ALBERT BIGELOW PAINE

MARK TWAIN

A BIOGRAPHY
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Mark Twain - A Biography

Volume 2: 1886 – 1910

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CLXII. BROWNING, MEREDITH, AND MEISTERSCHAFT

The Browning readings must have begun about this time. Just what kindled Mark Twain's interest in the poetry of Robert Browning is not remembered, but very likely his earlier associations with the poet had something to do with it. Whatever the beginning, we find him, during the winter of 1886 and 1887, studiously, even violently, interested in Browning's verses, entertaining a sort of club or class who gathered to hear his rich, sympathetic, and luminous reading of the Payleyings—"With Bernard de Mandeville," "Daniel Bartoli," or "Christopher Smart." Members of the Saturday Morning Club were among his listeners and others-friends of the family. They were rather remarkable gatherings, and no one of that group but always vividly remembered the marvelously clear insight which Mark Twain's vocal personality gave to those somewhat obscure measures. They did not all of them realize that before reading a poem he studied it line by line, even word by word; dug out its last syllable of meaning, so far as lay within human possibility, and indicated with pencil every shade of emphasis which would help to reveal the poet's purpose. No student of Browning ever more devoutly persisted in trying to compass a master's intent—in such poems as "Sordello," for instance—than Mark Twain. Just what permanent benefit he received from this particular passion it is difficult to know. Once, at a class-meeting, after finishing "Easter Day," he made a remark which the class requested him to "write down." It is recorded on the fly-leaf of Dramatis Personae as follows:

One's glimpses & confusions, as one reads Browning, remind me of looking through a telescope (the small sort which you must move with your hand, not clock-work). You toil across dark spaces which are (to your lens) empty; but every now & then a splendor of stars & suns bursts upon you and fills the whole field with flame. Feb. 23, 1887.

In another note he speaks of the "vague dim flash of splendid hamming-birds through a fog." Whatever mental treasures he may or may not have laid up from Browning there was assuredly a deep gratification in the discovery of those splendors of "stars and suns" and the flashing "humming-birds," as there must also have been in pointing out those wonders to the little circle of devout listeners. It all seemed so worth while.

It was at a time when George Meredith was a reigning literary favorite. There was a Meredith cult as distinct as that of Browning. Possibly it exists to-day, but, if so, it is less militant. Mrs. Clemens and her associates were caught in the Meredith movement and read Diana of the Crossways and the Egoist with reverential appreciation.

The Meredith epidemic did not touch Mark Twain. He read but few novels at most, and, skilful as was the artistry of the English favorite, he found his characters artificialities—ingeniously contrived puppets rather than human beings, and, on the whole, overrated by their creator. Diana of the Crossways was read aloud, and, listening now and then, he was likely to say:

"It doesn't seem to me that Diana lives up to her reputation. The author keeps telling us how smart she is, how brilliant, but I never seem to hear her say anything smart or brilliant. Read me some of Diana's smart utterances."

He was relentless enough in his criticism of a literature he did not care for, and he never learned to care for Meredith.

He read his favorite books over and over with an ever-changing point of view. He re-read Carlyle's French Revolution during the summer at the farm, and to Howells he wrote:

How stunning are the changes which age makes in man while he sleeps! When I finished Carlyle's French Revolution in 1871 I was a Girondin; every time I have read it since I have read it differently—being influenced & changed, little by little, by life & environment (& Taine & St. Simon); & now I lay the book down once more, & recognize that I am a Sansculotte!—And not a pale, characterless Sansculotte, but a Marat. Carlyle teaches no such gospel, so the change is in me—in my vision of the evidences. People pretend that the Bible means the same to them at 50 that it did at all former milestones in their journey. I wonder how they can lie so. It comes of practice, no doubt. They would not say that of Dickens's or Scott's books. Nothing remains the same. When a man goes back to look at the house of his childhood it has always shrunk; there is no instance of such house being as big as the picture in memory & imagination call for. Shrunk how? Why, to its correct dimensions; the house hasn't altered; this is the first time it has been in focus. Well, that's loss. To have house & Bible shrink so, under the disillusioning corrected angle, is loss—for a moment. But there are compensations. You tilt the tube skyward & bring planets & comets & corona flames a hundred & fifty thousand miles high into the field. Which I see you have done, & found Tolstoi. I haven't got him in focus yet, but I've got Browning.

In time the Browning passion would wane and pass, and the club was succeeded by, or perhaps it blended with, a German class which met at regular intervals at the Clemens home to study "der, die, and das" and the "gehabt habens" out of Meisterschaft and such other text-books as

Professor Schleutter could provide. They had monthly conversation days, when they discussed in German all sorts of things, real and imaginary. Once Dr. Root, a prominent member, and Clemens had a long wrangle over painting a house, in which they impersonated two German neighbors.

Clemens finally wrote for the class a three-act play "Meisterschaft"—a literary achievement for which he was especially qualified, with its picturesque mixture of German and English and its unfailing humor. It seems unlike anything ever attempted before or since. No one but Mark Twain could have written it. It was given twice by the class with enormous success, and in modified form it was published in the Century Magazine (January, 1888). It is included to-day in his "Complete Works," but one must have a fair knowledge of German to capture the full delight of it.—[On the original manuscript Mark Twain wrote: "There is some tolerably rancid German here and there in this piece. It is attributable to the proof-reader." Perhaps the proof-reader resented this and cut it out, for it does not appear as published.]

Mark Twain probably exaggerated his sentiments a good deal when in the Carlyle letter he claimed to be the most rabid of Sansculottes. It is unlikely that he was ever very bare-kneed and crimson in his anarchy. He believed always that cruelty should be swiftly punished, whether in king or commoner, and that tyrants should be destroyed. He was for the people as against kings, and for the union of labor as opposed to the union of capital, though he wrote of such matters judicially—not radically. The Knights of Labor organization, then very powerful, seemed to Clemens the salvation of oppressed humanity. He wrote a vehement and convincing paper on the subject, which he sent to Howells, to whom it appealed very strongly, for Howells was socialistic, in a sense, and Clemens made his appeal in the best and largest sense, dramatizing his conception in a picture that was to include, in one grand league, labor of whatever form, and, in the end, all mankind in a final

millennium. Howells wrote that he had read the essay “with thrills amounting to yells of satisfaction,” and declared it to be the best thing yet said on the subject. The essay closed:

He [the unionized workman] is here and he will remain. He is the greatest birth of the greatest age the nations of the world have known. You cannot sneer at him—that time has gone by. He has before him the most righteous work that was ever given into the hand of man to do; and he will do it. Yes, he is here; and the question is not—as it has been heretofore during a thousand ages—What shall we do with him? For the first time in history we are relieved of the necessity of managing his affairs for him. He is not a broken dam this time—he is the Flood!

It must have been about this time that Clemens developed an intense, even if a less permanent, interest in another matter which was to benefit the species. He was one day walking up Fifth Avenue when he noticed the sign,

PROFESSOR LOISETTESCHOOL OF MEMORYThe Instantaneous Art of Never Forgetting

Clemens went inside. When he came out he had all of Professor Loisette’s literature on “predicating correlation,” and for the next several days was steeping himself in an infusion of meaningless words and figures and sentences and forms, which he must learn backward and forward and diagonally, so that he could repeat them awake and asleep in order to predicate his correlation to a point where remembering the ordinary facts of life, such as names, addresses, and telephone numbers, would be a mere diversion.

It was another case of learning the multitudinous details of the Mississippi River in order to do the apparently simple thing of steering a boat from New Orleans to St. Louis, and it is fair to say that, for the time he gave it, he achieved a like success. He was so enthusiastic over this

new remedy for human distress that within a very brief time he was sending out a printed letter recommending Loisette to the public at large. Here is an extract:

... I had no SYSTEM—and some sort of rational order of procedure is, of course, necessary to success in any study. Well, Loisette furnished me a system. I cannot undertake to say it is the best, or the worst, because I don't know what the other systems are. Loisette, among other cruelties, requires you to memorize a great long string of words that, haven't any apparent connection or meaning—there are perhaps 500 of these words, arranged in maniacal lines of 6 to 8 or 9 words in each line—71 lines in all. Of course your first impulse is to resign, but at the end of three or four hours you find to your surprise that you've GOT them and can deliver them backward or forward without mistake or hesitation. Now, don't you see what a world of confidence that must necessarily breed? —confidence in a memory which before you wouldn't even venture to trust with the Latin motto of the U. S. lest it mislay it and the country suffer. Loisette doesn't make memories, he furnishes confidence in memories that already exist. Isn't that valuable? Indeed it is to me. Whenever hereafter I shall choose to pack away a thing properly in that refrigerator I sha'n't be bothered with the aforetime doubts; I shall know I'm going to find it sound and sweet when I go for it again.

Loisette naturally made the most of this advertising and flooded the public with Mark Twain testimonials. But presently Clemens decided that after all the system was not sufficiently simple to benefit the race at large. He recalled his printed letters and prevailed upon Loisette to suppress his circulars. Later he decided that the whole system was a humbug.

CLXIII. LETTER TO THE QUEEN OF ENGLAND

It was one day in 1887 that Clemens received evidence that his reputation as a successful author and publisher—a man of wealth and revenues—had penetrated even the dimness of the British Tax Offices. A formidable envelope came, inclosing a letter from his London publishers and a very large printed document all about the income tax which the Queen's officers had levied upon his English royalties as the result of a report that he had taken Buckenham Hall, Norwich, for a year, and was to become an English resident. The matter amused and interested him. To Chatto & Windus he wrote:

I will explain that all that about Buckenham Hall was an English newspaper's mistake. I was not in England, and if I had been I wouldn't have been at Buckenham Hall anyway, but Buckingham Palace, or I would have endeavored to have found out the reason why... But we won't resist. We'll pay as if I were really a resident. The country that allows me copyright has a right to tax me.

Reflecting on the matter, Clemens decided to make literature of it. He conceived the notion of writing an open letter to the Queen in the character of a rambling, garrulous, but well-disposed countryman whose idea was that her Majesty conducted all the business of the empire herself. He began:

HARTFORD, November 6, 2887. MADAM, You will remember that last May Mr. Edward Bright, the clerk of the Inland Revenue Office, wrote me about a tax which he said was due from me to the Government on books of mine published in London —that is to say, an income tax on the royalties. I do not know Mr. Bright, and it is embarrassing

to me to correspond with strangers, for I was raised in the country and have always lived there, the early part in Marion County, Missouri, before the war, and this part in Hartford County, Connecticut, near Bloomfield and about 8 miles this side of Farmington, though some call it 9, which it is impossible to be, for I have walked it many and many a time in considerably under three hours, and General Hawley says he has done it in two and a quarter, which is not likely; so it has seemed best that I write your Majesty.

The letter proceeded to explain that he had never met her Majesty personally, but that he once met her son, the Prince of Wales, in Oxford Street, at the head of a procession, while he himself was on the top of an omnibus. He thought the Prince would probably remember him on account of a gray coat with flap pockets which he wore, he being the only person on the omnibus who had on that kind of a coat.

"I remember him," he said, "as easily as I would a comet."

He explained the difficulty he had in understanding under what heading he was taxed. There was a foot-note on the list which stated that he was taxed under "Schedule D, section 14." He had turned to that place and found these three things: "Trades, Offices, Gas Works." He did not regard authorship as a trade, and he had no office, so he did not consider that he was taxable under "Schedule D, section 14." The letter concludes:

Having thus shown your Majesty that I am not taxable, but am the victim of the error of a clerk who mistakes the nature of my commerce, it only remains for me to beg that you will, of your justice, annul my letter that I spoke of, so that my publisher can keep back that tax money which, in the confusion and aberration caused by the Document, I ordered him to pay. You will not miss the sum, but this is a hard year for authors, and as for lectures I do not suppose

your Majesty ever saw such a dull season. With always great and ever-increasing respect, I beg to sign myself your Majesty's servant to command, MARK TWAIN. Her Majesty the Queen, London.

The letter, or "petition," as it was called, was published in the Harper's Magazine "Drawer" (December, 1889), and is now included in the "Complete Works." Taken as a whole it is one of the most exquisite of Mark Twain's minor humors. What other humorist could have refrained from hinting, at least, the inference suggested by the obvious "Gas Works"? Yet it was a subtler art to let his old, simple-minded countryman ignore that detail. The little skit was widely copied and reached the Queen herself in due time, and her son, Prince Edward, who never forgot its humor.

Clemens read a notable paper that year before the Monday Evening Club. Its subject was "Consistency"—political consistency—and in it he took occasion to express himself pretty vigorously regarding the virtue of loyalty to party before principle, as exemplified in the Blaine-Cleveland campaign. It was in effect a scathing reply to those who, three years, before, had denounced Twichell and himself for standing by their convictions.—[Characteristic paragraphs from this paper will be found under Appendix R, at the end of last volume.]

CLXIV. SOME FURTHER ACCOUNT OF CHARLES L. WEBSTER & CO.

Flood-tide is a temporary condition, and the ebb in the business of Charles L. Webster & Co., though very deliberate, was not delayed in its beginning. Most of the books published—the early ones at least-were profitable. McClellan's memoirs paid, as did others of the war series.

Even The Life of Pope Leo XIII. paid. What a statement to make, after all their magnificent dreams and preparations!

It was published simultaneously in six languages. It was exploited in every conceivable fashion, and its aggregate sales fell far short of the number which the general agents had promised for their first orders. It was amazing, it was incredible, but, alas! it was true. The prospective Catholic purchaser had decided that the Pope's Life was not necessary to his salvation or even to his entertainment. Howells explains it, to his own satisfaction at least, when he says:

We did not consider how often Catholics could not read, how often, when they could, they might not wish to read. The event proved that, whether they could read or not, the immeasurable majority did not wish to read The Life of the Pope, though it was written by a dignitary of the Church and issued to the world with sanction from the Vatican.

Howells, of course, is referring to the laboring Catholic of that day. There are no Catholics of this day—no American Catholics, at least—who do not read, and money among them has become plentiful. Perhaps had the Pope's Life been issued in this new hour of enlightenment the tale of its success might have been less sadly told.

A variety of books followed. Henry Ward Beecher agreed to write an autobiography, but he died just when he was beginning the work, and the biography, which his family put together, brought only a moderate return. A book of Sandwich Islands tales and legends, by his Hawaiian Majesty King Kalakaua, edited by Clemens's old friend, Rollin M. Daggett, who had become United States minister to the islands, barely paid for the cost of manufacture, while a volume of reminiscences by General Hancock was still less fortunate. The running expenses of the business were heavy. On the strength of the Grant success Webster had moved into still larger quarters at No. 3 East Fifteenth Street, and had a ground floor for a salesroom. The force had become numerous and costly. It was necessary that a

book should pay largely to maintain this pretentious establishment. A number of books were published at a heavy loss. Never mind their titles; we may forget them, with the name of the bookkeeper who presently embezzled thirty thousand dollars of the firm's money and returned but a trifling sum.

By the end of 1887 there were three works in prospect on which great hopes were founded—'The Library of Humor', which Howells and Clark had edited; a personal memoir of General Sheridan's, and a Library of American Literature in ten volumes, compiled by Edmund Clarence Stedman and Ellen Mackay Hutchinson. It was believed these would restore the fortunes and the prestige of the firm. They were all excellent, attractive features. The Library of Humor was ably selected and contained two hundred choice drawings by Kemble. The Sheridan Memoir was finely written, and the public interest in it was bound to be general. The Library of American Literature was a collection of the best American writing, and seemed bound to appeal to every American reading-home. It was necessary to borrow most of the money required to build these books, for the profit made from the Grant Life and less fortunate ventures was pretty well exhausted. Clemens presently found a little drift of his notes accumulating at this bank and that—a disturbing condition, when he remembered it, for he was financing the typesetting machine by this time, and it was costing a pretty sum.

Meantime, Webster was no longer active in the management. In two years he had broken down from overwork, and was now desperately ill with an acute neuralgia that kept him away from the business most of the time. Its burdens had fallen upon his assistant, Fred J. Hall, a willing, capable young man, persevering and hopeful, lacking only years and experience. Hall worked like a beaver, and continually looked forward to success. He explained, with each month's report of affairs, just why the business had not prospered more during that particular

month, and just why its profits would be greater during the next. Webster finally retired from the business altogether, and Hall was given a small partnership in the firm. He reduced expenses, worked desperately, pumping out the debts, and managed to keep the craft afloat.

The Library of Humor, the Life of Sheridan, and The Library of American Literature all sold very well; not so well as had been hoped, but the sales yielded a fair profit. It was thought that if Clemens himself would furnish a new book now and then the business might regain something of its original standing.

We may believe that Clemens had not been always patient, not always gentle, during this process of decline. He had differed with Webster, and occasionally had gone down and reconstructed things after his own notions. Once he wrote to Orion that he had suddenly awakened to find that there was no more system in the office than in a nursery without a nurse.

"But," he added, "I have spent a good deal of time there since, and reduced everything to exact order and system."

Just what were the new features of order instituted it would be interesting to know. That the financial pressure was beginning to be felt even in the Clemens home is shown by a Christmas letter to Mrs. Moffett.

HARTFORD, December 18, 1887. DEAR PAMELA,—Will you take this $15 & buy some candy or other trifle for yourself & Sam & his wife to remind you that we remember you?

If we weren't a little crowded this year by the type-setter I'd send a check large enough to buy a family Bible or some other useful thing like that. However, we go on & on, but the type-setter goes on forever—at $3,000 a month; which is much more satisfactory than was the case the first 17 months, when the bill only averaged $2,000, & promised to take a thousand years. We'll be through now in 3 or 4 months, I reckon, & then the strain will let up and we can

breathe freely once more, whether success ensues or failure.

Even with a type-setter on hand we ought not to be in the least scrimped-but it would take a long letter to explain why & who is to blame.

All the family send love to all of you, & best Christmas wishes for your prosperity.

Affectionately, SAM.

CLXV. LETTERS, VISITS, AND VISITORS

There were many pleasanter things, to be sure. The farm life never failed with each returning summer; the winters brought gay company and fair occasions. Sir Henry and Lady Stanley, visiting. America, were entertained in the Clemens home, and Clemens went on to Boston to introduce Stanley to his lecture audience. Charles Dickens's son, with his wife and daughter, followed a little later. An incident of their visit seems rather amusing now. There is a custom in England which requires the host to give the guest notice of bedtime by handing him a lighted candle. Mrs. Clemens knew of this custom, but did not have the courage to follow it in her own home, and the guests knew of no other way to relieve the situation; as a result, all sat up much later than usual. Eventually Clemens himself suggested that possibly the guests would like to retire.

Robert Louis Stevenson came down from Saranac, and Clemens went in to visit him at his New York hotel, the St. Stevens, on East Eleventh Street. Stevenson had orders to sit in the sunshine as much as possible, and during the few days of their association he and Clemens would walk down to Washington Square and sit on one of the benches and talk. They discussed many things—philosophies, people, books; it seems a pity their talk could not have been preserved.

Stevenson was a great admirer of Mark Twain's work. He said that during a recent painting of his portrait he had insisted on reading Huck Finn aloud to the artist, a Frenchman, who had at first protested, and finally had fallen a complete victim to Huck's yarn. In one of Stevenson's letters to Clemens he wrote:

My father, an old man, has been prevailed upon to read Roughing It (his usual amusement being found in theology), and after one evening spent with the book he declared: "I am frightened. It cannot be safe for a man at my time of life to laugh so much."

What heaps of letters, by the way, remain from this time, and how curious some of them are! Many of them are requests of one sort or another, chiefly for money—one woman asking for a single day's income, conservatively estimated at five thousand dollars. Clemens seldom answered an unwarranted letter; but at one time he began a series of unmailed answers—that is to say, answers in which he had let himself go merely to relieve his feelings and to restore his spiritual balance. He prepared an introduction for this series. In it he said:

... You receive a letter. You read it. It will be tolerably sure to produce one of three results: 1, pleasure; 2, displeasure; 3, indifference. I do not need to say anything about Nos. 1 & 3; everybody knows what to do with those breeds of letters; it is breed No. 2 that I am after. It is the one that is loaded up with trouble. When you get an exasperating letter what happens? If you are young you answer it promptly, instantly—and mail the thing you have written. At forty what do you do? By that time you have found out that a letter written in a passion is a mistake in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred; that it usually wrongs two persons, and always wrongs one—yourself. You have grown weary of wronging yourself and repenting; so you

manacle, you fetter, you log-chain the frantic impulse to write a pulverizing answer. You will wait a day or die. But in the mean time what do you do? Why, if it is about dinner-time, you sit at table in a deep abstraction all through the meal; you try to throw it off and help do the talking; you get a start three or four times, but conversation dies on your lips every time —your mind isn't on it; your heart isn't in it. You give up, and subside into a bottomless deep of silence, permanently; people must speak to you two or three times to get your attention, and then say it over again to make you understand. This kind of thing goes on all the rest of the evening; nobody can interest you in anything; you are useless, a depressing influence, a burden. You go to bed at last; but at three in the morning you are as wide awake as you were in the beginning. Thus we see what you have been doing for nine hours—on the outside. But what were you doing on the inside? You were writing letters—in your mind. And enjoying it, that is quite true; that is not to be denied. You have been flaying your correspondent alive with your incorporeal pen; you have been braining him, disemboweling him, carving him into little bits, and then—doing it all over again. For nine hours. It was wasted time, for you had no intention of putting any of this insanity on paper and mailing it. Yes, you know that, and confess it—but what were you to do? Where was your remedy? Will anybody contend that a man can say to such masterful anger as that, Go, and be obeyed? No, he cannot; that is certainly true. Well, then, what is he to do? I will explain by the suggestion contained in my opening paragraph. During the nine hours he has written as many as forty- seven furious letters—in his mind. If he had put just one of them on paper it would have brought him relief, saved him eight hours of trouble, and given him an hour's red-hot pleasure besides. He is not to mail this letter; he understands that, and so he can turn on the whole volume of his wrath; there is no harm. He is only writing it to get the bile out. So to speak, he is a volcano: imaging himself erupting does no

good; he must open up his crater and pour out in reality his intolerable charge of lava if he would get relief. Before he has filled his first sheet sometimes the relief is there. He degenerates into good-nature from that point. Sometimes the load is so hot and so great that one writes as many as three letters before he gets down to a mailable one; a very angry one, a less angry one, and an argumentative one with hot embers in it here and there. He pigeonholes these and then does one of two things—dismisses the whole matter from his mind or writes the proper sort of letter and mails it. To this day I lose my balance and send an overwarm letter—or more frequently telegram—two or three times a year. But that is better than doing it a hundred times a year, as I used to do years ago. Perhaps I write about as many as ever, but I pigeonhole them. They ought not to be thrown away. Such a letter a year or so old is as good as a sermon to the maw who wrote it. It makes him feel small and shabby, but—well, that wears off. Any sermon does; but the sermon does some little good, anyway. An old cold letter like that makes you wonder how you could ever have got into such a rage about nothing.

The unmailed answers that were to accompany this introduction were plentiful enough and generally of a fervent sort. One specimen will suffice. It was written to the chairman of a hospital committee.

DEAR SIR,—If I were Smithfield I would certainly go out and get behind something and blush. According to your report, "the politicians are afraid to tax the people for the support" of so humane and necessary a thing as a hospital. And do your "people" propose to stand that?—at the hands of vermin officials whom the breath of their votes could blow out of official existence in a moment if they had the pluck to band themselves together and blow. Oh, come, these are not "people"—they are cowed school-boys with backbones made of boiled macaroni. If you are not

misreporting those "people" you are just in the right business passing the mendicant hat for them. Dear sir, communities where anything like citizenship exists are accustomed to hide their shames, but here we have one proposing to get up a great "exposition" of its dishonor and advertise it all it can. It has been eleven years since I wrote anything for one of those graveyards called a "Fair paper," and so I have doubtless lost the knack of it somewhat; still I have done the best I could for you. This was from a burning heart and well deserved. One may almost regret that he did not send it.

Once he received a letter intended for one Samuel Clements, of Elma, New York, announcing that the said Clements's pension had been allowed. But this was amusing. When Clemens had forwarded the notice to its proper destination he could not resist sending this comment to the commissioner at Washington:

DEAR SIR,—I have not applied for a pension. I have often wanted a pension—often—ever so often—I may say, but in as much as the only military service I performed during the war was in the Confederate army, I have always felt a delicacy about asking you for it. However, since you have suggested the thing yourself, I feel strengthened. I haven't any very pensionable diseases myself, but I can furnish a substitute—a man who is just simply a chaos, a museum of all the different kinds of aches and pains, fractures, dislocations and malformations there are; a man who would regard "rheumatism and sore eyes" as mere recreation and refreshment after the serious occupations of his day. If you grant me the pension, dear sir, please hand it to General Jos. Hawley, United States Senator—I mean hand him the certificate, not the money, and he will forward it to me. You will observe by this postal-card which I inclose that he takes a friendly interest in the matter. He thinks I've already got the pension, whereas I've only got the

rheumatism; but didn't want that—I had that before. I wish it were catching. I know a man that I would load up with it pretty early. Lord, but we all feel that way sometimes. I've seen the day when but never mind that; you may be busy; just hand it to Hawley—the certificate, you understand, is not transferable.

Clemens was in good standing at Washington during the Cleveland administration, and many letters came, asking him to use his influence with the President to obtain this or that favor. He always declined, though once—a few years later, in Europe—when he learned that Frank Mason, consul-general at Frankfort, was about to be displaced, Clemens, of his own accord, wrote to Baby Ruth Cleveland about it.

MY DEAR RUTH, I belong to the Mugwumps, and one of the most sacred rules of our order prevents us from asking favors of officials or recommending men to office, but there is no harm in writing a friendly letter to you and telling you that an infernal outrage is about to be committed by your father in turning out of office the best Consul I know (and I know a great many) just because he is a Republican and a Democrat wants his place. He went on to recall Mason's high and honorable record, suggesting that Miss Ruth take the matter into her own hands. Then he said: I can't send any message to the President, but the next time you have a talk with him concerning such matters I wish you would tell him about Captain Mason and what I think of a Government that so treats its efficient officials.

Just what form of appeal the small agent made is not recorded, but by and by Mark Twain received a tiny envelope, postmarked Washington, inclosing this note in President Cleveland's handwriting:

Miss Ruth Cleveland begs to acknowledge the receipt of Mr. Twain's letter and say that she took the liberty of reading it to the President, who desires her to thank Mr. Twain for her information, and to say to him that Captain Mason will not be disturbed in the Frankfort Consulate. The President also desires Miss Cleveland to say that if Mr. Twain knows of any other cases of this kind he will be greatly obliged if he will write him concerning them at his earliest convenience.

Clemens immensely admired Grover Cleveland, also his young wife, and his visits to Washington were not infrequent. Mrs. Clemens was not always able to accompany him, and he has told us how once (it was his first visit after the President's marriage) she put a little note in the pocket of his evening waistcoat, which he would be sure to find when dressing, warning him about his deportment. Being presented to Mrs. Cleveland, he handed her a card on which he had written "He didn't," and asked her to sign her name below those words. Mrs. Cleveland protested that she couldn't sign it unless she knew what it was he hadn't done; but he insisted, and she promised to sign if he would tell her immediately afterward all about it. She signed, and he handed her Mrs. Clemens's note, which was very brief. It said:

"Don't wear your arctics in the White House."

Mrs. Cleveland summoned a messenger and had the card she had signed mailed at once to Mrs. Clemens at Hartford.

He was not always so well provided against disaster. Once, without consulting his engagements, he agreed to assist Mrs. Cleveland at a dedication, only to find that he must write an apology later. In his letter he said:

I do not know how it is in the White House, but in this house of ours whenever the minor half of the administration tries to run itself without the help of the major half it gets aground.

He explained his position, and added:

I suppose the President often acts just like that; goes and makes an impossible promise, and you never find it out until it is next to impossible to break it up and set things straight again. Well, that is just our way exactly—one-half the administration always busy getting the family into trouble and the other half busy getting it out.

CLVXI. A "PLAYER" AND A MASTER OF ARTS

One morning early in January Clemens received the following note:

DALY'S THEATER, NEW YORK, January 2, 1888. Mr. Augustin Daly will be very much pleased to have Mr. S. L. Clemens meet Mr. Booth, Mr. Barrett, and Mr. Palmer and a few friends at lunch on Friday next, January 6th (at one o'clock in Delmonico's), to discuss the formation of a new club which it is thought will claim your (sic) interest. R. S. V. P.

There were already in New York a variety of literary and artistic societies, such as The Kinsmen and Tile clubs, with which Clemens was more or less associated. It was proposed now to form a more comprehensive and pretentious organization—one that would include the various associated arts. The conception of this new club, which was to be called The Players, had grown out of a desire on the part of Edwin Booth to confer some enduring benefit upon the members of his profession. It had been discussed during a summer cruise on Mr. E. C. Benedict's steam-yacht by a little party which, besides the owner, consisted of Booth himself, Aldrich, Lawrence Barrett,

William Bispham, and Laurence Hutton. Booth's original idea had been to endow some sort of an actors' home, but after due consideration this did not appear to be the best plan. Some one proposed a club, and Aldrich, with never-failing inspiration, suggested its name, The Players, which immediately impressed Booth and the others. It was then decided that members of all the kindred arts should be admitted, and this was the plan discussed and perfected at the Daly luncheon. The guests became charter members, and The Players became an incorporated fact early in January, 1888.—[Besides Mr. Booth himself, the charter members were: Lawrence Barrett, William Bispham, Samuel L. Clemens, Augustin Daly, Joseph F. Daly, John Drew, Henry Edwards, Laurence Hutton, Joseph Jefferson, John A. Lane, James Lewis, Brander Matthews, Stephen H. Olin, A. M. Palmer, and William T. Sherman.]—Booth purchased the fine old brownstone residence at 16 Gramercy Park, and had expensive alterations made under the directions of Stanford White to adapt it for club purposes. He bore the entire cost, furnished it from garret to cellar, gave it his books and pictures, his rare collections of every sort. Laurence Hutton, writing of it afterward, said:

And on the first Founder's Night, the 31st of December, 1888, he transferred it all to the association, a munificent gift; absolutely without parallel in its way. The pleasure it gave to Booth during the few remaining years of his life was very great. He made it his home. Next to his own immediate family it was his chief interest, care, and consolation. He nursed and petted it, as it nursed and petted and honored him. He died in it. And it is certainly his greatest monument.

There is no other club quite like The Players. The personality of Edwin Booth pervades it, and there is a spirit in its atmosphere not found in other large clubs—a spirit of unity, and ancient friendship, and mellowness which usually come only of small membership and long establishment.

Mark Twain was always fond of The Players, and more than once made it his home. It is a true home, and its members are a genuine brotherhood.

It was in June, 1888, that Yale College conferred upon Samuel Clemens the degree of Master of Arts. It was his first honor of this kind, and he was proud of it. To Charles Hopkins ("Charley") Clark, who had been appointed to apprise him of the honor, he wrote:

I felt mighty proud of that degree; in fact I could squeeze the truth a little closer and say vain of it. And why shouldn't I be? I am the only literary animal of my particular subspecies who has ever been given a degree by any college in any age of the world as far as I know.

To which Clark answered:

MY DEAR FRIEND, You are "the only literary animal of your particular subspecies" in existence, and you've no cause for humility in the fact. Yale has done herself at least as much credit as she has done you, and "don't you forget it." C. H. C.

Clemens could not attend the alumni dinner, being at Elmira and unable to get away, but in an address he made at Yale College later in the year he thus freely expressed himself:

I was sincerely proud and grateful to be made a Master of Arts by this great and venerable University, and I would have come last June to testify this feeling, as I do now testify it, but that the sudden and unexpected notice of the honor done me found me at a distance from home and unable to discharge that duty and enjoy that privilege. Along at first, say for the first month or so, I, did not quite know hove to proceed because of my not knowing just what authorities and privileges belonged to the title which had

been granted me, but after that I consulted some students of Trinity—in Hartford—and they made everything clear to me. It was through them that I found out that my title made me head of the Governing Body of the University, and lodged in me very broad and severely responsible powers. I was told that it would be necessary to report to you at this time, and of course I comply, though I would have preferred to put it off till I could make a better showing; for indeed I have been so pertinaciously hindered and obstructed at every turn by the faculty that it would be difficult to prove that the University is really in any better shape now than it was when I first took charge. By advice, I turned my earliest attention to the Greek department. I told the Greek professor I had concluded to drop the use of Greek- written character because it is so hard to spell with, and so impossible to read after you get it spelt. Let us draw the curtain there. I saw by what followed that nothing but early neglect saved him from being a very profane man. I ordered the professor of mathematics to simplify the whole system, because the way it was I couldn't understand it, and I didn't want things going on in the college in what was practically a clandestine fashion. I told him to drop the conundrum system; it was not suited to the dignity of a college, which should deal in facts, not guesses and suppositions; we didn't want any more cases of if A and B stand at opposite poles of the earth's surface and C at the equator of Jupiter, at what variations of angle will the left limb of the moon appear to these different parties?—I said you just let that thing alone; it's plenty time to get in a sweat about it when it happens; as like as not it ain't going to do any harm, anyway. His reception of these instructions bordered on insubordination, insomuch that I felt obliged to take his number and report him. I found the astronomer of the University gadding around after comets and other such odds and ends—tramps and derelicts of the skies. I told him pretty plainly that we couldn't have that. I told him it was no economy to go on piling up and piling up raw material in

the way of new stars and comets and asteroids that we couldn't ever have any use for till we had worked off the old stock. At bottom I don't really mind comets so much, but somehow I have always been down on asteroids. There is nothing mature about them; I wouldn't sit up nights the way that man does if I could get a basketful of them. He said it was the bast line of goods he had; he said he could trade them to Rochester for comets, and trade the comets to Harvard for nebulae, and trade the nebula to the Smithsonian for flint hatchets. I felt obliged to stop this thing on the spot; I said we couldn't have the University turned into an astronomical junk shop. And while I was at it I thought I might as well make the reform complete; the astronomer is extraordinarily mutinous, and so, with your approval, I will transfer him to the law department and put one of the law students in his place. A boy will be more biddable, more tractable, also cheaper. It is true he cannot be intrusted with important work at first, but he can comb the skies for nebulae till he gets his hand in. I have other changes in mind, but as they are in the nature of surprises I judge it politic to leave them unspecified at this time.

Very likely it was in this new capacity, as the head of the governing body, that he wrote one morning to Clark advising him as to the misuse of a word in the Courant, though he thought it best to sign the communication with the names of certain learned friends, to give it weight with the public, as he afterward explained.

SIR,—The word "patricide" in your issue of this morning (telegrams) was an error. You meant it to describe the slayer of a father; you should have used "parricide" instead. Patricide merely means the killing of an Irishman—any Irishman, male or female. Respectfully, J. HAMMOND TRUMBULL. N. J. BURTON. J. H. TWICHELL.

CLXVII. NOTES AND LITERARY MATTERS

Clemens' note-books of this time are full of the vexations of his business ventures, figures, suggestions, and a hundred imagined combinations for betterment—these things intermingled with the usual bits of philosophy and reflections, and amusing reminders.

Aldrich's man who painted the fat toads red, and naturalist chasing and trying to catch them. Man who lost his false teeth over Brooklyn Bridge when he was on his way to propose to a widow. One believes St. Simon and Benvenuto and partly believes the Margravine of Bayreuth. There are things in the confession of Rousseau which one must believe. What is biography? Unadorned romance. What is romance? Adorned biography. Adorn it less and it will be better than it is. If God is what people say there can be none in the universe so unhappy as he; for he sees unceasingly myriads of his creatures suffering unspeakable miseries, and, besides this, foresees all they are going to suffer during the remainder of their lives. One might well say "as unhappy as God."

In spite of the financial complexities and the drain of the enterprises already in hand he did not fail to conceive others. He was deeply interested in Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress at the moment, and from photography and scenic effect he presaged a possibility to-day realized in the moving picture.

Dress up some good actors as Apollyon, Greatheart, etc., & the other Bunyan characters, take them to a wild gorge and photograph them—Valley of the Shadow of Death; to other effective places & photo them along with the scenery; to Paris, in their curious costumes, place them near the Arc de l'Etoile & photo them with the crowd-Vanity Fair; to