

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MARK TWAIN

An Emperor and a Janitor Who Agreed



In 1884.

(Dictated Thursday, December 6, 1906.)
FROM SUSY'S BIOGRAPHY OF ME

Feb. 27, Sunday
CLARA'S reputation as a baby was always a fine one, mine exactly the contrary. One often related story concerning her bravness as a baby and her

own opinion of this quality of hers. Clara and I often got shivers in our hands and when mamma took them out with a much dreaded needle Clara was always very brave, and I very cowardly. One day Clara got one of these shivers in her hand, a very bad one, and when mamma was taking it out, Clara stood perfectly still without even wincing. I saw how brave she was and turning to mamma said "Mamma isn't she a brave little thing?" Presently mamma had to give the little hand quite a dig with the needle and noticing how perfectly quiet Clara was about it she exclaimed, "Why Clara! you are a brave little thing!" Clara responded: "No bodys braver but God!"

CLARA'S bold remark is the main detail, and Susy has accurately remembered its phrasing. The three-year-old's wound was of a formidable sort, and one which the mother's surgery would have been equal to. The flesh of the finger had been burst by a very accident. It was the doctor that sewed it up, and to all appearances it was he, and the other independent witnesses, that did the main part of the suffering,—each stitch that he took made Clara wince slightly, but it shriveled the others.

I take pride in Clara's remark, because it shows that although she was only three years old, her frigid teachings were already making her a thinker,—a thinker and also an observer of proportions. I am not claiming any credit for this. I furnished to the children worldly knowledge and wisdom, but was not competent to go higher, and so I left their spiritual education in the hands of the mother. A result of this modesty of mine was made manifest to me in a very striking way some years afterward, when Jean was nine years old. We had recently arrived in Berlin at the time, and had begun house-keeping in a furnished apartment.

ONE morning at breakfast a vast card arrived,—an invitation. To be precise, it was a command from the Emperor of Germany to come to dinner. During several months I had encountered socially, on the Continent, men bearing lofty titles; and all this while Jean was becoming more and more impressed, and awed, and subdued, by these imposing events, for she had not been abroad before, and they were new to her—onders out of dreamland turned into realities. The imperial card was passed from hand to hand around the table, and examined with interest. When it reached Jean she exhibited excitement and emotion, but for a time was quite speechless; then she said:

"Why, papa! if it keeps going on like this, pretty soon there won't be anybody left for you to get acquainted with but God!"

It was not complimentary to think I was not acquainted in that quarter; but she was young, and the young jump to conclusions without reflection.

Necessarily, I did myself the honor to obey the command of the Emperor Wilhelm II. Prince Heinrich and six or eight other guests were present. The Emperor did most of the talking, and he talked well and in faultless English. In both of these conspicuousnesses I was gratified to recognize a resemblance to myself,—a very exact resemblance; no, almost exact, but not quite that,—a modified exactness, with the advantage in favor of the Emperor. My English, like his, is nearly faultless; like him, I talk well; and when I have guests at dinner I prefer to do all the talking myself. It is the best way, and the pleasantest, also the most profitable for the others.

I was greatly pleased to perceive that His Majesty was familiar with my books, and that his attitude toward them was not uncomplimentary. In the course of his talk he said that my best and most valuable book was "Old Times on the Mississippi." I will refer to that remark again presently.

AN official who was well up in the Foreign Office at that time, and had served under Bismarck for fourteen years, was still occupying his old place under Chancellor Caprivi. Smith, I will call him of whom I am speaking, though that is not his name. He was a special friend of mine, and I greatly enjoyed his society, although, in order to have it, it was necessary for me to seek it as late as midnight, and not earlier. This was because Government officials of his rank had to work all day, after nine

in the morning, and then attend official banquets in the evening; wherefore they were usually unable to get life restoring fresh air and exercise for their jaded minds and bodies earlier than midnight; then they turned out in groups of two or three, and gratefully and violently tramped the deserted streets until two in the morning.

Smith had been in the Government service, at home and abroad, for more than thirty years, and was now sixty years old, or close upon it. He could not remember a year in which he had had a vacation of more than a fortnight's length. He was weary all through to the bones and the marrow now, and was yearning for a holiday of a whole three months,—yearning so longingly and so poignantly that he had at last made up his mind to make a desperate cast for it and stand the consequences, whatever they might be. It was against all rules to ask for a vacation,—quite against all etiquette; the shock of it would paralyze the Chancellery. Stern etiquette and usage required another form: the applicant was not privileged to ask for a vacation; he must send in his resignation. The Chancellor would know that the applicant was not really trying to resign, and didn't want to resign, but was merely trying in this left handed way to get a vacation.

The night before the Emperor's dinner I helped Smith take his exercise, after midnight, and he was full of his project. He had sent in his resignation that day, and was trembling for the result, and naturally, because it might possibly be that the Chancellor would be happy to fill his place with somebody else, in which case he could accept the resignation without comment and without offense. Smith was in a very anxious frame of mind, not that he feared that Caprivi was dissatisfied with him, for he had no such fear; it was the Emperor

his pleasure, and that then his pleasure in the matter would be communicated by Caprivi.

Smith said he would know his fate the next evening, after the imperial dinner; that when I should escort His Majesty into the large salon contiguous to the dining room, I would find there about thirty men,—Cabinet Ministers, Admirals, Generals, and other great officials of the Empire,—and that these men would be standing talking together in little separate groups of two or three persons; that the Emperor would move from group to group and say a word to each, sometimes two words, sometimes ten words; and that the length of his speech, whether brief or not so brief, would indicate the exact standing in the Emperor's regard of the man accosted; and that by observing this thermometer an expert could tell to half a degree the state of the imperial weather in each case,—that in Berlin, as in the imperial days of Rome, the Emperor was the sun, and that his smile or his frown meant good fortune or disaster to the man upon whom it should fall. Smith suggested that I watch the thermometer while the Emperor went his rounds of the groups; and added that if His Majesty talked four minutes with any person there present, it meant high favor, and that the sun was in the zenith and cloudless for that man.

I mentally recorded that four-minute altitude, and resolved to see if any man there on that night stood in sufficient favor to achieve it.

VERY well. After the dinner I watched the Emperor while he passed from group to group, and privately I timed him with a watch. Two or three times he came near to reaching the four-minute altitude; but always he fell short a little. The last man he came to was Smith. He put his hand on Smith's shoulder and began to talk to him; and when he finished the thermometer had scored seven minutes! The company then moved toward the smoking room, where cigars, beer, and anecdotes would be in brisk service until midnight, and as Smith passed me he whispered:

"That settles it. The Chancellor will ask me how much of a vacation I want, and I sha'n't be afraid to raise the limit. I shall call for six months."

Smith's dream had been to spend his three months' vacation—in case he got a vacation instead of the other thing—in one of the great capitals of the Continent—a capital whose name I shall suppress at present. The next day the Chancellor asked him how much of a vacation he wanted, and where he desired to spend it. Smith told him. His prayer was granted, and rather more than granted. The Chancellor augmented his salary, and attached him to the German Embassy of that selected capital, giving him a place of high dignity, bearing an imposing title, and with nothing to do except attend banquets of an extraordinary character at the Embassy, once or twice a year. The term of his vacation was not specified; he was to continue it until requested to come back to his work in the Foreign Office. This was in 1894. Eight years later Smith was passing through Vienna, and he called upon me. There had been no interruption of his vacation as yet, and there was no likelihood that an interruption of it would occur while he should still be among the living.

[DICTATED MONDAY, DECEMBER 17, 1906.]

AS I have already remarked, "Old Times on the Mississippi" got the Kaiser's best praise. It was after midnight when I reached home. I was usually out until toward midnight, and the pleasure of being out late was poisoned, every night, by the dread of what I must meet at my front door,—an indignant face, a resentful face,—the face of the portier. The portier was a tow headed young German, twenty-two or three years old; and it had been for some time apparent to me that he did not enjoy being hammered out of his sleep, nights, to let me in. He never had a kind word for me, nor a pleasant look. I couldn't understand it, since it was his business to be on watch and let the occupants of the several flats in at any and all hours of the night. I could



"There! I Have Found It Out!" He Said.

that he was afraid of; he did not know how he stood with the Emperor. He said that while apparently it was Caprivi who would decide his case, it was in reality the Emperor who would perform that service; that the Emperor kept personal watch upon everything, and that no official sparrow could fall to the ground without his privity and consent; that his resignation would be laid before His Majesty, who would accept it or decline to accept it, according to

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