

# THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MARK TWAIN

## Orion Clemens, "A Most Strange Creature," Resumed



Mark Twain in 1867.

[DICTATED  
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**T**HERE were several candidates for all the offices in the gift of the new State of Nevada save two,—

United States Senator and Secretary of State. Nye was certain to get a senatorship, and Orion was so sure to get the secretaryship that no one but him was named for that office.

But he was hit with one of his spasms of virtue on the very day that the Republican party was to make its nominations in the convention, and refused to go near the convention. He was urged; but all persuasions failed. He said his presence there would be an unfair and improper influence, and that if he was to be nominated the compliment must come to him as a free and unspotted gift. This attitude would have settled his case for him without further effort; but he had another attack of virtue on the same day, that made it absolutely sure. It had been his habit for a great many years to change his religion with his shirt, and his ideas about temperance at the same time. He would be a teetotaler for awhile, and the champion of the cause; then he would change to the other side for a time. On nomination day he suddenly changed from a friendly attitude toward whisky, which was the popular attitude, to uncompromising teetotalism, and went absolutely dry. His friends besought and implored, but all in vain. He could not be persuaded to cross the threshold of a saloon. The paper next morning contained the list of chosen nominees. His name was not in it. He had not received a vote.

His rich income ceased when the State government came into power. He was without an occupation. Something had to be done. He put up his sign as attorney at law; but he got no clients. It was strange. It was difficult to account for. I cannot account for it; but if I were going to guess at a solution I should guess that by the make of him he would examine both sides of a case so diligently and so conscientiously that when he got through with his argument neither he nor a jury would know which side he was on. I think that his client would find out his make in laying his case before him, and would take warning and withdraw it in time to save himself from probable disaster.

I HAD taken up my residence in San Francisco about a year before the time I have just been speaking of. One day I got a tip from Mr. Camp, a bold man who was always making big fortunes in ingenious speculations and losing them again in the course of six months by other speculative ingenuities. Camp told me to buy some shares in the Hale & Norcross. I bought fifty shares at three hundred dollars a share. I bought on a margin, and put up twenty per cent. It exhausted my funds. I wrote Orion, and offered him half, and asked him to send his share of the money. I waited and waited. He wrote and said he was going to attend to it. The stock went along up pretty briskly. It went higher and higher. It reached a thousand dollars a share. It climbed to two thousand, then to three thousand, then to twice that figure. The money did not come, but I was not disturbed. By and by that stock took a turn, and began to gallop down. Then I wrote urgently. Orion answered that he had sent the money long ago; said he had sent it to the Occidental Hotel. I inquired for it. They said it was not there. To cut a long story short, that stock went on down until it fell below the price I had paid for it. Then it began to eat up the margin; and when at last I got out I was very badly crippled.

When it was too late, I found out what had become of Orion's money. Any other human being would have sent a check; but he sent gold. The hotel clerk put it in the safe and went on vacation, and there it had reposed all this time enjoying its final work, no doubt. Another man might have thought to tell me that the money was not in a letter, but was in an express package; but it never occurred to Orion to do that.

LATER, Mr. Camp gave me another chance. He agreed to buy our Tennessee land for two hundred thousand dollars, pay a part of the amount in cash, and give long notes for the rest. His scheme was to import foreigners from grape growing and wine making districts in Europe, settle them on the land, and turn it into a wine growing country. He knew what Mr. Longworth thought of those Tennessee

grapes, and was satisfied. I sent the contracts and things to Orion for his signature, he being one of the three heirs. But they arrived at a bad time,—in a doubly bad time, in fact. The temperance virtue was temporarily upon him in strong force, and he wrote and said that he would not be a party to debauching the country with wine. Also he said how could he know whether Mr. Camp was going to deal fairly and honestly with those poor people from Europe or not? And so, without waiting to find out, he quashed the whole trade, and there it fell, never to be brought to life again. The land, from being suddenly worth two hundred thousand dollars, became as suddenly worth what it was before,—nothing, and taxes to pay. I had paid the taxes and the other expenses for some years; but I dropped the Tennessee land there, and have never taken any interest in it since, pecuniarily or otherwise, until yesterday.

I had supposed, until yesterday, that Orion had frittered away the last acre, and indeed that was his own impression. But a gentleman arrived yesterday from Tennessee, and brought a map showing that by a correction of the ancient surveys we still own a thousand acres, in a coal district, out of the hundred thousand acres which my father left us when he died in 1847. The gentleman brought a proposition; also he brought a reputable and well to do citizen of New York. The proposition was that the Tennessean gentleman should sell that land; that the New York gentleman should pay all the expenses and fight all the lawsuits, in case any should turn up, and that of such profit as might eventuate the Tennessean gentleman should take a third, the New Yorker a third, and Sam Moffett and his sister and I, who are surviving heirs, the remaining third.

This time I hope we shall get rid of the Tennessee land for good and all, and never hear of it again.

I CAME East in January, 1867. Orion remained in Carson City perhaps a year longer. Then he sold his twelve thousand-dollar house and its furniture for thirty-five hundred in greenbacks at about sixty per cent. discount. He and his wife took passage in the steamer for home in Keokuk. About 1871 or '72 they came to New York. Orion had been trying to make a living in the law ever since he had arrived from the Pacific coast; but he had secured only two cases. Those he was to try free of charge—but the possible result will never be known, because the parties settled the cases out of court without his help.



He Was Hit with One of His Spasms of Virtue.

Orion got a job as proofreader on "The New York Evening Post" at ten dollars a week. By and by he came to Hartford and wanted me to get him a place as reporter on a Hartford paper. Here was a chance to try my scheme again, and I did it. I made him go to "The Hartford Evening Post," without any letter of introduction, and propose to scrub and sweep and do all sorts of things for nothing, on the plea that he didn't need money but only needed work, and that that was what he was pining for. Within six weeks he was on the editorial staff of that paper at twenty dollars a week, and he was worth the money. He was presently called for by some other paper at better wages; but I made him go to "The Post" people and tell them about it. They stood the raise, and kept him. It was the pleasantest berth he had ever had in his life. It was an

easy berth. He was in every way comfortable. But ill luck came. It was bound to come.

A new Republican daily was to be started in a New England city by a stock company of well to do politicians, and they offered him the chief editorship at three thousand a year. He was eager to accept. My beseechings and reasonings went for nothing. I said:

"You are as weak as water. Those people will find it out right away. They will easily see that you have no backbone; that they can deal with you as they would deal with a slave. You may last six months, but not longer. Then they will not dismiss you as they would dismiss a gentleman; they will fling you out as they would fling out an intruding tramp."

IT happened just so. Then he and his wife migrated to Keokuk once more. Orion wrote from there that he was not resuming the law; that he thought that what his health needed was the open air, in some sort of outdoor occupation; that his father in law had a strip of ground on the river border a mile above Keokuk with some sort of house on it, and his idea was to buy that place and start a chicken farm and provide Keokuk with chickens and eggs, and perhaps butter—but I don't know whether you can raise butter on a chicken farm or not. He said the place could be had for three thousand dollars cash; and I sent the money. He began to raise chickens, and he made a detailed monthly report to me, whereby it appeared that he was able to work off his chickens on the Keokuk people at a dollar and a quarter a pair. But it also appeared that it cost a dollar and sixty cents to raise the pair. This did not seem to discourage Orion, and so I let it go. Meantime he was borrowing a hundred dollars per month of me regularly, month by month. Now to show Orion's stern and rigid business ways,—and

he really prided himself on his large business capacities,—the moment he received the advance of a hundred dollars at the beginning of each month, he always sent me his note for the amount, and with it he sent, out of that money, three months' interest on the hundred dollars at six per cent. per annum, these notes being always for three months.

As I say, he always sent a detailed statement of the month's profit and loss on the chickens,—at least, the month's loss on the chickens,—and this detailed statement included the various items of expense: corn for the chickens, boots for himself, and so on, even carfares, and the weekly contribution of ten cents to help out the missionaries who were trying to damn the Chinese after a plan not satisfactory to those people.

I think the poultry experiment lasted about a year, possibly two years. It had then cost me six thousand dollars.

Orion returned to the law business, and I suppose he remained in that harness off and on for the succeeding quarter of a century; but so far as my knowledge goes he was only a lawyer in name, and had no clients.

My mother died, in her eighty-eighth year, in the summer of 1890. She had saved some money, and she left it to me, because it had come from me. I gave it to Orion, and he said, with thanks, that I had supported him long enough and now he was going to relieve me of that burden, and would also hope to pay back some of that expense, and maybe the whole of it. Accordingly, he proceeded to use up that money in building a considerable addition to the house, with the idea of taking boarders and getting rich. We need not dwell upon this venture. It was another of his failures. His wife tried hard to make the scheme succeed, and if anybody could have made it succeed she would have done it. She was a good woman, and was greatly liked. She had a practical side, and she would have made that