, the friends he had known so long and loved so well. He told of his recent trip to his boyhood home, and how he had stood with John Briggs on Holliday’s Hill and they had pointed out the haunts of their youth. Then at the end he paid a tribute to the companion of his home, who could not be there to share his evening’s triumph. This peroration—a beautiful heart-offering to her and to those that had shared in long friendship—demands admission:

Now, there is one invisible guest here. A part of me is not present; the larger part, the better part, is yonder at her home; that is my wife, and she has a good many personal friends here, and I think it won’t distress any one of them to know that, although she is going to be confined to her bed for many months to come from that nervous prostration, there is not any danger and she is coming along very well—and I think it quite appropriate that I should speak of her. I knew her for the first time just in the same year that I first knew John Hay and Tom Reed and Mr. Twichell—thirty-six years ago—and she has been the best friend I have ever had, and that is saying a good deal—she has reared me—she and Twichell together—and what I am I owe to them. Twichell—why, it is such a pleasure to look upon Twichell’s face! For five and twenty years I was under the Rev. Mr. Twichell’s tuition, I was in his pastorate occupying a pew in his church and held him in due reverence. That man is full of all the graces that go to make a person companionable and beloved; and wherever Twichell goes to start a church the people flock there to buy the land; they find real estate goes up all around the spot, and the envious and the thoughtful always try to get Twichell to move to their neighborhood and start a church; and wherever you see him go you can go and buy land there with confidence, feeling sure that there will be a double price for you before very long. I have tried to do good in this world, and it is marvelous in how many different ways I have done good, and it is comfortable to reflect—now, there’s Mr. Rogers—just out of the

Page 45

affection I bear that man many a time I have given him points in finance that he had never thought of—and if he could lay aside envy, prejudice, and superstition, and utilize those ideas in his business, it would make a difference in his bank-account. Well, I liked the poetry. I liked all the speeches and the poetry, too. I liked Dr. van Dyke's poem. I wish I could return thanks in proper measure to you, gentlemen, who have spoken and violated your feelings to pay me compliments; some were merited and some you overlooked, it is true; and Colonel Harvey did slander every one of you, and put things into my mouth that I never said, never thought of at all.

And now my wife and I, out of our single heart, return you our deepest and most grateful thanks, and—yesterday was her birthday.

The sixty-seventh birthday dinner was widely celebrated by the press, and newspaper men generally took occasion to pay brilliant compliments to Mark Twain. Arthur Brisbane wrote editorially:

For more than a generation he has been the Messiah of a genuine gladness and joy to the millions of three continents.

It was little more than a week later that one of the old friends he had mentioned, Thomas Brackett Reed, apparently well and strong that birthday evening, passed from the things of this world. Clemens felt his death keenly, and in a "good-by" which he wrote for Harper's Weekly he said:

His was a nature which invited affection—compelled it, in fact—and met it half-way. Hence, he was "Tom" to the most of his friends and to half of the nation

I cannot remember back to a time when he was not "Tom" Reed to me, nor to a time when he could have been offended at being so addressed by me. I cannot remember back to a time when I could let him alone in an after-dinner speech if he was present, nor to a time when he did not take my extravagance concerning him and misstatements about him in good part, nor yet to a time when he did not pay them back with usury when his turn came. The last speech he made was at my birthday dinner at the end of November, when naturally I was his text; my last word to him was in a letter the next day; a day later I was illustrating a fantastic article on art with his portrait among others—a portrait now to be laid reverently away among the jests that begin in humor and end in pathos. These things happened only eight days ago, and now he is gone from us, and the nation is speaking of him as one who was. It seems incredible, impossible. Such a man, such a friend, seems to us a permanent possession; his vanishing from our midst is unthinkable, as was the vanishing of the Campanile, that had stood for a thousand years and was turned to dust in a moment.



The appreciation closes:

I have only wished to say how fine and beautiful was his life and character, and to take him by the hand and say good-by, as to a fortunate friend who has done well his work and gees a pleasant journey.

CCXXV

Page 46

CHRISTIAN SCIENCE CONTROVERSIES

The North American Review for December (1902) contained an instalment of the Christian Science series which Mark Twain had written in Vienna several years before. He had renewed his interest in the doctrine, and his admiration for Mrs. Eddy's peculiar abilities and his antagonism toward her had augmented in the mean time. Howells refers to the "mighty moment when Clemens was building his engines of war for the destruction of Christian Science, which superstition nobody, and he least of all, expected to destroy":

He believed that as a religious machine the Christian Science Church was as perfect as the Roman Church, and destined to be more formidable in its control of the minds of men

An interesting phase of his psychology in this business was not. only his admiration for the masterly policy of the Christian Science hierarchy, but his willingness to allow the miracles of its healers to be tried on his friends and family if they wished it. He had a tender heart for the whole generation of empirics, as well as the newer sorts of scientists, but he seemed to base his faith in them largely upon the failure of the regulars, rather than upon their own successes, which also he believed in. He was recurrently, but not insistently, desirous that you should try their strange magics when you were going to try the familiar medicines.

Clemens never had any quarrel with the theory of Christian Science or mental healing, or with any of the empiric practices. He acknowledged good in all of them, and he welcomed most of them in preference to materia medica. It is true that his animosity for the founder of the Christian Science cult sometimes seems to lap over and fringe the religion itself; but this is apparent rather than real. Furthermore, he frequently expressed a deep obligation which humanity owed to the founder of the faith, in that she had organized a healing element ignorantly and indifferently employed hitherto. His quarrel with Mrs. Eddy lay in the belief that she herself, as he expressed it, was "a very unsound Christian Scientist."

I believe she has a serious malady—self-edification—and that it will be well to have one of the experts demonstrate over her. [But he added]: Closely examined, painstakingly studied, she is easily the most interesting person on the planet, and in several ways as easily the most extraordinary woman that was ever born upon it.

Necessarily, the forces of Christian Science were aroused by these articles, and there were various replies, among them, one by the founder herself, a moderate rejoinder in her usual literary form.

"Mrs. Eddy in Error," in the North American Review for April, 1903, completed what Clemens had to say on the matter for this time.

Page 47

He was putting together a book on the subject, comprised of his various published papers and some added chapters. It would not be a large volume, and he offered to let his Christian Science opponents share it with him, stating their side of the case. Mr. William D. McCrackan, one of the church's chief advocates, was among those invited to participate. McCrackan and Clemens, from having begun as enemies, had become quite friendly, and had discussed their differences face to face at considerable length. Early in the controversy Clemens one night wrote McCrackan a pretty savage letter. He threw it on the hall table for mailing, but later got out of bed and slipped down-stairs to get it. It was too late—the letters had been gathered up and mailed. Next evening a truly Christian note came from McCrackan, returning the hasty letter, which he said he was sure the writer would wish to recall. Their friendship began there. For some reason, however, the collaborated volume did not materialize. In the end, publication was delayed a number of years, by which time Clemens's active interest was a good deal modified, though the practice itself never failed to invite his attention.

Howells refers to his anti-Christian Science rages, which began with the postponement of the book, and these Clemens vented at the time in another manuscript entitled, "Eddypus," an imaginary history of a thousand years hence, when Eddyism should rule the world. By that day its founder would have become a deity, and the calendar would be changed to accord with her birth. It was not publishable matter, and really never intended as such. It was just one of the things which Mark Twain wrote to relieve mental pressure.

CCXXVI

"Was it heaven? Or hell?"

The Christmas number of Harper's Magazine for 1902 contained the story, "Was it Heaven? or Hell?" and it immediately brought a flood of letters to its author from grateful readers on both sides of the ocean. An Englishman wrote: "I want to thank you for writing so pathetic and so profoundly true a story"; and an American declared it to be the best short story ever written. Another letter said:

I have learned to love those maiden liars—love and weep over them
—then put them beside Dante's Beatrice in Paradise.

There were plenty of such letters; but there was one of a different sort. It was a letter from a man who had but recently gone through almost precisely the experience narrated in the tale. His dead daughter had even borne the same name—Helen. She had died of typhus while her mother was prostrated with the same malady, and the deception had been maintained in precisely the same way, even to the fictitiously written letters. Clemens replied to this letter, acknowledging the striking nature of the

coincidence it related, and added that, had he invented the story, he would have believed it a case of mental telegraphy.

Page 48

I was merely telling a true story just as it had been told to me by one who well knew the mother and the daughter & all the beautiful & pathetic details. I was living in the house where it had happened, three years before, & I put it on paper at once while it was fresh in my mind, & its pathos still straining at my heartstrings.

Clemens did not guess that the coincidences were not yet complete, that within a month the drama of the tale would be enacted in his own home. In his note-book, under the date of December 24(1902), he wrote:

Jean was hit with a chill: Clara was completing her watch in her mother's room and there was no one able to force Jean to go to bed. As a result she is pretty ill to-day-fever & high temperature.

Three days later he added:

It was pneumonia. For 5 days Jean's temperature ranged between 103 & 104 $\frac{2}{5}$, till this morning, when it got down to 101. She looks like an escaped survivor of a forest fire. For 6 days now my story in the Christmas Harper's "Was it Heaven? or Hell?"—has been enacted in this household. Every day Clara & the nurses have lied about Jean to her mother, describing the fine times she is having outdoors in the winter sports.

That proved a hard, trying winter in the Clemens home, and the burden of it fell chiefly, indeed almost entirely, upon Clara Clemens. Mrs. Clemens became still more frail, and no other member of the family, not even her husband, was allowed to see her for longer than the briefest interval. Yet the patient was all the more anxious to know the news, and daily it had to be prepared—chiefly invented—for her comfort. In an account which Clemens once set down of the "Siege and Season of Unveracity," as he called it, he said:

Clara stood a daily watch of three or four hours, and hers was a hard office indeed. Daily she sealed up in her heart a dozen dangerous truths, and thus saved her mother's life and hope and happiness with holy lies. She had never told her mother a lie in her life before, and I may almost say that she never told her a truth afterward. It was fortunate for us all that Clara's reputation for truthfulness was so well established in her mother's mind. It was our daily protection from disaster. The mother never doubted Clara's word. Clara could tell her large improbabilities without exciting any suspicion, whereas if I tried to market even a small and simple one the case would have been different. I was never able to get a reputation like Clara's. Mrs. Clemens questioned Clara every day concerning Jean's health, spirits, clothes, employments, and amusements, and how she was enjoying herself; and Clara furnished the information right along in minute detail—every word of it false, of course. Every day she had to tell how Jean dressed, and in time she got so tired of using Jean's existing clothes over and over again, and trying to get new effects out of them, that

Page 49

finally, as a relief to her hard-worked invention, she got to adding imaginary clothes to Jean's wardrobe, and probably would have doubled it and trebled it if a warning note in her mother's comments had not admonished her that she was spending more money on these spectral gowns and things than the family income justified.

Some portions of detailed accounts of Clara's busy days of this period, as written at the time by Clemens to Twichell and to Mrs. Crane, are eminently worth preserving. To Mrs. Crane:

Clara does not go to her Monday lesson in New York today [her mother having seemed not so well through the night], but forgets that fact and enters her mother's room (where she has no business to be) toward train-time dressed in a wrapper. *Livy*. Why, Clara, aren't you going to your lesson? *Clara* (almost caught). Yes. *L*. In that costume? *CL*. Oh no. *L*. Well, you can't make your train; it's impossible. *CL*. I know, but I'm going to take the other one. *L*. Indeed that won't do—you'll be ever so much too late for your lesson. *CL*. No, the lesson-time has been put an hour later. *L*. (satisfied, then suddenly). But, Clara, that train and the late lesson together will make you late to Mrs. Hapgood's luncheon. *CL*. No, the train leaves fifteen minutes earlier than it used to. *L*. (satisfied). Tell Mrs. Hapgood, *etc.*, *etc.*, *etc.* (which Clara promises to do). Clara, dear, after the luncheon—I hate to put this on you—but could you do two or three little shopping-errands for me? *CL*. Oh, it won't trouble me a bit—I can do it. (Takes a list of the things she is to buy—a list which she will presently hand to another.)

At 3 or 4 P.M. Clara takes the things brought from New York, studies over her part a little, then goes to her mother's room.

Livy. It's very good of you, dear. Of course, if I had known it was going to be so snowy and drizzly and sloppy I wouldn't have asked you to buy them. Did you get wet? *CL*. Oh, nothing to hurt. *L*. You took a cab both ways? *CL*. Not from the station to the lesson—the weather was good enough till that was over. *L*. Well, now, tell me everything Mrs. Hapgood said. Clara tells her a long yarn—avoiding novelties and surprises and anything likely to inspire questions difficult to answer; and of course detailing the menu, for if it had been the feeding of the 5,000 *Livy* would have insisted on knowing what kind of bread it was and how the fishes were served. By and by, while talking of something else: *Livy*. Clams!—in the end of December. Are you sure it was clams? *CL*. I didn't say cl—I meant Blue Points. *L*. (tranquilized). It seemed odd. What is Jean doing? *CL*. She said she was going to do a little typewriting. *L*. Has she been out to-day? *CL*. Only a moment, right after luncheon. She was determined

Page 50

to go out again, but—— L. How did you know she was out? CL. (saving herself in time). Katie told me. She was determined to go out again in the rain and snow, but I persuaded her to stay in. L. (with moving and grateful admiration). Clara, you are wonderful! the wise watch you keep over Jean, and the influence you have over her; it's so lovely of you, and I tied here and can't take care of her myself. (And she goes on with these undeserved praises till Clara is expiring with shame.)

To Twichell:

I am to see Livy a moment every afternoon until she has another bad night; and I stand in dread, for with all my practice I realize that in a sudden emergency I am but a poor, clumsy liar, whereas a fine alert and capable emergency liar is the only sort that is worth anything in a sick-chamber. Now, Joe, just see what reputation can do. All Clara's life she has told Livy the truth and now the reward comes; Clara lies to her three and a half hours every day, and Livy takes it all at par, whereas even when I tell her a truth it isn't worth much without corroboration

Soon my brief visit is due. I've just been up listening at Livy's door.

5 P.M. A great disappointment. I was sitting outside Livy's door waiting. Clara came out a minute ago and said Livy is not so well, and the nurse can't let me see her to-day.

That pathetic drama was to continue in some degree for many a long month. All that winter and spring Mrs. Clemens kept but a frail hold on life. Clemens wrote little, and refused invitations everywhere he could. He spent his time largely in waiting for the two-minute period each day when he could stand at the bed-foot and say a few words to the invalid, and he confined his writing mainly to the comforting, affectionate messages which he was allowed to push under her door. He was always waiting there long before the moment he was permitted to enter. Her illness and her helplessness made manifest what Howells has fittingly characterized as his "beautiful and tender loyalty to her, which was the most moving quality of his most faithful soul."

CCXXVII

THE SECOND RIVERDALE WINTER

Most of Mark Twain's stories have been dramatized at one time or another, and with more or less success. He had two plays going that winter, one of them the little "Death Disk," which—in story form had appeared a year before in Harper's Magazine. It was

put on at the Carnegie Lyceum with considerable effect, but it was not of sufficient importance to warrant a long continuance.

Another play of that year was a dramatization of Huckleberry Finn, by Lee Arthur. This was played with a good deal of success in Baltimore, Philadelphia, and elsewhere, the receipts ranging from three hundred to twenty-one hundred dollars per night, according to the weather and locality. Why the play was discontinued is not altogether apparent; certainly many a dramatic enterprise has gone further, faring worse.

Page 51

Huck in book form also had been having adventures a little earlier, in being tabooed on account of his morals by certain librarians of Denver and Omaha. It was years since Huck had been in trouble of that sort, and he acquired a good deal of newspaper notoriety in consequence.

Certain entries in Mark Twain's note-book reveal somewhat of his life and thought at this period. We find such entries as this:

Saturday, January 3, 1903. The offspring of riches: Pride, vanity, ostentation, arrogance, tyranny.

Sunday, January 4, 1903. The offspring of poverty: Greed, sordidness, envy, hate, malice, cruelty, meanness, lying, shirking, cheating, stealing, murder.

Monday, February 2, 1903. 33d wedding anniversary. I was allowed to see Livy 5 minutes this morning in honor of the day. She makes but little progress toward recovery, still there is certainly some, we are sure.

Sunday, March 1, 1903. We may not doubt that society in heaven consists mainly of undesirable persons.

Thursday, March 19, 1903. Susy's birthday. She would be 31 now.

The family illnesses, which presently included an allotment for himself, his old bronchitis, made him rage more than ever at the imperfections of the species which could be subject to such a variety of ills. Once he wrote:

Man was made at the end of the week's work when God was tired.

And again:

Adam, man's benefactor—he gave him all that he has ever received that was worth having—death.

The Riverdale home was in reality little more than a hospital that spring. Jean had scarcely recovered her physical strength when she was attacked by measles, and Clara also fell a victim to the infection. Fortunately Mrs. Clemens's health had somewhat improved.

It was during this period that Clemens formulated his eclectic therapeutic doctrine. Writing to Twichell April 4, 1903, he said:

Livy does make a little progress these past 3 or 4 days, progress which is visible to even the untrained eye. The physicians are doing good work for her, but my notion is,

that no art of healing is the best for all ills. I should distribute the ailments around: surgery cases to the surgeon; lupus to the actinic-ray specialist; nervous prostration to the Christian Scientist; most ills to the allopath & the homeopath; & (in my own particular case) rheumatism, gout, & bronchial attack to the osteopathist.

He had plenty of time to think and to read during those weeks of confinement, and to rage, and to write when he felt the need of that expression, though he appears to have completed not much for print beyond his reply to Mrs. Eddy, already mentioned, and his burlesque, "Instructions in Art," with pictures by himself, published in the Metropolitan for April and May.

Page 52

Howells called his attention to some military outrages in the Philippines, citing a case where a certain lieutenant had tortured one of his men, a mild offender, to death out of pure deviltry, and had been tried but not punished for his fiendish crime.—[The torture to death of Private Edward C. Richter, an American soldier, by orders of a commissioned officer of the United States army on the night of February 7, 1902. Private Richter was bound and gagged and the gag held in his mouth by means of a club while ice-water was slowly poured into his face, a dipper full at a time, for two hours and a half, until life became extinct.]

Clemens undertook to give expression to his feelings on this subject, but he boiled so when he touched pen to paper to write of it that it was simply impossible for him to say anything within the bounds of print. Then his only relief was to rise and walk the floor, and curse out his fury at the race that had produced such a specimen.

Mrs. Clemens, who perhaps got some drift or the echo of these tempests, now and then sent him a little admonitory, affectionate note.

Among the books that Clemens read, or tried to read, during his confinement were certain of the novels of Sir Walter Scott. He had never been able to admire Scott, and determined now to try to understand this author's popularity and his standing with the critics; but after wading through the first volume of one novel, and beginning another one, he concluded to apply to one who could speak as having authority. He wrote to Brander Matthews:

Dear Brander,—I haven't been out of my bed for 4 weeks, but-well, I have been reading a good deal, & it occurs to me to ask you to sit down, some time or other when you have 8 or 9 months to spare, & jot me down a certain few literary particulars for my help & elevation. Your time need not be thrown away, for at your further leisure you can make Columbian lectures out of the results & do your students a good turn.

1. Are there in Sir Walter's novels passages done in good English—English which is neither slovenly nor involved?
2. Are there passages whose English is not poor & thin & commonplace, but is of a quality above that?
3. Are there passages which burn with real fire—not punk, fox-fire, make-believe?
4. Has he heroes & heroines who are not cads and cadesses?
5. Has he personages whose acts & talk correspond with their characters as described by him?



6. Has he heroes & heroines whom the reader admires—admires and knows why?
7. Has he funny characters that are funny, and humorous passages that are humorous?
8. Does he ever chain the reader's interest & make him reluctant to lay the book down?
9. Are there pages where he ceases from posing, ceases from admiring the placid flood & flow of his own dilution, ceases from being artificial, & is for a time, long or short, recognizably sincere & in earnest?
10. Did he know how to write English, & didn't do it because he didn't want to?

Page 53

11. Did he use the right word only when he couldn't think of another one, or did he run so much to wrong words because he didn't know the right one when he saw it?

12. Can you read him and keep your respect for him? Of course a person could in his day—an era of sentimentality & sloppy romantics—but land! can a body do it to-day?

Brander, I lie here dying; slowly dying, under the blight of Sir Walter. I have read the first volume of Rob Roy, & as far as Chapter XIX of Guy Mannering, & I can no longer hold my head up or take my nourishment. Lord, it's all so juvenile! so artificial, so shoddy; & such wax figures & skeletons & specters. Interest? Why, it is impossible to feel an interest in these bloodless shams, these milk-&water humbugs. And oh, the poverty of invention! Not poverty in inventing situations, but poverty in furnishing reasons for them. Sir Walter usually gives himself away when he arranges for a situation—elaborates & elaborates & elaborates till, if you live to get to it, you don't believe in it when it happens.

I can't find the rest of Rob Roy, I, can't stand any more Mannering—I do not know just what to do, but I will reflect, & not quit this great study rashly

My, I wish I could see you & Leigh Hunt!

Sincerely yours,

S. L. *Clemens*.

But a few days later he experienced a revelation. It came when he perseveringly attacked still a third work of Scott—Quentin Durward. Hastily he wrote to Matthews again:

I'm still in bed, but the days have lost their dullness since I broke into Sir Walter & lost my temper. I finished Guy Mannering that curious, curious book, with its mob of squalid shadows gibbering around a single flesh-&-blood being—Dinmont; a book crazily put together out of the very refuse of the romance artist's stage properties—finished it & took up Quentin Durward & finished that.

It was like leaving the dead to mingle with the living; it was like withdrawing from the infant class in the college of journalism to sit under the lectures in English literature in Columbia University.

I wonder who wrote Quentin Durward?—[This letter, enveloped, addressed, and stamped, was evidently mislaid. It was found and mailed seven years later, June, 1910 message from the dead.]

Among other books which he read that winter and spring was Helen Keller's 'The Story of My Life', then recently published. That he finished it in a mood of sweet gentleness we gather from a long, lovely letter which he wrote her—a letter in which he said:

I am charmed with your book—enchanted. You are a wonderful creature, the most wonderful in the world—you and your other half together—Miss Sullivan, I mean—for it took the pair of you to make a complete & perfect whole. How she stands out in her letters! her brilliancy, penetration, originality, wisdom, character, & the fine literary competencies of her pen—they are all there.

Page 54

When reading and writing failed as diversion, Mark Twain often turned to mathematics. With no special talent for accuracy in the matter of figures, he had a curious fondness for calculations, scientific and financial, and he used to cover pages, ciphering at one thing and another, arriving pretty inevitably at the wrong results. When the problem was financial, and had to do with his own fortunes, his figures were as likely as not to leave him in a state of panic. The expenditures were naturally heavy that spring; and one night, when he had nothing better to do, he figured the relative proportion to his income. The result showed that they were headed straight for financial ruin. He put in the rest of the night fearfully rolling and tossing, and reconstructing his figures that grew always worse, and next morning summoned Jean and Clara and petrified them with the announcement that the cost of living was one hundred and twenty-five per cent. more than the money-supply.

Writing to MacAlister three days later he said:

It was a mistake. When I came down in the morning, a gray and aged wreck, I found that in some unaccountable way (unaccountable to a business man, but not to me) I had multiplied the totals by two. By God, I dropped seventy-five years on the floor where I stood! Do you know it affected me as one is affected when one wakes out of a hideous dream & finds it was only a dream. It was a great comfort & satisfaction to me to call the daughters to a private meeting of the board again. Certainly there is a blistering & awful reality about a well-arranged unreality. It is quite within the possibilities that two or three nights like that of mine would drive a man to suicide. He would refuse to examine the figures, they would revolt him so, & he would go to his death unaware that there was nothing serious about them. I cannot get that night out of my head, it was so vivid, so real, so ghastly: In any other year of these thirty-three the relief would have been simple: go where you can, cut your cloth to fit your income. You can't do that when your wife can't be moved, even from one room to the next. The doctor & a specialist met in conspiracy five days ago, & in their belief she will by and by come out of this as good as new, substantially. They ordered her to Italy for next winter—which seems to indicate that by autumn she will be able to undertake the voyage. So Clara is writing to a Florence friend to take a look around among the villas for us in the regions near that city.

CCXXVIII

PROFFERED HONORS

Mark Twain had been at home well on toward three years; but his popularity showed no signs of diminishing. So far from having waned, it had surged to a higher point than ever before. His crusade against public and private abuses had stirred readers, and had set them to thinking; the news of illness in his household; a report that he was contemplating another residence abroad—these things moved deeply the public heart,

and a tide of letters flowed in, letters of every sort—of sympathy, of love, or hearty endorsement, whatever his attitude of reform.

Page 55

When a writer in a New York newspaper said, "Let us go outside the realm of practical politics next time in choosing our candidates for the Presidency," and asked, "Who is our ablest and most conspicuous private citizen?" another editorial writer, Joseph Hollister, replied that Mark Twain was "the greatest man of his day in private life, and entitled to the fullest measure of recognition."

But Clemens was without political ambitions. He knew the way of such things too well. When Hollister sent him the editorial he replied only with a word of thanks, and did not, even in jest, encourage that tiny seed of a Presidential boom. One would like to publish many of the beautiful letters received during this period, for they are beautiful, most of them, however illiterate in form, however discouraging in length —beautiful in that they overflow with the writers' sincerity and gratitude.

So many of them came from children, usually without the hope of a reply, some signed only with initials, that the writers might not be open to the suspicion of being seekers for his autograph. Almost more than any other reward, Mark Twain valued this love of the children.

A department in the St. Nicholas Magazine offered a prize for a caricature drawing of some well-known man. There were one or two of certain prominent politicians and capitalists, and there was literally a wheelbarrow load of Mark Twain. When he was informed of this he wrote: "No tribute could have pleased me more than that—the friendship of the children."

Tributes came to him in many forms. In his native State it was proposed to form a Mark Twain Association, with headquarters at Hannibal, with the immediate purpose of having a week set apart at the St. Louis World's Fair, to be called the Mark Twain week, with a special Mark Twain day, on which a national literary convention would be held. But when his consent was asked, and his co-operation invited, he wrote characteristically:

It is indeed a high compliment which you offer me, in naming an association after me and in proposing the setting apart of a Mark Twain day at the great St. Louis Fair, but such compliments are not proper for the living; they are proper and safe for the dead only. I value the impulse which moves you to tender me these honors. I value it as highly as any one can, and am grateful for it, but I should stand in a sort of terror of the honors themselves. So long as we remain alive we are not safe from doing things which, however righteously and honorably intended, can wreck our reputations and extinguish our friendships.

I hope that no society will be named for me while I am still alive, for I might at some time or other do something which would cause its members to regret having done me that honor. After I shall have joined the dead I shall follow the custom of those people, and be guilty of no conduct that can wound any friend; but until that time shall come I shall be a doubtful quantity, like the rest of our race.

Page 56

The committee, still hoping for his consent, again appealed to him. But again he wrote:

While I am deeply touched by the desire of my friends of Hannibal to confer these great honors upon me I must still forbear to accept them. Spontaneous and unpremeditated honors, like those which came to me at Hannibal, Columbia, St. Louis, and at the village stations all down the line, are beyond all price and are a treasure for life in the memory, for they are a free gift out of the heart and they come without solicitation; but I am a Missourian, and so I shrink from distinctions which have to be arranged beforehand and with my privity, for I then become a party to my own exalting. I am humanly fond of honors that happen, but chary of those that come by canvass and intention.

Somewhat later he suggested a different feature for the fair; one that was not practical, perhaps, but which certainly would have aroused interest—that is to say, an old-fashioned six-day steamboat-race from New Orleans to St. Louis, with the old-fashioned accessories, such as torch-baskets, forecastle crowds of negro singers, with a negro on the safety-valve. In his letter to President Francis he said:

As to particulars, I think that the race should be a genuine reproduction of the old-time race, not just an imitation of it, and that it should cover the whole course. I think the boats should begin the trip at New Orleans, and side by side (not an interval between), and end it at North St. Louis, a mile or two above the Big Mound.

In a subsequent letter to Governor Francis he wrote:

It has been a dear wish of mine to exhibit myself at the great Fair & get a prize, but circumstances beyond my control have interfered

I suppose you will get a prize, because you have created the most prodigious Fair the planet has ever seen. Very well, you have indeed earned it, and with it the gratitude of the State and the nation.

Newspaper men used every inducement to get interviews from him. They invited him to name a price for any time he could give them, long or short. One reporter offered him five hundred dollars for a two-hour talk. Another proposed to pay him one hundred dollars a week for a quarter of a day each week, allowing him to discuss any subject he pleased. One wrote asking him two questions: the first, "Your favorite method of escaping from Indians"; the second, "Your favorite method of escaping capture by the Indians when they were in pursuit of you." They inquired as to his favorite copy-book maxim; as to what he considered most important to a young man's success; his definition of a gentleman. They wished to know his plan for the settlement of labor troubles. But they did not awaken his interest, or his cupidity. To one applicant he wrote:

No, there are temptations against which we are fire-proof. Your proposition is one which comes to me with considerable frequency, but it never tempts me. The price isn't the objection; you offer plenty. It is the nature of the work that is the objection—a kind of work which I could not do well enough to satisfy me. To multiply the price by twenty would not enable me to do the work to my satisfaction, & by consequence would make no impression upon me.

Page 57

Once he allowed himself to be interviewed for the Herald, when from Mr. Rogers's yacht he had watched Sir Thomas Lipton's Shamrock go down to defeat; but this was a subject which appealed to him—a kind of hotweather subject—and he could be as light-minded about it as he chose.

CCXXXIX

THE LAST SUMMER AT ELMIRA

The Clemenses were preparing to take up residence in Florence, Italy. The Hartford house had been sold in May, ending forever the association with the city that had so long been a part of their lives. The Tarrytown place, which they had never occupied, they also agreed to sell, for it was the belief now that Mrs. Clemens's health would never greatly prosper there. Howells says, or at least implies, that they expected their removal to Florence to be final. He tells us, too, of one sunny afternoon when he and Clemens sat on the grass before the mansion at Riverdale, after Mrs. Clemens had somewhat improved, and how they "looked up toward a balcony where by and by that lovely presence made itself visible, as if it had stooped there from a cloud. A hand frailly waved a handkerchief; Clemens ran over the lawn toward it, calling tenderly." It was a greeting to Howells the last he would ever receive from her.

Mrs. Clemens was able to make a trip to Elmira by the end of June, and on the 1st of July Mr. Rogers brought Clemens and his wife down the river on his yacht to the Lackawanna pier, and they reached Quarry Farm that evening. She improved in the quietude and restfulness of that beloved place. Three weeks later Clemens wrote to Twichell:

Livy is coming along: eats well, sleeps some, is mostly very gay, not very often depressed; spends all day on the porch, sleeps there a part of the night; makes excursions in carriage & in wheel-chair; &, in the matter of superintending everything & everybody, has resumed business at the old stand.

During three peaceful months she spent most of her days reclining on the wide veranda, surrounded by those dearest to her, and looking out on the dreamlike landscape—the long, grassy slope, the drowsy city, and the distant hills—getting strength for the far journey by sea. Clemens did some writing, occupying the old octagonal study—shut in now and overgrown with vines—where during the thirty years since it was built so many of his stories had been written. 'A Dog's Tale'—that pathetic anti-vivisection story—appears to have been the last manuscript ever completed in the spot consecrated by Huck and Tom, and by Tom Canty the Pauper and the little wandering Prince.

It was October 5th when they left Elmira. Two days earlier Clemens had written in his note-book:

Today I placed flowers on Susy's grave—for the last time probably
—& read words:

“Good-night, dear heart, good-night.”

They did not return to Riverdale, but went to the Hotel Grosvenor for the intervening weeks. They had engaged passage for Italy on the Princess Irene, which would sail on the 24th. It was during the period of their waiting that Clemens concluded his final Harper contract. On that day, in his note-book, he wrote:

Page 58

The prophecy

In 1895 Cheiro the palmist examined my hand & said that in my 68th year (1903) I would become suddenly rich. I was a bankrupt & \$94,000 in debt at the time through the failure of Charles L. Webster & Co. Two years later—in London—Cheiro repeated this long-distance prediction, & added that the riches would come from a quite unexpected source. I am superstitious. I kept the prediction in mind & often thought of it. When at last it came true, October 22, 1903, there was but a month & 9 days to spare.

The contract signed that day concentrates all my books in Harper's hands & now at last they are valuable; in fact they are a fortune. They guarantee me \$25,000 a year for 5 years, and they will yield twice as much as that.—[In earlier note-books and letters Clemens more than once refers to this prophecy and wonders if it is to be realized. The Harper contract, which brought all of his books into the hands of one publisher (negotiated for him by Mr. Rogers), proved, in fact, a fortune. The books yielded always more than the guarantee; sometimes twice that amount, as he had foreseen.]

During the conclusion of this contract Clemens made frequent visits to Fairhaven on the Kanawha. Joe Goodman came from the Pacific to pay him a good-by visit during this period. Goodman had translated the Mayan inscriptions, and his work had received official recognition and publication by the British Museum. It was a fine achievement for a man in later life and Clemens admired it immensely. Goodman and Clemens enjoyed each other in the old way at quiet resorts where they could talk over the old tales. Another visitor of that summer was the son of an old friend, a Hannibal printer named Daulton. Young Daulton came with manuscripts seeking a hearing of the magazine editors, so Clemens wrote a letter which would insure that favor: *Introducing Mr. GEO. Daulton*:

To Gilder, Alden, Harvey, McClURE, Walker, page, Bok, Collier, and such other members of the sacred guild as privilege me to call them friends—these:

Although I have no personal knowledge of the bearer of this, I have what is better: He comes recommended to me by his own father—a thing not likely to happen in any of your families, I reckon. I ask you, as a favor to me, to waive prejudice & superstition for this once & examine his work with an eye to its literary merit, instead of to the chastity of its spelling. I wish to God you cared less for that particular.

I set (or sat) type alongside of his father, in Hannibal, more than 50 years ago, when none but the pure in heart were in that business. A true man he was; and if I can be of any service to his son—and to you at the same time, let me hope—I am here heartily to try.

Yours by the sanctions of time & deserving,



Sincerely,
S. L. *Clemens*.

Page 59

Among the kindly words which came to Mark Twain before leaving America was this one which Rudyard Kipling had written to his publisher, Frank Doubleday:

I love to think of the great and godlike Clemens. He is the biggest man you have on your side of the water by a damn sight, and don't you forget it. Cervantes was a relation of his.

It curiously happened that Clemens at the same moment was writing to Doubleday about Kipling:

I have been reading "The Bell Buoy" and "The Old Man" over and over again—my custom with Kipling's work—and saving up the rest for other leisurely and luxurious meals. A bell-buoy is a deeply impressive fellow-being. In these many recent trips up and down the Sound in the Kanawha he has talked to me nightly sometimes in his pathetic and melancholy way, sometimes with his strenuous and urgent note, and I got his meaning—now I have his words! No one but Kipling could do this strong and vivid thing. Some day I hope to hear the poem chanted or sung—with the bell-buoy breaking in out of the distance.

P. S.—Your letter has arrived. It makes me proud and glad—what Kipling says. I hope Fate will fetch him to Florence while we are there. I would rather see him than any other man.

CCXXX

THE RETURN TO FLORENCE

From the note-book:

Saturday, October 24, 1903. Sailed in the Princess Irene for Genoa at 11. Flowers & fruit from Mrs. Rogers & Mrs. Coe. We have with us Katie Leary (in our domestic service 23 years) & Miss Margaret Sherry (trained nurse).

Two days later he wrote:

Heavy storm all night. Only 3 stewardesses. Ours served 60 meals in rooms this morning.

On the 27th:

Livy is enduring the voyage marvelously well. As well as Clara & Jean, I think, & far better than the trained nurse.

She has been out on deck an hour.

November 2. Due at Gibraltar 10 days from New York. 3 days to Naples, then 2 day to Genoa. At supper the band played “Cavalleria Rusticana,” which is forever associated in my mind with Susy. I love it better than any other, but it breaks my heart.

It was the “Intermezzo” he referred to, which had been Susy’s favorite music, and whenever he heard it he remembered always one particular opera-night long ago, and Susy’s face rose before him.

They were in Naples on the 5th; thence to Genoa, and to Florence, where presently they were installed in the Villa Reale di Quarto, a fine old Italian palace built by Cosimo more than four centuries ago. In later times it has been occupied and altered by royal families of Wurtemberg and Russia. Now it was the property of the Countess Massiglia, from whom Clemens had leased it.

Page 60

They had hoped to secure the Villa Papiniano, under Fiesole, near Professor Fiske, but negotiations for it had fallen through. The Villa Quarto, as it is usually called, was a more pretentious place and as beautifully located, standing as it does in an ancient garden looking out over Florence toward Vallombrosa and the Chianti hills. Yet now in the retrospect, it seems hardly to have been the retreat for an invalid. Its garden was supernaturally beautiful, all that one expects that a garden of Italy should be—such a garden as Maxfield Parrish might dream; but its beauty was that which comes of antiquity—the accumulation of dead years. Its funereal cypresses, its crumbling walls and arches, its clinging ivy and moldering marbles, and a clock that long ago forgot the hours, gave it a mortuary look. In a way it suggested Arnold Böcklin's "Todteninsel," and it might well have served as the allegorical setting for a gateway to the bourne of silence.

The house itself, one of the most picturesque of the old Florentine suburban palaces, was historically interesting, rather than cheerful. The rooms, in number more than sixty, though richly furnished, were vast and barnlike, and there were numbers of them wholly unused and never entered. There was a dearth of the modern improvements which Americans have learned to regard as a necessity, and the plumbing, such as it was, was not always in order. The place was approached by narrow streets, along which the more uninviting aspects of Italy were not infrequent. Youth and health and romance might easily have reveled in the place; but it seems now not to have been the best choice for that frail invalid, to whom cheer and brightness and freshness and the lovelier things of hope meant always so much.—[Villa Quarto has recently been purchased by Signor P. de Ritter Lahony, and thoroughly restored and refreshed and beautified without the sacrifice of any of its romantic features.]—Neither was the climate of Florence all that they had hoped for. Their former sunny winter had misled them. Tradition to the contrary, Italy—or at least Tuscany—is not one perpetual dream of sunlight. It is apt to be damp and cloudy; it is likely to be cold. Writing to MacAlister, Clemens said:

Florentine sunshine? Bless you, there isn't any. We have heavy fogs every morning & rain all day. This house is not merely large, it is vast—therefore I think it must always lack the home feeling.

His dissatisfaction in it began thus early, and it grew as one thing after another went wrong. With it all, however, Mrs. Clemens seemed to gain a little, and was glad to see company—a reasonable amount of company—to brighten her surroundings.

Clemens began to work and wrote a story or two, and those lively articles about the Italian language.

To Twichell he reported progress:

Page 61

I have a handsome success in one way here. I left New York under a sort of half-promise to furnish to the Harper magazines 30,000 words this year. Magazining is difficult work because every third page represents two pages that you have put in the fire (you are nearly sure to start wrong twice), & so when you have finished an article & are willing to let it go to print it represents only 10 cents a word instead of 30. But this time I had the curious (& unprecedented) luck to start right in each case. I turned out 37,000 words in 25 working days; & the reason I think I started right every time is, that not only have I approved and accepted the several articles, but the court of last resort (Livy) has done the same. On many of the between-days I did some work, but only of an idle & not necessarily necessary sort, since it will not see print until I am dead. I shall continue this (an hour per day), but the rest of the year I expect to put in on a couple of long books (half-completed ones). No more magazine work hanging over my head. This secluded & silent solitude, this clean, soft air, & this enchanting view of Florence, the great valley & snow-mountains that frame it, are the right conditions for work. They are a persistent inspiration. To-day is very lovely; when the afternoon arrives there will be a new picture every hour till dark, & each of them divine—or progressing from divine to diviner & divinest. On this (second) floor Clara's room commands the finest; she keeps a window ten feet high wide open all the time & frames it in that. I go in from time to time every day & trade sass for a look. The central detail is a distant & stately snow-hump that rises above & behind black-forested hills, & its sloping vast buttresses, velvety & sun-polished, with purple shadows between, make the sort of picture we knew that time we walked in Switzerland in the days of our youth.

From this letter, which is of January 7, 1904, we gather that the weather had greatly improved, and with it Mrs. Clemens's health, notwithstanding she had an alarming attack in December. One of the stories he had finished was "The \$30,000 Bequest." The work mentioned, which would not see print until after his death, was a continuation of those autobiographical chapters which for years he had been setting down as the mood seized him.

He experimented with dictation, which he had tried long before with Redpath, and for a time now found it quite to his liking. He dictated some of his copyright memories, and some anecdotes and episodes; but his amanuensis wrote only longhand, which perhaps hampered him, for he tired of it by and by and the dictations were discontinued.

Among these notes there is one elaborate description of the Villa di Quarto, dictated at the end of the winter, by which time we are not surprised to find he had become much attached to the place. The Italian spring was in the air, and it was his habit to grow fond of his surroundings. Some atmospheric paragraphs of these impressions invite us here:

Page 62

We are in the extreme south end of the house, if there is any such thing as a south end to a house, whose orientation cannot be determined by me, because I am incompetent in all cases where an object does not point directly north & south. This one slants across between, & is therefore a confusion. This little private parlor is in one of the two corners of what I call the south end of the house. The sun rises in such a way that all the morning it is pouring its light through the 33 glass doors or windows which pierce the side of the house which looks upon the terrace & garden; the rest of the day the light floods this south end of the house, as I call it; at noon the sun is directly above Florence yonder in the distance in the plain, directly across those architectural features which have been so familiar to the world in pictures for some centuries, the Duomo, the Campanile, the Tomb of the Medici, & the beautiful tower of the Palazzo Vecchio; in this position it begins to reveal the secrets of the delicious blue mountains that circle around into the west, for its light discovers, uncovers, & exposes a white snowstorm of villas & cities that you cannot train yourself to have confidence in, they appear & disappear so mysteriously, as if they might not be villas & cities at all, but the ghosts of perished ones of the remote & dim Etruscan times; & late in the afternoon the sun sets down behind those mountains somewhere, at no particular time & at no particular place, so far as I can see.

Again at the end of March he wrote:

Now that we have lived in this house four and a half months my prejudices have fallen away one by one & the place has become very homelike to me. Under certain conditions I should like to go on living in it indefinitely. I should wish the Countess to move out of Italy, out of Europe, out of the planet. I should want her bonded to retire to her place in the next world & inform me which of the two it was, so that I could arrange for my own hereafter.

Complications with their landlady had begun early, and in time, next to Mrs. Clemens's health, to which it bore such an intimate and vital relation, the indifference of the Countess Massiglia to their needs became the supreme and absorbing concern of life at the villa, and led to continued and almost continuous house-hunting.

Days when the weather permitted, Clemens drove over the hills looking for a villa which he could lease or buy—one with conveniences and just the right elevation and surroundings. There were plenty of villas; but some of them were badly situated as to altitude or view; some were falling to decay, and the search was rather a discouraging one. Still it was not abandoned, and the reports of these excursions furnished new interest and new hope always to the invalid at home.

"Even if we find it," he wrote Howells, "I am afraid it will be months before we can move Mrs. Clemens. Of course it will. But it comforts us to let on that we think otherwise, and these pretensions help to keep hope alive in her."

Page 63

She had her bad days and her good days, days when it was believed she had passed the turning-point and was traveling the way to recovery; but the good days were always a little less hopeful, the bad days a little more discouraging. On February 22d Clemens wrote in his note-book:

At midnight Livy's pulse went to 192 & there was a collapse. Great alarm. Subcutaneous injection of brandy saved her.

And to MacAlister toward the end of March:

We are having quite perfect weather now & are hoping that it will bring effects for Mrs. Clemens.

But a few days later he added that he was watching the driving rain through the windows, and that it was bad weather for the invalid. "But it will not last," he said.

The invalid improved then, and there was a concert in Florence at which Clara Clemens sang. Clemens in his note-book says:

April 8. Clara's concert was a triumph. Livy woke up & sent for her to tell her all about it, near midnight.

But a day or two later she was worse again—then better. The hearts in that household were as pendulums, swinging always between hope and despair.

One familiar with the Clemens history might well have been filled with forebodings. Already in January a member of the family, Mollie Clemens, Orion's wife, died, news which was kept from Mrs. Clemens, as was the death of Aldrich's son, and that of Sir Henry M. Stanley, both of which occurred that spring.

Indeed, death harvested freely that year among the Clemens friendships. Clemens wrote Twichell:

Yours has just this moment arrived—just as I was finishing a note to poor Lady Stanley. I believe the last country-house visit we paid in England was to Stanley's. Lord! how my friends & acquaintances fall about me now in my gray-headed days! Vereshchagin, Mommsen, Dvorak, Lenbach, & Jokai, all so recently, & now Stanley. I have known Stanley 37 years. Goodness, who is there I haven't known?

CCXXXI

THE CLOSE OF A BEAUTIFUL LIFE

In one of his notes near the end of April Clemens writes that once more, as at Riverdale, he has been excluded from Mrs. Clemens's room except for the briefest moment at a time. But on May 12th, to R. W. Gilder, he reported:

For two days now we have not been anxious about Mrs. Clemens (unberufen). After 20 months of bedridden solitude & bodily misery she all of a sudden ceases to be a pallid, shrunken shadow, & looks bright & young & pretty. She remains what she always was, the most wonderful creature of fortitude, patience, endurance, and recuperative power that ever was. But ah, dear! it won't last; this fiendish malady will play new treacheries upon her, and I shall go back to my prayers again—unutterable from any pulpit!

May 13, A.M. I have just paid one of my pair of permitted 2-minute visits per day to the sick-room. And found what I have learned to expect—retrogression.

Page 64

There was a day when she was brought out on the terrace in a wheel-chair to see the wonder of the early Italian summer. She had been a prisoner so long that she was almost overcome with the delight of it all—the more so, perhaps, in the feeling that she might so soon be leaving it.

It was on Sunday, the 5th of June, that the end came. Clemens and Jean had driven out to make some calls, and had stopped at a villa, which promised to fulfil most of the requirements. They came home full of enthusiasm concerning it, and Clemens, in his mind, had decided on the purchase. In the corridor Clara said:

“She is better to-day than she has been for three months.”

Then quickly, under her breath, “Unberufen,” which the others, too, added hastily—superstitiously.

Mrs. Clemens was, in fact, bright and cheerful, and anxious to hear all about the new property which was to become their home. She urged him to sit by her during the dinner-hour and tell her the details; but once, when the sense of her frailties came upon her, she said they must not mind if she could not go very soon, but be content where they were. He remained from half past seven until eight—a forbidden privilege, but permitted because she was so animated, feeling so well. Their talk was as it had been in the old days, and once during it he reproached himself, as he had so often done, and asked forgiveness for the tears he had brought into her life. When he was summoned to go at last he chided himself for remaining so long; but she said there was no harm, and kissed him, saying: “You will come back,” and he answered, “Yes, to say good night,” meaning at half past nine, as was the permitted custom. He stood a moment at the door throwing kisses to her, and she returning them, her face bright with smiles.

He was so hopeful and happy that it amounted to exaltation. He went to his room at first, then he was moved to do a thing which he had seldom done since Susy died. He went to the piano up-stairs and sang the old jubilee songs that Susy had liked to hear him sing. Jean came in presently, listening. She had not done this before, that he could remember. He sang “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” and “My Lord He Calls Me.” He noticed Jean then and stopped, but she asked him to go on.

Mrs. Clemens, in her room, heard the distant music, and said to her attendant:

“He is singing a good-night carol to me.”

The music ceased presently, and then a moment later she asked to be lifted up. Almost in that instant life slipped away without a sound.

Clemens, coming to say good night, saw a little group about her bed, Clara and Jean standing as if dazed. He went and bent over and looked into her face, surprised that

she did not greet him. He did not suspect what had happened until he heard one of the daughters ask:

“Katie, is it true? Oh, Katie, is it true?”

He realized then that she was gone.

Page 65

In his note-book that night he wrote:

At a quarter past 9 this evening she that was the life of my life passed to the relief & the peace of death after as months of unjust & unearned suffering. I first saw her near 37 years ago, & now I have looked upon her face for the last time. Oh, so unexpected!... I was full of remorse for things done & said in these 34 years of married life that hurt Livy's heart.

He envied her lying there, so free from it all, with the great peace upon her face. He wrote to Howells and to Twichell, and to Mrs. Crane, those nearest and dearest ones. To Twichell he said:

How sweet she was in death, how young, how beautiful, how like her dear girlish self of thirty years ago, not a gray hair showing! This rejuvenescence was noticeable within two hours after her death; & when I went down again (2.30) it was complete. In all that night & all that day she never noticed my caressing hand—it seemed strange.

To Howells he recalled the closing scene:

I bent over her & looked in her face & I think I spoke—I was surprised & troubled that she did not notice me. Then we understood & our hearts broke. How poor we are to-day!

But how thankful I am that her persecutions are ended! I would not call her back if I could.

To-day, treasured in her worn, old Testament, I found a dear & gentle letter from you dated Far Rockaway, September 13, 1896, about our poor Susy's death. I am tired & old; I wish I were with Livy.

And in a few days:

It would break Livy's heart to see Clara. We excuse ourself from all the friends that call—though, of course, only intimates come. Intimates—but they are not the old, old friends, the friends of the old, old times when we laughed. Shall we ever laugh again? If I could only see a dog that I knew in the old times & could put my arms around his neck and tell him all, everything, & ease my heart!

CCXXXII

THE SAD JOURNEY HOME

A tidal wave of sympathy poured in. Noble and commoner, friend and stranger—humanity of every station—sent their messages of condolence to the friend of mankind.

The cablegrams came first—bundles of them from every corner of the world—then the letters, a steady inflow. Howells, Twichell, Aldrich—those oldest friends who had themselves learned the meaning of grief—spoke such few and futile words as the language can supply to allay a heart's mourning, each recalling the rarity and beauty of the life that had slipped away. Twichell and his wife wrote:

Dear, dear Mark,—There is nothing we can say. What is there to say? But here we are—with you all every hour and every minute—filled with unutterable thoughts; unutterable affection for the dead and for the living.

Harmony and Joe.

Page 66

Howells in his letter said:

She hallowed what she touched far beyond priests What are you going to do, you poor soul?

A hundred letters crowd in for expression here, but must be denied—not, however, the beam of hope out of Helen Keller's illumined night:

Do try to reach through grief and feel the pressure of her hand, as
I reach through darkness and feel the smile on my friends' lips and
the light in their eyes though mine are closed.

They were adrift again without plans for the future. They would return to America to lay Mrs. Clemens to rest by Susy and little Langdon, but beyond that they could not see. Then they remembered a quiet spot in Massachusetts, Tyringham, near Lee, where the Gilders lived, and so, on June 7th, he wrote:

Dear Gilder family,—I have been worrying and worrying to know what to do; at last I went to the girls with an idea—to ask the Gilders to get us shelter near their summer home. It was the first time they have not shaken their heads. So to-morrow I will cable to you and shall hope to be in time. An hour ago the best heart that ever beat for me and mine was carried silent out of this house, and I am as one who wanders and has lost his way. She who is gone was our head, she was our hands. We are now trying to make plans—we: we who have never made a plan before, nor ever needed to. If she could speak to us she would make it all simple and easy with a word, & our perplexities would vanish away. If she had known she was near to death she would have told us where to go and what to do, but she was not suspecting, neither were we. She was all our riches and she is gone; she was our breath, she was our life, and now we are nothing.

We send you our love-and with it the love of you that was in her heart when she died.

S. L. Clemens.

They arranged to sail on the Prince Oscar on the 29th of June. There was an earlier steamer, but it was the Princess Irene, which had brought them, and they felt they would not make the return voyage on that vessel. During the period of waiting a curious thing happened. Clemens one day got up in a chair in his room on the second floor to pull down the high window-sash. It did not move easily and his hand slipped. It was only by the merest chance that he saved himself from falling to the ground far below. He mentions this in his note-book, and once, speaking of it to Frederick Duneka, he said:

“Had I fallen it would probably have killed me, and in my bereaved circumstances the world would have been convinced that it was suicide. It was one of those curious coincidences which are always happening and being misunderstood.”

The homeward voyage and its sorrowful conclusion are pathetically conveyed in his notes:

June 29, 1904. Sailed last night at 10. The bugle-call to breakfast. I recognized the notes and was distressed. When I heard them last Livy heard them with me; now they fall upon her ear unheeded.

In my life there have been 68 Junes—but how vague & colorless 67 of them are contrasted with the deep blackness of this one!

Page 67

July 1, 1904. I cannot reproduce Livy's face in my mind's eye—I was never in my life able to reproduce a face. It is a curious infirmity—and now at last I realize it is a calamity.

July 2, 1904. In these 34 years we have made many voyages together, Livy dear—and now we are making our last; you down below & lonely; I above with the crowd & lonely.

July 3, 1904. Ship-time, 8 A.M. In 13 hours & a quarter it will be 4 weeks since Livy died.

Thirty-one years ago we made our first voyage together—and this is our last one in company. Susy was a year old then. She died at 24 & had been in her grave 8 years.

July 10, 1904. To-night it will be 5 weeks. But to me it remains yesterday—as it has from the first. But this funeral march—how sad & long it is!

Two days more will end the second stage of it.

July 14, 1904 (*Elmira*). Funeral private in the house of Livy's young maidenhood. Where she stood as a bride 34 years ago there her coffin rested; & over it the same voice that had made her a wife then committed her departed spirit to God now.

It was Joseph Twichell who rendered that last service. Mr. Beecher was long since dead. It was a simple, touching utterance, closing with this tender word of farewell:

Robert Browning, when he was nearing the end of his earthly days, said that death was the thing that we did not believe in. Nor do we believe in it. We who journeyed through the bygone years in companionship with the bright spirit now withdrawn are growing old. The way behind is long; the way before is short. The end cannot be far off. But what of that? Can we not say, each one:

"So long that power hath blessed me, sure it still
Will lead me on;
O'er moor and fen; o'er crag and torrent, till
The night is gone;
And with the morn, their angel faces smile,
Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile!"

And so good-by. Good-by, dear heart! Strong, tender, and true.
Good-by until for us the morning break and these shadows fly away.

Dr. Eastman, who had succeeded Mr. Beecher, closed the service with a prayer, and so the last office we can render in this life for those we love was finished.

Clemens ordered that a simple marker should be placed at the grave, bearing, besides the name, the record of birth and death, followed by the German line:

‘Gott sei dir gnadig, O meine Wonne’!

CCXXXIII

BEGINNING ANOTHER HOME

There was an extra cottage on the Gilder place at Tyringham, and this they occupied for the rest of that sad summer. Clemens, in his note-book, has preserved some of its aspects and incidents.

July 24, 1904. Rain—rain—rain. Cold. We built a fire in my room. Then clawed the logs out & threw water, remembering there was a brood of swallows in the chimney. The tragedy was averted.

Page 68

July 31. *Lee, Massachusetts (Berkshire hills)*. Last night the young people out on a moonlight ride. Trolley frightened Jean's horse —collision—horse killed. Rodman Gilder picked Jean up, unconscious; she was taken to the doctor, per the car. Face, nose, side, back contused; tendon of left ankle broken.

August 10. *New York*. Clam here sick—never well since June 5. Jean is at the summer home in the Berkshire Hills crippled.

The next entry records the third death in the Clemens family within a period of eight months—that of Mrs. Moffett, who had been Pamela Clemens. Clemens writes:

September 1. Died at Greenwich, Connecticut, my sister, Pamela Moffett, aged about 73.

Death dates this year January 14, June 5, September 1.

That fall they took a house in New York City, on the corner of Ninth Street and Fifth Avenue, No. 21, remaining for a time at the Grosvenor while the new home was being set in order. The home furniture was brought from Hartford, unwrapped, and established in the light of strange environment. Clemens wrote:

We have not seen it for thirteen years. Katie Leary, our old housekeeper, who has been in our service more than twenty-four years, cried when she told me about it to-day. She said, "I had forgotten it was so beautiful, and it brought Mrs. Clemens right back to me—in that old time when she was so young and lovely."

Clara Clemens had not recovered from the strain of her mother's long illness and the shock of her death, and she was ordered into retirement with the care of a trained nurse. The life at 21 Fifth Avenue, therefore, began with only two remaining members of the broken family —Clemens and Jean.

Clemens had undertaken to divert himself with work at Tyringham, though without much success. He was not well; he was restless and disturbed; his heart bleak with a great loneliness. He prepared an article on Copyright for the 'North American Review',—[Published Jan., 1905. A dialogue presentation of copyright conditions, addressed to Thorwald Stolberg, Register of Copyrights, Washington, D. C. One of the best of Mark Twain's papers on the subject.]—and he began, or at least contemplated, that beautiful fancy, 'Eve's Diary', which in the widest and most reverential sense, from the first word to the last, conveys his love, his worship, and his tenderness for the one he had laid away. Adam's single comment at the end, "Wheresoever she was, there was Eden," was his own comment, and is perhaps the most tenderly beautiful line he ever wrote. These two books, Adam's Diary and Eve's—amusing and sometimes absurd as they are, and so far removed from the literal—are as autobiographic as anything he has done, and one of them as lovely in its truth. Like the first Maker of men, Mark Twain

created Adam in his own image; and his rare Eve is no less the companion with whom, half a lifetime before, he had begun the marriage journey. Only here the likeness ceases. No Serpent ever entered their Eden. And they never left it; it traveled with them so long as they remained together.

Page 69

In the Christmas Harper for 1904 was published "Saint Joan of Arc"—the same being the Joan introduction prepared in London five years before. Joan's proposed beatification had stirred a new interest in the martyred girl, and this most beautiful article became a sort of key-note of the public heart. Those who read it were likely to go back and read the Recollections, and a new appreciation grew for that masterpiece. In his later and wider acceptance by his own land, and by the world at large, the book came to be regarded with a fresh understanding. Letters came from scores of readers, as if it were a newly issued volume. A distinguished educator wrote:

I would rather have written your history of Joan of Arc than any other piece of literature in any language.

And this sentiment grew. The demand for the book increased, and has continued to increase, steadily and rapidly. In the long and last analysis the good must prevail. A day will come when there will be as many readers of Joan as of any other of Mark Twain's works.

[The growing appreciation of Joan is shown by the report of sales for the three years following 1904. The sales for that year in America were 1,726; for 1905, 2,445 for 1906, 5,381; for 1907, 6,574. At this point it passed Pudd'nhead Wilson, the Yankee, The Gilded Age, Life on the Mississippi, overtook the Tramp Abroad, and more than doubled The American Claimant. Only The Innocents Abroad, Huckleberry Finn, Tom Sawyer, and Roughing It still ranged ahead of it, in the order named.]

CCXXXIV

LIFE AT 21 FIFTH AVENUE

The house at 21 Fifth Avenue, built by the architect who had designed Grace Church, had a distinctly ecclesiastical suggestion about its windows, and was of fine and stately proportions within. It was a proper residence for a venerable author and a sage, and with the handsome Hartford furnishings distributed through it, made a distinctly suitable setting for Mark Twain. But it was lonely for him. It lacked soul. He added, presently, a great AEolian Orchestrelle, with a variety of music for his different moods. He believed that he would play it himself when he needed the comfort of harmony, and that Jean, who had not received musical training, or his secretary could also play to him. He had a passion for music, or at least for melody and stately rhythmic measures, though his ear was not attuned to what are termed the more classical compositions. For Wagner, for instance, he cared little, though in a letter to Mrs. Crane he said:

Certainly nothing in the world is so solemn and impressive and so divinely beautiful as "Tannhauser." It ought to be used as a religious service.

Beethoven's sonatas and symphonies also moved him deeply. Once, writing to Jean, he asked:

What is your favorite piece of music, dear? Mine is Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. I have found that out within a day or two.

Page 70

It was the majestic movement and melodies of the second part that he found most satisfying; but he oftener inclined to the still tenderer themes of Chopin's nocturnes and one of Schubert's impromptus, while the "Lorelei" and the "Erlking" and the Scottish airs never wearied him. Music thus became a chief consolation during these lonely days—rich organ harmonies that filled the emptiness of his heart and beguiled from dull, material surroundings back into worlds and dreams that he had known and laid away.

He went out very little that winter—usually to the homes of old and intimate friends. Once he attended a small dinner given him by George Smalley at the Metropolitan Club; but it was a private affair, with only good friends present. Still, it formed the beginning of his return to social life, and it was not in his nature to retire from the brightness of human society, or to submerge himself in mourning. As the months wore on he appeared here and there, and took on something of his old-time habit. Then his annual bronchitis appeared, and he was confined a good deal to his home, where he wrote or planned new reforms and enterprises.

The improvement of railway service, through which fewer persons should be maimed and destroyed each year, interested him. He estimated that the railroads and electric lines killed and wounded more than all of the wars combined, and he accumulated statistics and prepared articles on the subject, though he appears to have offered little of such matter for publication. Once, however, when his sympathy was awakened by the victim of a frightful trolley and train collision in Newark, New Jersey, he wrote a letter which promptly found its way into print.

Dear miss Madeline, Your good & admiring & affectionate brother has told me of your sorrowful share in the trolley disaster which brought unaccustomed tears to millions of eyes & fierce resentment against those whose criminal indifference to their responsibilities caused it, & the reminder has brought back to me a pang out of that bygone time. I wish I could take you sound & whole out of your bed & break the legs of those officials & put them in it—to stay there. For in my spirit I am merciful, and would not break their necks & backs also, as some would who have no feeling.

It is your brother who permits me to write this line—and so it is not an intrusion, you see.

May you get well-& soon!
Sincerely yours,
S. L. Clemens.

A very little later he was writing another letter on a similar subject to St. Clair McKelway, who had narrowly escaped injury in a railway accident.

Dear McKELWAY, Your innumerable friends are grateful, most grateful.

Page 71

As I understand the telegrams, the engineers of your train had never seen a locomotive before The government's official report, showing that our railways killed twelve hundred persons last year & injured sixty thousand, convinces me that under present conditions one Providence is not enough properly & efficiently to take care of our railroad business. But it is characteristically American—always trying to get along short-handed & save wages.

A massacre of Jews in Moscow renewed his animosity for semi-barbaric Russia. Asked for a Christmas sentiment, he wrote:

It is my warm & world-embracing Christmas hope that all of us that deserve it may finally be gathered together in a heaven of rest & peace, & the others permitted to retire into the clutches of Satan, or the Emperor of Russia, according to preference—if they have a preference.

An article, "The Tsar's Soliloquy," written at this time, was published in the North American Review for March (1905). He wrote much more, but most of the other matter he put aside. On a subject like that he always discarded three times as much as he published, and it was usually about three times as terrific as that which found its way into type. "The Soliloquy," however, is severe enough. It represents the Tsar as contemplating himself without his clothes, and reflecting on what a poor human specimen he presents:

Is it this that 140,000,000 Russians kiss the dust before and worship?—manifestly not! No one could worship this spectacle which is Me. Then who is it, what is it, that they worship? Privately, none knows better than I: it is my clothes! Without my clothes I should be as destitute of authority as any other naked person. No one could tell me from a parson and barber tutor. Then who is the real Emperor of Russia! My clothes! There is no other.

The emperor continues this fancy, and reflects on the fierce cruelties that are done in his name. It was a withering satire on Russian imperialism, and it stirred a wide response. This encouraged Clemens to something even more pretentious and effective in the same line. He wrote "King Leopold's Soliloquy," the reflections of the fiendish sovereign who had maimed and slaughtered fifteen millions of African subjects in his greed—gentle, harmless blacks-men, women, and little children whom he had butchered and mutilated in his Congo rubber-fields. Seldom in the history of the world have there been such atrocious practices as those of King Leopold in the Congo, and Clemens spared nothing in his picture of them. The article was regarded as not quite suitable for magazine publication, and it was given to the Congo Reform Association and issued as a booklet for distribution, with no return to the author, who would gladly have written a hundred times as much if he could have saved that unhappy race and have sent Leopold to the electric chair.—[The

Page 72

book was price-marked twenty-five cents, but the returns from such as were sold went to the cause. Thousands of them were distributed free. The Congo, a domain four times as large as the German empire, had been made the ward of Belgium at a convention in Berlin by the agreement of fourteen nations, America and thirteen European states. Leopold promptly seized the country for his personal advantage and the nations apparently found themselves powerless to depose him. No more terrible blunder was ever committed by an assemblage of civilized people.]

Various plans and movements were undertaken for Congo reform, and Clemens worked and wrote letters and gave his voice and his influence and exhausted his rage, at last, as one after another of the half-organized and altogether futile undertakings showed no results. His interest did not die, but it became inactive. Eventually he declared: "I have said all I can say on that terrible subject. I am heart and soul in any movement that will rescue the Congo and hang Leopold, but I cannot write any more."

His fires were likely to burn themselves out, they raged so fiercely. His final paragraph on the subject was a proposed epitaph for Leopold when time should have claimed him. It ran:

Here under this gilded tomb lies rotting the body of one the smell of whose name will still offend the nostrils of men ages upon ages after all the Caesars and Washingtons & Napoleons shall have ceased to be praised or blamed & been forgotten—Leopold of Belgium.

Clemens had not yet lost interest in the American policy in the Philippines, and in his letters to Twichell he did not hesitate to criticize the President's attitude in this and related matters. Once, in a moment of irritation, he wrote:

Dear Joe,—I knew I had in me somewhere a definite feeling about the President. If I could only find the words to define it with! Here they are, to a hair—from Leonard Jerome:

"For twenty years I have loved Roosevelt the man, and hated Roosevelt the statesman and politician."

It's mighty good. Every time in twenty-five years that I have met Roosevelt the man a wave of welcome has streaked through me with the hand-grip; but whenever (as a rule) I meet Roosevelt the statesman & politician I find him destitute of morals & not respectable. It is plain that where his political self & party self are concerned he has nothing resembling a conscience; that under those inspirations he is naively indifferent to the restraints of duty & even unaware of them; ready to kick the Constitution into the back yard whenever it gets in his way....But Roosevelt is excusable—I recognize it & (ought

to) concede it. We are all insane, each in his own way, & with insanity goes irresponsibility. Theodore the man is sane; in fairness we ought to keep in mind that Theodore, as statesman & politician, is insane & irresponsible.

Page 73

He wrote a great deal more from time to time on this subject; but that is the gist of his conclusions, and whether justified by time, or otherwise, it expresses today the deduction of a very large number of people. It is set down here, because it is a part of Mark Twain's history, and also because a little while after his death there happened to creep into print an incomplete and misleading note (since often reprinted), which he once made in a moment of anger, when he was in a less judicial frame of mind. It seems proper that a man's honest sentiments should be recorded concerning the nation's servants.

Clemens wrote an article at this period which he called the "War Prayer." It pictured the young recruits about to march away for war—the excitement and the celebration—the drum-beat and the heart-beat of patriotism—the final assembly in the church where the minister utters that tremendous invocation:

God the all-terrible! Thou who ordainest,
Thunder, Thy clarion, and lightning, Thy sword!

and the "long prayer" for victory to the nation's armies. As the prayer closes a white-robed stranger enters, moves up the aisle, and takes the preacher's place; then, after some moments of impressive silence, he begins:

"I come from the Throne-bearing a message from Almighty God!..... He has heard the prayer of His servant, your shepherd, & will grant it if such shall be your desire after I His messenger shall have explained to you its import—that is to say its full import. For it is like unto many of the prayers of men in that it asks for more than he who utters it is aware of—except he pause & think.

"God's servant & yours has prayed his prayer. Has he paused & taken thought? Is it one prayer? No, it is two—one uttered, the other not. Both have reached the ear of Him who heareth all supplications, the spoken & the unspoken . . . "You have heard your servant's prayer—the uttered part of it. I am commissioned of God to put into words the other part of it—that part which the pastor—and also you in your hearts—fervently prayed, silently. And ignorantly & unthinkingly? God grant that it was so! You heard these words: 'Grant us the victory, O Lord our God!' That is sufficient. The whole of the uttered prayer is completed into those pregnant words.

"Upon the listening spirit of God the Father fell also the unspoken part of the prayer. He commandeth me to put it into words. Listen!

"O Lord our Father, our young patriots, idols of our hearts, go forth to battle—be Thou near them! With them—in spirit—we also go forth from the sweet peace of our beloved firesides to smite the foe." O Lord our God, help us to tear their soldiers to bloody shreds

with our shells; help us to cover their smiling fields with the pale forms of their patriot
dead; help us to drown the thunder of the guns with the wounded, writhing

Page 74

in pain; help us to lay waste their humble homes with a hurricane of fire; help us to wring the hearts of their unoffending widows with unavailing grief; help us to turn them out roofless with their little children to wander unfriended through wastes of their desolated land in rags & hunger & thirst, sport of the sun- flames of summer & the icy winds of winter, broken in spirit, worn with travail, imploring Thee for the refuge of the grave & denied it—for our sakes, who adore Thee, Lord, blast their hopes, blight their lives, protract their bitter pilgrimage, make heavy their steps, water their way with their tears, stain the white snow with the blood of their wounded feet! We ask of one who is the Spirit of love & who is the ever-faithful refuge & friend of all that are sore beset, & seek His aid with humble & contrite hearts. Grant our prayer, O Lord; & Thine shall be the praise & honor & glory now & ever, Amen.”

(After a pause.) “Ye have prayed it; if ye still desire it, speak!—the messenger of the Most High waits.”

.....

It was believed, afterward, that the man was a lunatic, because there was no sense in what he said.

To Dan Beard, who dropped in to see him, Clemens read the “War Prayer,” stating that he had read it to his daughter Jean, and others, who had told him he must not print it, for it would be regarded as sacrilege.

“Still you—are going to publish it, are you not?”

Clemens, pacing up and down the room in his dressing-gown and slippers, shook his head.

“No,” he said, “I have told the whole truth in that, and only dead men can tell the truth in this world. It can be published after I am dead.”

He did not care to invite the public verdict that he was a lunatic, or even a fanatic with a mission to destroy the illusions and traditions and conclusions of mankind. To Twichell he wrote, playfully but sincerely:

Am I honest? I give you my word of honor (privately) I am not. For seven years I have suppressed a book which my conscience tells me I ought to publish. I hold it a duty to publish it. There are other difficult duties which I am equal to, but I am not equal to that one. Yes, even I am dishonest. Not in many ways, but in some. Forty-one, I think it is. We are certainly all honest in one or several ways—every man in the world—though I

have a reason to think I am the only one whose blacklist runs so light. Sometimes I feel lonely enough in this lofty solitude.

It was his Gospel he referred to as his unpublished book, his doctrine of Selfishness, and of Man the irresponsible Machine. To Twichell he pretended to favor war, which he declared, to his mind, was one of the very best methods known of diminishing the human race.

What a life it is!—this one! Everything we try to do, somebody intrudes & obstructs it. After years of thought & labor I have arrived within one little bit of a step of perfecting my invention for exhausting the oxygen in the globe's air during a stretch of two minutes, & of course along comes an obstructor who is inventing something to protect human life. Damn such a world anyway.

Page 75

He generally wrote Twichell when he had things to say that were outside of the pale of print. He was sure of an attentive audience of one, and the audience, whether it agreed with him or not, would at least understand him and be honored by his confidence. In one letter of that year he said:

I have written you to-day, not to do you a service, but to do myself one. There was bile in me. I had to empty it or lose my day to-morrow. If I tried to empty it into the North American Review—oh, well, I couldn't afford the risk. No, the certainty! The certainty that I wouldn't be satisfied with the result; so I would burn it, & try again to-morrow; burn that and try again the next day. It happens so nearly every time. I have a family to support, & I can't afford this kind of dissipation. Last winter when I was sick I wrote a magazine article three times before I got it to suit me. I Put \$500 worth of work on it every day for ten days, & at last when I got it to suit me it contained but 3,000 words—\$900. I burned it & said I would reform.

And I have reformed. I have to work my bile off whenever it gets to where I can't stand it, but I can work it off on you economically, because I don't have to make it suit me. It may not suit you, but that isn't any matter; I'm not writing it for that. I have used you as an equilibrium—restorer more than once in my time, & shall continue, I guess. I would like to use Mr. Rogers, & he is plenty good-natured enough, but it wouldn't be fair to keep him rescuing me from my leather-headed business snarls & make him read interminable bile-irruptions besides; I can't use Howells, he is busy & old & lazy, & won't stand it; I dasn't use Clara, there's things I have to say which she wouldn't put up with—a very dear little ashcat, but has claws. And so—you're It.

[See the preface to the "Autobiography of Mark Twain": 'I am writing from the grave. On these terms only can a man be approximately frank. He cannot be straitly and unqualifiedly frank either in the grave or out of it.' D.W.]

CCXXXV

A SUMMER IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

He took for the summer a house at Dublin, New Hampshire, the home of Henry Copley Greene, Lone Tree Hill, on the Monadnock slope. It was in a lovely locality, and for neighbors there were artists, literary people, and those of kindred pursuits, among them a number of old friends. Colonel Higginson had a place near by, and Abbott H. Thayer, the painter, and George de Forest Brush, and the Raphael Pumpelly family, and many more.

Colonel Higginson wrote Clemens a letter of welcome as soon as the news got out that he was going to Dublin; and Clemens, answering, said:

Page 76

I early learned that you would be my neighbor in the summer & I rejoiced, recognizing in you & your family a large asset. I hope for frequent intercourse between the two households. I shall have my youngest daughter with me. The other one will go from the rest-cure in this city to the rest-cure in Norfolk, Connecticut; & we shall not see her before autumn. We have not seen her since the middle of October. Jean, the younger daughter, went to Dublin & saw the house & came back charmed with it. I know the Thayers of old—manifestly there is no lack of attractions up there. Mrs. Thayer and I were shipmates in a wild excursion perilously near 40 years ago.

Aldrich was here half an hour ago, like a breeze from over the fields, with the fragrance still upon his spirit. I am tired wanting for that man to get old.

They went to Dublin in May, and became at once a part of the summer colony which congregated there. There was much going to and fro among the different houses, pleasant afternoons in the woods, mountain-climbing for Jean, and everywhere a spirit of fine, unpretentious comradeship.

The Copley Greene house was romantically situated, with a charming outlook. Clemens wrote to Twichell:

We like it here in the mountains, in the shadows of Monadnock. It is a woody solitude. We have no near neighbors. We have neighbors and I can see their houses scattered in the forest distances, for we live on a hill. I am astonished to find that I have known 8 of these 14 neighbors a long time; 10 years is the shortest; then seven beginning with 25 years & running up to 37 years' friendship. It is the most remarkable thing I ever heard of.

This letter was written in July, and he states in it that he has turned out one hundred thousand words of a large manuscript. . It was a fantastic tale entitled "3,000 Years among the Microbes," a sort of scientific revel—or revelry—the autobiography of a microbe that had been once a man, and through a failure in a biological experiment transformed into a cholera germ when the experimenter was trying to turn him into a bird. His habitat was the person of a disreputable tramp named Blitzowski, a human continent of vast areas, with seething microbic nations and fantastic life problems. It was a satire, of course —Gulliver's Lilliput outdone—a sort of scientific, socialistic, mathematical jamboree.

He tired of it before it reached completion, though not before it had attained the proportions of a book of size. As a whole it would hardly have added to his reputation, though it is not without fine and humorous passages, and certainly not without interest. Its chief mission was to divert him mentally that summer during, those days and nights when he would otherwise have been alone and brooding upon his loneliness.—[For

extracts from “3,000 Years among the Microbes” see Appendix V, at the end of this work.] *Mark Twain’s suggested title-page for his microbe book:*



Page 77

3000 Years
among the microbes

By a Microbe

With notes
added by the same Hand
7000 years later

Translated from the Original
Microbic
by

Mark Twain

His inability to reproduce faces in his mind's eye he mourned as an increasing calamity. Photographs were lifeless things, and when he tried to conjure up the faces of his dead they seemed to drift farther out of reach; but now and then kindly sleep brought to him something out of that treasure-house where all our realities are kept for us fresh and fair, perhaps for a day when we may claim them again. Once he wrote to Mrs. Crane:

Susy dear,—I have had a lovely dream. Livy, dressed in black, was sitting up in my bed (here) at my right & looking as young & sweet as she used to when she was in health. She said, "What is the name of your sweet sister?" I said, "Pamela." "Oh yes, that is it, I thought it was—(naming a name which has escaped me) won't you write it down for me?" I reached eagerly for a pen & pad, laid my hands upon both, then said to myself, "It is only a dream," and turned back sorrowfully & there she was still. The conviction flamed through me that our lamented disaster was a dream, & this a reality. I said, "How blessed it is, how blessed it is, it was all a dream, only a dream!" She only smiled and did not ask what dream I meant, which surprised me. She leaned her head against mine & kept saying, "I was perfectly sure it was a dream; I never would have believed it wasn't." I think she said several things, but if so they are gone from my memory. I woke & did not know I had been dreaming. She was gone. I wondered how she could go without my knowing it, but I did not spend any thought upon that. I was too busy thinking of how vivid & real was the dream that we had lost her, & how unspeakably blessed it was to find that it was not true & that she was still ours & with us.

He had the orchestrelle moved to Dublin, although it was no small undertaking, for he needed the solace of its harmonies; and so the days passed along, and he grew stronger in body and courage as his grief drifted farther behind him. Sometimes, in the afternoon or in the evening; when the neighbors had come in for a little while, he would walk up and down and talk in his old, marvelous way of all the things on land and sea, of the past and of the future, "Of Providence, foreknowledge, will, and fate," of the

friends he had known and of the things he had done, of the sorrow and absurdities of the world.

It was the same old scintillating, incomparable talk of which Howells once said:

“We shall never know its like again. When he dies it will die with him.”

It was during the summer at Dublin that Clemens and Rogers together made up a philanthropic ruse on Twichell. Twichell, through his own prodigal charities, had fallen into debt, a fact which Rogers knew. Rogers was a man who concealed his philanthropies when he could, and he performed many of them of which the world will never know: In this case he said:

Page 78

“Clemens, I want to help Twichell out of his financial difficulty. I will supply the money and you will do the giving. Twichell must think it comes from you.”

Clemens agreed to this on the condition that he be permitted to leave a record of the matter for his children, so that he would not appear in a false light to them, and that Twichell should learn the truth of the gift, sooner or later. So the deed was done, and Twichell and his wife lavished their thanks upon Clemens, who, with his wife, had more than once been their benefactors, making the deception easy enough now. Clemens writhed under these letters of gratitude, and forwarded them to Clara in Norfolk, and later to Rogers himself. He pretended to take great pleasure in this part of the conspiracy, but it was not an unmixed delight. To Rogers he wrote:

I wanted her [Clara] to see what a generous father she's got. I didn't tell her it was you, but by and by I want to tell her, when I have your consent; then I shall want her to remember the letters. I want a record there, for my Life when I am dead, & must be able to furnish the facts about the Relief-of-Lucknow-Twichell in case I fall suddenly, before I get those facts with your consent, before the Twichells themselves.

I read those letters with immense pride! I recognized that I had scored one good deed for sure on my halo account. I haven't had anything that tasted so good since the stolen watermelon.

P. S.-I am hurrying them off to you because I dasn't read them again! I should blush to my heels to fill up with this unearned gratitude again, pouring out of the thankful hearts of those poor swindled people who do not suspect you, but honestly believe I gave that money.

Mr. Rogers hastily replied:

My dear Clemens,—The letters are lovely. Don't breathe. They are so happy! It would be a crime to let them think that you have in any way deceived them. I can keep still. You must. I am sending you all traces of the crime, so that you may look innocent and tell the truth, as you usually do when you think you can escape detection. Don't get rattled.Seriously. You have done a kindness. You are proud of it, I know. You have made your friends happy, and you ought to be so glad as to cheerfully accept reproof from your conscience. Joe Wadsworth and I once stole a goose and gave it to a poor widow as a Christmas present. No crime in that. I always put my counterfeit money on the plate. “The passer of the sasser” always smiles at me and I get credit for doing generous things. But seriously again, if you do feel a little uncomfortable wait until I see you before you tell anybody. Avoid cultivating misery. I am trying to loaf ten solid days. We do hope to see you soon.

The secret was kept, and the matter presently (and characteristically) passed out of Clemens's mind altogether. He never remembered to tell Twichell, and it is revealed here, according to his wish.

Page 79

The Russian-Japanese war was in progress that summer, and its settlement occurred in August. The terms of it did not please Mark Twain. When a newspaper correspondent asked him for an expression of opinion on the subject he wrote:

Russia was on the highroad to emancipation from an insane and intolerable slavery. I was hoping there would be no peace until Russian liberty was safe. I think that this was a holy war, in the best and noblest sense of that abused term, and that no war was ever charged with a higher mission. I think there can be no doubt that that mission is now defeated and Russia's chain riveted; this time to stay. I think the Tsar will now withdraw the small humanities that have been forced from him, and resume his medieval barbarisms with a relieved spirit and an immeasurable joy. I think Russian liberty has had its last chance and has lost it. I think nothing has been gained by the peace that is remotely comparable to what has been sacrificed by it. One more battle would have abolished the waiting chains of billions upon billions of unborn Russians, and I wish it could have been fought. I hope I am mistaken, yet in all sincerity I believe that this peace is entitled to rank as the most conspicuous disaster in political history.

It was the wisest public utterance on the subject—the deep, resonant note of truth sounding amid a clamor of foolish joy-bells. It was the message of a seer—the prophecy of a sage who sees with the clairvoyance of knowledge and human understanding. Clemens, a few days later, was invited by Colonel Harvey to dine with Baron Rosen and M. Sergius Witte; but an attack of his old malady—rheumatism—prevented his acceptance. His telegram of declination apparently pleased the Russian officials, for Witte asked permission to publish it, and declared that he was going to take it home to show to the Tsar. It was as follows:

To *colonel Harvey*,—I am still a cripple, otherwise I should be more than glad of this opportunity to meet the illustrious magicians who came here equipped with nothing but a pen, & with it have divided the honors of the war with the sword. It is fair to presume that in thirty centuries history will not get done in admiring these men who attempted what the world regarded as the impossible & achieved it.

Mark Twain.

But this was a modified form. His original draft would perhaps have been less gratifying to that Russian embassy. It read:

To *colonel Harvey*,—I am still a cripple, otherwise I should be more than glad of this opportunity to meet those illustrious magicians who with the pen have annulled, obliterated, & abolished every high achievement of the Japanese sword and turned the tragedy of a tremendous war into a gay & blithesome comedy. If I may, let me in all respect and honor salute them as my fellow-humorists, I taking third place, as becomes one who was not born to modesty, but by diligence & hard work is acquiring it.

Mark.

Page 80

There was still another form, brief and expressive:

*Dear colonel,—No, this is a love-feast; when you call a lodge of sorrow send for me.
Mark.*

Clemens's war sentiment was given the widest newspaper circulation, and brought him many letters, most of them applauding his words. Charles Francis Adams wrote him:

It attracted my attention because it so exactly expresses the views
I have myself all along entertained.

And this was the gist of most of the expressed sentiments which came to him.

Clemens wrote a number of things that summer, among them a little essay entitled, "The Privilege of the Grave"—that is to say, free speech. He was looking forward, he said, to the time when he should inherit that privilege, when some of the things he had said, written and laid away, could be published without damage to his friends or family. An article entitled, "Interpreting the Deity," he counted as among the things to be uttered when he had entered into that last great privilege. It is an article on the reading of signs and auguries in all ages to discover the intentions of the Almighty, with historical examples of God's judgments and vindications. Here is a fair specimen. It refers to the chronicle of Henry Huntington:

All through this book Henry exhibits his familiarity with the intentions of God and with the reasons for the intentions. Sometimes very often, in fact—the act follows the intention after such a wide interval of time that one wonders how Henry could fit one act out of a hundred to one intention, and get the thing right every time, when there was such abundant choice among acts and intentions. Sometimes a man offends the Deity with a crime, and is punished for it thirty years later; meantime he has committed a million other crimes: no matter, Henry can pick out the one that brought the worms. Worms were generally used in those days for the slaying of particularly wicked people. This has gone out now, but in the old times it was a favorite. It always indicated a case of "wrath." For instance: "The just God avenging Robert Fitzhildebrand's perfidity, a worm grew in his vitals which, gradually gnawing its way through his intestines, fattened on the abandoned man till, tortured with excruciating sufferings and venting himself in bitter moans, he was by a fitting punishment brought to his end" (p. 400).

It was probably an alligator, but we cannot tell; we only know it was a particular breed, and only used to convey wrath. Some authorities think it was an ichthyosaurus, but there is much doubt.

The entire article is in this amusing, satirical strain, and might well enough be printed to-day. It is not altogether clear why it was withheld, even then.

He finished his Eve's Diary that summer, and wrote a story which was originally planned to oblige Mrs. Minnie Maddern Fiske, to aid her in a crusade against bullfighting in Spain. Mrs. Fiske wrote him that she had read his dog story, written against the cruelties of vivisection, and urged him to do something to save the horses that, after faithful service, were sacrificed in the bull-ring. Her letter closed:

Page 81

I have lain awake nights very often wondering if I dare ask you to write a story of an old horse that is finally given over to the bull-ring. The story you would write would do more good than all the laws we are trying to have made and enforced for the prevention of cruelty to animals in Spain. We would translate and circulate the story in that country. I have wondered if you would ever write it.

With most devoted homage,
Sincerely yours,
Minnie Maddern Fiske.

Clemens promptly replied:

Dear Mrs. Fiske, I shall certainly write the story. But I may not get it to suit me, in which case it will go in the fire. Later I will try it again—& yet again—& again. I am used to this. It has taken me twelve years to write a short story—the shortest one I ever wrote, I think. —[Probably “The Death Disk:”]—So do not be discouraged; I will stick to this one in the same way.

Sincerely yours,
S. L. Clemens.

It was an inspiring subject, and he began work on it immediately. Within a month from the time he received Mrs. Fiske’s letter he had written that pathetic, heartbreaking little story, “A Horse’s Tale,” and sent it to Harper’s Magazine for illustration. In a letter written to Mr. Duneka at the time, he tells of his interest in the narrative, and adds:

This strong interest is natural, for the heroine is my small daughter Susy, whom we lost. It was not intentional—it was a good while before I found it out, so I am sending you her picture to use —& to reproduce with photographic exactness the unsurpassable expression & all. May you find an artist who has lost an idol.

He explains how he had put in a good deal of work, with his secretary, on the orchestrelle to get the bugle-calls.

We are to do these theatricals this evening with a couple of neighbors for audience, and then pass the hat.

It is not one of Mark Twain’s greatest stories, but its pathos brings the tears, and no one can read it without indignation toward the custom which it was intended to oppose. When it was published, a year later, Mrs. Fiske sent him her grateful acknowledgments, and asked permission to have it printed for pamphlet circulation in Spain.

A number of more or less notable things happened in this, Mark Twain’s seventieth year. There was some kind of a reunion going on in California, and he was variously invited to attend. Robert Fulton, of Nevada, was appointed a committee of one to invite

him to Reno for a great celebration which was to be held there. Clemens replied that he remembered, as if it were but yesterday, when he had disembarked from the Overland stage in front of the Ormsby Hotel, in Carson City, and told how he would like to accept the invitation.

Page 82

If I were a few years younger I would accept it, and promptly, and I would go. I would let somebody else do the oration, but as for me I would talk—just talk. I would renew my youth; and talk—and talk—and talk—and have the time of my life! I would march the unforgotten and unforgettable antiques by, and name their names, and give them reverent hail and farewell as they passed—Goodman, McCarthy, Gillis, Curry, Baldwin, Winters, Howard, Nye, Stewart, Neely Johnson, Hal Clayton, North, Root—and my brother, upon whom be peace!—and then the desperadoes, who made life a joy, and the “slaughter-house,” a precious possession: Sam Brown, Farmer Pete, Bill Mayfield, Six-fingered Jake, Jack Williams, and the rest of the crimson discipleship, and so on, and so on. Believe me, I would start a resurrection it would do you more good to look at than the next one will, if you go on the way you are going now.

Those were the days!—those old ones. They will come no more; youth will come no more. They were so full to the brim with the wine of life; there have been no others like them. It chokes me up to think of them. Would you like me to come out there and cry? It would not beseem my white head.

Good-by. I drink to you all. Have a good time-and take an old man’s blessing.

In reply to another invitation from H. H. Bancroft, of San Francisco, he wrote that his wandering days were over, and that it was his purpose to sit by the fire for the rest of his “remnant of life.”

A man who, like me, is going to strike 70 on the 30th of next November has no business to be flitting around the way Howells does —that shameless old fictitious butterfly. (But if he comes don’t tell him I said it, for it would hurt him & I wouldn’t brush a flake of powder from his wing for anything. I only say it in envy of his indestructible youth anyway. Howells will be 88 in October.)

And it was either then or on a similar occasion that he replied after this fashion:

I have done more for San Francisco than any other of its old residents. Since I left there it has increased in population fully 300,000. I could have done more—I could have gone earlier—it was suggested.

Which, by the way, is a perfect example of Mark Twain’s humorous manner, the delicately timed pause, and the afterthought. Most humorists would have been contented to end with the statement, “I could have gone earlier.” Only Mark Twain could have added that final exquisite touch —“it was suggested.”

CCXXXVI

AT PIER 70

Mark Twain was nearing seventy, the scriptural limitation of life, and the returns were coming in. Some one of the old group was dying all the time. The roll-call returned only a scattering answer. Of his oldest friends, Charles Henry Webb, John Hay, and Sir Henry Irving, all died that year. When Hay died Clemens gave this message to the press:

Page 83

I am deeply grieved, & I mourn with the nation this loss which is irreparable. My friendship with Mr. Hay & my admiration of him endured 38 years without impairment.

It was only a little earlier that he had written Hay an anonymous letter, a copy of which he preserved. It here follows:

Dear & honored sir,—I never hear any one speak of you & of your long roll of illustrious services in other than terms of pride & praise—& out of the heart. I think I am right in believing you to be the only man in the civil service of the country the cleanness of whose motives is never questioned by any citizen, & whose acts proceed always upon a broad & high plane, never by accident or pressure of circumstance upon a narrow or low one. There are majorities that are proud of more than one of the nation's great servants, but I believe, & I think I know, that you are the only one of whom the entire nation is proud. Proud & thankful.

Name & address are lacking here, & for a purpose: to leave you no chance to make my words a burden to you and a reproach to me, who would lighten your burdens if I could, not add to them.

Irving died in October, and Clemens ordered a wreath for his funeral. To MacAlister he wrote:

I profoundly grieve over Irving's death. It is another reminder. My section of the procession has but a little way to go. I could not be very sorry if I tried.

Mark Twain, nearing seventy, felt that there was not much left for him to celebrate; and when Colonel Harvey proposed a birthday gathering in his honor, Clemens suggested a bohemian assembly over beer and sandwiches in some snug place, with Howells, Henry Rogers, Twichell, Dr. Rice, Dr. Edward Quintard, Augustus Thomas, and such other kindred souls as were still left to answer the call. But Harvey had something different in view: something more splendid even than the sixty-seventh birthday feast, more pretentious, indeed, than any former literary gathering. He felt that the attainment of seventy years by America's most distinguished man of letters and private citizen was a circumstance which could not be moderately or even modestly observed. The date was set five days later than the actual birthday—that is to say, on December 5th, in order that it might not conflict with the various Thanksgiving holidays and occasions. Delmonico's great room was chosen for the celebration of it, and invitations were sent out to practically every writer of any distinction in America, and to many abroad. Of these nearly two hundred accepted, while such as could not come sent pathetic regrets.

Page 84

What an occasion it was! The flower of American literature gathered to do honor to its chief. The whole atmosphere of the place seemed permeated with his presence, and when Colonel Harvey presented William Dean Howells, and when Howells had read another double-barreled sonnet, and introduced the guest of the evening with the words, "I will not say, 'O King, live forever,' but, 'O King, live as long as you like!'" and Mark Twain rose, his snow-white hair gleaming above that brilliant assembly, it seemed that a world was speaking out in a voice of applause and welcome. With a great tumult the throng rose, a billow of life, the white handkerchiefs flying foam-like on its crest. Those who had gathered there realized that it was a mighty moment, not only in his life but in theirs. They were there to see this supreme embodiment of the American spirit as he scaled the mountain-top. He, too, realized the drama of that moment—the marvel of it—and he must have flashed a swift panoramic view backward over the long way he had come, to stand, as he had himself once expressed it, "for a single, splendid moment on the Alps of fame outlined against the sun." He must have remembered; for when he came to speak he went back to the very beginning, to his very first banquet, as he called it, when, as he said, "I hadn't any hair; I hadn't any teeth; I hadn't any clothes." He sketched the meagerness of that little hamlet which had seen his birth, sketched it playfully, delightfully, so that his hearers laughed and shouted; but there was always a tenderness under it all, and often the tears were not far beneath the surface. He told of his habits of life, how he had attained seventy years by simply sticking to a scheme of living which would kill anybody else; how he smoked constantly, loathed exercise, and had no other regularity of habits. Then, at last, he reached that wonderful, unforgettable close:

Threescore years and ten!

It is the scriptural statute of limitations. After that you owe no active duties; for you the strenuous life is over. You are a time- expired man, to use Kipling's military phrase: You have served your term, well or less well, and you are mustered out. You are become an honorary member of the republic, you are emancipated, compulsions are not for you, nor any bugle-call but "lights out." You pay the time-worn duty bills if you choose, or decline if you prefer—and without prejudice—for they are not legally collectable. The previous-engagement plea, which in forty years has cost you so many twinges, you can lay aside forever; on this side of the grave you will never need it again. If you shrink at thought of night, and winter, and the late homecomings from the banquet and the lights and laughter through the deserted streets—a desolation which would not remind you now, as for a generation it did, that your friends are sleeping and you must creep in a-tiptoe and not disturb them, but

Page 85

would only remind you that you need not tiptoe, you can never disturb them more—if you shrink at the thought of these things you need only reply, “Your invitation honors me and pleases me because you still keep me in your remembrance, but I am seventy; seventy, and would nestle in the chimney-corner, and smoke my pipe, and read my book, and take my rest, wishing you well in all affection, and that when you in your turn shall arrive at Pier 70 you may step aboard your waiting ship with a reconciled spirit, and lay your course toward the sinking sun with a contented heart.”

The tears that had been lying in wait were not restrained now. If there were any present who did not let them flow without shame, who did not shout their applause from throats choked with sobs, the writer of these lines failed to see them or to hear of them. There was not one who was ashamed to pay the great tribute of tears.

Many of his old friends, one after another, rose to tell their love for him—Brander Matthews, Cable, Kate Douglas Riggs, Gilder, Carnegie, Bangs, Bacheller—they kept it up far into the next morning. No other arrival at Pier 70 ever awoke a grander welcome.

CCXXXVII

AFTERMATH

The announcement of the seventieth birthday dinner had precipitated a perfect avalanche of letters, which continued to flow in until the news accounts of it precipitated another avalanche. The carriers' bags were stuffed with greetings that came from every part of the world, from every class of humanity. They were all full of love and tender wishes. A card signed only with initials said: “God bless your old sweet soul for having lived.”

Aldrich, who could not attend the dinner, declared that all through the evening he had been listening in his mind to a murmur of voices in the hall at Delmonico's. A group of English authors in London combined in a cable of congratulations. Anstey, Alfred Austin, Balfour, Barrie, Bryce, Chesterton, Dobson, Doyle, Gosse, Hardy, Hope, Jacobs, Kipling, Lang, Parker, Tenniel, Watson, and Zangwill were among the signatures.

Helen Keller wrote:

And you are seventy years old? Or is the report exaggerated, like that of your death? I remember, when I saw you last, at the house of dear Mr. Hutton, in Princeton, you said:

“If a man is a pessimist before he is forty-eight he knows too much. If he is an optimist after he is forty-eight he knows too little.”

Now we know you are an optimist, and nobody would dare to accuse one on the “seven-terraced summit” of knowing little. So probably you are not seventy after all, but only forty-seven!

Helen Keller was right. Mark Twain was not a pessimist in his heart, but only by premeditation. It was his observation and his logic that led him to write those things that, even in their bitterness, somehow conveyed that spirit of human sympathy which is so closely linked to hope. To Miss Keller he wrote:

Page 86

"Oh, thank you for your lovely words!"

He was given another birthday celebration that month—this time by the Society of Illustrators. Dan Beard, president, was also toast-master; and as he presented Mark Twain there was a trumpet-note, and a lovely girl, costumed as Joan of Arc, entered and, approaching him, presented him with a laurel wreath. It was planned and carried out as a surprise to him, and he hardly knew for the moment whether it was a vision or a reality. He was deeply affected, so much so that for several moments he could not find his voice to make any acknowledgments.

Clemens was more than ever sought now, and he responded when the cause was a worthy one. He spoke for the benefit of the Russian sufferers at the Casino on December 18th. Madame Sarah Bernhardt was also there, and spoke in French. He followed her, declaring that it seemed a sort of cruelty to inflict upon an audience our rude English after hearing that divine speech flowing in that lucid Gallic tongue.

It has always been a marvel to me—that French language; it has always been a puzzle to me. How beautiful that language is! How expressive it seems to be! How full of grace it is!

And when it comes from lips like those, how eloquent and how limpid it is! And, oh, I am always deceived—I always think I am going to understand it.

It is such a delight to me, such a delight to me, to meet Madame Bernhardt, and laugh hand to hand and heart to heart with her. I have seen her play, as we all have, and, oh, that is divine; but I have always wanted to know Madame Bernhardt herself—her fiery self. I have wanted to know that beautiful character.

Why, she is the youngest person I ever saw, except myself—for I always feel young when I come in the presence of young people.

And truly, at seventy, Mark Twain was young, his manner, his movement, his point of view—these were all, and always, young.

A number of palmists about that time examined impressions of his hand without knowledge as to the owner, and they all agreed that it was the hand of a man with the characteristics of youth, with inspiration, and enthusiasm, and sympathy—a lover of justice and of the sublime. They all agreed, too, that he was a deep philosopher, though, alas! they likewise agreed that he lacked the sense of humor, which is not as surprising as it sounds, for with Mark Twain humor was never mere fun-making nor the love of it; rather it was the flower of his philosophy—its bloom and fragrance.



When the fanfare and drum-beat of his birthday honors had passed by, and a moment of calm had followed, Mark Twain set down some reflections on the new estate he had achieved. The little paper, which forms a perfect pendant to the "Seventieth Birthday Speech," here follows:

Old age

I think it likely that people who have not been here will be interested to know what it is like. I arrived on the thirtieth of November, fresh from carefree & frivolous 69, & was disappointed.

Page 87

There is nothing novel about it, nothing striking, nothing to thrill you & make your eye glitter & your tongue cry out, "Oh, it is wonderful, perfectly wonderful!" Yes, it is disappointing. You say, "Is this it?—this? after all this talk and fuss of a thousand generations of travelers who have crossed this frontier & looked about them & told what they saw & felt? Why, it looks just like 69." And that is true. Also it is natural, for you have not come by the fast express; you have been lagging & dragging across the world's continents behind oxen; when that is your pace one country melts into the next one so gradually that you are not able to notice the change; 70 looks like 69; 69 looked like 68; 68 looked like 67—& so on back & back to the beginning. If you climb to a summit & look back—ah, then you see! Down that far-reaching perspective you can make out each country & climate that you crossed, all the way up from the hot equator to the ice-summit where you are perched. You can make out where Infancy verged into Boyhood; Boyhood into down-lipped Youth; Youth into bearded, indefinite Young-Manhood; indefinite Young-Manhood into definite Manhood; definite Manhood, with large, aggressive ambitions, into sobered & heedful Husbandhood & Fatherhood; these into troubled & foreboding Age, with graying hair; this into Old Age, white-headed, the temple empty, the idols broken, the worshipers in their graves, nothing left but You, a remnant, a tradition, belated fag-end of a foolish dream, a dream that was so ingeniously dreamed that it seemed real all the time; nothing left but You, center of a snowy desolation, perched on the ice-summit, gazing out over the stages of that long trek & asking Yourself, "Would you do it again if you had the chance?"

CCXXXVIII

THE WRITER MEETS MARK TWAIN

We have reached a point in this history where the narrative becomes mainly personal, and where, at the risk of inviting the charge of egotism, the form of the telling must change.

It was at the end of 1901 that I first met Mark Twain—at The Players Club on the night when he made the Founder's Address mentioned in an earlier chapter.

I was not able to arrive in time for the address, but as I reached the head of the stairs I saw him sitting on the couch at the dining-room entrance, talking earnestly to some one, who, as I remember it, did not enter into my consciousness at all. I saw only that crown of white hair, that familiar profile, and heard the slow modulations of his measured speech. I was surprised to see how frail and old he looked. From his pictures I had conceived him different. I did not realize that it was a temporary condition due to a period of poor health and a succession of social demands. I have no idea how long I stood there watching him. He had been my literary idol from childhood, as he had been of so many others; more than that, for the personality in his work had made him nothing less than a hero to his readers.

Page 88

He rose presently to go, and came directly toward me. A year before I had done what new writers were always doing—I had sent him a book I had written, and he had done what he was always doing—acknowledged it with a kindly letter. I made my thanks now an excuse for addressing him. It warmed me to hear him say that he remembered the book, though at the time I confess I thought it doubtful. Then he was gone; but the mind and ear had photographed those vivid first impressions that remain always clear.

It was the following spring that I saw him again—at an afternoon gathering, and the memory of that occasion is chiefly important because I met Mrs. Clemens there for the only time, and like all who met her, however briefly, felt the gentleness and beauty of her spirit. I think I spoke with her at two or three different moments during the afternoon, and on each occasion was impressed with that feeling of acquaintanceship which we immediately experience with those rare beings whose souls are wells of human sympathy and free from guile. Bret Harte had just died, and during the afternoon Mr. Clemens asked me to obtain for him some item concerning the obsequies.

It was more than three years before I saw him again. Meantime, a sort of acquaintance had progressed. I had been engaged in writing the life of Thomas Nast, the cartoonist, and I had found among the material a number of letters to Nast from Mark Twain. I was naturally anxious to use those fine characteristic letters, and I wrote him for his consent. He wished to see the letters, and the permission that followed was kindness itself. His admiration of Nast was very great.

It was proper, under the circumstances, to send him a copy of the book when it appeared; but that was 1904, his year of sorrow and absence, and the matter was postponed. Then came the great night of his seventieth birthday dinner, with an opportunity to thank him in person for the use of the letters. There was only a brief exchange of words, and it was the next day, I think, that I sent him a copy of the book. It did not occur to me that I should hear of it again.

We step back a moment here. Something more than a year earlier, through a misunderstanding, Mark Twain's long association with The Players had been severed. It was a sorrow to him, and a still greater sorrow to the club. There was a movement among what is generally known' as the "Round Table Group"—because its members have long had a habit of lunching at a large, round table in a certain window—to bring him back again. David Munro, associate editor of the North American Review—"David," a man well loved of men—and Robert Reid, the painter, prepared this simple document:

To
Mark Twain
from
the clansmen

Will ye no come back again?
Will ye no come back again?
Better lo'ed ye canna be,
Will ye no come back again?

Page 89

It was signed by Munro and by Reid and about thirty others, and it touched Mark Twain deeply. The lines had always moved him. He wrote:

To Robt. Reid & the others—

Well-beloved,—Surely those lovely verses went to Prince Charlie's heart, if he had one, & certainly they have gone to mine. I shall be glad & proud to come back again after such a moving & beautiful compliment as this from comrades whom I have loved so long. I hope you can poll the necessary vote; I know you will try, at any rate. It will be many months before I can foregather with you, for this black border is not perfunctory, not a convention; it symbolizes the loss of one whose memory is the only thing I worship.

It is not necessary for me to thank you—& words could not deliver what I feel, anyway. I will put the contents of your envelope in the small casket where I keep the things which have become sacred to me.

S. L. C.

So the matter was temporarily held in abeyance until he should return to social life. At the completion of his seventieth year the club had taken action, and Mark Twain had been brought back, not in the regular order of things, but as an honorary life member without dues or duties. There was only one other member of this class, Sir Henry Irving.

The Players, as a club, does not give dinners. Whatever is done in that way is done by one or more of the members in the private dining-room, where there is a single large table that holds twenty-five, even thirty when expanded to its limit. That room and that table have mingled with much distinguished entertainment, also with history. Henry James made his first after-dinner speech there, for one thing—at least he claimed it was his first, though this is by the way.

A letter came to me which said that those who had signed the plea for the Prince's return were going to welcome him in the private dining-room on the 5th of January. It was not an invitation, but a gracious privilege. I was in New York a day or two in advance of the date, and I think David Munro was the first person I met at The Players. As he greeted me his eyes were eager with something he knew I would wish to hear. He had been delegated to propose the dinner to Mark Twain, and had found him propped up in bed, and noticed on the table near him a copy of the *Nast* book. I suspect that Munro had led him to speak of it, and that the result had lost nothing filtered through that radiant benevolence of his.

Page 90

The night of January 5, 1906, remains a memory apart from other dinners. Brander Matthews presided, and Gilder was there, and Frank Millet and Willard Metcalf and Robert Reid, and a score of others; some of them are dead now, David Munro among them. It so happened that my seat was nearly facing the guest of the evening, who, by custom of The Players, is placed at the side and not at the end of the long table. He was no longer frail and thin, as when I had first met him. He had a robust, rested look; his complexion had the tints of a miniature painting. Lit by the glow of the shaded candles, relieved against the dusk richness of the walls, he made a picture of striking beauty. One could not take his eyes from it, and to one guest at least it stirred the farthest memories. I suddenly saw the interior of a farm-house sitting-room in the Middle West, where I had first heard uttered the name of Mark Twain, and where night after night a group gathered around the evening lamp to hear the tale of the first pilgrimage, which, to a boy of eight, had seemed only a wonderful poem and fairy tale. To Charles Harvey Genung, who sat next to me, I whispered something of this, and how, during the thirty-six years since then, no other human being to me had meant quite what Mark Twain had meant—in literature, in life, in the ineffable thing which means more than either, and which we call “inspiration,” for lack of a truer word. Now here he was, just across the table. It was the fairy tale come true.

Genung said:

“You should write his life.”

His remark seemed a pleasant courtesy, and was put aside as such. When he persisted I attributed it to the general bloom of the occasion, and a little to the wine, maybe, for the dinner was in its sweetest stage just then—that happy, early stage when the first glass of champagne, or the second, has proved its quality. He urged, in support of his idea, the word that Munro had brought concerning the Nast book, but nothing of what he said kindled any spark of hope. I could not but believe that some one with a larger equipment of experience, personal friendship, and abilities had already been selected for the task. By and by the speaking began—delightful, intimate speaking in that restricted circle—and the matter went out of my mind.

When the dinner had ended, and we were drifting about the table in general talk, I found an opportunity to say a word to the guest of the evening about his Joan of Arc, which I had recently re-read. To my happiness, he detained me while he told me the long-ago incident which had led to his interest, not only in the martyred girl, but in all literature. I think we broke up soon after, and descended to the lower rooms. At any rate, I presently found the faithful Charles Genung privately reasserting to me the proposition that I should undertake the biography of Mark Twain. Perhaps it was the brief sympathy established by the name of Joan of Arc, perhaps it was only Genung’s insistent purpose—his faith, if I may be permitted the word. Whatever it was, there came an impulse, in the instant of bidding good-by to our guest of honor, which prompted me to say:

Page 91

"May I call to see you, Mr. Clemens, some day?"

And something—dating from the primal atom, I suppose—prompted him to answer:

"Yes, come soon."

This was on Wednesday night, or rather on Thursday morning, for it was past midnight, and a day later I made an appointment with his secretary to call on Saturday.

I can say truly that I set out with no more than the barest hope of success, and wondering if I should have the courage, when I saw him, even to suggest the thought in my mind. I know I did not have the courage to confide in Genung that I had made the appointment—I was so sure it would fail. I arrived at 21 Fifth Avenue and was shown into that long library and drawing-room combined, and found a curious and deep interest in the books and ornaments along the shelves as I waited. Then I was summoned, and I remember ascending the stairs, wondering why I had come on so futile an errand, and trying to think of an excuse to offer for having come at all.

He was propped up in bed—in that stately bed-sitting, as was his habit, with his pillows placed at the foot, so that he might have always before him the rich, carved beauty of its headboard. He was delving through a copy of Huckleberry Finn, in search of a paragraph concerning which some random correspondent had asked explanation. He was commenting unfavorably on this correspondent and on miscellaneous letter-writing in general. He pushed the cigars toward me, and the talk of these matters ran along and blended into others more or less personal. By and by I told him what so many thousands had told him before: what he had meant to me, recalling the childhood impressions of that large, black-and-gilt-covered book with its wonderful pictures and adventures—the Mediterranean pilgrimage. Very likely it bored him—he had heard it so often—and he was willing enough, I dare say, to let me change the subject and thank him for the kindly word which David Munro had brought. I do not remember what he said then, but I suddenly found myself suggesting that out of his encouragement had grown a hope—though certainly it was something less—that I might some day undertake a book about himself. I expected the chapter to end at this point, and his silence which followed seemed long and ominous.

He said, at last, that at various times through his life he had been preparing some autobiographical matter, but that he had tired of the undertaking, and had put it aside. He added that he had hoped his daughters would one day collect his letters; but that a biography—a detailed story of personality and performance, of success and failure —was of course another matter, and that for such a work no arrangement had been made. He may have added one or two other general remarks; then, turning those piercing agate-blue eyes directly upon me, he said:

"When would you like to begin?"

There was a dresser with a large mirror behind him. I happened to catch my reflection in it, and I vividly recollect saying to it mentally: "This is not true; it is only one of many similar dreams." But even in a dream one must answer, and I said:

Page 92

“Whenever you like. I can begin now.”

He was always eager in any new undertaking.

“Very good,” he said. “The sooner, then, the better. Let’s begin while we are in the humor. The longer you postpone a thing of this kind the less likely you are ever to get at it.”

This was on Saturday, as I have stated. I mentioned that my family was still in the country, and that it would require a day or two to get established in the city. I asked if Tuesday, January 9th, would be too soon to begin. He agreed that Tuesday would do, and inquired something about my plan of work. Of course I had formed nothing definite, but I said that in similar undertakings a part of the work had been done with a stenographer, who had made the notes while I prompted the subject to recall a procession of incidents and episodes, to be supplemented with every variety of material obtainable—letters and other documentary accumulations. Then he said:

“I think I should enjoy dictating to a stenographer, with some one to prompt me and to act as audience. The room adjoining this was fitted up for my study. My manuscripts and notes and private books and many of my letters are there, and there are a trunkful or two of such things in the attic. I seldom use the room myself. I do my writing and reading in bed. I will turn that room over to you for this work. Whatever you need will be brought to you. We can have the dictation here in the morning, and you can put in the rest of the day to suit yourself. You can have a key and come and go as you please.”

That was always his way. He did nothing by halves; nothing without unquestioning confidence and prodigality. He got up and showed me the lovely luxury of the study, with its treasures of material. I did not believe it true yet. It had all the atmosphere of a dream, and I have no distinct recollection of how I came away. When I returned to The Players and found Charles Harvey Genung there, and told him about it, it is quite certain that he perjured himself when he professed to believe it true and pretended that he was not surprised.

CCXXXIX

WORKING WITH MARK TWAIN

On Tuesday, January 9, 1906, I was on hand with a capable stenographer —Miss Josephine Hobby, who had successively, and successfully, held secretarial positions with Charles Dudley Warner and Mrs. Mary Mapes Dodge, and was therefore peculiarly qualified for the work in hand.



Clemens, meantime, had been revolving our plans and adding some features of his own. He proposed to double the value and interest of our employment by letting his dictations continue the form of those earlier autobiographical chapters, begun with Redpath in 1885, and continued later in Vienna and at the Villa Quarto. He said he did not think he could follow a definite chronological program; that he would like to wander about, picking up this point and that,

Page 93

as memory or fancy prompted, without any particular biographical order. It was his purpose, he declared, that his dictations should not be published until he had been dead a hundred years or more—a prospect which seemed to give him an especial gratification.—[As early as October, 1900, he had proposed to Harper & Brothers a contract for publishing his personal memoirs at the expiration of one hundred years from date; and letters covering the details were exchanged with Mr. Rogers. The document, however, was not completed.]

He wished to pay the stenographer, and to own these memoranda, he said, allowing me free access to them for any material I might find valuable. I could also suggest subjects for dictation, and ask particulars of any special episode or period. I believe this covered the whole arrangement, which did not require more than five minutes, and we set to work without further prologue.

I ought to state that he was in bed when we arrived, and that he remained there during almost all of these earlier dictations, clad in a handsome silk dressing-gown of rich Persian pattern, propped against great snowy pillows. He loved this loose luxury and ease, and found it conducive to thought. On the little table beside him, where lay his cigars, papers, pipes, and various knickknacks, shone a reading-lamp, making more brilliant the rich coloring of his complexion and the gleam of his shining hair. There was daylight, too, but it was north light, and the winter days were dull. Also the walls of the room were a deep, unreflecting red, and his eyes were getting old. The outlines of that vast bed blending into the luxuriant background, the whole focusing to the striking central figure, remain in my mind to-day—a picture of classic value.

He dictated that morning some matters connected with the history of the Comstock mine; then he drifted back to his childhood, returning again to the more modern period, and closed, I think, with some comments on current affairs. It was absorbingly interesting; his quaint, unhurried fashion of speech, the unconscious movement of his hands, the play of his features as his fancies and phrases passed in mental review and were accepted or waved aside. We were watching one of the great literary creators of his time in the very process of his architecture. We constituted about the most select audience in the world enjoying what was, likely enough, its most remarkable entertainment. When he turned at last and inquired the time we were all amazed that two hours and more had slipped away.

“And how much I have enjoyed it!” he said. “It is the ideal plan for this kind of work. Narrative writing is always disappointing. The moment you pick up a pen you begin to lose the spontaneity of the personal relation, which contains the very essence of interest. With shorthand dictation one can talk as if he were at his own dinner-table — always a most inspiring place. I expect to dictate all the rest of my life, if you good people are willing to come and listen to it.”

Page 94

The dictations thus begun continued steadily from week to week, and always with increasing charm. We never knew what he was going to talk about, and it was seldom that he knew until the moment of beginning; then he went drifting among episodes, incidents, and periods in his irresponsible fashion; the fashion of table-conversation, as he said, the methodless method of the human mind. It was always delightful, and always amusing, tragic, or instructive, and it was likely to be one of these at one instant, and another the next. I felt myself the most fortunate biographer in the world, as undoubtedly I was, though not just in the way that I first imagined.

It was not for several weeks that I began to realize that these marvelous reminiscences bore only an atmospheric relation to history; that they were aspects of biography rather than its veritable narrative, and built largely—sometimes wholly—from an imagination that, with age, had dominated memory, creating details, even reversing them, yet with a perfect sincerity of purpose on the part of the narrator to set down the literal and unvarnished truth. It was his constant effort to be frank and faithful to fact, to record, to confess, and to condemn without stint. If you wanted to know the worst of Mark Twain you had only to ask him for it. He would give it, to the last syllable—worse than the worst, for his imagination would magnify it and adorn it with new iniquities, and if he gave it again, or a dozen times, he would improve upon it each time, until the thread of history was almost impossible to trace through the marvel of that fabric; and he would do the same for another person just as willingly. Those vividly real personalities that he marched and countermarched before us were the most convincing creatures in the world; the most entertaining, the most excruciatingly humorous, or wicked, or tragic; but, alas, they were not always safe to include in a record that must bear a certain semblance to history. They often disagreed in their performance, and even in their characters, with the documents in the next room, as I learned by and by when those records, disentangled, began to rebuild the structure of the years.

His gift of dramatization had been exercised too long to be discarded now. The things he told of Mrs. Clemens and of Susy were true—marvelously and beautifully true, in spirit and in aspect—and the actual detail of these mattered little in such a record. The rest was history only as ‘*Roughing It*’ is history, or the ‘*Tramp Abroad*’; that is to say, it was fictional history, with fact as a starting-point. In a prefatory note to these volumes we have quoted Mark Twain’s own lovely and whimsical admission, made once when he realized his deviations:

“When I was younger I could remember anything, whether it happened or not; but I am getting old, and soon I shall remember only the latter.”

At another time he paraphrased one of Josh Billings’s sayings in the remark: “It isn’t so astonishing, the number of things that I can remember, as the number of things I can remember that aren’t so.”

Page 95

I do not wish to say, by any means, that his so-called autobiography is a mere fairy tale. It is far from that. It is amazingly truthful in the character-picture it represents of the man himself. It is only not reliable—and it is sometimes even unjust—as detailed history. Yet, curiously enough, there were occasional chapters that were photographically exact, and fitted precisely with the more positive, if less picturesque, materials. It is also true that such chapters were likely to be episodes intrinsically so perfect as to not require the touch of art.

In the talks which we usually had, when the dictations were ended and Miss Hobby had gone, I gathered much that was of still greater value. Imagination was temporarily dispossessed, as it were, and, whether expounding some theory or summarizing some event, he cared little for literary effect, and only for the idea and the moment immediately present.

It was at such times that he allowed me to make those inquiries we had planned in the beginning, and which apparently had little place in the dictations themselves. Sometimes I led him to speak of the genesis of his various books, how he had come to write them, and I think there was not a single case where later I did not find his memory of these matters almost exactly in accord with the letters of the moment, written to Howells or Twichell, or to some member of his family. Such reminiscence was usually followed by some vigorous burst of human philosophy, often too vigorous for print, too human, but as dazzling as a search-light in its revelation.

It was during this earlier association that he propounded, one day, his theory of circumstance, already set down, that inevitable sequence of cause and effect, beginning with the first act of the primal atom. He had been dictating that morning his story of the clairvoyant dream which preceded his brother's death, and the talk of foreknowledge had continued. I said one might logically conclude from such a circumstance that the future was a fixed quantity.

"As absolutely fixed as the past," he said; and added the remark already quoted.—[Chap. lxxv] A little later he continued:

"Even the Almighty Himself cannot check or change that sequence of events once it is started. It is a fixed quantity, and a part of the scheme is a mental condition during certain moments usually of sleep—when the mind may reach out and grasp some of the acts which are still to come."

It was a new angle to me—a line of logic so simple and so utterly convincing that I have remained unshaken in it to this day. I have never been able to find any answer to it, nor any one who could even attempt to show that the first act of the first created atom did not strike the key-note of eternity.

At another time, speaking of the idea that God works through man, he burst out:

“Yes, of course, just about as much as a man works through his microbes!”

Page 96

He had a startling way of putting things like that, and it left not much to say.

I was at this period interested a good deal in mental healing, and had been treated for neurasthenia with gratifying results. Like most of the world, I had assumed, from his published articles, that he condemned Christian Science and its related practices out of hand. When I confessed, rather reluctantly, one day, the benefit I had received, he surprised me by answering:

“Of course you have been benefited. Christian Science is humanity’s boon. Mother Eddy deserves a place in the Trinity as much as any member of it. She has organized and made available a healing principle that for two thousand years has never been employed, except as the merest kind of guesswork. She is the benefactor of the age.”

It seemed strange, at the time, to hear him speak in this way concerning a practice of which he was generally regarded as the chief public antagonist. It was another angle of his many-sided character.

CCXL

THE DEFINITION OF A GENTLEMAN

That was a busy winter for him socially. He was constantly demanded for this thing and that—for public gatherings, dinners—everywhere he was a central figure. Once he presided at a Valentine dinner given by some Players to David Munro. He had never presided at a dinner before, he said, and he did it in his own way, which certainly was a taking one, suitable to that carefree company and occasion—a real Scotch occasion, with the Munro tartan everywhere, the table banked with heather, and a wild piper marching up and down in the anteroom, blowing savage airs in honor of Scotland’s gentlest son.

An important meeting of that winter was at Carnegie Hall—a great gathering which had assembled for the purpose of aiding Booker T. Washington in his work for the welfare of his race. The stage and the auditorium were thronged with notables. Joseph H. Choate and Mark Twain presided, and both spoke; also Robert C. Ogden and Booker T. Washington himself. It was all fine and interesting. Choate’s address was ably given, and Mark Twain was at his best. He talked of politics and of morals—public and private—how the average American citizen was true to his Christian principles three hundred and sixty-three days in the year, and how on the other two days of the year he left those principles at home and went to the tax-office and the voting-booths, and did his best to damage and undo his whole year’s faithful and righteous work.

I used to be an honest man, but I am crumbling—no, I have crumbled. When they assessed me at \$75,000 a fortnight ago I went out and tried to borrow the money and

couldn't. Then when I found they were letting a whole crowd of millionaires live in New York at a third of the price they were charging me I was hurt, I was indignant, and said, this is the last feather. I am

Page 97

not going to run this town all by myself. In that moment—in that memorable moment, I began to crumble. In fifteen minutes the disintegration was complete. In fifteen minutes I was become just a mere moral sand-pile, and I lifted up my hand, along with those seasoned and experienced deacons, and swore off every rag of personal property I've got in the world.

I had never heard him address a miscellaneous audience. It was marvelous to see how he convulsed it, and silenced it, and controlled it at will. He did not undertake any special pleading for the negro cause; he only prepared the way with cheerfulness.

Clemens and Choate joined forces again, a few weeks later, at a great public meeting assembled in aid of the adult blind. Helen Keller was to be present, but she had fallen ill through overwork. She sent to Clemens one of her beautiful letters, in which she said:

I should be happy if I could have spelled into my hand the words as they fall from your lips, and receive, even as it is uttered, the eloquence of our newest ambassador to the blind.

Clemens, dictating the following morning, told of his first meeting with Helen Keller at a little gathering in Lawrence Hutton's home, when she was about the age of fourteen. It was an incident that invited no elaboration, and probably received none.

Henry Rogers and I went together. The company had all assembled and had been waiting a while. The wonderful child arrived now with her about equally wonderful teacher, Miss Sullivan, and seemed quite well to recognize the character of her surroundings. She said, "Oh, the books, the books, so many, many books. How lovely!"

The guests were brought one after another. As she shook hands with each she took her hand away and laid her fingers lightly against Miss Sullivan's lips, who spoke against them the person's name.

Mr. Howells seated himself by Helen on the sofa, and she put her fingers against his lips and he told her a story of considerable length, and you could see each detail of it pass into her mind and strike fire there and throw the flash of it into her face. After a couple of hours spent very pleasantly some one asked if Helen would remember the feel of the hands of the company after this considerable interval of time and be able to discriminate the hands and name the possessors of them. Miss Sullivan said, "Oh, she will have no difficulty about that." So the company filed past, shook hands in turn, and with each hand-shake Helen greeted the owner of the hand pleasantly and spoke the name that belonged to it without hesitation. By and by the assemblage proceeded to the dining-room and sat down to the luncheon. I had to go away before it was over, and as I

passed by Helen I patted her lightly on the head and passed on. Miss Sullivan called to me and said,

Page 98

"Stop, Mr. Clemens, Helen is distressed because she did not recognize your hand. Won't you come back and do that again?" I went back and patted her lightly on the head, and she said at once, "Oh, it's Mr. Clemens."

Perhaps some one can explain this miracle, but I have never been able to do it. Could she feel the wrinkles in my hand through her hair? Some one else must answer this.

It was three years following this dictation that the mystery received a very simple and rather amusing solution. Helen had come to pay a visit to Mark Twain's Connecticut home, Stormfield, then but just completed. He had met her, meantime, but it had not occurred to him before to ask her how she had recognized him that morning at Hutton's, in what had seemed such a marvelous way. She remembered, and with a smile said:

"I smelled you." Which, after all, did not make the incident seem much less marvelous.

On one of the mornings after Miss Hobby had gone Clemens said:

"A very curious thing has happened—a very large-sized-joke." He was shaving at the time, and this information came in brief and broken relays, suited to a performance of that sort. The reader may perhaps imagine the effect without further indication of it.

"I was going on a yachting trip once, with Henry Rogers, when a reporter stopped me with the statement that Mrs. Astor had said that there had never been a gentleman in the White House, and he wanted me to give him my definition of a gentleman. I didn't give him my definition; but he printed it, just the same, in the afternoon paper. I was angry at first, and wanted to bring a damage suit. When I came to read the definition it was a satisfactory one, and I let it go. Now to-day comes a letter and a telegram from a man who has made a will in Missouri, leaving ten thousand dollars to provide tablets for various libraries in the State, on which shall be inscribed Mark Twain's definition of a gentleman. He hasn't got the definition—he has only heard of it, and he wants me to tell him in which one of my books or speeches he can find it. I couldn't think, when I read that letter, what in the nation the man meant, but shaving somehow has a tendency to release thought, and just now it all came to me."

It was a situation full of amusing possibilities; but he reached no conclusion in the matter. Another telegram was brought in just then, which gave a sadder aspect to his thought, for it said that his old coachman, Patrick McAleer, who had begun in the Clemens service with the bride and groom of thirty-six years before, was very low, and could not survive more than a few days. This led him to speak of Patrick, his noble and faithful nature, and how he always claimed to be in their service, even during their long intervals of absence abroad. Clemens gave orders that everything possible should be done for Patrick's comfort. When the end came, a few days later, he traveled to



Hartford to lay flowers on Patrick's bier, and to serve, with Patrick's friends —neighbor coachmen and John O'Neill, the gardener—as pall-bearer, taking his allotted place without distinction or favor.

Page 99

It was the following Sunday, at the Majestic Theater, in New York, that Mark Twain spoke to the Young Men's Christian Association. For several reasons it proved an unusual meeting. A large number of free tickets had been given out, far more than the place would hold; and, further, it had been announced that when the ticket-holders had been seated the admission would be free to the public. The subject chosen for the talk was "Reminiscences."

When we arrived the streets were packed from side to side for a considerable distance and a riot was in progress. A great crowd had swarmed about the place, and the officials, instead of throwing the doors wide and letting the theater fill up, regardless of tickets, had locked them. As a result there was a shouting, surging human mass that presently dashed itself against the entrance. Windows and doors gave way, and there followed a wild struggle for entrance. A moment later the house was packed solid. A detachment of police had now arrived, and in time cleared the street. It was said that amid the tumult some had lost their footing and had been trampled and injured, but of this we did not learn until later. We had been taken somehow to a side entrance and smuggled into boxes.—[The paper next morning bore the head-lines: "10,000 Stampeded at the Mark Twain Meeting. Well-dressed Men and Women Clubbed by Police at Majestic Theater." In this account the paper stated that the crowd had collected an hour before the time for opening; that nothing of the kind had been anticipated and no police preparation had been made.]

It was peaceful enough in the theater until Mark Twain appeared on the stage. He was wildly greeted, and when he said, slowly and seriously, "I thank you for this signal recognition of merit," there was a still noisier outburst. In the quiet that followed he began his memories, and went wandering along from one anecdote to another in the manner of his daily dictations.

At last it seemed to occur to him, in view of the character of his audience, that he ought to close with something in the nature of counsel suited to young men.

It is from experiences such as mine [he said] that we get our education of life. We string them into jewels or into tinware, as we may choose. I have received recently several letters asking for counsel or advice, the principal request being for some incident that may prove helpful to the young. It is my mission to teach, and I am always glad to furnish something. There have been a lot of incidents in my career to help me along—sometimes they helped me along faster than I wanted to go.

He took some papers from his pocket and started to unfold one of them; then, as if remembering, he asked how long he had been talking. The answer came, "Thirty-five minutes." He made as if to leave the stage, but the audience commanded him to go on.

"All right," he said, "I can stand more of my own talk than any one I ever knew." Opening one of the papers, a telegram, he read:

Page 100

"In which one of your works can we find the definition of a gentleman?" Then he added:

I have not answered that telegram. I couldn't. I never wrote any such definition, though it seems to me that if a man has just, merciful, and kindly instincts he would be a gentleman, for he would need nothing else in this world.

He opened a letter. "From Howells," he said.

My old friend, William Dean Howells—Howells, the head of American literature. No one is able to stand with him. He is an old, old friend of mine, and he writes me, "To-morrow I shall be sixty-nine years old." Why, I am surprised at Howells writing so. I have known him myself longer than that. I am sorry to see a man trying to appear so young. Let's see. Howells says now, "I see you have been burying Patrick. I suppose he was old, too."

The house became very still. Most of them had read an account of Mark Twain's journey to Hartford and his last service to his faithful servitor. The speaker's next words were not much above a whisper, but every syllable was distinct.

No, he was never old-Patrick. He came to us thirty-six years ago. He was our coachman from the day that I drove my young bride to our new home. He was a young Irishman, slender, tall, lithe, honest, truthful, and he never changed in all his life. He really was with us but twenty-five years, for he did not go with us to Europe; but he never regarded that a separation. As the children grew up he was their guide. He was all honor, honesty, and affection. He was with us in New Hampshire last summer, and his hair was just as black, his eyes were just as blue, his form just as straight, and his heart just as good as on the day we first met. In all the long years Patrick never made a mistake. He never needed an order; he never received a command. He knew. I have been asked for my idea of an ideal gentleman, and I give it to you—Patrick McAleer.

It was the sort of thing that no one but Mark Twain has quite been able to do, and it was just that recognized quality behind it that had made crowds jam the street and stampede the entrance to be in his presence—to see him and to hear his voice.

CCXLI

GORKY, HOWELLS, AND MARK TWAIN

Clemens was now fairly back again in the wash of banquets and speech-making that had claimed him on his return from England, five years before. He made no less than a dozen speeches altogether that winter, and he was continually at some feasting or other, where he was sure to be called upon for remarks. He fell out of the habit of preparing his addresses, relying upon the inspiration of the moment, merely following the procedure of his daily dictations, which had doubtless given him confidence for this

departure from his earlier method. There was seldom an afternoon or an evening that he was not required, and seldom a morning that the papers did not have some report of his doings. Once more, and in a larger fashion than ever, he had become “the belle of New York.” But he was something further. An editorial in the Evening Mail said:

Page 101

Mark Twain, in his “last and best of life for which the first was made,” seems to be advancing rapidly to a position which makes him a kind of joint Aristides, Solon, and Themistocles of the American metropolis—an Aristides for justness and boldness as well as incessancy of opinion, a Solon for wisdom and cogency, and a Themistocles for the democracy of his views and the popularity of his person. Things have reached the point where, if Mark Twain is not at a public meeting or banquet, he is expected to console it with one of his inimitable letters of advice and encouragement. If he deigns to make a public appearance there is a throng at the doors which overtaxes the energy and ability of the police. We must be glad that we have a public commentator like Mark Twain always at hand and his wit and wisdom continually on tap. His sound, breezy Mississippi Valley Americanism is a corrective to all sorts of snobbery. He cultivates respect for human rights by always making sure that he has his own.

He talked one afternoon to the Barnard girls, and another afternoon to the Women’s University Club, illustrating his talk with what purported to be moral tales. He spoke at a dinner given to City Tax Commissioner Mr. Charles Putzel; and when he was introduced there as the man who had said, “When in doubt tell the truth,” he replied that he had invented that maxim for others, but that when in doubt himself, he used more sagacity.

The speeches he made kept his hearers always in good humor; but he made them think, too, for there was always substance and sound reason and searching satire in the body of what he said.

It was natural that there should be reporters calling frequently at Mark Twain’s home, and now and then the place became a veritable storm-center of news. Such a moment arrived when it became known that a public library in Brooklyn had banished Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer from the children’s room, presided over by a young woman of rather severe morals. The incident had begun in November of the previous year. One of the librarians, Asa Don Dickinson, who had vigorously voted against the decree, wrote privately of the matter. Clemens had replied:

Dear sir,—I am greatly troubled by what you say. I wrote Tom Sawyer & Huck Finn for adults exclusively, & it always distresses me when I find that boys & girls have been allowed access to them. The mind that becomes soiled in youth can never again be washed clean. I know this by my own experience, & to this day I cherish an unappeasable bitterness against the unfaithful guardians of my young life, who not only permitted but compelled me to read an unexpurgated Bible through before I was 15 years old. None can do that and ever draw a clean, sweet breath again this side of the grave. Ask that young lady—she will tell you so. Most honestly do I wish that I could

Page 102

say a softening word or two in defense of Huck's character since you wish it, but really, in my opinion, it is no better than those of Solomon, David, & the rest of the sacred brotherhood.

If there is an unexpurgated in the Children's Department, won't you please help that young woman remove Tom & Huck from that questionable companionship?

Sincerely yours,
S. L. Clemens.

I shall not show your letter to any one-it is safe with me.

Mr. Dickinson naturally kept this letter from the public, though he read it aloud to the assembled librarians, and the fact of its existence and its character eventually leaked out.—[It has been supplied to the writer by Mr. Dickinson, and is published here with his consent.]—One of the librarians who had heard it mentioned it at a theater-party in hearing of an unrealized newspaper man. This was near the end of the following March.

The "tip" was sufficient. Telephone-bells began to jingle, and groups of newspaper men gathered simultaneously on Mr. Dickinson's and on Mark Twain's door-steps. At a 21 Fifth Avenue you could hardly get in or out, for stepping on them. The evening papers surmised details, and Huck and Tom had a perfectly fresh crop of advertising, not only in America, but in distant lands. Dickinson wrote Clemens that he would not give out the letter without his authority, and Clemens replied:

Be wise as a serpent and wary as a dove! The newspaper boys want that letter—don't you let them get hold of it. They say you refuse to allow them to see it without my consent. Keep on refusing, and I'll take care of this end of the line.

In a recent letter to the writer Mr. Dickinson states that Mark Twain's solicitude was for the librarian, whom he was unwilling to involve in difficulties with his official superiors, and he adds:

There may be some doubt as to whether Mark Twain was or was not a religious man, for there are many definitions of the word religion. He was certainly a hater of conventions, had no patience with sanctimony and bibliolatry, and was perhaps irreverent. But any one who reads carefully the description of the conflict in Huck's soul, in regard to the betrayal of Jim, will credit the creator of the scene with deep and true moral feeling.

The reporters thinned out in the course of a few days when no result was forthcoming; but they were all back again presently when the Maxim Gorky fiasco came along. The distinguished revolutionist, Tchaykovsky, as a sort of advance agent for Gorky, had already called upon Clemens to enlist his sympathy in their mission, which was to secure funds in the cause of Russian emancipation. Clemens gave his sympathy, and now promised his aid, though he did not hesitate to discourage the mission. He said that American enthusiasm in such matters stopped well above their pockets, and that this revolutionary errand would fail. Howells, too, was of this opinion. In his account of the episode he says:

Page 103

I told a valued friend of his and mine that I did not believe he could get twenty-five hundred dollars, and I think now I set the figure too high.

Clemens's interest, however, grew. He attended a dinner given to Gorky at the "A Club," No. 3 Fifth Avenue, and introduced Gorky to the diners. Also he wrote a letter to be read by Tchaykoffsky at a meeting held at the Grand Central Palace, where three thousand people gathered to hear this great revolutionist recite the story of Russia's wrongs. The letter ran:

Dear Mr. Tchaykoffsky,—My sympathies are with the Russian revolution, of course. It goes without saying. I hope it will succeed, and now that I have talked with you I take heart to believe it will. Government by falsified promises, by lies, by treachery, and by the butcher-knife, for the aggrandizement of a single family of drones and its idle and vicious kin has been borne quite long enough in Russia, I should think. And it is to be hoped that the roused nation, now rising in its strength, will presently put an end to it and set up the republic in its place. Some of us, even the white-headed, may live to see the blessed day when tsars and grand dukes will be as scarce there as I trust they are in heaven.

Most sincerely yours,
Mark Twain.

Clemens and Howells called on Gorky and agreed to figure prominently in a literary dinner to be given in his honor. The movement was really assuming considerable proportions, when suddenly something happened which caused it to flatten permanently, and rather ridiculously.

Arriving at 21 Fifth Avenue, one afternoon, I met Howells coming out. I thought he had an unhappy, hunted look. I went up to the study, and on opening the door I found the atmosphere semi-opaque with cigar smoke, and Clemens among the drifting blue wreaths and layers, pacing up and down rather fiercely. He turned, inquiringly, as I entered. I had clipped a cartoon from a morning paper, which pictured him as upsetting the Tsar's throne—the kind of thing he was likely to enjoy. I said:

"Here is something perhaps you may wish to see, Mr. Clemens."

He shook his head violently.

"No, I can't see anything now," and in another moment had disappeared into his own room. Something extraordinary had happened. I wondered if, after all their lifelong friendship, he and Howells had quarreled. I was naturally curious, but it was not a good time to investigate. By and by I went down on the street, where the newsboys were calling extras. When I had bought one, and glanced at the first page, I knew. Gorky had been expelled from his hotel for having brought to America, as his wife, a woman

not so recognized by the American laws. Madame Andreieva, a Russian actress, was a leader in the cause of freedom, and by Russian custom her relation with Gorky was recognized and respected; but it was not sufficiently orthodox for American conventions, and it was certainly unfortunate that an apostle of high purpose should come handicapped in that way. Apparently the news had already reached Howells and Clemens, and they had been feverishly discussing what was best to do about the dinner.

Page 104

Within a day or two Gorky and Madame Andreieva were evicted from a procession of hotels, and of course the papers rang with the head-lines. An army of reporters was chasing Clemens and Howells. The Russian revolution was entirely forgotten in this more lively, more intimate domestic interest. Howells came again, the reporters following and standing guard at the door below. In 'My Mark Twain' he says:

That was the moment of the great Vesuvian eruption, and we figured ourselves in easy reach of a volcano which was every now and then "blowing a cone off," as the telegraphic phrase was. The roof of the great market in Naples had just broken in under its load of ashes and cinders, and crushed hundreds of people; and we asked each other if we were not sorry we had not been there, where the pressure would have been far less terrific than it was with us in Fifth Avenue. The forbidden butler came up with a message that there were some gentlemen below who wanted to see Clemens.

"How many?" he demanded.

"Five," the butler faltered.

"Reporters?"

The butler feigned uncertainty.

"What would you do?" he asked me.

"I wouldn't see them," I said, and then Clemens went directly down to them. How or by what means he appeased their voracity I cannot say, but I fancy it was by the confession of the exact truth, which was harmless enough. They went away joyfully, and he came back in radiant satisfaction with having seen them.

It is not quite clear at this time just what word was sent to Gorky but the matter must have been settled that night, for Clemens was in a fine humor next morning. It was before dictation time, and he came drifting into the study and began at once to speak of the dinner and the impossibility of its being given now. Then he said:

"American public opinion is a delicate fabric. It shrivels like the webs of morning at the lightest touch."

Later in the day he made this memorandum:

Laws can be evaded and punishment escaped, but an openly transgressed custom brings sure punishment. The penalty may be unfair, unrighteous, illogical, and a cruelty; no matter, it will be inflicted just the same. Certainly, then, there can be but one wise thing for a visiting stranger to do—find out what the country's customs are and refrain from offending against them. The efforts which have been made in Gorky's justification are entitled to all respect because of the magnanimity of the motive back of them, but I

think that the ink was wasted. Custom is custom: it is built of brass, boiler-iron, granite; facts, seasonings, arguments have no more effect upon it than the idle winds have upon Gibraltar.—[To Dan Beard he said, “Gorky made an awful mistake, Dan. He might as well have come over here in his shirt-tail.”]

The Gorky disturbance had hardly begun to subside when there came another upheaval that snuffed it out completely. On the afternoon of the 18th of April I heard, at The Players, a wandering telephonic rumor that a great earthquake was going on in San Francisco. Half an hour later, perhaps, I met Clemens coming out of No. 21. He asked:

Page 105

"Have you heard the news about San Francisco?"

I said I had heard a rumor of an earthquake; and had seen an extra with big scare-heads; but I supposed the matter was exaggerated.

"No," he said, "I am afraid it isn't. We have just had a telephone message that it is even worse than at first reported. A great fire is consuming the city. Come along to the news-stand and we'll see if there is a later edition."

We walked to Sixth Avenue and Eighth Street and got some fresh extras. The news was indeed worse, than at first reported. San Francisco was going to destruction. Clemens was moved deeply, and began to recall this old friend and that whose lives and property might be in danger. He spoke of Joe Goodman and the Gillis families, and pictured conditions in the perishing city.

CCXLII

MARK TWAIN'S GOOD-BY TO THE PLATFORM

It was on April 19, 1906, the day following the great earthquake, that Mark Twain gave a "Farewell Lecture" at Carnegie Hall for the benefit of the Robert Fulton Memorial Association. Some weeks earlier Gen. Frederick D. Grant, its president, had proposed to pay one thousand dollars for a Mark Twain lecture; but Clemens' had replied that he was permanently out of the field, and would never again address any audience that had to pay to hear him.

"I always expect to talk as long as I can get people to listen to me," he said, "but I never again expect to charge for it." Later came one of his inspirations, and he wrote: "I will lecture for one thousand dollars, on one condition: that it will be understood to be my farewell lecture, and that I may contribute the thousand dollars to the Fulton Association."

It was a suggestion not to be discouraged, and the bills and notices, "Mark Twain's Farewell Lecture," were published without delay.

I first heard of the matter one afternoon when General Grant had called. Clemens came into the study where I was working; he often wandered in and out-sometimes without a word, sometimes to relieve himself concerning things in general. But this time he suddenly chilled me by saying:

"I'm going to deliver my farewell lecture, and I want you to appear on the stage and help me."

I feebly expressed my pleasure at the prospect. Then he said:



“I am going to lecture on Fulton—on the story of his achievements. It will be a burlesque, of course, and I am going to pretend to forget my facts, and I want you to sit there in a chair. Now and then, when I seem to get stuck, I’ll lean over and pretend to ask you some thing, and I want you to pretend to prompt me. You don’t need to laugh, or to pretend to be assisting in the performance any more than just that.” *Handbill of Mark Twain’s “Farewell lecture”*:

Mark Twain

Will Deliver His Farewell Lecture

Carnegie hall

Page 106

April 19th, 1906

For the benefit of

Robert Fulton Memorial Association

*Military organization old guard in
full dress uniform will be present*

Music by old guard band

*Tickets and boxes on sale at Carnegie hall
and Waldorf-Astoria*

Seats \$1.50, \$1.00, 50 Cents

It was not likely that I should laugh. I had a sinking feeling in the cardiac region which does not go with mirth. It did not for the moment occur to me that the stage would be filled with eminent citizens and vice-presidents, and I had a vision of myself sitting there alone in the chair in that wide emptiness, with the chief performer directing attention to me every other moment or so, for perhaps an hour. Let me hurry on to say that it did not happen. I dare say he realized my unfitness for the work, and the far greater appropriateness of conferring the honor on General Grant, for in the end he gave him the assignment, to my immeasurable relief.

It was a magnificent occasion. That spacious hall was hung with bunting, the stage was banked and festooned with decoration of every sort. General Grant, surrounded by his splendidly uniformed staff, sat in the foreground, and behind was ranged a levee of foremost citizens of the republic. The band played "America" as Mark Twain entered, and the great audience rose and roared out its welcome. Some of those who knew him best had hoped that on this occasion of his last lecture he would tell of that first appearance in San Francisco, forty years before, when his fortunes had hung in the balance. Perhaps he did not think of it, and no one had had the courage to suggest it. At all events, he did a different thing. He began by making a strong plea for the smitten city where the flames were still raging, urging prompt help for those who had lost not only their homes, but the last shred of their belongings and their means of livelihood. Then followed his farcical history of Fulton, with General Grant to make the responses, and presently he drifted into the kind of lecture he had given so often in his long trip around the world-retelling the tales which had won him fortune and friends in many lands.

I do not know whether the entertainment was long or short. I think few took account of time. To a letter of inquiry as to how long the entertainment would last, he had replied:

I cannot say for sure. It is my custom to keep on talking till I get the audience cowed. Sometimes it takes an hour and fifteen minutes, sometimes I can do it in an hour.

There was no indication at any time that the audience was cowed. The house was packed, and the applause was so recurrent and continuous that often his voice was lost to those in its remoter corners. It did not matter. The tales were familiar to his hearers; merely to see Mark Twain, in his old age and in that splendid setting, relating them was enough. The audience realized that it was witnessing the close of a heroic chapter in a unique career.

Page 107

CCXLIII

AN INVESTMENT IN REDDING

Many of the less important happenings seem worth remembering now. Among them was the sale, at the Nast auction, of the Mark Twain letters, already mentioned. The fact that these letters brought higher prices than any others offered in this sale was gratifying. Roosevelt, Grant, and even Lincoln items were sold; but the Mark Twain letters led the list. One of them sold for forty-three dollars, which was said to be the highest price ever paid for the letter of a living man. It was the letter written in 1877, quoted earlier in this work, in which Clemens proposed the lecture tour to Nast. None of the Clemens-Nast letters brought less than twenty-seven dollars, and some of them were very brief. It was a new measurement of public sentiment. Clemens, when he heard of it, said:

“I can’t rise to General Grant’s lofty place in the estimation of this country; but it is a deep satisfaction to me to know that when it comes to letter-writing he can’t sit in the front seat along with me. That forty-three-dollar letter ought to be worth as much as eighty-six dollars after I’m dead.”

A perpetual string of callers came to 21 Fifth Avenue, and it kept the secretary busy explaining to most of them why Mark Twain could not entertain their propositions, or listen to their complaints, or allow them to express in person their views on public questions. He did see a great many of what might be called the milder type persons who were evidently sincere and not too heavily freighted with eloquence. Of these there came one day a very gentle-spoken woman who had promised that she would stay but a moment, and say no more than a few words, if only she might sit face to face with the great man. It was in the morning hour before the dictations, and he received her, quite correctly clad in his beautiful dressing-robe and propped against his pillows. She kept her contract to the letter; but when she rose to go she said, in a voice of deepest reverence:

“May I kiss your hand?”

It was a delicate situation, and might easily have been made ludicrous. Denial would have hurt her. As it was, he lifted his hand, a small, exquisite hand it was, with the gentle dignity and poise of a king, and she touched her lips to it with what was certainly adoration. Then, as she went, she said:

“How God must love you!”

“I hope so,” he said, softly, and he did not even smile; but after she had gone he could not help saying, in a quaint, half-pathetic voice “I guess she hasn’t heard of our strained relations.”

Sitting in that royal bed, clad in that rich fashion, he easily conveyed the impression of royalty, and watching him through those marvelous mornings he seemed never less than a king, as indeed he was—the king of a realm without national boundaries. Some of those nearest to him fell naturally into the habit of referring to him as “the King,” and in time the title crept out of the immediate household and was taken up by others who loved him.

Page 108

He had been more than once photographed in his bed; but it was by those who had come and gone in a brief time, with little chance to study his natural attitudes. I had acquired some knowledge of the camera, and I obtained his permission to let me photograph him—a permission he seldom denied to any one. We had no dictations on Saturdays, and I took the pictures on one of these holiday mornings. He was so patient and tractable, and so natural in every attitude, that it was a delight to make the negatives. I was afraid he would become impatient, and made fewer exposures than I might otherwise have done. I think he expected very little from this amateur performance; but, by that happy element of accident which plays so large a part in photographic success, the results were better than I had hoped for. When I brought him the prints, a few days later, he expressed pleasure and asked, “Why didn’t you make more?”

Among them was one in an attitude which had grown so familiar to us, that of leaning over to get his pipe from the smoking-table, and this seemed to give him particular satisfaction. It being a holiday, he had not donned his dressing-gown, which on the whole was well for the photographic result. He spoke of other pictures that had been made of him, especially denouncing one photograph, taken some twenty years before by Sarony, a picture, as he said, of a gorilla in an overcoat, which the papers and magazines had insisted on using ever since.

“Sarony was as enthusiastic about wild animals as he was about photography, and when Du Chaillu brought over the first gorilla he sent for me to look at it and see if our genealogy was straight. I said it was, and Sarony was so excited that I had recognized the resemblance between us, that he wanted to make it more complete, so he borrowed my overcoat and put it on the gorilla and photographed it, and spread that picture out over the world as mine. It turns up every week in some newspaper or magazine; but it’s not my favorite; I have tried to get it suppressed.”

Mark Twain made his first investment in Redding that spring. I had located there the autumn before, and bought a vacant old house, with a few acres of land, at what seemed a modest price. I was naturally enthusiastic over the bargain, and the beauty and salubrity of the situation. His interest was aroused, and when he learned that there was a place adjoining, equally reasonable and perhaps even more attractive, he suggested immediately that I buy it for him; and he wanted to write a check then for the purchase price, for fear the opportunity might be lost. I think there was then no purpose in his mind of building a country home; but he foresaw that such a site, at no great distance from New York, would become more valuable, and he had plenty of idle means. The purchase was made without difficulty—a tract of seventy-five acres, to which presently was added another tract of one hundred and ten acres, and subsequently still

Page 109

other parcels of land, to complete the ownership of the hilltop, for it was not long until he had conceived the idea of a home. He was getting weary of the heavy pressure of city life. He craved the retirement of solitude—one not too far from the maelstrom, so that he might mingle with it now and then when he chose. The country home would not be begun for another year yet, but the purpose of it was already in the air. No one of the family had at this time seen the location.

CCXLIV

TRAITS AND PHILOSOPHIES

I brought to the dictation one morning the Omar Khayyam card which Twichell had written him so long ago; I had found it among the letters. It furnished him a subject for that morning. He said:

How strange there was a time when I had never heard of Omar Khayyam! When that card arrived I had already read the dozen quatrains or so in the morning paper, and was still steeped in the ecstasy of delight which they occasioned. No poem had ever given me so much pleasure before, and none has given me so much pleasure since. It is the only poem I have ever carried about with me. It has not been from under my hand all these years.

He had no general fondness for poetry; but many poems appealed to him, and on occasion he liked to read them aloud. Once, during the dictation, some verses were sent up by a young authoress who was waiting below for his verdict. The lines pictured a phase of negro life, and she wished to know if he thought them worthy of being read at some Tuskegee ceremony. He did not fancy the idea of attending to the matter just then and said:

"Tell her she can read it. She has my permission. She may commit any crime she wishes in my name."

It was urged that the verses were of high merit and the author a very charming young lady.

"I'm very glad," he said, "and I am glad the Lord made her; I hope He will make some more just like her. I don't always approve of His handiwork, but in this case I do."

Then suddenly he added:

"Well, let me see it—no time like the present to get rid of these things."

He took the manuscript and gave such a rendition of those really fine verses as I believe could not be improved upon. We were held breathless by his dramatic fervor and power. He returned a message to that young aspirant that must have made her heart sing. When the dictation had ended that day, I mentioned his dramatic gift.

“Yes,” he said, “it is a gift, I suppose, like spelling and punctuation and smoking. I seem to have inherited all those.” Continuing, he spoke of inherited traits in general.

Page 110

“There was Paige,” he said; “an ignorant man who could not make a machine himself that would stand up, nor draw the working plans for one; but he invented the eighteen thousand details of the most wonderful machine the world has ever known. He watched over the expert draftsmen, and superintended the building of that marvel. Pratt & Whitney built it; but it was Paige’s machine, nevertheless—the child of his marvelous gift. We don’t create any of our traits; we inherit all of them. They have come down to us from what we impudently call the lower animals. Man is the last expression, and combines every attribute of the animal tribes that preceded him. One or two conspicuous traits distinguish each family of animals from the others, and those one or two traits are found in every member of each family, and are so prominent as to eternally and unchangeably establish the character of that branch of the animal world. In these cases we concede that the several temperaments constitute a law of God, a command of God, and that whatsoever is done in obedience to that law is blameless. Man, in his evolution, inherited the whole sum of these numerous traits, and with each trait its share of the law of God. He widely differs from them in this: that he possesses not a single characteristic that is equally prominent in each member of his race. You can say the housefly is limitlessly brave, and in saying it you describe the whole housefly tribe; you can say the rabbit is limitlessly timid, and by the phrase you describe the whole rabbit tribe; you can say the spider and the tiger are limitlessly murderous, and by that phrase you describe the whole spider and tiger tribes; you can say the lamb is limitlessly innocent and sweet and gentle, and by that phrase you describe all the lambs. There is hardly a creature that you cannot definitely and satisfactorily describe by one single trait—except man. Men are not all cowards like the rabbit, nor all brave like the house-fly, nor all sweet and innocent and gentle like the lamb, nor all murderous like the spider and the tiger and the wasp, nor all thieves like the fox and the bluejay, nor all vain like the peacock, nor all frisky like the monkey. These things are all in him somewhere, and they develop according to the proportion of each he received in his allotment: We describe a man by his vicious traits and condemn him; or by his fine traits and gifts, and praise him and accord him high merit for their possession. It is comical. He did not invent these things; he did not stock himself with them. God conferred them upon him in the first instant of creation. They constitute the law, and he could not escape obedience to the decree any more than Paige could have built the type-setter he invented, or the Pratt & Whitney machinists could have invented the machine which they built.”

He liked to stride up and down, smoking as he talked, and generally his words were slowly measured, with varying pauses between them. He halted in the midst of his march, and without a suggestion of a smile added:

Page 111

“What an amusing creature the human being is!”

It is absolutely impossible, of course, to preserve the atmosphere and personality of such talks as this—the delicacies of his speech and manner which carried an ineffable charm. It was difficult, indeed, to record the substance. I did not know shorthand, and I should not have taken notes at such times in any case; but I had trained myself in similar work to preserve, with a fair degree of accuracy, the form of phrase, and to some extent its wording, if I could get hold of pencil and paper soon enough afterward. In time I acquired a sort of phonographic faculty; though it always seemed to me that the bouquet, the subtleness of speech, was lacking in the result. Sometimes, indeed, he would dictate next morning the substance of these experimental reflections; or I would find among his papers memoranda and fragmentary manuscripts where he had set them down himself, either before or after he had tried them verbally. In these cases I have not hesitated to amend my notes where it seemed to lend reality to his utterance, though, even so, there is always lacking—and must be—the wonder of his personality.

CCXLV

IN THE DAY’S ROUND

A number of dictations of this period were about Susy, her childhood, and the biography she had written of him, most of which he included in his chapters. More than once after such dictations he reproached himself bitterly for the misfortunes of his house. He consoled himself a little by saying that Susy had died at the right time, in the flower of youth and happiness; but he blamed himself for the lack of those things which might have made her childhood still more bright. Once he spoke of the biography she had begun, and added:

“Oh, I wish I had paid more attention to that little girl’s work! If I had only encouraged her now and then, what it would have meant to her, and what a beautiful thing it would have been to have had her story of me told in her own way, year after year! If I had shown her that I cared, she might have gone on with it. We are always too busy for our children; we never give them the time nor the interest they deserve. We lavish gifts upon them; but the most precious gift—our personal association, which means so much to them—we give grudgingly and throw it away on those who care for it so little.” Then, after a moment of silence: “But we are repaid for it at last. There comes a time when we want their company and their interest. We want it more than anything in the world, and we are likely to be starved for it, just as they were starved so long ago. There is no appreciation of my books that is so precious to me as appreciation from my children. Theirs is the praise we want, and the praise we are least likely to get.”

His moods of remorse seemed to overwhelm him at times. He spoke of Henry’s death and little Langdon’s, and charged himself with both. He declared that for years he had

filled Mrs. Clemens's life with privations, that the sorrow of Susy's death had hastened her own end. How darkly he painted it! One saw the jester, who for forty years had been making the world laugh, performing always before a background of tragedy.

Page 112

But such moods were evanescent. He was oftener gay than somber. One morning before we settled down to work he related with apparent joy how he had made a failure of story-telling at a party the night before. An artist had told him a yarn, he said, which he had considered the most amusing thing in the world. But he had not been satisfied with it, and had attempted to improve on it at the party. He had told it with what he considered the nicest elaboration of detail and artistic effect, and when he had concluded and expected applause, only a sickening silence had followed.

"A crowd like that can make a good deal of silence when they combine," he said, "and it probably lasted as long as ten seconds, because it seemed an hour and a half. Then a lady said, with evident feeling, 'Lord, how pathetic!' For a moment I was stupefied. Then the fountains of my great deeps were broken up, and I rained laughter for forty days and forty nights during as much as three minutes. By that time I realized it was my fault. I had overdone the thing. I started in to deceive them with elaborate burlesque pathos, in order to magnify the humorous explosion at the end; but I had constructed such a fog of pathos that when I got to the humor you couldn't find it."

He was likely to begin the morning with some such incident which perhaps he did not think worth while to include in his dictations, and sometimes he interrupted his dictations to relate something aside, or to outline some plan or scheme which his thought had suggested.

Once, when he was telling of a magazine he had proposed to start, the Back Number, which was, to contain reprints of exciting events from history—newspaper gleanings—eye-witness narrations, which he said never lost their freshness of interest—he suddenly interrupted himself to propose that we start such a magazine in the near future—he to be its publisher and I its editor. I think I assented, and the dictation proceeded, but the scheme disappeared permanently.

He usually had a number of clippings or slips among the many books on the bed beside him from which he proposed to dictate each day, but he seldom could find the one most needed. Once, after a feverishly impatient search for a few moments, he invited Miss Hobby to leave the room temporarily, so, as he said, that he might swear. He got up and we began to explore the bed, his profanity increasing amazingly with each moment. It was an enormously large bed, and he began to disparage the size of it.

"One could lose a dog in this bed," he declared.

Finally I suggested that he turn over the clipping which he had in his hand. He did so, and it proved to be the one he wanted. Its discovery was followed by a period of explosions, only half suppressed as to volume. Then he said:

"There ought to be a room in this house to swear in. It's dangerous to have to repress an emotion like that."

Page 113

A moment later, when Miss Hobby returned, he was serene and happy again. He was usually gentle during the dictations, and patient with those around him—remarkably so, I thought, as a rule. But there were moments that involved risk. He had requested me to interrupt his dictation at any time that I found him repeating or contradicting himself, or misstating some fact known to me. At first I hesitated to do this, and cautiously mentioned the matter when he had finished. Then he was likely to say:

“Why didn’t you stop me? Why did you let me go on making a jackass of myself when you could have saved me?”

So then I used to take the risk of getting struck by lightning, and nearly always stopped him at the time. But if it happened that I upset his thought the thunderbolt was apt to fly. He would say:

“Now you’ve knocked everything out of my head.”

Then, of course, I would apologize and say I was sorry, which would rectify matters, though half an hour later it might happen again. I became lightning-proof at last; also I learned better to select the psychological moment for the correction.

There was a humorous complexion to the dictations which perhaps I have not conveyed to the reader at all; humor was his natural breath and life, and was not wholly absent in his most somber intervals.

But poetry was there as well. His presence was full of it: the grandeur of his figure; the grace of his movement; the music of his measured speech. Sometimes there were long pauses when he was wandering in distant valleys of thought and did not speak at all. At such times he had a habit of folding and refolding the sleeve of his dressing-gown around his wrist, regarding it intently, as it seemed. His hands were so fair and shapely; the palms and finger-tips as pink as those of a child. Then when he spoke he was likely to fling back his great, white mane, his eyes half closed yet showing a gleam of fire between the lids, his clenched fist lifted, or his index-finger pointing, to give force and meaning to his words. I cannot recall the picture too often, or remind myself too frequently how precious it was to be there, and to see him and to hear him. I do not know why I have not said before that he smoked continually during these dictations—probably as an aid to thought—though he smoked at most other times, for that matter. His cigars were of that delicious fragrance which characterizes domestic tobacco; but I had learned early to take refuge in another brand when he offered me one. They were black and strong and inexpensive, and it was only his early training in the printing-office and on the river that had seasoned him to tobacco of that temper. Rich, admiring friends used to send him quantities of expensive imported cigars; but he seldom touched them, and they crumbled away or were smoked by visitors. Once, to a minister who proposed to send him something very special, he wrote:

Page 114

I should accept your hospitable offer at once but for the fact that I couldn't do it and remain honest. That is to say, if I allowed you to send me what you believed to be good cigars it would distinctly mean that I meant to smoke them, whereas I should do nothing of the kind. I know a good cigar better than you do, for I have had 60 years' experience. No, that is not what I mean; I mean I know a bad cigar better than anybody else. I judge by the price only; if it costs above 5 cents I know it to be either foreign or half foreign & unsmokable—by me. I have many boxes of Havana cigars, of all prices from 20 cents apiece up to \$1.66 apiece; I bought none of them, they were all presents; they are an accumulation of several years. I have never smoked one of them & never shall; I work them off on the visitor. You shall have a chance when you come.

He smoked a pipe a good deal, and he preferred it to be old and violent; and once, when he had bought a new, expensive English brier-root he regarded it doubtfully for a time, and then handed it over to me, saying:

"I'd like to have you smoke that a year or two, and when it gets so you can't stand it, maybe it will suit me."

I am happy to add that subsequently he presented me with the pipe altogether, for it apparently never seemed to get qualified for his taste, perhaps because the tobacco used was too mild.

One day, after the dictation, word was brought up that a newspaper man was downstairs who wished to see him concerning a report that Chauncey Depew was to resign his Senatorial seat and Mark Twain was to be nominated in his place. The fancy of this appealed to him, and the reporter was allowed to come up. He was a young man, and seemed rather nervous, and did not wish to state where the report had originated. His chief anxiety was apparently to have Mark Twain's comment on the matter. Clemens said very little at the time. He did not wish to be a Senator; he was too busy just now dictating biography, and added that he didn't think he would care for the job, anyway. When the reporter was gone, however, certain humorous possibilities developed. The Senatorship would be a stepping-stone to the Presidency, and with the combination of humorist, socialist, and peace-patriot in the Presidential chair the nation could expect an interesting time. Nothing further came of the matter. There was no such report. The young newspaper man had invented the whole idea to get a "story" out of Mark Twain. The item as printed next day invited a good deal of comment, and Collier's Weekly made it a text for an editorial on his mental vigor and general fitness for the place.

Page 115

If it happened that he had no particular engagement for the afternoon, he liked to walk out, especially when the pleasant weather came. Sometimes we walked up Fifth Avenue, and I must admit that for a good while I could not get rid of a feeling of self-consciousness, for most people turned to look, though I was fully aware that I did not in the least come into their scope of vision. They saw only Mark Twain. The feeling was a more comfortably one at The Players, where we sometimes went for luncheon, for the acquaintance there and the democracy of that institution had a tendency to eliminate contrasts and incongruities. We sat at the Round Table among those good fellows who were always so glad to welcome him.

Once we went to the "Music Master," that tender play of Charles Klein's, given by that matchless interpreter, David Warfield. Clemens was fascinated, and said more than once:

"It is as permanent as 'Rip Van Winkle.' Warfield, like Jefferson, can go on playing it all his life."

We went behind when it was over, and I could see that Warfield glowed with Mark Twain's unstinted approval. Later, when I saw him at The Players, he declared that no former compliment had ever made him so happy.

There were some billiard games going on between the champions Hoppe and Sutton, at the Madison Square Garden, and Clemens, with his eager fondness for the sport, was anxious to attend them. He did not like to go anywhere alone, and one evening he invited me to accompany him. Just as he stepped into the auditorium there was a vigorous round of applause. The players stopped, somewhat puzzled, for no especially brilliant shot had been made. Then they caught the figure of Mark Twain and realized that the game, for the moment, was not the chief attraction. The audience applauded again, and waved their handkerchiefs. Such a tribute is not often paid to a private citizen.

Clemens had a great admiration for the young champion Hoppe, which the billiardist's extreme youth and brilliancy invited, and he watched his game with intense eagerness. When it was over the referee said a few words and invited Mark Twain to speak. He rose and told them a story-probably invented on the instant. He said:

"Once in Nevada I dropped into a billiard-room casually, and picked up a cue and began to knock the balls around. The proprietor, who was a red-haired man, with such hair as I have never seen anywhere except on a torch, asked me if I would like to play. I said, 'Yes.' He said, 'Knock the balls around a little and let me see how you can shoot.' So I knocked them around, and thought I was doing pretty well, when he said, 'That's all right; I'll play you left-handed.' It hurt my pride, but I played him. We banked for the shot and he won it. Then he commenced to play, and I commenced to chalk my cue to

get ready to play, and he went on playing, and I went on chalking my cue; and he played and I chalked all through that game. When he had run his string out I said:

“That’s wonderful! perfectly wonderful! If you can play that way left-handed what could you do right-handed?”

Page 116

“‘Couldn’t do anything,’ he said. ‘I’m a left-handed man.’”

How it delighted them! I think it was the last speech of any sort he made that season. A week or two later he went to Dublin, New Hampshire, for the summer—this time to the Upton House, which had been engaged a year before, the Copley Greene place being now occupied by its owner.

CCXLVI

THE SECOND SUMMER AT DUBLIN

The Upton House stands on the edge of a beautiful beech forest some two or three miles from Dublin, just under Monadnock—a good way up the slope. It is a handsome, roomy frame-house, and had a long colonnaded veranda overlooking one of the most beautiful landscape visions on the planet: lake, forest, hill, and a far range of blue mountains—all the handiwork of God is there. I had seen these things in paintings, but I had not dreamed that such a view really existed. The immediate foreground was a grassy slope, with ancient, blooming apple-trees; and just at the right hand Monadnock rose, superb and lofty, sloping down to the panorama below that stretched away, taking on an ever deeper blue, until it reached that remote range on which the sky rested and the world seemed to end. It was a masterpiece of the Greater Mind, and of the highest order, perhaps, for it had in it nothing of the touch of man. A church spire glinted here and there, but there was never a bit of field, or stone wall, or cultivated land. It was lonely; it was unfriendly; it cared nothing whatever for humankind; it was as if God, after creating all the world, had wrought His masterwork here, and had been so engrossed with the beauty of it that He had forgotten to give it a soul. In a sense this was true, for He had not made the place suitable for the habitation of men. It lacked the human touch; the human interest, and I could never quite believe in its reality.

The time of arrival heightened this first impression. It was mid-May and the lilacs were prodigally in bloom; but the bright sunlight was chill and unnatural, and there was a west wind that laid the grass flat and moaned through the house, and continued as steadily as if it must never stop from year’s end to year’s end. It seemed a spectral land, a place of supernatural beauty. Warm, still, languorous days would come, but that first feeling of unreality would remain permanent. I believe Jean Clemens was the only one who ever really loved the place. Something about it appealed to her elemental side and blended with her melancholy moods. She dressed always in white, and she was tall and pale and classically beautiful, and she was often silent, like a spirit. She had a little retreat for herself farther up the mountain-side, and spent most of her days there wood-carving, which was her chief diversion.

Page 117

Clara Clemens did not come to the place at all. She was not yet strong, and went to Norfolk, Connecticut, where she could still be in quiet retirement and have her physician's care. Miss Hobby came, and on the 21st of May the dictations were resumed. We began in his bedroom, as before, but the feeling there was depressing—the absence of the great carved bed and other furnishings, which had been so much a part of the picture, was felt by all of us. Nothing of the old luxury and richness was there. It was a summer-furnished place, handsome but with the customary bareness. At the end of this first session he dressed in his snowy flannels, which he had adopted in the place of linen for summer wear, and we descended to the veranda and looked out over that wide, wonderful expanse of scenery.

"I think I shall like it," he said, "when I get acquainted with it, and get it classified and labeled, and I think we'll do our dictating out here hereafter. It ought to be an inspiring place."

So the dictations were transferred to the long veranda, and he was generally ready for them, a white figure pacing up and down before that panoramic background. During the earlier, cooler weeks he usually continued walking with measured step during the dictations, pausing now and then to look across the far-lying horizon. When it stormed we moved into the great living-room, where at one end there was a fireplace with blazing logs, and at the other the orchestrelle, which had once more been freighted up those mountain heights for the comfort of its harmonies. Sometimes, when the wind and rain were beating outside, and he was striding up and down the long room within, with only the blurred shapes of mountains and trees outlined through the trailing rain, the feeling of the unreality became so strong that it was hard to believe that somewhere down below, beyond the rain and the woods, there was a literal world—a commonplace world, where the ordinary things of life were going on in the usual way. When the dictation finished early, there would be music—the music that he loved most—Beethoven's symphonies, or the Schubert impromptu, or the sonata by Chopin.—[Schubert, Op. 142, No. 2; Chopin, Op. 37, No. 2.]—It is easy to understand that this carried one a remove farther from the customary things of life. It was a setting far out of the usual, though it became that unique white figure and his occupation. In my notes, made from day to day, I find that I have set down more than once an impression of the curious unreality of the place and its surroundings, which would show that it was not a mere passing fancy.

Page 118

I had lodgings in the village, and drove out mornings for the dictations, but often came out again afoot on pleasant afternoons; for he was not much occupied with social matters, and there was opportunity for quiet, informing interviews. There was a woods path to the Upton place, and it was a walk through a fairyland. A part of the way was through such a growth of beech timber as I have never seen elsewhere: tall, straight, mottled trees with an undergrowth of laurel, the sunlight sifting through; one found it easy to expect there storybook ladies, wearing crowns and green mantles, riding on white palfreys. Then came a more open way, an abandoned grass-grown road full of sunlight and perfume; and this led to a dim, religious place, a natural cathedral, where the columns were stately pine-trees branching and meeting at the top: a veritable temple in which it always seemed that music was about to play. You crossed a brook and climbed a little hill, and pushed through a hedge into a place more open, and the house stood there among the trees.

The days drifted along, one a good deal like another, except, as the summer deepened, the weather became warmer, the foliage changed, a drowsy haze gathered along the valleys and on the mountain-side. He sat more often now in a large rocking-chair, and generally seemed to be looking through half-dosed lids toward the Monadnock heights, that were always changing in aspect-in color and in form—as cloud shapes drifted by or gathered in those lofty hollows. White and yellow butterflies hovered over the grass, and there were some curious, large black ants—the largest I have ever seen and quite harmless—that would slip in and out of the cracks on the veranda floor, wholly undisturbed by us. Now and then a light flutter of wind would come murmuring up from the trees below, and when the apple-bloom was falling there would be a whirl of white and pink petals that seemed a cloud of smaller butterflies.

On June 1st I find in my note-book this entry:

Warm and pleasant. The dictation about Grant continues; a great privilege to hear this foremost man, of letters review his associations with that foremost man of arms. He remained seated today, dressed in white as usual, a large yellow pansy in his buttonhole, his white hair ruffled by the breeze. He wears his worn morocco slippers with black hose; sits in the rocker, smoking and looking out over the hazy hills, delivering his sentences with a measured accuracy that seldom calls for change. He is speaking just now of a Grant dinner which he attended where Depew spoke. One is impressed with the thought that we are looking at and listening to the war-worn veteran of a thousand dinners—the honored guest of many; an honored figure of all. Earlier, when he had been chastising some old offender, he added, “However, he’s dead, and I forgive him.” Then, after a moment’s reflection, “No; strike that last sentence out.”

Page 119

When we laughed, he added, "We can't forgive him yet."

A few days later—it was June 4th, the day before the second anniversary of the death of Mrs. Clemens—we found him at first in excellent humor from the long dictation of the day before. Then his mind reverted to the tragedy of the season, and he began trying to tell of it. It was hard work. He walked back and forth in the soft sunlight, saying almost nothing. He gave it up at last, remarking, "We will not work to-morrow." So we went away.

He did not dictate on the 5th or the 6th, but on the 7th he resumed the story of Mrs. Clemens's last days at Florence. The weather had changed: the sunlight and warmth had all gone; a chill, penetrating mist was on the mountains; Monadnock was blotted out. We expected him to go to the fire, but evidently he could not bear being shut in with that subject in his mind. A black cape was brought out and thrown about his shoulders, which seemed to fit exactly into the somberness of the picture. For two hours or more we sat there in the gloom and chill, while he paced up and down, detailing as graphically as might be that final chapter in the life of the woman he had loved.

It is hardly necessary to say that beyond the dictation Clemens did very little literary work during these months. He had brought his "manuscript trunk" as usual, thinking, perhaps, to finish the "microbe" story and other of the uncompleted things; but the dictation gave him sufficient mental exercise, and he did no more than look over his "stock in trade," as he called it, and incorporate a few of the finished manuscripts into "autobiography." Among these were the notes of his trip down the Rhone, made in 1891, and the old Stormfield story, which he had been treasuring and suppressing so long. He wrote Howells in June:

The dictating goes lazily and pleasantly on. With intervals. I find that I've been at it, off & on, nearly two hours for 155 days since January 9. To be exact, I've dictated 75 hours in 80 days & loafed 75 days. I've added 60,000 words in the month that I've been here; which indicates that I've dictated during 20 days of that time—40 hours, at an average of 1,500 words an hour. It's a plenty, & I'm satisfied.

There's a good deal of "fat." I've dictated (from January 9) 210,000 words, & the "fat" adds about 50,000 more.

The "fat" is old pigeonholed things of the years gone by which I or editors didn't das't to print. For instance, I am dumping in the little old book which I read to you in Hartford about 30 years ago & which you said "publish & ask Dean Stanley to furnish an introduction; he'll do it" (Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven). It reads quite to suit me without altering a word now that it isn't to see print until I am dead. To-morrow I mean to

dictate a chapter which will get my heirs & assigns burned alive if they venture to print it this side of A.D. 2006—which

Page 120

I judge they won't. There'll be lots of such chapters if I live 3 or 4 years longer. The edition of A.D. 2006 will make a stir when it comes out. I shall be hovering around taking notice, along with other dead pals. You are invited.

The chapter which was to invite death at the stake for his successors was naturally one of religious heresies a violent attack on the orthodox, scriptural God, but really an expression of the highest reverence for the God which, as he said, had created the earth and sky and the music of the constellations. Mark Twain once expressed himself concerning reverence and the lack of it:

"I was never consciously and purposely irreverent in my life, yet one person or another is always charging me with a lack of reverence. Reverence for what—for whom? Who is to decide what ought to command my reverence—my neighbor or I? I think I ought to do the electing myself. The Mohammedan reveres Mohammed—it is his privilege; the Christian doesn't—apparently that is his privilege; the account is square enough. They haven't any right to complain of the other, yet they do complain of each other, and that is where the unfairness comes in. Each says that the other is irreverent, and both are mistaken, for manifestly you can't have reverence for a thing that doesn't command it. If you could do that you could digest what you haven't eaten, and do other miracles and get a reputation."

He was not reading many books at this time—he was inclined rather to be lazy, as he said, and to loaf during the afternoons; but I remember that he read aloud 'After the Wedding' and 'The Mother'—those two beautiful word-pictures by Howells—which he declared sounded the depths of humanity with a deep-sea lead. Also he read a book by William Allen White, 'In Our Town', a collection of tales that he found most admirable. I think he took the trouble to send White a personal, hand-written letter concerning them, although, with the habit of dictation, he had begun, as he said, to "loathe the use of the pen."

There were usually some sort of mild social affairs going on in the neighborhood, luncheons and afternoon gatherings like those of the previous year, though he seems to have attended fewer of them, for he did not often leave the house. Once, at least, he assisted in an afternoon entertainment at the Dublin Club, where he introduced his invention of the art of making an impromptu speech, and was assisted in its demonstration by George de Forest Brush and Joseph Lindon Smith, to the very great amusement of a crowd of summer visitors. The "art" consisted mainly of having on hand a few reliable anecdotes and a set formula which would lead directly to them from any given subject.

Twice or more he collected the children of the neighborhood for charades and rehearsed them, and took part in the performance, as in the Hartford days. Sometimes he drove out or took an extended walk. But these things were seldom.

Page 121

Now and then during the summer he made a trip to New York of a semi-business nature, usually going by the way of Fairhaven, where he would visit for a few days, journeying the rest of the way in Mr. Rogers's yacht. Once they made a cruise of considerable length to Bar Harbor and elsewhere. Here is an amusing letter which he wrote to Mrs. Rogers after such a visit:

Dear Mrs. Rogers,—In packing my things in your house yesterday morning I inadvertently put in some articles that was laying around, I thinking about theology & not noticing, the way this family does in similar circumstances like these. Two books, Mr. Rogers' brown slippers, & a ham. I thought it was oun, it looks like one we used to have. I am very sorry it happened, but it sha'n't occur again & don't you worry. He will temper the wind to the shorn lamb & I will send some of the things back anyway if there is some that won't keep.

CCXLVI

DUBLIN, CONTINUED

In time Mark Twain became very lonely in Dublin. After the brilliant winter the contrast was too great. He was not yet ready for exile. In one of his dictations he said:

The skies are enchantingly blue. The world is a dazzle of sunshine. Monadnock is closer to us than usual by several hundred yards. The vast extent of spreading valley is intensely green—the lakes as intensely blue. And there is a new horizon, a remoter one than we have known before, for beyond the mighty half-circle of hazy mountains that form the usual frame of the picture rise certain shadowy great domes that are unfamiliar to our eyesBut there is a defect—only one, but it is a defect which almost entitles it to be spelled with a capital D. This is the defect of loneliness. We have not a single neighbor who is a neighbor. Nobody lives within two miles of us except Franklin MacVeagh, and he is the farthest off of any, because he is in EuropeI feel for Adam and Eve now, for I know how it was with them. I am existing, broken-hearted, in a Garden of Eden.... The Garden of Eden I now know was an unendurable solitude. I know that the advent of the serpent was a welcome change—anything for societyI never rose to the full appreciation of the utter solitude of this place until a symbol of it—a compact and visible allegory of it —furnished me the lacking lift three days ago. I was standing alone on this veranda, in the late afternoon, mourning over the stillness, the far-spreading, beautiful desolation, and the absence of visible life, when a couple of shapely and graceful deer came sauntering across the grounds and stopped, and at their leisure impudently looked me over, as if they had an idea of buying me as bric-a-brac. Then they seemed to conclude that they could do better for less money elsewhere, and they sauntered

Page 122

indolently away and disappeared among the trees. It sized up this solitude. It is so complete, so perfect, that even the wild animals are satisfied with it. Those dainty creatures were not in the least degree afraid of me.

This was no more than a mood—though real enough while it lasted—somber, and in its way regal. It was the loneliness of a king—King Lear. Yet he returned gladly enough to solitude after each absence.

It was just before one of his departures that I made another set of pictures of him, this time on the colonnaded veranda, where his figure had become so familiar. He had determined to have his hair cut when he reached New York, and I was anxious to get the pictures before this happened. When the proofs came seven of them—he arranged them as a series to illustrate what he called “The Progress of a Moral Purpose.” He ordered a number of sets of this series, and he wrote a legend on each photograph, numbering them from 1 to 7, laying each set in a sheet of letter-paper which formed a sort of wrapper, on which was written:

This series of q photographs registers with scientific precision, stage by stage, the progress of a moral purpose through the mind of the human race’s Oldest Friend. S. L. C.

He added a personal inscription, and sent one to each of his more intimate friends. One of the pictures amused him more than the others, because during the exposure a little kitten, unnoticed, had walked into it, and paused near his foot. He had never outgrown his love for cats, and he had rented this kitten and two others for the summer from a neighbor. He didn’t wish to own them, he said, for then he would have to leave them behind uncared for, so he preferred to rent them and pay sufficiently to insure their subsequent care. These kittens he called Sackcloth and Ashes—Ashes being the joint name of the two that looked exactly alike, and so did not need distinctive titles. Their gambols always amused him. He would stop any time in the midst of dictation to enjoy them. Once, as he was about to enter the screen-door that led into the hall, two of the kittens ran up in front of him and stood waiting. With grave politeness he opened the door, made a low bow, and stepped back and said: “Walk in, gentlemen. I always give precedence to royalty.” And the kittens marched in, tails in air. All summer long they played up and down the wide veranda, or chased grasshoppers and butterflies down the clover slope. It was a never-ending amusement to him to see them jump into the air after some insect, miss it and tumble back, and afterward jump up, with a surprised expression and a look of disappointment and disgust. I remember once, when he was walking up and down discussing some very serious subject—and one of the kittens was lying on the veranda asleep—a butterfly came drifting along three feet or so above the floor. The kitten must have got a glimpse of the insect out of the corner

Page 123

of its eye, and perhaps did not altogether realize its action. At all events, it suddenly shot straight up into the air, exactly like a bounding rubber ball, missed the butterfly, fell back on the porch floor with considerable force and with much surprise. Then it sprang to its feet, and, after spitting furiously once or twice, bounded away. Clemens had seen the performance, and it completely took his subject out of his mind. He laughed extravagantly, and evidently cared more for that moment's entertainment than for many philosophies.

In that remote solitude there was one important advantage—there was no procession of human beings with axes to grind, and few curious callers. Occasionally an automobile would find its way out there and make a circuit of the drive, but this happened too seldom to annoy him. Even newspaper men rarely made the long trip from Boston or New York to secure his opinions, and when they came it was by permission and appointment. Newspaper telegrams arrived now and then, asking for a sentiment on some public condition or event, and these he generally answered willingly enough. When the British Premier, Campbell-Bannerman, celebrated his seventieth birthday, the London Tribune and the New York Herald requested a tribute. He furnished it, for Bannerman was a very old friend. He had known him first at Marienbad in '91, and in Vienna in '98, in daily intercourse, when they had lived at the same hotel. His tribute ran:

To his excellency the British Premier,—Congratulations, not condolences. Before seventy we are merely respected, at best, and we have to behave all the time, or we lose that asset; but after seventy we are respected, esteemed, admired, revered, and don't have to behave unless we want to. When I first knew you, Honored Sir, one of us was hardly even respected.

Mark Twain.

He had some misgivings concerning the telegram after it had gone, but he did not recall it.

Clemens became the victim of a very clever hoax that summer. One day a friend gave him two examples of the most deliciously illiterate letters, supposed to have been written by a woman who had contributed certain articles of clothing to the San Francisco sufferers, and later wished to recall them because of the protests of her household. He was so sure that the letters were genuine that he included them in his dictations, after reading them aloud with great effect. To tell the truth, they did seem the least bit too well done, too literary in their illiteracy; but his natural optimism refused to admit of any suspicion, and a little later he incorporated one of the Jennie Allen letters in a speech which he made at a Press Club dinner in New York on the subject of simplified spelling—offering it as an example of language with phonetic brevity exercising its supreme function, the direct conveyance of ideas. The letters, in the end, proved to be the clever

work of Miss Grace Donworth, who has since published them serially and in book form. Clemens was not at all offended or disturbed by the exposure. He even agreed to aid the young author in securing a publisher, and wrote to Miss Stockbridge, through whom he had originally received the documents:

Page 124

Dear miss Stockbridge (if she really exists),

257 Benefit Street (if there is any such place):

Yes, I should like a copy of that other letter. This whole fake is delightful; & I tremble with fear that you are a fake yourself & that I am your guileless prey. (But never mind, it isn't any matter.)

Now as to publication——

He set forth his views and promised his assistance when enough of the letters should be completed.

Clemens allowed his name to be included with the list of spelling reformers, but he never employed any of the reforms in his letters or writing. His interest was mainly theoretical, and when he wrote or spoke on the subject his remarks were not likely to be testimonials in its favor. His own theory was that the alphabet needed reform, first of all, so that each letter or character should have one sound, and one sound only; and he offered as a solution of this an adaptation of shorthand. He wrote and dictated in favor of this idea to the end of his life. Once he said:

“Our alphabet is pure insanity. It can hardly spell any large word in the English language with any degree of certainty. Its sillinesses are quite beyond enumeration. English orthography may need reforming and simplifying, but the English alphabet needs it a good many times as much.”

He would naturally favor simplicity in anything. I remember him reading, as an example of beautiful English, *The Death of King Arthur*, by Sir Thomas Malory, and his verdict:

“That is one of the most beautiful things ever written in English, and written when we had no vocabulary.”

“A vocabulary, then, is sometimes a handicap?”

“It is indeed.”

Still I think it was never a handicap with him, but rather the plumage of flight. Sometimes, when just the right word did not come, he would turn his head a little at different angles, as if looking about him for the precise term. He would find it directly, and it was invariably the word needed. Most writers employ, now and again, phrases that do not sharply present the idea—that blur the picture like a poor opera-glass. Mark Twain's English always focused exactly.

CCXLVIII

"What is man?" And the autobiography

Clemens decided to publish anonymously, or, rather, to print privately, the Gospel, which he had written in Vienna some eight years before and added to from time to time. He arranged with Frank Doubleday to take charge of the matter, and the De Vinne Press was engaged to do the work. The book was copyrighted in the name of J. W. Bothwell, the superintendent of the De Vinne company, and two hundred and fifty numbered copies were printed on hand-made paper, to be gradually distributed to intimate friends. —[In an introductory word (dated February, 1905) the author

Page 125

states that the studies for these papers had been made twenty-five or twenty-seven years before. He probably referred to the Monday Evening Club essay, "What Is Happiness?" (February, 1883). See chap. cxli.]—A number of the books were sent to newspaper reviewers, and so effectually had he concealed the personality of his work that no critic seems to have suspected the book's authorship. It was not over-favorably received. It was generally characterized as a clever, and even brilliant, expose of philosophies which were no longer startlingly new. The supremacy of self-interest and "man the irresponsible machine" are the main features of 'What Is Man' and both of these and all the rest are comprehended in his wider and more absolute doctrine of that inevitable life-sequence which began with the first created spark. There can be no training of the ideals, "upward and still upward," no selfishness and unselfishness, no atom of voluntary effort within the boundaries of that conclusion. Once admitting the postulate, that existence is merely a sequence of cause and effect beginning with the primal atom, and we have a theory that must stand or fall as a whole. We cannot say that man is a creature of circumstance and then leave him free to select his circumstance, even in the minutest fractional degree. It was selected for him with his disposition; in that first instant of created life. Clemens himself repeatedly emphasized this doctrine, and once, when it was suggested to him that it seemed to "surround every thing, like the sky," he answered:

"Yes, like the sky; you can't break through anywhere."

Colonel Harvey came to Dublin that summer and persuaded Clemens to let him print some selections from the dictations in the new volume of the North American Review, which he proposed to issue fortnightly. The matter was discussed a good deal, and it was believed that one hundred thousand words could be selected which would be usable forthwith, as well as in that long-deferred period for which it was planned. Colonel Harvey agreed to take a copy of the dictated matter and make the selections himself, and this plan was carried out. It may be said that most of the chapters were delightful enough; though, had it been possible to edit them with the more positive documents as a guide, certain complications might have been avoided. It does not matter now, and it was not a matter of very wide import then.

The payment of these chapters netted Clemens thirty thousand dollars—a comfortable sum, which he promptly proposed to spend in building on the property at Redding. He engaged John Mead Howells to prepare some preliminary plans.

Clara Clemens, at Norfolk, was written to of the matter.

A little later I joined her in Redding, and she was the first of the family to see that beautiful hilltop. She was well pleased with the situation, and that day selected the spot

where the house should stand. Clemens wrote Howells that he proposed to call it “Autobiography House,” as it was to be built out of the Review money, and he said:

Page 126

"If you will build on my farm and live there it will set Mrs. Howells's health up for sure. Come and I'll sell you the site for twenty-five dollars. John will tell you it is a choice place."

The unusual summer was near its close. In my notebook, under date of September 16th, appears this entry:

Windy in valleys but not cold. This veranda is protected. It is peaceful here and perfect, but we are at the summer's end.

This is my last entry, and the dictations must have ceased a few days later. I do not remember the date of the return to New York, and apparently I made no record of it; but I do not think it could have been later than the 20th. It had been four months since the day of arrival, a long, marvelous summer such as I would hardly know again. When I think of that time I shall always hear the ceaseless slippered, shuffling walk, and see the white figure with its rocking, rolling movement passing up and down the long gallery, with that preternaturally beautiful landscape behind, and I shall hear his deliberate speech—always deliberate, save at rare intervals; always impressive, whatever the subject might be; whether recalling some old absurdity of youth, or denouncing orthodox creeds, or detailing the shortcomings of human-kind.

CCXLIX

BILLIARDS

The return to New York marked the beginning of a new era in my relations with Mark Twain. I have not meant to convey up to this time that there was between us anything resembling a personal friendship. Our relations were friendly, certainly, but they were relations of convenience and mainly of a business, or at least of a literary nature. He was twenty-six years my senior, and the discrepancy of experience and attainments was not measurable. With such conditions friendship must be a deliberate growth; something there must be to bridge the dividing gulf. Truth requires the confession that, in this case, the bridge took a very solid, material form, it being, in fact, nothing less than a billiard-table.—[Clemens had been without a billiard-table since 1891, the old one having been disposed of on the departure from Hartford.]

It was a present from Mrs. Henry H. Rogers, and had been intended for his Christmas; but when he heard of it he could not wait, and suggested delicately that if he had it "right now" he could begin using it sooner. So he went one day with Mr. Rogers to the Balke-Collender Company, and they selected a handsome combination table suitable to all games—the best that money could buy. He was greatly excited over the prospect, and his former bedroom was carefully measured, to be certain that it was large enough for billiard purposes. Then his bed was moved into the study, and the bookcases and

certain appropriate pictures were placed and hung in the billiard-room to give it the proper feeling.

The billiard-table arrived and was put in place, the brilliant green cloth in contrast with the rich red wallpaper and the bookbindings and pictures making the room wonderfully handsome and inviting.

Page 127

Meantime, Clemens, with one of his sudden impulses, had conceived the notion of spending the winter in Egypt, on the Nile. He had gone so far, within a few hours after the idea developed, as to plan the time of his departure, and to partially engage a traveling secretary, so that he might continue his dictations. He was quite full of the idea just at the moment when the billiard table was being installed. He had sent for a book on the subject—the letters of Lady Duff-Gordon, whose daughter, Janet Ross, had become a dear friend in Florence during the Viviani days. He spoke of this new purpose on the morning when we renewed the New York dictations, a month or more following the return from Dublin. When the dictation ended he said:

“Have you any special place to lunch to-day?”

I replied that I had not.

“Lunch here,” he said, “and we’ll try the new billiard-table.”

I said what was eminently true—that I could not play—that I had never played more “than a few games of pool, and those very long ago.

“No matter,” he answered; “the poorer you play, the better I shall like it.”

So I remained for luncheon and we began, November 2d, the first game ever played on the Christmas table. We played the English game, in which caroms and pockets both count. I had a beginner’s luck, on the whole, and I remember it as a riotous, rollicking game, the beginning of a closer understanding between us—of a distinct epoch in our association. When it was ended he said:

“I’m not going to Egypt. There was a man here yesterday afternoon who said it was bad for bronchitis, and, besides, it’s too far away from this billiard-table.”

He suggested that I come back in the evening and play some more. I did so, and the game lasted until after midnight. He gave me odds, of course, and my “nigger luck,” as he called it, continued. It kept him sweating and swearing feverishly to win. Finally, once I made a great fluke—a carom, followed by most of the balls falling into the pockets.

“Well,” he said, “when you pick up that cue this damn table drips at every pore.”

After that the morning dictations became a secondary interest. Like a boy, he was looking forward to the afternoon of play, and it never seemed to come quick enough to suit him. I remained regularly for luncheon, and he was inclined to cut the courses short, that he might the sooner get up-stairs to the billiard-room. His earlier habit of not eating in the middle of the day continued; but he would get up and dress, and walk about the dining-room in his old fashion, talking that marvelous, marvelous talk which I was always trying to remember, and with only fractional success at best. To him it was

only a method of killing time. I remember once, when he had been discussing with great earnestness the Japanese question, he suddenly noticed that the luncheon was about ending, and he said:

Page 128

“Now we’ll proceed to more serious matters—it’s your—shot.” And he was quite serious, for the green cloth and the rolling balls afforded him a much larger interest.

To the donor of his new possession Clemens wrote:

Dear Mrs. Rogers,—The billiard-table is better than the doctors. I have a billiardist on the premises, & walk not less than ten miles every day with the cue in my hand. And the walking is not the whole of the exercise, nor the most health giving part of it, I think. Through the multitude of the positions and attitudes it brings into play every muscle in the body & exercises them all. The games begin right after luncheons, daily, & continue until midnight, with 2 hours’ intermission for dinner & music. And so it is 9 hours’ exercise per day & 10 or 12 on Sunday. Yesterday & last night it was 12—& I slept until 8 this morning without waking. The billiard-table as a Sabbath-breaker can beat any coal-breaker in Pennsylvania & give it 30 in the game. If Mr. Rogers will take to daily billiards he can do without the doctors & the masseur, I think.

We are really going to build a house on my farm, an hour & a half from New York. It is decided.

With love & many thanks.
S. L. C.

Naturally enough, with continued practice I improved my game, and he reduced my odds accordingly. He was willing to be beaten, but not too often. Like any other boy, he preferred to have the balance in his favor. We set down a record of the games, and he went to bed happier if the tally-sheet showed him winner.

It was natural, too, that an intimacy of association and of personal interest should grow under such conditions—to me a precious boon—and I wish here to record my own boundless gratitude to Mrs. Rogers for her gift, which, whatever it meant to him, meant so much more to me. The disparity of ages no longer existed; other discrepancies no longer mattered. The pleasant land of play is a democracy where such things do not count.

To recall all the humors and interesting happenings of those early billiard-days would be to fill a large volume. I can preserve no more than a few characteristic phases.

He was not an even-tempered player. When the balls were perverse in their movements and his aim unsteady, he was likely to become short with his opponent—critical and even fault-finding. Then presently a reaction would set in, and he would be seized with remorse. He would become unnecessarily gentle and kindly—even attentive—placing the balls as I knocked them into the pockets, hurrying from one end of the table to render this service, endeavoring to show in every way except by actual

confession in words that he was sorry for what seemed to him, no doubt, an unworthy display of temper, unjustified irritation.

Naturally, this was a mood that I enjoyed less than that which had induced it. I did not wish him to humble himself; I was willing that he should be severe, even harsh, if he felt so inclined; his age, his position, his genius entitled him to special privileges; yet I am glad, as I remember it now, that the other side revealed itself, for it completes the sum of his great humanity.

Page 129

Indeed, he was always not only human, but superhuman; not only a man, but superman. Nor does this term apply only to his psychology. In no other human being have I ever seen such physical endurance. I was comparatively a young man, and by no means an invalid; but many a time, far in the night, when I was ready to drop with exhaustion, he was still as fresh and buoyant and eager for the game as at the moment of beginning. He smoked and smoked continually, and followed the endless track around the billiard-table with the light step of youth. At three or four o'clock in the morning he would urge just one more game, and would taunt me for my weariness. I can truthfully testify that never until the last year of his life did he willingly lay down the billiard-cue, or show the least suggestion of fatigue.

He played always at high pressure. Now and then, in periods of adversity, he would fly into a perfect passion with things in general. But, in the end, it was a sham battle, and he saw the uselessness and humor of it, even in the moment of his climax. Once, when he found it impossible to make any of his favorite shots, he became more and more restive, the lightning became vividly picturesque as the clouds blackened. Finally, with a regular thunder-blast, he seized the cue with both hands and literally mowed the balls across the table, landing one or two of them on the floor. I do not recall his exact remarks during the performance; I was chiefly concerned in getting out of the way, and those sublime utterances were lost. I gathered up the balls and we went on playing as if nothing had happened, only he was very gentle and sweet, like the sun on the meadows after the storm has passed by. After a little he said:

"This is a most amusing game. When you play badly it amuses me, and when I play badly and lose my temper it certainly must amuse you."

His enjoyment of his opponent's perplexities was very keen. When he had left the balls in some unfortunate position which made it almost impossible for me to score he would laugh boisterously. I used to affect to be injured and disturbed by this ridicule. Once, when he had made the conditions unusually hard for me, and was enjoying the situation accordingly, I was tempted to remark:

"Whenever I see you laugh at a thing like that I always doubt your sense of humor." Which seemed to add to his amusement.

Sometimes, when the balls were badly placed for me, he would offer ostensible advice, suggesting that I should shoot here and there—shots that were possible, perhaps, but not promising. Often I would follow his advice, and then when I failed to score his amusement broke out afresh.

Page 130

Other billiardists came from time to time: Colonel Harvey, Mr. Duneka, and Major Leigh, of the Harper Company, and Peter Finley Dunne (Mr. Dooley); but they were handicapped by their business affairs, and were not dependable for daily and protracted sessions. Any number of his friends were willing, even eager, to come for his entertainment; but the percentage of them who could and would devote a number of hours each day to being beaten at billiards and enjoy the operation dwindled down to a single individual. Even I could not have done it—could not have afforded it, however much I might have enjoyed the diversion—had it not been contributory to my work. To me the association was invaluable; it drew from him a thousand long-forgotten incidents; it invited a stream of picturesque comments and philosophies; it furnished the most intimate insight into his character.

He was not always glad to see promiscuous callers, even some one that he might have met pleasantly elsewhere. One afternoon a young man whom he had casually invited to “drop in some day in town” happened to call in the midst of a very close series of afternoon games. It would all have been well enough if the visitor had been content to sit quietly on the couch and “bet on the game,” as Clemens suggested, after the greetings were over; but he was a very young man, and he felt the necessity of being entertaining. He insisted on walking about the room and getting in the way, and on talking about the Mark Twain books he had read, and the people he had met from time to time who had known Mark Twain on the river, or on the Pacific coast, or elsewhere. I knew how fatal it was for him to talk to Clemens during his play, especially concerning matters most of which had been laid away. I trembled for our visitor. If I could have got his ear privately I should have said: “For heaven’s sake sit down and keep still or go away! There’s going to be a combination of earthquake and cyclone and avalanche if you keep this thing up.”

I did what I could. I looked at my watch every other minute. At last, in desperation, I suggested that I retire from the game and let the visitor have my cue. I suppose I thought this would eliminate an element of danger. He declined on the ground that he seldom played, and continued his deadly visit. I have never been in an atmosphere so fraught with danger. I did not know how the game stood, and I played mechanically and forgot to count the score. Clemens’s face was grim and set and savage. He no longer ventured even a word. By and by I noticed that he was getting white, and I said, privately, “Now, this young man’s hour has come.”

It was certainly by the mercy of God just then that the visitor said:

“I’m sorry, but I’ve got to go. I’d like to stay longer, but I’ve got an engagement for dinner.”

I don’t remember how he got out, but I know that tons lifted as the door closed behind him. Clemens made his shot, then very softly said:

Page 131

"If he had stayed another five minutes I should have offered him twenty-five cents to go."

But a moment later he glared at me.

"Why in nation did you offer him your cue?"

"Wasn't that the courteous thing to do?" I asked.

"No!" he ripped out. "The courteous and proper thing would have been to strike him dead. Did you want to saddle that disaster upon us for life?"

He was blowing off steam, and I knew it and encouraged it. My impulse was to lie down on the couch and shout with hysterical laughter, but I suspected that would be indiscreet. He made some further comment on the propriety of offering a visitor a cue, and suddenly began to sing a travesty of an old hymn:

"How tedious are they
Who their sovereign obey,"

and so loudly that I said:

"Aren't you afraid he'll hear you and come back?" Whereupon he pretended alarm and sang under his breath, and for the rest of the evening was in boundless good-humor.

I have recalled this incident merely as a sample of things that were likely to happen at any time in his company, and to show the difficulty one might find in fitting himself to his varying moods. He was not to be learned in a day, or a week, or a month; some of those who knew him longest did not learn him at all.

We celebrated his seventy-first birthday by playing billiards all day. He invented a new game for the occasion; inventing rules for it with almost every shot.

It happened that no member of the family was at home on this birthday. Ill health had banished every one, even the secretary. Flowers, telegrams, and congratulations came, and there was a string of callers; but he saw no one beyond some intimate friends—the Gilders—late in the afternoon. When they had gone we went down to dinner. We were entirely alone, and I felt the great honor of being his only guest on such an occasion. Once between the courses, when he rose, as usual, to walk about, he wandered into the drawing-room, and seating himself at the orchestrelle began to play the beautiful flower-song from "Faust." It was a thing I had not seen him do before, and I never saw him do it again. When he came back to the table he said:

"Speaking of companions of the long ago, after fifty years they become only shadows and might as well be in the grave. Only those whom one has really loved mean

anything at all. Of my playmates I recall John Briggs, John Garth, and Laura Hawkins—just those three; the rest I buried long ago, and memory cannot even find their graves.”

He was in his loveliest humor all that day and evening; and that night, when he stopped playing, he said:

“I have never had a pleasanter day at this game.”

I answered, “I hope ten years from to-night we shall still be playing it.”

“Yes,” he said, “still playing the best game on earth.”

CCL

Page 132

PHILOSOPHY AND PESSIMISM

In a letter to MacAlister, written at this time, he said:

The doctors banished Jean to the country 5 weeks ago; they banished my secretary to the country for a fortnight last Saturday; they banished Clara to the country for a fortnight last Monday They banished me to Bermuda to sail next Wednesday, but I struck and sha'n't go. My complaint is permanent bronchitis & is one of the very best assets I've got, for it excuses me from every public function this winter—& all other winters that may come.

If he had bronchitis when this letter was written, it must have been of a very mild form, for it did not interfere with billiard games, which were more protracted and strenuous than at almost any other period. I conclude, therefore, that it was a convenient bronchitis, useful on occasion.

For a full ten days we were alone in the big house with the servants. It was a holiday most of the time. We hurried through the mail in the morning and the telephone calls; then, while I answered such letters as required attention, he dictated for an hour or so to Miss Hobby, after which, billiards for the rest of the day and evening. When callers were reported by the butler, I went down and got rid of them. Clara Clemens, before her departure, had pinned up a sign, "*No billiards after 10 P.M.*," which still hung on the wall, but it was outlawed. Clemens occasionally planned excursions to Bermuda and other places; but, remembering the billiard-table, which he could not handily take along, he abandoned these projects. He was a boy whose parents had been called away, left to his own devices, and bent on a good time.

There were likely to be irritations in his morning's mail, and more often he did not wish to see it until it had been pretty carefully sifted. So many people wrote who wanted things, so many others who made the claim of more or less distant acquaintanceship the excuse for long and trivial letters.

"I have stirred up three generations," he said; "first the grandparents, then the children, and now the grandchildren; the great-grandchildren will begin to arrive soon."

His mail was always large; but often it did not look interesting. One could tell from the envelope and the superscription something of the contents. Going over one assortment he burst out:

"Look at them! Look how trivial they are! Every envelope looks as if it contained a trivial human soul."

Many letters were filled with fulsome praise and compliment, usually of one pattern. He was sated with such things, and seldom found it possible to bear more than a line or two of them. Yet a fresh, well-expressed note of appreciation always pleased him.

“I can live for two months on a good compliment,” he once said. Certain persistent correspondents, too self-centered to realize their lack of consideration, or the futility of their purpose, followed him relentlessly. Of one such he remarked:

Page 133

"That woman intends to pursue me to the grave. I wish something could be done to appease her."

And again:

"Everybody in the world who wants something—something of no interest to me—writes to me to get it."

These morning sessions were likely to be of great interest. Once a letter spoke of the desirability of being an optimist. "That word perfectly disgusts me," he said, and his features materialized the disgust, "just as that other word, pessimist, does; and the idea that one can, by any effort of will, be one or the other, any more than he can change the color of his hair. The reason why a man is a pessimist or an optimist is not because he wants to be, but because he was born so; and this man [a minister of the Gospel who was going to explain life to him] is going to tell me why he isn't a pessimist. Oh, he'll do it, but he won't tell the truth; he won't make it short enough."

Yet he was always patient with any one who came with spiritual messages, theological arguments, and consolations. He might have said to them: "Oh, dear friends, those things of which you speak are the toys that long ago I played with and set aside." He could have said it and spoken the truth; but I believe he did not even think it. He listened to any one for whom he had respect, and was grateful for any effort in his behalf. One morning he read aloud a lecture given in London by George Bernard Shaw on religion, commenting as he read. He said:

"This letter is a frank breath of expression [and his comments were equally frank]. There is no such thing as morality; it is not immoral for the tiger to eat the wolf, or the wolf the cat, or the cat the bird, and so on down; that is their business. There is always enough for each one to live on. It is not immoral for one nation to seize another nation by force of arms, or for one man to seize another man's property or life if he is strong enough and wants to take it. It is not immoral to create the human species—with or without ceremony; nature intended exactly these things."

At one place in the lecture Shaw had said: "No one of good sense can accept any creed to-day without reservation."

"Certainly not," commented Clemens; "the reservation is that he is a d—d fool to accept it at all."

He was in one of his somber moods that morning. I had received a print of a large picture of Thomas Nast—the last one taken. The face had a pathetic expression which told the tragedy of his last years. Clemens looked at the picture several moments without speaking. Then he broke out:



“Why can’t a man die when he’s had his tragedy? I ought to have died long ago.” And somewhat later: “Once Twichell heard me cussing the human race, and he said, ‘Why, Mark, you are the last person in the world to do that—one selected and set apart as you are.’ I said ‘Joe, you don’t know what you are talking about. I am not cussing altogether about my own little troubles. Any one can stand his own misfortunes; but when I read in the papers all about the rascalities and outrages going on I realize what a creature the human animal is. Don’t you care more about the wretchedness of others than anything that happens to you?’ Joe said he did, and shut up.”

Page 134

It occurred to me to suggest that he should not read the daily papers. "No difference," he said. "I read books printed two hundred years ago, and they hurt just the same."

"Those people are all dead and gone," I objected.

"They hurt just the same," he maintained.

I sometimes thought of his inner consciousness as a pool darkened by his tragedies, its glassy surface, when calm, reflecting all the joy and sunlight and merriment of the world, but easily—so easily—troubled and stirred even to violence. Once following the dictation, when I came to the billiard-room he was shooting the balls about the table, apparently much depressed. He said:

"I have been thinking it out—if I live two years more I will put an end to it all. I will kill myself."

"You have much to live for——"

"But I am so tired of the eternal round," he interrupted; "so tired." And I knew he meant that he was ill of the great loneliness that had come to him that day in Florence, and would never pass away.

I referred to the pressure of social demands in the city, and the relief he would find in his country home. He shook his head.

"The country home I need," he said, fiercely, "is a cemetery."

Yet the mood changed quickly enough when the play began. He was gay and hilarious presently, full of the humors and complexities of the game. H. H. Rogers came in with a good deal of frequency, seldom making very long calls, but never seeming to have that air of being hurried which one might expect to find in a man whose day was only twenty-four hours long, and whose interests were so vast and innumerable. He would come in where we were playing, and sit down and watch the game, or perhaps would pick up a book and read, exchanging a remark now and then. More often, however, he sat in the bedroom, for his visits were likely to be in the morning. They were seldom business calls, or if they were, the business was quickly settled, and then followed gossip, humorous incident, or perhaps Clemens would read aloud something he had written. But once, after greetings, he began:

"Well, Rogers, I don't know what you think of it, but I think I have had about enough of this world, and I wish I were out of it."

Mr. Rogers replied, "I don't say much about it, but that expresses my view."

This from the foremost man of letters and one of the foremost financiers of the time was impressive. Each at the mountain-top of his career, they agreed that the journey was not worth while—that what the world had still to give was not attractive enough to tempt them to prevent a desire to experiment with the next stage. One could remember a thousand poor and obscure men who were perfectly willing to go on struggling and starving, postponing the day of settlement as long as possible; but perhaps, when one has had all the world has to give, when there are no new worlds in sight to conquer, one has a different feeling.



Page 135

Well, the realization lay not so far ahead for either of them, though at that moment they both seemed full of life and vigor—full of youth. One could not imagine the day when for them it would all be over.

CCLI

A LOBBYING EXPEDITION

Clara Clemens came home now and then to see how matters were progressing, and very properly, for Clemens was likely to become involved in social intricacies which required a directing hand. The daughter inherited no little of the father's characteristics of thought and phrase, and it was always a delight to see them together when one could be just out of range of the crossfire. I remember soon after her return, when she was making some searching inquiries concerning the billiard-room sign, and other suggested or instituted reforms, he said:

"Oh well, never mind, it doesn't matter. I'm boss in this house."

She replied, quickly: "Oh no, you're not. You're merely owner. I'm the captain—the commander-in-chief."

One night at dinner she mentioned the possibility of going abroad that year. During several previous summers she had planned to visit Vienna to see her old music-master, Leschetizky, once more before his death. She said:

"Leschetizky is getting so old. If I don't go soon I'm afraid I sha'n't be in time for his funeral."

"Yes," said her father, thoughtfully, "you keep rushing over to Leschetizky's funeral, and you'll miss mine."

He had made one or two social engagements without careful reflection, and the situation would require some delicacy of adjustment. During a moment between the courses, when he left the table and was taking his exercise in the farther room, she made some remark which suggested a doubt of her father's gift for social management. I said:

"Oh, well, he is a king, you know, and a king can do no wrong."

"Yes, I know," she answered. "The king can do no wrong; but he frightens me almost to death, sometimes, he comes so near it."

He came back and began to comment rather critically on some recent performance of Roosevelt's, which had stirred up a good deal of newspaper amusement—it was the

Storer matter and those indiscreet letters which Roosevelt had written relative to the ambassadorship which Storer so much desired. Miss Clemens was inclined to defend the President, and spoke with considerable enthusiasm concerning his elements of popularity, which had won him such extraordinary admiration.

“Certainly he is popular,” Clemens admitted, “and with the best of reasons. If the twelve apostles should call at the White House, he would say, ‘Come in, come in! I am delighted to see you. I’ve been watching your progress, and I admired it very much.’ Then if Satan should come, he would slap him on the shoulder and say, ‘Why, Satan, how do you do? I am so glad to meet you. I’ve read all your works and enjoyed every one of them.’ Anybody could be popular with a gift like that.”

Page 136

It was that evening or the next, perhaps, that he said to her:

“Ben [one of his pet names for her], now that you are here to run the ranch, Paine and I are going to Washington on a vacation. You don’t seem to admire our society much, anyhow.”

There were still other reasons for the Washington expedition. There was an important bill up for the extension of the book royalty period, and the forces of copyright were going down in a body to use every possible means to get the measure through.

Clemens, during Cleveland’s first administration, some nineteen years before, had accompanied such an expedition, and through S. S. (“Sunset”) Cox had obtained the “privileges of the floor” of the House, which had enabled him to canvass the members individually. Cox assured the doorkeeper that Clemens had received the thanks of Congress for national literary service, and was therefore entitled to that privilege. This was not strictly true; but regulations were not very severe in those days, and the ruse had been regarded as a good joke, which had yielded excellent results. Clemens had a similar scheme in mind now, and believed that his friendship with Speaker Cannon—“Uncle Joe”—would obtain for him a similar privilege. The Copyright Association working in its regular way was very well, he said, but he felt he could do more as an individual than by acting merely as a unit of that body.

“I canvassed the entire House personally that other time,” he said. “Cox introduced me to the Democrats, and John D. Long, afterward Secretary of the Navy, introduced me to the Republicans. I had a darling time converting those members, and I’d like to try the experiment again.”

I should have mentioned earlier, perhaps, that at this time he had begun to wear white clothing regularly, regardless of the weather and season. On the return from Dublin he had said:

“I can’t bear to put on black clothes again. I wish I could wear white all winter. I should prefer, of course, to wear colors, beautiful rainbow hues, such as the women have monopolized. Their clothing makes a great opera audience an enchanting spectacle, a delight to the eye and to the spirit—a garden of Eden for charm and color.

“The men, clothed in odious black, are scattered here and there over the garden like so many charred stumps. If we are going to be gay in spirit, why be clad in funeral garments? I should like to dress in a loose and flowing costume made all of silks and velvets resplendent with stunning dyes, and so would every man I have ever known; but none of us dares to venture it. If I should appear on Fifth Avenue on a Sunday morning clothed as I would like to be clothed the churches would all be vacant and the congregation would come tagging after me. They would scoff, of course, but they would

envy me, too. When I put on black it reminds me of my funerals. I could be satisfied with white all the year round.”

Page 137

It was not long after this that he said:

"I have made up my mind not to wear black any more, but white, and let the critics say what they will."

So his tailor was sent for, and six creamy flannel and serge suits were ordered, made with the short coats, which he preferred, with a gray suit or two for travel, and he did not wear black again, except for evening dress and on special occasions. It was a gratifying change, and though the newspapers made much of it, there was no one who was not gladdened by the beauty of his garments and their general harmony with his person. He had never worn anything so appropriate or so impressive.

This departure of costume came along a week or two before the Washington trip, and when his bags were being packed for the excursion he was somewhat in doubt as to the propriety of bursting upon Washington in December in that snowy plumage. I ventured:

"This is a lobbying expedition of a peculiar kind, and does not seem to invite any half-way measures. I should vote in favor of the white suit."

I think Miss Clemens was for it, too. She must have been or the vote wouldn't have carried, though it was clear he strongly favored the idea. At all events, the white suits came along.

We were off the following afternoon: Howells, Robert Underwood Johnson, one of the Appletons, one of the Putnams, George Bowker, and others were on the train. On the trip down in the dining-car there was a discussion concerning the copyrighting of ideas, which finally resolved itself into the possibility of originating a new one. Clemens said:

"There is no such thing as a new idea. It is impossible. We simply take a lot of old ideas and put them into a sort of mental kaleidoscope. We give them a turn and they make new and curious combinations. We keep on turning and making new combinations indefinitely; but they are the same old pieces of colored glass that have been in use through all the ages."

We put up at the Willard, and in the morning drove over to the Congressional Library, where the copyright hearing was in progress. There was a joint committee of the two Houses seated round a long table at work, and a number of spectators more or less interested in the bill, mainly, it would seem, men concerned with the protection of mechanical music-rolls. The fact that this feature was mixed up with literature was not viewed with favor by most of the writers. Clemens referred to the musical contingent as "those hand-organ men who ought to have a bill of their own."

I should mention that early that morning Clemens had written this letter to Speaker Cannon:

December 7, 1906.

Dear uncle Joseph,—Please get me the thanks of the Congress—not next week, but right away. It is very necessary. Do accomplish this for your affectionate old friend right away; by persuasion, if you can; by violence, if you must, for it is imperatively necessary that I get on the floor for two or three hours and talk to the members, man by man, in behalf of the support, encouragement, and protection of one of the nation's most valuable assets and industries—its literature. I have arguments with me, also a barrel with liquid in it.

Page 138

Give me a chance. Get me the thanks of Congress. Don't wait for others —there isn't time. I have stayed away and let Congress alone for seventy-one years and I am entitled to thanks. Congress knows it perfectly well, and I have long felt hurt that this quite proper and earned expression of gratitude has been merely felt by the House and never publicly uttered. Send me an order on the Sergeant-at-Arms quick. When shall I come?

With love and a benediction;
Mark Twain.

We went over to the Capitol now to deliver to “Uncle Joe” this characteristic letter. We had picked up Clemens's nephew, Samuel E. Moffett, at the Library, and he came along and led the way to the Speaker's room. Arriving there, Clemens laid off his dark overcoat and stood there, all in white, certainly a startling figure among those clerks, newspaper men, and incidental politicians. He had been noticed as he entered the Capitol, and a number of reporters had followed close behind. Within less than a minute word was being passed through the corridors that Mark Twain was at the Capitol in his white suit. The privileged ones began to gather, and a crowd assembled in the hall outside.

Speaker Cannon was not present at the moment; but a little later he “billowed” in—which seems to be the word to express it—he came with such a rush and tide of life. After greetings, Clemens produced the letter and read it to him solemnly, as if he were presenting a petition. Uncle Joe listened quite seriously, his head bowed a little, as if it were really a petition, as in fact it was. He smiled, but he said, quite seriously:

“That is a request that ought to be granted; but the time has gone by when I am permitted any such liberties. Tom Reed, when he was Speaker, inaugurated a strict precedent excluding all outsiders from the use of the floor of the House.”

“I got in the other time,” Clemens insisted.

“Yes,” said Uncle Joe; “but that ain't now. Sunset Cox could let you in, but I can't. They'd hang me.” He reflected a moment, and added: “I'll tell you what I'll do: I've got a private room down-stairs that I never use. It's all fitted up with table and desk, stationery, chinaware, and cutlery; you could keep house there, if you wanted to. I'll let you have it as long as you want to stay here, and I'll give you my private servant, Neal, who's been here all his life and knows every official, every Senator and Representative, and they all know him. He'll bring you whatever you want, and you can send in messages by him. You can have the members brought down singly or in bunches, and convert them as much as you please. I'd give you a key to the room, only I haven't got one myself. I never can get in when I want to, but Neal can get in, and he'll unlock it for you. You can have the room, and you can have Neal. Now, will that do you?”

Page 139

Clemens said it would. It was, in fact, an offer without precedent. Probably never in the history of the country had a Speaker given up his private room to lobbyists. We went in to see the House open, and then went down with Neal and took possession of the room. The reporters had promptly seized upon the letter, and they now got hold of its author, led him to their own quarters, and, gathering around him, fired questions at him, and kept their note-books busy. He made a great figure, all in white there among them, and they didn't fail to realize the value of it as "copy." He talked about copyright, and about his white clothes, and about a silk hat which Howells wore.

Back in the Speaker's room, at last, he began laying out the campaign, which would begin next day. By and by he said:

"Look here! I believe I've got to speak over there in that committee-room to-day or to-morrow. I ought to know just when it is."

I had not heard of this before, and offered to go over and see about it, which I did at once. I hurried back faster than I had gone.

"Mr. Clemens, you are to speak in half an hour, and the room is crowded full; people waiting to hear you."

"The devil!" he said. "Well, all right; I'll just lie down here a few minutes and then we'll go over. Take paper and pencil and make a few headings."

There was a couch in the room. He lay down while I sat at the table with a pencil, making headings now and then, as he suggested, and presently he rose and, shoving the notes into his pocket, was ready. It was half past three when we entered the committee-room, which was packed with people and rather dimly lighted, for it was gloomy outside. Herbert Putnam, the librarian, led us to seats among the literary group, and Clemens, removing his overcoat, stood in that dim room clad as in white armor. There was a perceptible stir. Howells, startled for a moment, whispered:

"What in the world did he wear that white suit for?" though in his heart he admired it as much as the others.

I don't remember who was speaking when we came in, but he was saying nothing important. Whoever it was, he was followed by Dr. Edward Everett Hale, whose age always commanded respect, and whose words always invited interest. Then it was Mark Twain's turn. He did not stand by his chair, as the others had done, but walked over to the Speaker's table, and, turning, faced his audience. I have never seen a more impressive sight than that snow-white figure in that dim-lit, crowded room. He never touched his notes; he didn't even remember them. He began in that even, quiet, deliberate voice of his the most even, the most quiet, the most deliberate voice in the world—and, without a break or a hesitation for a word, he delivered a copyright

argument, full of humor and serious reasoning, such a speech as no one in that room, I suppose, had ever heard. Certainly it was a fine and dramatic bit

Page 140

of impromptu pleading. The weary committee, which had been tortured all day with dull, statistical arguments made by the mechanical device fiends, and dreary platitudes unloaded by men whose chief ambition was to shine as copyright champions, suddenly realized that they were being rewarded for the long waiting. They began to brighten and freshen, and uplift and smile, like flowers that have been wilted by a drought when comes the refreshing shower that means renewed life and vigor. Every listener was as if standing on tiptoe. When the last sentence was spoken the applause came like an explosion.—[Howells in his book *My Mark Twain* speaks of Clemens's white clothing as "an inspiration which few men would have had the courage to act upon." He adds: "The first time I saw him wear it was at the authors' hearing before the Congressional Committee on Copyright in Washington. Nothing could have been more dramatic than the gesture with which he flung off his long, loose overcoat and stood forth in white from his feet to the crown of his silvery head. It was a magnificent coup, and he dearly loved a coup; but the magnificent speech which he made, tearing to shreds the venerable farrago of nonsense about nonproperty in ideas which had formed the basis of all copyright legislation, made you forget even his spectacularity."]

There came a universal rush of men and women to get near enough for a word and to shake his hand. But he was anxious to get away. We drove to the Willard and talked and smoked, and got ready for dinner. He was elated, and said the occasion required full-dress. We started down at last, fronted and frocked like penguins.

I did not realize then the fullness of his love for theatrical effect. I supposed he would want to go down with as little ostentation as possible, so took him by the elevator which enters the dining-room without passing through the long corridor known as "Peacock Alley," because of its being a favorite place for handsomely dressed fashionables of the national capital. When we reached the entrance of the dining-room he said:

"Isn't there another entrance to this place?"

I said there was, but that it was very conspicuous. We should have to go down the long corridor.

"Oh, well," he said, "I don't mind that. Let's go back and try it over."

So we went back up the elevator, walked to the other end of the hotel, and came down to the F Street entrance. There is a fine, stately flight of steps—a really royal stair—leading from this entrance down into "Peacock Alley." To slowly descend that flight is an impressive thing to do. It is like descending the steps of a throne-room, or to some royal landing-place where Cleopatra's barge might lie. I confess that I was somewhat nervous at the awfulness of the occasion, but I reflected that I was powerfully protected;

so side by side, both in full-dress, white ties, white-silk waistcoats, and all, we came down that regal flight.

Page 141

Of course he was seized upon at once by a lot of feminine admirers, and the passage along the corridor was a perpetual gantlet. I realize now that this gave the dramatic finish to his day, and furnished him with proper appetite for his dinner. I did not again make the mistake of taking him around to the more secluded elevator. I aided and abetted him every evening in making that spectacular descent of the royal stairway, and in running that fair and frivolous gantlet the length of "Peacock Alley." The dinner was a continuous reception. No sooner was he seated than this Congressman and that Senator came over to shake hands with Mark Twain. Governor Francis of Missouri also came. Eventually Howells drifted in, and Clemens reviewed the day, its humors and successes. Back in the rooms at last he summed up the progress thus far—smoked, laughed over "Uncle Joe's" surrender to the "copyright bandits," and turned in for the night.

We were at the Capitol headquarters in Speaker Cannon's private room about eleven o'clock next morning. Clemens was not in the best humor because I had allowed him to oversleep. He was inclined to be discouraged at the prospect, and did not believe many of the members would come down to see him. He expressed a wish for some person of influence and wide acquaintance, and walked up and down, smoking gloomily. I slipped out and found the Speaker's colored body-guard, Neal, and suggested that Mr. Clemens was ready now to receive the members.

That was enough. They began to arrive immediately. John Sharp Williams came first, then Boutell, from Illinois, Littlefield, of Maine, and after them a perfect procession, including all the leading lights—Dalzell, Champ Clark, McCall—one hundred and eighty or so in all during the next three or four hours.

Neal announced each name at the door, and in turn I announced it to Clemens when the press was not too great. He had provided boxes of cigars, and the room was presently blue with smoke, Clemens in his white suit in the midst of it, surrounded by those darker figures—shaking hands, dealing out copyright gospel and anecdotes—happy and wonderfully excited. There were chairs, but usually there was only standing room. He was on his feet for several hours and talked continually; but when at last it was over, and Champ Clark, who I believe remained longest and was most enthusiastic in the movement, had bade him good-by, he declared that he was not a particle tired, and added:

"I believe if our bill could be presented now it would pass."

He was highly elated, and pronounced everything a perfect success. Neal, who was largely responsible for the triumph, received a ten-dollar bill.

Page 142

We drove to the hotel and dined that night with the Dodges, who had been neighbors at Riverdale. Later, the usual crowd of admirers gathered around him, among them I remember the minister from Costa Rica, the Italian minister, and others of the diplomatic service, most of whom he had known during his European residence. Some one told of traveling in India and China, and how a certain Hindu “god” who had exchanged autographs with Mark Twain during his sojourn there was familiar with only two other American names—George Washington and Chicago; while the King of Siam had read but three English books—the Bible, Bryce’s American Commonwealth, and The Innocents Abroad.

We were at Thomas Nelson Page’s for dinner next evening—a wonderfully beautiful home, full of art treasures. A number of guests had been invited. Clemens naturally led the dinner-talk, which eventually drifted to reading. He told of Mrs. Clemens’s embarrassment when Stepniak had visited them and talked books, and asked her what her husband thought of Balzac, Thackeray, and the others. She had been obliged to say that he had not read them.

“‘How interesting!’ said Stepniak. But it wasn’t interesting to Mrs. Clemens. It was torture.”

He was light-spirited and gay; but recalling Mrs. Clemens saddened him, perhaps, for he was silent as we drove to the hotel, and after he was in bed he said, with a weary despair which even the words do not convey:

“If I had been there a minute earlier, it is possible—it is possible that she might have died in my arms. Sometimes I think that perhaps there was an instant—a single instant—when she realized that she was dying and that I was not there.”

In New York I had once brought him a print of the superb “Adams Memorial,” by Saint-Gaudens—the bronze woman who sits in the still court in the Rock Creek Cemetery at Washington.

On the morning following the Page dinner at breakfast, he said:

“Engage a carriage and we will drive out and see the Saint-Gaudens bronze.”

It was a bleak, dull December day, and as we walked down through the avenues of the dead there was a presence of realized sorrow that seemed exactly suited to such a visit. We entered the little inclosure of cedars where sits the dark figure which is art’s supreme expression of the great human mystery of life and death. Instinctively we removed our hats, and neither spoke until after we had come away. Then:

“What does he call it?” he asked.

I did not know, though I had heard applied to it that great line of Shakespeare's—"the rest is silence."

"But that figure is not silent," he said.

And later, as we were driving home:

"It is in deep meditation on sorrowful things."

When we returned to New York he had the little print framed, and kept it always on his mantelpiece.

CCLII

Page 143

THEOLOGY AND EVOLUTION

From the Washington trip dates a period of still closer association with Mark Twain. On the way to New York he suggested that I take up residence in his house—a privilege which I had no wish to refuse. There was room going to waste, he said, and it would be handier for the early and late billiard sessions. So, after that, most of the days and nights I was there.

Looking back on that time now, I see pretty vividly three quite distinct pictures. One of them, the rich, red interior of the billiard-room with the brilliant, green square in the center, on which the gay balls are rolling, and bending over it that luminous white figure in the instant of play. Then there is the long, lighted drawing-room with the same figure stretched on a couch in the corner, drowsily smoking, while the rich organ tones fill the place summoning for him scenes and faces which others do not see. This was the hour between dinner and billiards—the hour which he found most restful of the day. Sometimes he rose, walking the length of the parlors, his step timed to the music and his thought. Of medium height, he gave the impression of being tall—his head thrown up, and like a lion's, rather large for his body. But oftener he lay among the cushions, the light flooding his white hair and dress and heightening his brilliant coloring.

The third picture is that of the dinner-table—always beautifully laid, and always a shrine of wisdom when he was there. He did not always talk; but it was his habit to do so, and memory holds the clearer vision of him when, with eyes and face alive with interest, he presented some new angle of thought in fresh picturesqueness of speech. These are the pictures that have remained to me out of the days spent under his roof, and they will not fade while memory lasts.

Of Mark Twain's table philosophies it seems proper to make rather extended record. They were usually unpremeditated, and they presented the man as he was, and thought. I preserved as much of them as I could, and have verified phrase and idea, when possible, from his own notes and other unprinted writings.

This dinner-table talk naturally varied in character from that of the billiard-room. The latter was likely to be anecdotal and personal; the former was more often philosophical and commentative, ranging through a great variety of subjects scientific, political, sociological, and religious. His talk was often of infinity—the forces of creation—and it was likely to be satire of the orthodox conceptions, intermingled with heresies of his own devising.

Once, after a period of general silence, he said:

“No one who thinks can imagine the universe made by chance. It is too nicely assembled and regulated. There is, of course, a great Master Mind, but it cares nothing for our happiness or our unhappiness.”

It was objected, by one of those present, that as the Infinite Mind suggested perfect harmony, sorrow and suffering were defects which that Mind must feel and eventually regulate.

Page 144

"Yes," he said, "not a sparrow falls but He is noticing, if that is what you mean; but the human conception of it is that God is sitting up nights worrying over the individuals of this infinitesimal race."

Then he recalled a fancy which I have since found among his memoranda. In this note he had written:

The suns & planets that form the constellations of a billion billion solar systems & go pouring, a tossing flood of shining globes, through the viewless arteries of space are the blood-corpuscles in the veins of God; & the nations are the microbes that swarm and wiggle & brag in each, & think God can tell them apart at that distance & has nothing better to do than try. This—the entertainment of an eternity. Who so poor in his ambitions as to consent to be God on those terms? Blasphemy? No, it is not blasphemy. If God is as vast as that, He is above blasphemy; if He is as little as that, He is beneath it.

"The Bible," he said, "reveals the character of its God with minute exactness. It is a portrait of a man, if one can imagine a man with evil impulses far beyond the human limit. In the Old Testament He is pictured as unjust, ungenerous, pitiless, and revengeful, punishing innocent children for the misdeeds of their parents; punishing unoffending people for the sins of their rulers, even descending to bloody vengeance upon harmless calves and sheep as punishment for puny trespasses committed by their proprietors. It is the most damnatory biography that ever found its way into print. Its beginning is merely childish. Adam is forbidden to eat the fruit of a certain tree, and gravely informed that if he disobeys he shall die. How could that impress Adam? He could have no idea of what death meant. He had never seen a dead thing. He had never heard of one. If he had been told that if he ate the apples he would be turned into a meridian of longitude that threat would have meant just as much as the other one. The watery intellect that invented that notion could be depended on to go on and decree that all of Adam's descendants down to the latest day should be punished for that nursery trespass in the beginning.

"There is a curious poverty of invention in Bibles. Most of the great races each have one, and they all show this striking defect. Each pretends to originality, without possessing any. Each of them borrows from the other, confiscates old stage properties, puts them forth as fresh and new inspirations from on high. We borrowed the Golden Rule from Confucius, after it had seen service for centuries, and copyrighted it without a blush. We went back to Babylon for the Deluge, and are as proud of it and as satisfied with it as if it had been worth the trouble; whereas we know now that Noah's flood never happened, and couldn't have happened—not in that way. The flood is a favorite with Bible-makers. Another favorite with the founders of religions is the Immaculate Conception. It had been worn threadbare; but we adopted it as a new idea. It was old in Egypt several thousand years before Christ was born. The Hindus prized it ages ago. The Egyptians adopted it even for some of their kings. The Romans borrowed the

idea from Greece. We got it straight from heaven by way of Rome. We are still charmed with it."

Page 145

He would continue in this strain, rising occasionally and walking about the room. Once, considering the character of God—the Bible God—he said:

“We haven’t been satisfied with God’s character as it is given in the Old Testament; we have amended it. We have called Him a God of mercy and love and morals. He didn’t have a single one of those qualities in the beginning. He didn’t hesitate to send the plagues on Egypt, the most fiendish punishments that could be devised—not for the king, but for his innocent subjects, the women and the little children, and then only to exhibit His power just to show off—and He kept hardening Pharaoh’s heart so that He could send some further ingenuity of torture, new rivers of blood, and swarms of vermin and new pestilences, merely to exhibit samples of His workmanship. Now and then, during the forty years’ wandering, Moses persuaded Him to be a little more lenient with the Israelites, which would show that Moses was the better character of the two. That Old Testament God never had an inspiration of His own.”

He referred to the larger conception of God, that Infinite Mind which had projected the universe. He said:

“In some details that Old Bible God is probably a more correct picture than our conception of that Incomparable One that created the universe and flung upon its horizonless ocean of space those giant suns, whose signal-lights are so remote that we only catch their flash when it has been a myriad of years on its way. For that Supreme One is not a God of pity or mercy—not as we recognize these qualities. Think of a God of mercy who would create the typhus germ, or the house-fly, or the centipede, or the rattlesnake, yet these are all His handiwork. They are a part of the Infinite plan. The minister is careful to explain that all these tribulations are sent for a good purpose; but he hires a doctor to destroy the fever germ, and he kills the rattlesnake when he doesn’t run from it, and he sets paper with molasses on it for the house-fly.

“Two things are quite certain: one is that God, the limitless God, manufactured those things, for no man could have done it. The man has never lived who could create even the humblest of God’s creatures. The other conclusion is that God has no special consideration for man’s welfare or comfort, or He wouldn’t have created those things to disturb and destroy him. The human conception of pity and morality must be entirely unknown to that Infinite God, as much unknown as the conceptions of a microbe to man, or at least as little regarded.

“If God ever contemplates those qualities in man He probably admires them, as we always admire the thing which we do not possess ourselves; probably a little grain of pity in a man or a little atom of mercy would look as big to Him as a constellation. He could create a constellation with a thought; but He has been all the measureless ages, and He has never acquired those qualities that we have named—pity and mercy and morality. He goes on destroying a whole island of people with an earthquake, or a whole cityful with a plague, when we punish a man in the electric chair for merely killing

the poorest of our race. The human being needs to revise his ideas again about God. Most of the scientists have done it already; but most of them don't dare to say so."

Page 146

He pointed out that the moral idea was undergoing constant change; that what was considered justifiable in an earlier day was regarded as highly immoral now. He pointed out that even the Decalogue made no reference to lying, except in the matter of bearing false witness against a neighbor. Also, that there was a commandment against covetousness, though covetousness to-day was the basis of all commerce: The general conclusion being that the morals of the Lord had been the morals of the beginning; the morals of the first-created man, the morals of the troglodyte, the morals of necessity; and that the morals of mankind had kept pace with necessity, whereas those of the Lord had remained unchanged. It is hardly necessary to say that no one ever undertook to contradict any statements of this sort from him. In the first place, there was no desire to do so; and in the second place, any one attempting it would have cut a puny figure with his less substantial arguments and his less vigorous phrase. It was the part of wisdom and immeasurably the part of happiness to be silent and listen.

On another evening he began:

“The mental evolution of the species proceeds apparently by regular progress side by side with the physical development until it comes to man, then there is a long, unexplained gulf. Somewhere man acquired an asset which sets him immeasurably apart from the other animals—his imagination. Out of it he created for himself a conscience, and clothes, and immodesty, and a hereafter, and a soul. I wonder where he got that asset. It almost makes one agree with Alfred Russel Wallace that the world and the universe were created just for his benefit, that he is the chief love and delight of God. Wallace says that the whole universe was made to take care of and to keep steady this little floating mote in the center of it, which we call the world. It looks like a good deal of trouble for such a small result; but it's dangerous to dispute with a learned astronomer like Wallace. Still, I don't think we ought to decide too soon about it—not until the returns are all in. There is the geological evidence, for instance. Even after the universe was created, it took a long time to prepare the world for man. Some of the scientists, ciphering out the evidence furnished by geology, have arrived at the conviction that the world is prodigiously old. Lord Kelvin doesn't agree with them. He says that it isn't more than a hundred million years old, and he thinks the human race has inhabited it about thirty thousand years of that time. Even so, it was 99,970,000 years getting ready, impatient as the Creator doubtless was to see man and admire him. That was because God first had to make the oyster. You can't make an oyster out of nothing, nor you can't do it in a day. You've got to start with a vast variety of invertebrates, belemnites, trilobites, jebusites, amalekites, and that sort of fry, and put them into soak in a primary

Page 147

sea and observe and wait what will happen. Some of them will turn out a disappointment; the belemnites and the amalekites and such will be failures, and they will die out and become extinct in the course of the nineteen million years covered by the experiment; but all is not lost, for the amalekites will develop gradually into encrinites and stalactites and blatherskites, and one thing and another, as the mighty ages creep on and the periods pile their lofty crags in the primordial seas, and at last the first grand stage in the preparation of the world for man stands completed; the oyster is done. Now an oyster has hardly any more reasoning power than a man has, so it is probable this one jumped to the conclusion that the nineteen million years was a preparation for him. That would be just like an oyster, and, anyway, this one could not know at that early date that he was only an incident in a scheme, and that there was some more to the scheme yet.

“The oyster being finished, the next step in the preparation of the world for man was fish. So the old Silurian seas were opened up to breed the fish in. It took twenty million years to make the fish and to fossilize him so we’d have the evidence later.

“Then, the Paleozoic limit having been reached, it was necessary to start a new age to make the reptiles. Man would have to have some reptiles —not to eat, but to develop himself from. Thirty million years were required for the reptiles, and out of such material as was left were made those stupendous saurians that used to prowls about the steamy world in remote ages, with their snaky heads forty feet in the air and their sixty feet of body and tail racing and thrashing after them. They are all gone now, every one of them; just a few fossil remnants of them left on this far-flung fringe of time.

“It took all those years to get one of those creatures properly constructed to proceed to the next step. Then came the pterodactyl, who thought all that preparation all those millions of years had been intended to produce him, for there wasn’t anything too foolish for a, pterodactyl to imagine. I suppose he did attract a good deal of attention, for even the least observant could see that there was the making of a bird in him, also the making of a mammal, in the course of time. You can’t say too much for the picturesqueness of the pterodactyl —he was the triumph of his period. He wore wings and had teeth, and was a starchy-looking creature. But the progression went right along.

“During the next thirty million years the bird arrived, and the kangaroo, and by and by the mastodon, and the giant sloth, and the Irish elk, and the old Silurian ass, and some people thought that man was about due. But that was a mistake, for the next thing they knew there came a great ice-sheet, and those creatures all escaped across the Bering Strait and wandered around in Asia and died, all except a few to carry on the preparation with. There were

Page 148

six of those glacial periods, with two million years or so between each. They chased those poor orphans up and down the earth, from weather to weather, from tropic temperature to fifty degrees below. They never knew what kind of weather was going to turn up next, and if they settled any place the whole continent suddenly sank from under them, and they had to make a scramble for dry land. Sometimes a volcano would turn itself loose just as they got located. They led that uncertain, strenuous existence for about twenty-five million years, always wondering what was going to happen next, never suspecting that it was just a preparation for man, who had to be done just so or there wouldn't be any proper or harmonious place for him when he arrived, and then at last the monkey came, and everybody could see at a glance that man wasn't far off now, and that was true enough. The monkey went on developing for close upon five million years, and then he turned into a man—to all appearances.

"It does look like a lot of fuss and trouble to go through to build anything, especially a human being, and nowhere along the way is there any evidence of where he picked up that final asset—his imagination. It makes him different from the others—not any better, but certainly different. Those earlier animals didn't have it, and the monkey hasn't it or he wouldn't be so cheerful."

[Paine records Twain's thoughts in that magnificent essay: "Was the World Made for Man" published long after his death in the group of essays under the title "Letters from the Earth. There are minor additions in the published version: "coal to fry the fish" ; and the remnants of life being chased from pole to pole "without a dry rag on them,"; and the "coat of paint" on top of the bulb on top the Eiffel Tower representing "man's portion of this world's history." Ed.]

He often held forth on the shortcomings of the human race—always a favorite subject—the incompetencies and imperfections of this final creation, in spite of, or because of, his great attribute—the imagination. Once (this was in the billiard-room) I started him by saying that whatever the conditions in other planets, there seemed no reason why life should not develop in each, adapted as perfectly to prevailing conditions as man is suited to conditions here. He said:

"Is it your idea, then, that man is perfectly adapted to the conditions of this planet?"

I began to qualify, rather weakly; but what I said did not matter. He was off on his favorite theme.

"Man adapted to the earth?" he said. "Why, he can't sleep out-of-doors without freezing to death or getting the rheumatism or the malaria; he can't keep his nose under water over a minute without being drowned; he can't climb a tree without falling out and

breaking his neck. Why, he's the poorest, clumsiest excuse of all the creatures that inhabit this earth. He has got to be coddled and housed and swathed and bandaged

Page 149

and up holstered to be able to live at all. He is a rickety sort of a thing, anyway you take him, a regular British Museum of infirmities and inferiorities. He is always under going repairs. A machine that is as unreliable as he is would have no market. The higher animals get their teeth without pain or inconvenience. The original cave man, the troglodyte, may have got his that way. But now they come through months and months of cruel torture, and at a time of life when he is least able to bear it. As soon as he gets them they must all be pulled out again, for they were of no value in the first place, not worth the loss of a night's rest. The second set will answer for a while; but he will never get a set that can be depended on until the dentist makes one. The animals are not much troubled that way. In a wild state, a natural state, they have few diseases; their main one is old age. But man starts in as a child and lives on diseases to the end as a regular diet. He has mumps, measles, whooping-cough, croup, tonsillitis, diphtheria, scarlet-fever, as a matter of course. Afterward, as he goes along, his life continues to be threatened at every turn by colds, coughs, asthma, bronchitis, quinsy, consumption, yellow-fever, blindness, influenza, carbuncles, pneumonia, softening of the brain, diseases of the heart and bones, and a thousand other maladies of one sort and another. He's just a basketful of festering, pestilent corruption, provided for the support and entertainment of microbes. Look at the workmanship of him in some of its particulars. What are his tonsils for? They perform no useful function; they have no value. They are but a trap for tonsillitis and quinsy. And what is the appendix for? It has no value. Its sole interest is to lie and wait for stray grape-seeds and breed trouble. What is his beard for? It is just a nuisance. All nations persecute it with the razor. Nature, however, always keeps him supplied with it, instead of putting it on his head, where it ought to be. You seldom see a man bald-headed on his chin, but on his head. A man wants to keep his hair. It is a graceful ornament, a comfort, the best of all protections against weather, and he prizes it above emeralds and rubies, and Nature half the time puts it on so it won't stay.

"Man's sight and smell and hearing are all inferior. If he were suited to the conditions he could smell an enemy; he could hear him; he could see him, just as the animals can detect their enemies. The robin hears the earthworm burrowing his course under the ground; the bloodhound follows a scent that is two days old. Man isn't even handsome, as compared with the birds; and as for style, look at the Bengal tiger—that ideal of grace, physical perfection, and majesty. Think of the lion and the tiger and the leopard, and then think of man—that poor thing!—the animal of the wig, the ear-trumpet, the glass eye, the porcelain teeth, the wooden leg, the trepanned skull, the silver wind-pipe—a creature that is mended and patched all over from top to bottom. If he can't get renewals of his bric-a-brac in the next world what will he look like? He has just that one stupendous superiority—his imagination, his intellect. It makes him supreme—the higher animals can't match him there. It's very curious."

Page 150

A letter which he wrote to J. Howard Moore concerning his book *The Universal Kinship* was of this period, and seems to belong here.

Dear Mr. Moore, The book has furnished me several days of deep pleasure & satisfaction; it has compelled my gratitude at the same time, since it saves me the labor of stating my own long-cherished opinions & reflections & resentments by doing it lucidly & fervently & irascibly for me. There is one thing that always puzzles me: as inheritors of the mentality of our reptile ancestors we have improved the inheritance by a thousand grades; but in the matter of the morals which they left us we have gone backward as many grades. That evolution is strange & to me unaccountable & unnatural. Necessarily we started equipped with their perfect and blemishless morals; now we are wholly destitute; we have no real morals, but only artificial ones—morals created and preserved by the forced suppression of natural & healthy instincts. Yes, we are a sufficiently comical invention, we humans.

Sincerely yours,
S. L. Clemens.

CCLIII

AN EVENING WITH HELEN KELLER

I recall two pleasant social events of that winter: one a little party given at the Clemenses' home on New-Year's Eve, with charades and story-telling and music. It was the music feature of this party that was distinctive; it was supplied by wire through an invention known as the telharmonium which, it was believed, would revolutionize musical entertainment in such places as hotels, and to some extent in private houses. The music came over the regular telephone wire, and was delivered through a series of horns or megaphones—similar to those used for phonographs—the playing being done, meanwhile, by skilled performers at the central station. Just why the telharmonium has not made good its promises of popularity I do not know. Clemens was filled with enthusiasm over the idea. He made a speech a little before midnight, in which he told how he had generally been enthusiastic about inventions which had turned out more or less well in about equal proportions. He did not dwell on the failures, but he told how he had been the first to use a typewriter for manuscript work; how he had been one of the earliest users of the fountain-pen; how he had installed the first telephone ever used in a private house, and how the audience now would have a demonstration of the first telharmonium music so employed. It was just about the stroke of midnight when he finished, and a moment later the horns began to play chimes and "Auld Lang Syne" and "America."

Page 151

The other pleasant evening referred to was a little company given in honor of Helen Keller. It was fascinating to watch her, and to realize with what a store of knowledge she had lighted the black silence of her physical life. To see Mark Twain and Helen Keller together was something not easily to be forgotten. When Mrs. Macy (who, as Miss Sullivan, had led her so marvelously out of the shadows) communicated his words to her with what seemed a lightning touch of the fingers her face radiated every shade of his meaning—humorous, serious, pathetic. Helen visited the various objects in the room, and seemed to enjoy them more than the usual observer of these things, and certainly in greater detail. Her sensitive fingers spread over articles of bric-a-brac, and the exclamations she uttered were always fitting, showing that she somehow visualized each thing in all its particulars. There was a bronze cat of handsome workmanship and happy expression, and when she had run those all—seeing fingers of hers over it she said: “It is smiling.”

CCLIV

BILLIARD-ROOM NOTES

The billiard games went along pretty steadily that winter. My play improved, and Clemens found it necessary to eliminate my odds altogether, and to change the game frequently in order to keep me in subjection. Frequently there were long and apparently violent arguments over the legitimacy of some particular shot or play—arguments to us quite as enjoyable as the rest of the game. Sometimes he would count a shot which was clearly out of the legal limits, and then it was always a delight to him to have a mock-serious discussion over the matter of conscience, and whether or not his conscience was in its usual state of repair. It would always end by him saying: “I don’t wish even to seem to do anything which can invite suspicion. I refuse to count that shot,” or something of like nature. Sometimes when I had let a questionable play pass without comment, he would watch anxiously until I had made a similar one and then insist on my scoring it to square accounts. His conscience was always repairing itself.

He had experimented, a great many years before, with what was in the nature of a trick on some unsuspecting player. It consisted in turning out twelve pool-balls on the table with one cue ball, and asking his guest how many caroms he thought he could make with all those twelve balls to play on. He had learned that the average player would seldom make more than thirty-one counts, and usually, before this number was reached, he would miss through some careless play or get himself into a position where he couldn’t play at all. The thing looked absurdly easy. It looked as if one could go on playing all day long, and the victim was usually eager to bet that he could make fifty or perhaps a hundred; but for more than an hour I tried it patiently, and seldom succeeded in scoring more than fifteen or twenty without missing. Long after the play itself ceased to be amusing to me, he insisted on my going on and trying it some more, and he would

throw himself back and roar with laughter, the tears streaming down his cheeks, to see me work and fume and fail.

Page 152

It was very soon after that that Peter Dunne ("Mr. Dooley") came down for luncheon, and after several games of the usual sort, Clemens quietly—as if the idea had just occurred to him—rolled out the twelve balls and asked Dunne how many caroms he thought he could make without a miss. Dunne said he thought he could make a thousand. Clemens quite indifferently said that he didn't believe he could make fifty. Dunne offered to bet five dollars that he could, and the wager was made. Dunne scored about twenty-five the first time and missed; then he insisted on betting five dollars again, and his defeats continued until Clemens had twenty-five dollars of Dunne's money, and Dunne was sweating and swearing, and Mark Twain rocking with delight. Dunne went away still unsatisfied, promising that he would come back and try it again. Perhaps he practised in his absence, for when he returned he had learned something. He won his twenty-five dollars back, and I think something more added. Mark Twain was still ahead, for Dunne furnished him with a good five hundred dollars' worth of amusement.

Clemens never cared to talk and never wished to be talked to when the game was actually in progress. If there was anything to be said on either side, he would stop and rest his cue on the floor, or sit down on the couch, until the matter was concluded. Such interruptions happened pretty frequently, and many of the bits of personal comment and incident scattered along through this work are the result of those brief rests. Some shot, or situation, or word would strike back through the past and awaken a note long silent, and I generally kept a pad and pencil on the window-sill with the score-sheet, and later, during his play, I would scrawl some reminder that would be precious by and by.

On one of these I find a memorandum of what he called his three recurrent dreams. All of us have such things, but his seem worth remembering.

"There is never a month passes," he said, "that I do not dream of being in reduced circumstances, and obliged to go back to the river to earn a living. It is never a pleasant dream, either. I love to think about those days; but there's always something sickening about the thought that I have been obliged to go back to them; and usually in my dream I am just about to start into a black shadow without being able to tell whether it is Selma bluff, or Hat Island, or only a black wall of night.

"Another dream that I have of that kind is being compelled to go back to the lecture platform. I hate that dream worse than the other. In it I am always getting up before an audience with nothing to say, trying to be funny; trying to make the audience laugh, realizing that I am only making silly jokes. Then the audience realizes it, and pretty soon they commence to get up and leave. That dream always ends by my standing there in the semidarkness talking to an empty house.

Page 153

“My other dream is of being at a brilliant gathering in my night-garments. People don’t seem to notice me there at first, and then pretty soon somebody points me out, and they all begin to look at me suspiciously, and I can see that they are wondering who I am and why I am there in that costume. Then it occurs to me that I can fix it by making myself known. I take hold of some man and whisper to him, ‘I am Mark Twain’; but that does not improve it, for immediately I can hear him whispering to the others, ‘He says he is Mark Twain,’ and they all look at me a good deal more suspiciously than before, and I can see that they don’t believe it, and that it was a mistake to make that confession. Sometimes, in that dream, I am dressed like a tramp instead of being in my night-clothes; but it all ends about the same—they go away and leave me standing there, ashamed. I generally enjoy my dreams, but not those three, and they are the ones I have oftenest.”

Quite often some curious episode of the world’s history would flash upon him—something amusing, or coarse, or tragic, and he would bring the game to a standstill and recount it with wonderful accuracy as to date and circumstance. He had a natural passion for historic events and a gift for mentally fixing them, but his memory in other ways was seldom reliable. He was likely to forget the names even of those he knew best and saw oftenest, and the small details of life seldom registered at all.

He had his breakfast served in his room, and once, on a slip of paper, he wrote, for his own reminder:

The accuracy of your forgetfulness is absolute—it seems never to fail. I prepare to pour my coffee so it can cool while I shave—and I always forget to pour it.

Yet, very curiously, he would sometimes single out a minute detail, something every one else had overlooked, and days or even weeks afterward would recall it vividly, and not always at an opportune moment. Perhaps this also was a part of his old pilot-training. Once Clara Clemens remarked:

“It always amazes me the things that father does and does not remember. Some little trifle that nobody else would notice, and you are hoping that he didn’t, will suddenly come back to him just when you least expect it or care for it.”

My note-book contains the entry:

February 11, 1907. He said to-day:

“A blindfolded chess-player can remember every play and discuss the game afterward, while we can’t remember from one shot to the next.”

I mentioned his old pilot-memory as an example of what he could do if he wished.

“Yes,” he answered, “those are special memories; a pilot will tell you the number of feet in every crossing at any time, but he can’t remember what he had for breakfast.”

“How long did you keep your pilot-memory?” I asked.

“Not long; it faded out right away, but the training served me, for when I went to report on a paper a year or two later I never had to make any notes.”

Page 154

"I suppose you still remember some of the river?"

"Not much. Hat Island, Helena and here and there a place; but that is about all."

CCLV

FURTHER PERSONALITIES

Like every person living, Mark Twain had some peculiar and petty economies. Such things in great men are noticeable. He lived extravagantly. His household expenses at the time amounted to more than fifty dollars a day. In the matter of food, the choicest, and most expensive the market could furnish was always served in lavish abundance. He had the best and highest-priced servants, ample as to number. His clothes he bought generously; he gave without stint to his children; his gratuities were always liberal. He never questioned pecuniary outgoes —seldom worried as to the state of his bank-account so long as there was plenty. He smoked cheap cigars because he preferred their flavor. Yet he had his economies. I have seen him, before leaving a room, go around and carefully lower the gas-jets, to provide against that waste. I have known him to examine into the cost of a cab, and object to an apparent overcharge of a few cents.

It seemed that his idea of economy might be expressed in these words: He abhorred extortion and visible waste.

Furthermore, he had exact ideas as to ownership. One evening, while we were playing billiards, I noticed a five-cent piece on the floor. I picked it up, saying:

"Here is five cents; I don't know whose it is."

He regarded the coin rather seriously, I thought, and said:

"I don't know, either."

I laid it on the top of the book-shelves which ran around the room. The play went on, and I forgot the circumstance. When the game ended that night I went into his room with him, as usual, for a good-night word. As he took his change and keys from the pocket of his trousers, he looked the assortment over and said:

"That five-cent piece you found was mine."

I brought it to him at once, and he took it solemnly, laid it with the rest of his change, and neither of us referred to it again. It may have been one of his jokes, but I think it

more likely that he remembered having had a five-cent piece, probably reserved for car fare, and that it was missing.

More than once, in Washington, he had said:

“Draw plenty of money for incidental expenses. Don’t bother to keep account of them.”

So it was not miserliness; it was just a peculiarity, a curious attention to a trifling detail.

He had a fondness for riding on the then newly completed Subway, which he called the Underground. Sometimes he would say:

“I’ll pay your fare on the Underground if you want to take a ride with me.” And he always insisted on paying the fare, and once when I rode far up-town with him to a place where he was going to luncheon, and had taken him to the door, he turned and said, gravely:

Page 155

"Here is five cents to pay your way home." And I took it in the same spirit in which it had been offered. It was probably this trait which caused some one occasionally to claim that Mark Twain was close in money matters. Perhaps there may have been times in his life when he was parsimonious; but, if so, I must believe that it was when he was sorely pressed and exercising the natural instinct of self-preservation. He wished to receive the full value (who does not?) of his labors and properties. He took a childish delight in piling up money; but it became greed only when he believed some one with whom he had dealings was trying to get an unfair division of profits. Then it became something besides greed. It became an indignation that amounted to malevolence. I was concerned in a number of dealings with Mark Twain, and at a period in his life when human traits are supposed to become exaggerated, which is to say old age, and if he had any natural tendency to be unfair, or small, or greedy in his money dealings I think I should have seen it. Personally, I found him liberal to excess, and I never observed in him anything less than generosity to those who were fair with him.

Once that winter, when a letter came from Steve Gillis saying that he was an invalid now, and would have plenty of time to read Sam's books if he owned them, Clemens ordered an expensive set from his publishers, and did what meant to him even more than the cost in money—he autographed each of those twenty-five volumes. Then he sent them, charges paid, to that far Californian retreat. It was hardly the act of a stingy man.

He had the human fondness for a compliment when it was genuine and from an authoritative source, and I remember how pleased he was that winter with Prof. William Lyon Phelps's widely published opinion, which ranked Mark Twain as the greatest American novelist, and declared that his fame would outlive any American of his time. Phelps had placed him above Holmes, Howells, James, and even Hawthorne. He had declared him to be more American than any of these—more American even than Whitman. Professor Phelps's position in Yale College gave this opinion a certain official weight; but I think the fact of Phelps himself being a writer of great force, with an American freshness of style, gave it a still greater value.

Among the pleasant things that winter was a meeting with Eugene F. Ware, of Kansas, with whose penname—"Ironquill"—Clemens had long been familiar.

Ware was a breezy Western genius of the finest type. If he had abandoned law for poetry, there is no telling how far his fame might have reached. There was in his work that same spirit of Americanism and humor and humanity that is found in Mark Twain's writings, and he had the added faculty of rhyme and rhythm, which would have set him in a place apart. I had known Ware personally during a period of Western residence, and later, when he was Commissioner of

Page 156

Pensions under Roosevelt. I usually saw him when he came to New York, and it was a great pleasure now to bring together the two men whose work I so admired. They met at a small private luncheon at The Players, and Peter Dunne was there, and Robert Collier, and it was such an afternoon as Howells has told of when he and Aldrich and Bret Harte and those others talked until the day faded into twilight, and twilight deepened into evening. Clemens had put in most of the day before reading Ware's book of poems, 'The Rhymes of Ironquill', and had declared his work to rank with the very greatest of American poetry—I think he called it the most truly American in flavor. I remember that at the luncheon he noted Ware's big, splendid physique and his Western liberties of syntax with a curious intentness. I believe he regarded him as being nearer his own type in mind and expression than any one he had met before.

Among Ware's poems he had been especially impressed with the "Fables," and with some verses entitled "Whist," which, though rather more optimistic, conformed to his own philosophy. They have a distinctly "Western" feeling.

Whist

Hour after hour the cards were fairly shuffled,
And fairly dealt, and still I got no hand;
The morning came; but I, with mind unruffled,
Did simply say, "I do not understand."
Life is a game of whist. From unseen sources
The cards are shuffled, and the hands are dealt.
Blind are our efforts to control the forces
That, though unseen, are no less strongly felt.
I do not like the way the cards are shuffled,
But still I like the game and want to play;
And through the long, long night will I, unruffled,
Play what I get, until the break of day.