

PAINE ALBERT BIGELOW

THE BOYS' LIFE OF MARK
TWAIN

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Albert Bigelow Paine

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PREFACE

This is the story of a boy, born in the humblest surroundings, reared almost without schooling, and amid benighted conditions such as to-day have no existence, yet who lived to achieve a world-wide fame; to attain honorary degrees from the greatest universities of America and Europe; to be sought by statesmen and kings; to be loved and honored by all men in all lands, and mourned by them when he died. It is the story of one of the world's very great men—the story of Mark Twain.

I.

THE FAMILY OF JOHN CLEMENS

A long time ago, back in the early years of another century, a family named Clemens moved from eastern Tennessee to eastern Missouri—from a small, unheard-of place called Pall Mall, on Wolf River, to an equally small and unknown place called Florida, on a tiny river named the Salt.

That was a far journey, in those days, for railway trains in 1835 had not reached the South and West, and John Clemens and his family traveled in an old two-horse barouche, with two extra riding-horses, on one of which rode the eldest child, Orion Clemens, a boy of ten, and on the other Jennie, a slave girl.

In the carriage with the parents were three other children—Pamela and Margaret, aged eight and five, and little Benjamin, three years old. The time was spring, the period of the Old South, and, while these youngsters did not realize that they were passing through a sort of Golden Age, they must have enjoyed the weeks of leisurely journeying toward what was then the Far West—the Promised Land.

The Clemens fortunes had been poor in Tennessee. John Marshall Clemens, the father, was a lawyer, a man of education; but he was a dreamer, too, full of schemes that usually failed. Born in Virginia, he had grown up in Kentucky, and married

there Jane Lampton, of Columbia, a descendant of the English Lamptons and the belle of her region. They had left Kentucky for Tennessee, drifting from one small town to another that was always smaller, and with dwindling law-practice John Clemens in time had been obliged to open a poor little store, which in the end had failed to pay. Jennie was the last of several slaves he had inherited from his Virginia ancestors. Besides Jennie, his fortune now consisted of the horses and barouche, a very limited supply of money, and a large, unsalable tract of east Tennessee land, which John Clemens dreamed would one day bring his children fortune.

Readers of the "Gilded Age" will remember the journey of the Hawkins family from the "Knobs" of Tennessee to Missouri and the important part in that story played by the Tennessee land. Mark Twain wrote those chapters, and while they are not history, but fiction, they are based upon fact, and the picture they present of family hardship and struggle is not overdrawn. The character of Colonel Sellers, who gave the Hawkinses a grand welcome to the new home, was also real. In life he was James Lampton, cousin to Mrs. Clemens, a gentle and radiant merchant of dreams, who believed himself heir to an English earldom and was always on the verge of colossal fortune. With others of the Lampton kin, he was already settled in Missouri and had written back glowing accounts; though perhaps not more glowing than those which had come from another relative, John Quarles, brother-in-law to Mrs. Clemens, a jovial, whole-hearted

optimist, well-loved by all who knew him.

It was a June evening when the Clemens family, with the barouche and the two outriders, finally arrived in Florida, and the place, no doubt, seemed attractive enough then, however it may have appeared later. It was the end of a long journey, relatives gathered with fond welcome; prospects seemed bright. Already John Quarles had opened a general store in the little town. Florida, he said, was certain to become a city. Salt River would be made navigable with a series of locks and dams. He offered John Clemens a partnership in his business.

Quarles, for that time and place, was a rich man. Besides his store he had a farm and thirty slaves. His brother-in-law's funds, or lack of them, did not matter. The two had married sisters. That was capital enough for his hearty nature. So, almost on the moment of arrival in the new land, John Clemens once more found himself established in trade.

The next thing was to find a home. There were twenty-one houses in Florida, and none of them large. The one selected by John and Jane Clemens had two main rooms and a lean-to kitchen—a small place and lowly—the kind of a place that so often has seen the beginning of exalted lives. Christianity began with a babe in a manger; Shakespeare first saw the light in a cottage at Stratford; Lincoln entered the world by way of a leaky cabin in Kentucky, and into the narrow limits of the Clemens home in Florida, on a bleak autumn day—November 30, 1835—there was born one who under the name of Mark Twain would

live to cheer and comfort a tired world.

The name Mark Twain had not been thought of then, and probably no one prophesied favorably for the new-comer, who was small and feeble, and not over-welcome in that crowded household. They named him Samuel, after his paternal grandfather, and added Langhorne for an old friend—a goodly burden for so frail a wayfarer. But more appropriately they called him "Little Sam," or "Sammy," which clung to him through the years of his delicate childhood.

It seems a curious childhood, as we think of it now. Missouri was a slave State—Little Sam's companions were as often black as white. All the children of that time and locality had negroes for playmates, and were cared for by them. They were fond of their black companions and would have felt lost without them. The negro children knew all the best ways of doing things—how to work charms and spells, the best way to cure warts and heal stone-bruises, and to make it rain, and to find lost money. They knew what signs meant, and dreams, and how to keep off hoodoo; and all negroes, old and young, knew any number of weird tales.

John Clemens must have prospered during the early years of his Florida residence, for he added another slave to his household—Uncle Ned, a man of all work—and he built a somewhat larger house, in one room of which, the kitchen, was a big fireplace. There was a wide hearth and always plenty of wood, and here after supper the children would gather, with Jennie and Uncle Ned, and the latter would tell hair-lifting tales of "ha'nts," and

lonely roads, and witch-work that would make his hearers shiver with terror and delight, and look furtively over their shoulders toward the dark window-panes and the hovering shadows on the walls. Perhaps it was not the healthiest entertainment, but it was the kind to cultivate an imagination that would one day produce "Tom Sawyer" and "Huck Finn."

True, Little Sam was very young at this period, but even a little chap of two or three would understand most of that fireside talk, and get impressions more vivid than if the understanding were complete. He was barely four when this earliest chapter of his life came to a close.

John Clemens had not remained satisfied with Florida and his undertakings there. The town had not kept its promises. It failed to grow, and the lock-and-dam scheme that would make Salt River navigable fell through. Then one of the children, Margaret, a black-eyed, rosy little girl of nine, suddenly died. This was in August, 1839. A month or two later the saddened family abandoned their Florida home and moved in wagons, with their household furnishings, to Hannibal, a Mississippi River town, thirty miles away. There was only one girl left now, Pamela, twelve years old, but there was another boy, baby Henry, three years younger than Little Sam—four boys in all.

II.

THE NEW HOME, AND UNCLE JOHN QUARLES'S FARM

Hannibal was a town with prospects and considerable trade. It was slumbrous, being a slave town, but it was not dead. John Clemens believed it a promising place for business, and opened a small general store with Orion Clemens, now fifteen, a studious, dreamy lad, for clerk.

The little city was also an attractive place of residence. Mark Twain remembered it as "the white town drowsing in the sunshine of a summer morning, . . . the great Mississippi, the magnificent Mississippi, rolling its mile-wide tide along, the dense forest away on the other side."

The "white town" was built against green hills, and abutting the river were bluffs—Holliday's Hill and Lover's Leap. A distance below the town was a cave—a wonderful cave, as every reader of Tom Sawyer knows—while out in the river, toward the Illinois shore, was the delectable island that was one day to be the meeting-place of Tom's pirate band, and later to become the hiding-place of Huck and Nigger Jim.

The river itself was full of interest. It was the highway to the outside world. Rafts drifted by; smartly painted steamboats panted up and down, touching to exchange traffic and travelers,

a never-ceasing wonder to those simple shut-in dwellers whom the telegraph and railway had not yet reached. That Hannibal was a pleasant place of residence we may believe, and what an attractive place for a boy to grow up in!

Little Sam, however, was not yet ready to enjoy the island and the cave. He was still delicate—the least promising of the family. He was queer and fanciful, and rather silent. He walked in his sleep and was often found in the middle of the night, fretting with the cold, in some dark corner. Once he heard that a neighbor's children had the measles, and, being very anxious to catch the complaint, slipped over to the house and crept into bed with an infected playmate. Some days later, Little Sam's relatives gathered about his bed to see him die. He confessed, long after, that the scene gratified him. However, he survived, and fell into the habit of running away, usually in the direction of the river.

"You gave me more uneasiness than any child I had," his mother once said to him, in her old age.

"I suppose you were afraid I wouldn't live," he suggested.

She looked at him with the keen humor which had been her legacy to him. "No, afraid you would," she said. Which was only her joke, for she had the tenderest of hearts, and, like all mothers, had a weakness for the child that demanded most of her mother's care. It was chiefly on his account that she returned each year to Florida to spend the summer on John Quarles's farm.

If Uncle John Quarles's farm was just an ordinary Missouri farm, and his slaves just average negroes, they certainly never

seemed so to Little Sam. There was a kind of glory about everything that belonged to Uncle John, and it was not all imagination, for some of the spirit of that jovial, kindly hearted man could hardly fail to radiate from his belongings.

The farm was a large one for that locality, and the farmhouse was a big double log building—that is, two buildings with a roofed-over passage between, where in summer the lavish Southern meals were served, brought in on huge dishes by the negroes, and left for each one to help himself. Fried chicken, roast pig, turkeys, ducks, geese, venison just killed, squirrels, rabbits, partridges, pheasants, prairie-chickens, green corn, watermelon—a little boy who did not die on that bill of fare would be likely to get well on it, and to Little Sam the farm proved a life-saver.

It was, in fact, a heavenly place for a little boy. In the corner of the yard there were hickory and black-walnut trees, and just over the fence the hill sloped past barns and cribs to a brook, a rare place to wade, though there were forbidden pools. Cousin Tabitha Quarles, called "Puss," his own age, was Little Sam's playmate, and a slave girl, Mary, who, being six years older, was supposed to keep them out of mischief. There were swings in the big, shady pasture, where Mary swung her charges and ran under them until their feet touched the branches. All the woods were full of squirrels and birds and blooming flowers; all the meadows were gay with clover and butterflies, and musical with singing grasshoppers and calling larks; the fence-rows were full of wild

blackberries; there were apples and peaches in the orchard, and plenty of melons ripening in the corn. Certainly it was a glorious place!

Little Sam got into trouble once with the watermelons. One of them had not ripened quite enough when he ate several slices of it. Very soon after he was seized with such terrible cramps that some of the household did not think he could live.

But his mother said: "Sammy will pull through. He was not born to die that way." Which was a true prophecy. Sammy's slender constitution withstood the strain. It was similarly tested more than once during those early years. He was regarded as a curious child. At times dreamy and silent, again wild-headed and noisy, with sudden impulses that sent him capering and swinging his arms into the wind until he would fall with shrieks and spasms of laughter and madly roll over and over in the grass. It is not remembered that any one prophesied very well for his future at such times.

The negro quarters on Uncle John's farm were especially fascinating. In one cabin lived a bedridden old woman whom the children looked upon with awe. She was said to be a thousand years old, and to have talked with Moses. She had lost her health in the desert, coming out of Egypt. She had seen Pharaoh drown, and the fright had caused the bald spot on her head. She could ward off witches and dissolve spells.

Uncle Dan'l was another favorite, a kind-hearted, gentle soul, who long after, as Nigger Jim in the Tom Sawyer

and Huckleberry Finn tales, would win world-wide love and sympathy.

Through that far-off, warm, golden summer-time Little Sam romped and dreamed and grew. He would return each summer to the farm during those early years. It would become a beautiful memory. His mother generally kept him there until the late fall, when the chilly evenings made them gather around the wide, blazing fireplace. Sixty years later he wrote:

"I can see the room yet with perfect clearness. I can see all its belongings, all its details; the family-room of the house, with the trundle-bed in one corner and the spinning-wheel in another—a wheel whose rising and falling wail, heard from a distance, was the mournfulest of all sounds to me and made me homesick and low- spirited and filled my atmosphere with the wandering spirits of the dead; the vast fireplace, piled high with flaming logs from whose ends a sugary sap bubbled out but did not go to waste, for we scraped it off and ate it; . . . the lazy cat spread out on the rough hearthstones, the drowsy dogs braced against the jambs, blinking; my aunt in one chimney-corner, and my uncle in the other, smoking his corn-cob pipe."

It is hard not to tell more of the farm, for the boy who was one day going to write of Tom and Huck and the rest learned there so many things that Tom and Huck would need to know.

III.

SCHOOL

But he must have "book-learning," too, Jane Clemens said. On his return to Hannibal that first summer, she decided that Little Sam was ready for school. He was five years old and regarded as a "stirring child."

"He drives me crazy with his didoes when he's in the house," his mother declared, "and when he's out of it I'm expecting every minute that some one will bring him home half dead."

Mark Twain used to say that he had had nine narrow escapes from drowning, and it was at this early age that he was brought home one afternoon in a limp state, having been pulled from a deep hole in Bear Creek by a slave girl.

When he was restored, his mother said: "I guess there wasn't much danger. People born to be hanged are safe in water."

Mark Twain's mother was the original of Aunt Polly in the story of Tom Sawyer, an outspoken, keen-witted, charitable woman, whom it was good to know. She had a heart full of pity, especially for dumb creatures. She refused to kill even flies, and punished the cat for catching mice. She would drown young kittens when necessary, but warmed the water for the purpose. She could be strict, however, with her children, if occasion required, and recognized their faults.

Little Sam was inclined to elaborate largely on fact. A neighbor once said to her: "You don't believe anything that child says, I hope."

"Oh yes, I know his average. I discount him ninety per cent. The rest is pure gold."

She declared she was willing to pay somebody to take him off her hands for a part of each day and try to teach him "manners." A certain Mrs. E. Horr was selected for the purpose.

Mrs. Horr's school on Main Street, Hannibal, was of the old-fashioned kind. There were pupils of all ages, and everything was taught up to the third reader and long division. Pupils who cared to go beyond those studies went to a Mr. Cross, on the hill, facing what is now the public square. Mrs. Horr received twenty-five cents a week for each pupil, and the rules of conduct were read daily. After the rules came the A-B-C class, whose recitation was a hand-to-hand struggle, requiring no study-time.

The rules of conduct that first day interested Little Sam. He wondered how nearly he could come to breaking them and escape. He experimented during the forenoon, and received a warning. Another experiment would mean correction. He did not expect to be caught again; but when he least expected it he was startled by a command to go out and bring a stick for his own punishment.

This was rather dazing. It was sudden, and, then, he did not know much about choosing sticks for such a purpose. Jane Clemens had commonly used her hand. A second command was

needed to start him in the right direction, and he was still dazed when he got outside. He had the forests of Missouri to select from, but choice was not easy. Everything looked too big and competent. Even the smallest switch had a wiry look. Across the way was a cooper's shop. There were shavings outside, and one had blown across just in front of him. He picked it up, and, gravely entering the room, handed it to Mrs. Horr. So far as known, it is the first example of that humor which would one day make Little Sam famous before all the world.

It was a failure in this instance. Mrs. Horr's comic side may have prompted forgiveness, but discipline must be maintained.

"Samuel Langhorne Clemens," she said (he had never heard it all strung together in that ominous way), "I am ashamed of you! Jimmy Dunlap, go and bring a switch for Sammy." And the switch that Jimmy Dunlap brought was of a kind to give Little Sam a permanent distaste for school. He told his mother at noon that he did not care for education; that he did not wish to be a great man; that his desire was to be an Indian and scalp such persons as Mrs. Horr. In her heart Jane Clemens was sorry for him, but she openly said she was glad there was somebody who could take him in hand.

Little Sam went back to school, but he never learned to like it. A school was ruled with a rod in those days, and of the smaller boys Little Sam's back was sore as often as the next. When the days of early summer came again, when from his desk he could see the sunshine lighting the soft green of Holliday's Hill, with

the glint of the river and the purple distance beyond, it seemed to him that to be shut up with a Webster spelling-book and a cross teacher was more than human nature could bear. There still exists a yellow slip of paper upon which, in neat, old-fashioned penmanship is written:

MISS PAMELA CLEMENS

Has won the love of her teacher and schoolmates by her amiable deportment and faithful application to her various studies.

E. HORR, Teacher.

Thus we learn that Little Sam's sister, eight years older than himself, attended the same school, and that she was a good pupil. If any such reward of merit was ever conferred on Little Sam, it has failed to come to light. If he won the love of his teacher and playmates, it was probably for other reasons.

Yet he must have learned somehow, for he could read, presently, and was a good speller for his age.

IV.

EDUCATION OUT OF SCHOOL

On their arrival in Hannibal, the Clemens family had moved into a part of what was then the Pavey Hotel. They could not have remained there long, for they moved twice within the next few years, and again in 1844 into a new house which Judge Clemens, as he was generally called, had built on Hill Street—a house still standing, and known to-day as the Mark Twain home.

John Clemens had met varying fortunes in Hannibal. Neither commerce nor the practice of law had paid. The office of justice of the peace, to which he was elected, returned a fair income, but his business losses finally obliged him to sell Jennie, the slave girl. Somewhat later his business failure was complete. He surrendered everything to his creditors, even to his cow and household furniture, and relied upon his law practice and justice fees. However, he seems to have kept the Tennessee land, possibly because no one thought it worth taking. There had been offers for it earlier, but none that its owner would accept. It appears to have been not even considered by his creditors, though his own faith in it never died.

The struggle for a time was very bitter. Orion Clemens, now seventeen, had learned the printer's trade and assisted the family with his wages. Mrs. Clemens took a few boarders. In the midst

of this time of hardship little Benjamin Clemens died. He was ten years old. It was the darkest hour.

Then conditions slowly improved. There was more law practice and better justice fees. By 1844 Judge Clemens was able to build the house mentioned above—a plain, cheap house, but a shelter and a home. Sam Clemens—he was hardly "Little Sam" any more—was at this time nine years old. His boyhood had begun.

Heretofore he had been just a child—wild and mischievous, often exasperating, but still a child—a delicate little lad to be worried over, mothered, or spanked and put to bed. Now at nine he had acquired health, with a sturdy ability to look out for himself, as boys in such a community will. "Sam," as they now called him, was "grown up" at nine and wise for his years. Not that he was old in spirit or manner—he was never that, even to his death—but he had learned a great number of things, many of them of a kind not taught at school.

He had learned a good deal of natural history and botany—the habits of plants, insects, and animals. Mark Twain's books bear evidence of this early study. His plants, bugs, and animals never do the wrong things. He was learning a good deal about men, and this was often less pleasant knowledge. Once Little Sam—he was still Little Sam then—saw an old man shot down on Main Street at noon day. He saw them carry him home, lay him on the bed, and spread on his breast an open family Bible, which looked as heavy as an anvil. He thought if he could only drag that

great burden away the poor old dying man would not breathe so heavily.

He saw a young emigrant stabbed with a bowie-knife by a drunken comrade, and two young men try to kill their uncle, one holding him while the other snapped repeatedly an Allen revolver, which failed to go off. Then there was the drunken rowdy who proposed to raid the "Welshman's" house, one sultry, threatening evening—he saw that, too. With a boon companion, John Briggs, he followed at a safe distance behind. A widow with her one daughter lived there. They stood in the shadow of the dark porch; the man had paused at the gate to revile them. The boys heard the mother's voice warning the intruder that she had a loaded gun and would kill him if he stayed where he was. He replied with a tirade, and she warned him that she would count ten—that if he remained a second longer she would fire. She began slowly and counted up to five, the man laughing and jeering. At six he grew silent, but he did not go. She counted on: seven, eight, nine—

The boys, watching from the dark roadside, felt their hearts stop. There was a long pause, then the final count, followed a second later by a gush of flame. The man dropped, his breast riddled. At the same instant the thunder-storm that had been gathering broke loose. The boys fled wildly, believing that Satan himself had arrived to claim the lost soul.

That was a day and locality of violent impulse and sudden action. Happenings such as these were not infrequent in a town

like Hannibal. And there were events connected with slavery. Sam once saw a slave struck down and killed with a piece of slag, for a trifling offense. He saw an Abolitionist attacked by a mob that would have lynched him had not a Methodist minister defended him on a plea that he must be crazy. He did not remember in later years that he had ever seen a slave auction, but he added:

"I am suspicious that it was because the thing was a commonplace spectacle and not an uncommon or impressive one. I do vividly remember seeing a dozen black men and women, chained together, lying in a group on the pavement, waiting shipment to a Southern slave- market. They had the saddest faces I ever saw."

Readers of Mark Twain's books—especially the stories of Huck and Tom, will hardly be surprised to hear of these early happenings that formed so large a portion of the author's early education. Sam, however, did not regard them as education—not at the time. They got into his dreams. He set them down as warnings, or punishments, intended to give him a taste for a better life. He felt that it was his conscience that made such things torture him. That was his mother's idea, and he had a high respect for her opinion in such matters. Among other things, he had seen her one day defy a vicious and fierce Corsican—a common terror in the town—who had chased his grown daughter with a heavy rope in his hand, declaring he would wear it out on her. Cautious citizens got out of the way, but Jane Clemens opened her door to

the fugitive; then, instead of rushing in and closing it, spread her arms across it, barring the way. The man raved, and threatened her with the rope, but she did not flinch or show any sign of fear. She stood there and shamed and defied him until he slunk off, crestfallen and conquered. Any one as brave as his mother must have a perfect conscience, Sam thought, and would know how to take care of it. In the darkness he would say his prayers, especially when a thunderstorm was coming, and vow to begin a better life. He detested Sunday-school as much as he did day-school, and once his brother Orion, who was moral and religious, had threatened to drag him there by the collar, but, as the thunder got louder, Sam decided that he loved Sunday-school and would go the next Sunday without being invited.

Sam's days were not all disturbed by fierce events. They were mostly filled with pleasanter things. There were picnics sometimes, and ferryboat excursions, and any day one could roam the woods, or fish, alone or in company. The hills and woods around Hannibal were never disappointing. There was the cave with its marvels. There was Bear Creek, where he had learned to swim. He had seen two playmates drown; twice, himself, he had been dragged ashore, more dead than alive; once by a slave girl, another time by a slave man—Neal Champ, of the Pavey Hotel. But he had persevered, and with success. He could swim better than any playmate of his age.

It was the river that he cared for most. It was the pathway that led to the great world outside. He would sit by it for hours and

dream. He would venture out on it in a quietly borrowed boat, when he was barely strong enough to lift an oar. He learned to know all its moods and phases.

More than anything in the world he hungered to make a trip on one of the big, smart steamers that were always passing. "You can hardly imagine what it meant," he reflected, once, "to a boy in those days, shut in as we were, to see those steamboats pass up and down, and never take a trip on them."

It was at the mature age of nine that he found he could endure this no longer. One day when the big packet came down and stopped at Hannibal, he slipped aboard and crept under one of the boats on the upper deck. Then the signal-bells rang, the steamer backed away and swung into midstream; he was really going at last. He crept from beneath the boat and sat looking out over the water and enjoying the scenery. Then it began to rain—a regular downpour. He crept back under the boat, but his legs were outside, and one of the crew saw him. He was dragged out and at the next stop set ashore. It was the town of Louisiana, where there were Lampton relatives, who took him home. Very likely the home-coming was not entirely pleasant, though a "lesson," too, in his general education.

And always, each summer, there was the farm, where his recreation was no longer mere girl plays and swings, with a colored nurse following about, but sports with his older boy cousins, who went hunting with the men, for partridges by day and for 'coons and 'possums by night. Sometimes the little boy

followed the hunters all night long, and returned with them through the sparkling and fragrant morning, fresh, hungry, and triumphant, just in time for breakfast. So it is no wonder that Little Sam, at nine, was no longer Little Sam, but plain Sam Clemens, and grown up. If there were doubtful spots in his education—matters related to smoking and strong words—it is also no wonder, and experience even in these lines was worth something in a book like Tom Sawyer.

The boy Sam Clemens was not a particularly attractive lad. He was rather undersized, and his head seemed too large for his body. He had a mass of light sandy hair, which he plastered down to keep from curling. His eyes were keen and blue and his features rather large. Still, he had a fair, delicate complexion when it was not blackened by grime and tan; a gentle, winning manner; a smile and a slow way of speaking that made him a favorite with his companions. He did not talk much, and was thought to be rather dull—was certainly so in most of his lessons—but, for some reason, he never spoke that every playmate in hearing did not stop, whatever he was doing, to listen. Perhaps it would be a plan for a new game or lark; perhaps it was something droll; perhaps it was just a casual remark that his peculiar drawl made amusing. His mother always referred to his slow fashion of speech as "Sammy's long talk." Her own speech was even more deliberate, though she seemed not to notice it. Sam was more like his mother than the others. His brother, Henry Clemens, three years younger, was as unlike Sam as possible. He did not have

the "long talk," and was a handsome, obedient little fellow whom the mischievous Sam loved to tease. Henry was to become the Sid of Tom Sawyer, though he was in every way a finer character than Sid. With the death of little Benjamin, Sam and Henry had been drawn much closer together, and, in spite of Sam's pranks, loved each other dearly. For the pranks were only occasional, and Sam's love for Henry was constant. He fought for him oftener than with him.

Many of the home incidents in the Tom Sawyer book really happened. Sam did clod Henry for getting him into trouble about the colored thread with which he sewed his shirt when he came home from swimming; he did inveigle a lot of boys into whitewashing a fence for him; he did give painkiller to Peter, the cat. As for escaping punishment for his misdeeds, as described in the book, this was a daily matter, and his methods suited the occasions. For, of course, Tom Sawyer was Sam Clemens himself, almost entirely, as most readers of that book have imagined. However, we must have another chapter for Tom Sawyer and his doings—the real Tom and his real doings with those graceless, lovable associates, Joe Harper and Huckleberry Finn.

V.

TOM SAWYER AND HIS BAND

In beginning "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" the author says, "Most of the adventures recorded in this book really occurred," and he tells us that Huck Finn is drawn from life; Tom Sawyer also, though not from a single individual, being a composite of three boys whom Mark Twain had known.

The three boys were himself, almost entirely, with traces of two schoolmates, John Briggs and Will Bowen. John Briggs was also the original of Joe Harper, the "Terror of the Seas." As for Huck Finn, the "Red-Handed," his original was a village waif named Tom Blankenship, who needed no change for his part in the story.

The Blankenship family picked up an uncertain livelihood, fishing and hunting, and lived at first under a tree in a bark shanty, but later moved into a large, barn-like building, back of the Clemens home on Hill Street. There were three male members of the household: Old Ben, the father, shiftless and dissolute; young Ben, the eldest son—a doubtful character, with certain good traits; and Tom—that is to say, Huck, who was just as he is described in the book—a ruin of rags, a river-rat, kind of heart, and accountable for his conduct to nobody in the world. He could come and go as he chose; he never had to work or go to

school; he could do all the things, good and bad, that other boys longed to do and were forbidden. To them he was the symbol of liberty; his knowledge of fishing, trapping, signs, and of the woods and river gave value to his society, while the fact that it was forbidden made it necessary to Sam Clemens's happiness.

The Blankenships being handy to the back gate of the Hill Street house, he adopted them at sight. Their free mode of life suited him. He was likely to be there at any hour of the day, and Tom made cat-call signals at night that would bring Sam out on the shed roof at the back and down a little trellis and flight of steps to the group of boon companions, which, besides Tom, usually included John Briggs, Will Pitts, and the two younger Bowen boys. They were not malicious boys, but just mischievous, fun-loving boys—little boys of ten or twelve—rather thoughtless, being mainly bent on having a good time.

They had a wide field of action: they ranged from Holliday's Hill on the north to the cave on the south, and over the fields and through all the woods between. They explored both banks of the river, the islands, and the deep wilderness of the Illinois shore. They could run like turkeys and swim like ducks; they could handle a boat as if born in one. No orchard or melon-patch was entirely safe from them. No dog or slave patrol was so watchful that they did not sooner or later elude it. They borrowed boats with or without the owner's consent—it did not matter.

Most of their expeditions were harmless enough. They often cruised up to Turtle Island, about two miles above Hannibal,

and spent the day feasting. There were quantities of turtles and their eggs there, and mussels, and plenty of fish. Fishing and swimming were their chief pastimes, with incidental raiding, for adventure. Bear Creek was their swimming-place by day, and the river-front at night-fall—a favorite spot being where the railroad bridge now ends. It was a good distance across to the island where, in the book, Tom Sawyer musters his pirate band, and where later Huck found Nigger Jim, but quite often in the evening they swam across to it, and when they had frolicked for an hour or more on the sandbar at the head of the island, they would swim back in the dusk, breasting the strong, steady Mississippi current without exhaustion or dread. They could swim all day, those little scamps, and seemed to have no fear. Once, during his boyhood, Sam Clemens swam across to the Illinois side, then turned and swam back again without landing, a distance of at least two miles as he had to go. He was seized with a cramp on the return trip. His legs became useless and he was obliged to make the remaining distance with his arms.

The adventures of Sam Clemens and his comrades would fill several books of the size of Tom Sawyer. Many of them are, of course, forgotten now, but those still remembered show that Mark Twain had plenty of real material.

It was not easy to get money in those days, and the boys were often without it. Once "Huck" Blankenship had the skin of a 'coon he had captured, and offered to sell it to raise capital. At Selms's store, on Wild Cat Corner, the 'coon-skin would bring

ten cents. But this was not enough. The boys thought of a plan to make it bring more. Selms's back window was open, and the place where he kept his pelts was pretty handy. Huck went around to the front door and sold the skin for ten cents to Selms, who tossed it back on the pile. Then Huck came back and, after waiting a reasonable time, crawled in the open window, got the 'coon-skin, and sold it to Selms again. He did this several times that afternoon, and the capital of the band grew. But at last John Pierce, Selms's clerk, said:

"Look here, Mr. Selms, there's something wrong about this. That boy has been selling us 'coonskins all the afternoon."

Selms went back to his pile of pelts. There were several sheepskins and some cow-hides, but only one 'coon-skin—the one he had that moment bought.

Selms himself, in after years, used to tell this story as a great joke.

One of the boys' occasional pastimes was to climb Holliday's Hill and roll down big stones, to frighten the people who were driving by. Holliday's Hill above the road was steep; a stone once started would go plunging downward and bound across the road with the deadly momentum of a shell. The boys would get a stone poised, then wait until they saw a team approaching, and, calculating the distance, would give the boulder a start. Dropping behind the bushes, they would watch the sudden effect upon the party below as the great missile shot across the road a few yards before them. This was huge sport, but they carried it too far. For

at last they planned a grand climax that would surpass anything before attempted in the stone-rolling line.

A monstrous boulder was lying up there in the right position to go down-hill, once started. It would be a glorious thing to see that great stone go smashing down a hundred yards or so in front of some peaceful-minded countryman jogging along the road. Quarrymen had been getting out rock not far away and had left their picks and shovels handy. The boys borrowed the tools and went to work to undermine the big stone. They worked at it several hours. If their parents had asked them to work like that, they would have thought they were being killed.

Finally, while they were still digging, the big stone suddenly got loose and started down. They were not ready for it at all. Nobody was coming but an old colored man in a cart; their splendid stone was going to be wasted.

One could hardly call it wasted, however; they had planned for a thrilling result, and there was certainly thrill enough while it lasted. In the first place the stone nearly caught Will Bowen when it started. John Briggs had that moment quit digging and handed Will the pick. Will was about to take his turn when Sam Clemens leaped aside with a yell:

"Lookout, boys; she's coming!"

She came. The huge boulder kept to the ground at first, then, gathering momentum, it went bounding into the air. About half-way down the hill it struck a sapling and cut it clean off. This turned its course a little, and the negro in the cart, hearing the

noise and seeing the great mass come crashing in his direction, made a wild effort to whip up his mule.

The boys watched their bomb with growing interest. It was headed straight for the negro, also for a cooper-shop across the road. It made longer leaps with every bound, and, wherever it struck, fragments and dust would fly. The shop happened to be empty, but the rest of the catastrophe would call for close investigation. They wanted to fly, but they could not move until they saw the rock land. It was making mighty leaps now, and the terrified negro had managed to get exactly in its path. The boys stood holding their breath, their mouths open.

Then, suddenly, they could hardly believe their eyes; a little way above the road the boulder struck a projection, made one mighty leap into the air, sailed clear over the negro and his mule, and landed in the soft dirt beyond the road, only a fragment striking the shop, damaging, but not wrecking it. Half buried in the ground, the great stone lay there for nearly forty years; then it was broken up. It was the last rock the boys ever rolled down. Nearly sixty years later John Briggs and Mark Twain walked across Holliday's Hill and looked down toward the river road.

Mark Twain said: "It was a mighty good thing, John, that stone acted the way it did. We might have had to pay a fancy price for that old dinky I can see him yet."¹

It can be no harm now, to confess that the boy Sam Clemens—

¹ John Briggs died in 1907; earlier in the same year the writer of this memoir spent an afternoon with him and obtained from him most of the material for this chapter.

a pretty small boy, a good deal less than twelve at the time, and by no means large for his years—was the leader of this unhallowed band. In any case, truth requires this admission. If the band had a leader, it was Sam, just as it was Tom Sawyer in the book. They were always ready to listen to him—they would even stop fishing to do that—and to follow his plans. They looked to him for ideas and directions, and he gloried in being a leader and showing off, just as Tom did in the book. It seems almost a pity that in those far-off barefoot days he could not have looked down the years and caught a glimpse of his splendid destiny.

But of literary fame he could never have dreamed. The chief ambition—the "permanent ambition"—of every Hannibal boy was to be a pilot. The pilot in his splendid glass perch with his supreme power and princely salary was to them the noblest of all human creatures. An elder Bowen boy was already a pilot, and when he came home, as he did now and then, his person seemed almost too sacred to touch.

Next to being a pilot, Sam thought he would like to be a pirate or a bandit or a trapper-scout—something gorgeous and awe-inspiring, where his word, his nod, would still be law. The river kept his river ambition always fresh, and with the cave and the forest round about helped him to imagine those other things.

The cave was the joy of his heart. It was a real cave, not merely a hole, but a marvel of deep passages and vaulted chambers that led back into the bluffs and far down into the earth, even below the river, some said. Sam Clemens never tired of the cave.

He was willing any time to quit fishing or swimming or melon-hunting for the three-mile walk, or pull, that brought them to its mystic door. With its long corridors, its royal chambers hung with stalactites, its remote hiding-places, it was exactly suitable, Sam thought, to be the lair of an outlaw, and in it he imagined and carried out adventures which his faithful followers may not always have understood, though enjoying them none the less for that reason.

In Tom Sawyer, Indian Joe dies in the cave. He did not die there in real life, but was lost there once and was very weak when they found him. He was not as bad as painted in the book, though he was dissolute and accounted dangerous; and when one night he died in reality, there came a thunder-storm so terrific that Sam Clemens at home, in bed, was certain that Satan had come in person for the half-breed's soul. He covered his head and said his prayers with fearful anxiety lest the evil one might decide to save another trip by taking him along then.

The treasure-digging adventure in the book had this foundation in fact: It was said that two French trappers had once buried a chest of gold about two miles above Hannibal, and that it was still there. Tom Blankenship (Huck) one morning said he had dreamed just where the treasure was, and that if the boys—Sam Clemens and John Briggs—would go with him and help dig, he would divide. The boys had great faith in dreams, especially in Huck's dreams. They followed him to a place with some shovels and picks, and he showed them just where to dig. Then he sat

down under the shade of a pawpaw-bush and gave orders.

They dug nearly all day. Huck didn't dig any himself, because he had done the dreaming, which was his share. They didn't find the treasure that day, and next morning they took two long iron rods to push and drive into the ground until they should strike something. They struck a number of things, but when they dug down it was never the money they found. That night the boys said they wouldn't dig any more.

But Huck had another dream. He dreamed the gold was exactly under the little pawpaw-tree. This sounded so circumstantial that they went back and dug another day. It was hot weather, too—August—and that night they were nearly dead. Even Huck gave it up then. He said there was something wrong about the way they dug.

This differs a good deal from the treasure incident in the book, but it shows us what respect the boys had for the gifts of the ragamuffin original of Huck Finn. Tom Blankenship's brother Ben was also used, and very importantly, in the creation of our beloved Huck. Ben was considerably older, but certainly no more reputable, than Tom. He tormented the smaller boys, and they had little love for him. Yet somewhere in Ben Blankenship's nature there was a fine, generous strain of humanity that provided Mark Twain with that immortal episode—the sheltering of Nigger Jim. This is the real story:

A slave ran off from Monroe County, Missouri, and got across the river into Illinois. Ben used to fish and hunt

over there in the swamps, and one day found him. It was considered a most worthy act in those days to return a runaway slave; in fact, it was a crime not to do it. Besides, there was for this one a reward of fifty dollars—a fortune to ragged, out-cast Ben Blankenship. That money, and the honor he could acquire, must have been tempting to the waif, but it did not outweigh his human sympathy. Instead of giving him up and claiming the reward, Ben kept the runaway over there in the marshes all summer. The negro fished, and Ben carried him scraps of other food. Then, by and by, the facts leaked out. Some wood-choppers went on a hunt for the fugitive and chased him to what was called Bird Slough. There, trying to cross a drift, he was drowned.

Huck's struggle in the book is between conscience and the law, on one side, and deep human sympathy on the other. Ben Blankenship's struggle, supposing there was one, would be between sympathy and the offered reward. Neither conscience nor law would trouble him. It was his native humanity that made him shelter the runaway, and it must have been strong and genuine to make him resist the lure of the fifty-dollar prize.

There was another chapter to this incident. A few days after the drowning of the runaway, Sam Clemens and his band made their way to the place and were pushing the drift about, when, all at once, the negro shot up out of the water, straight and terrible, a full half-length in the air. He had gone down foremost and had been caught in the drift. The boys did not stop to investigate, but flew in terror to report their tale.

Those early days seem to have been full of gruesome things. In "The Innocents Abroad," the author tells how he once spent a night in his father's office and discovered there a murdered man. This was a true incident. The man had been stabbed that afternoon and carried into the house to die. Sam and John Briggs had been playing truant all day and knew nothing of the matter. Sam thought the office safer than his home, where his mother was probably sitting up for him. He climbed in by a window and lay down on the lounge, but did not sleep. Presently he noticed what appeared to be an unusual shape on the floor. He tried to turn his face to the wall and forget it, but that would not do. In agony he watched the thing until at last a square of moonlight gradually revealed a sight that he never forgot. In the book he says:

"I went away from there. I do not say that I went in any sort of hurry, but I simply went—that is sufficient. I went out of the window, and I carried the sash along with me. I did not need the sash, but it was handier to take it than to leave it, and so I took it. I was not scared, but I was considerable agitated."

Sam was not yet twelve, for his father was no longer living when the boy had reached that age. And how many things had crowded themselves into his few brief years! We must be content here with only a few of them. Our chapter is already too long.

Ministers and deacons did not prophesy well for Sam Clemens and his mad companions. They spoke feelingly of state prison

and the gallows. But the boys were a disappointing lot. Will Bowen became a fine river-pilot. Will Pitts was in due time a leading merchant and bank president. John Briggs grew into a well-to-do and highly respected farmer. Huck Finn—which is to say, Tom Blankenship—died an honored citizen and justice of the peace in a Western town. As for Sam Clemens, we shall see what he became as the chapters pass.

VI.

CLOSING SCHOOL-DAYS

Sam was at Mr. Cross's school on the Square in due time, and among the pupils were companions that appealed to his gentler side. There were the Robards boys—George, the best Latin scholar, and John, who always won the good-conduct medal, and would one day make all the other boys envious by riding away with his father to California, his curls of gold blowing in the wind.

There was Buck Brown, a rival speller, and John Garth, who would marry little Helen Kercheval, and Jimmy MacDaniel, whom it was well to know because his father kept a pastry-shop and he used to bring cakes and candy to school.

There were also a number of girls. Bettie Ormsley, Artemisia Briggs, and Jennie Brady were among the girls he remembered in later years, and Mary Miller, who was nearly double his age and broke his heart by getting married one day, a thing he had not expected at all.

Yet through it all he appears, like Tom Sawyer, to have had one faithful sweetheart. In the book it is Becky Thatcher—in real life she was Laura Hawkins. The Clemens and Hawkins families lived opposite, and the children were early acquainted. The "Black Avenger of the Spanish Main" was very gentle when he was playing at house-building with little Laura, and once,

when he dropped a brick on her finger, he cried the louder and longer of the two.

For he was a tender-hearted boy. He would never abuse an animal, except when his tendency to mischief ran away with him, as in the "pain-killer" incident. He had a real passion for cats. Each summer he carried his cat to the farm in a basket, and it always had a place by him at the table. He loved flowers—not as a boy botanist or gardener, but as a companion who understood their thoughts. He pitied dead leaves and dry weeds because their lives were ended and they would never know summer again or grow glad with another spring. Even in that early time he had that deeper sympathy which one day would offer comfort to humanity and make every man his friend.

But we are drifting away from Sam Clemens's school-days. They will not trouble us much longer now. More than anything in the world Sam detested school, and he made any excuse to get out of going. It is hard to say just why, unless it was the restraint and the long hours of confinement.

The Square in Hannibal, where stood the school of Mr. Cross, was a grove in those days, with plum-trees and hazel-bushes and grape-vines. When spring came, the children gathered flowers at recess, climbed trees, and swung in the vines. It was a happy place enough, only—it was school. To Sam Clemens, the spelling-bee every Friday afternoon was the one thing that made it worth while. Sam was a leader at spelling—it was one of his gifts—he could earn compliments even from Mr. Cross, whose

name, it would seem, was regarded as descriptive. Once in a moment of inspiration Sam wrote on his slate:

"Cross by name and Cross by nature,
Cross jumped over an Irish potato."

John Briggs thought this a great effort, and urged the author to write it on the blackboard at noon. Sam hesitated.

"Oh, pshaw!" said John, "I wouldn't be afraid to do it."

"I dare you to do it," said Sam.

This was enough. While Mr. Cross was at dinner John wrote in a large hand the fine couplet. The teacher returned and called the school to order. He looked at the blackboard, then, searchingly, at John Briggs. The handwriting was familiar.

"Did you do that?" he asked, ominously.

It was a time for truth.

"Yes, sir," said John.

"Come here!" And John came and paid handsomely for his publishing venture. Sam Clemens expected that the author would be called for next; but perhaps Mr. Cross had exhausted himself on John. Sam did not often escape. His back kept fairly warm from one "flailing" to the next.

Yet he usually wore one of the two medals offered in that school—the medal for spelling. Once he lost it by leaving the first "r" out of February. Laura Hawkins was on the floor against him, and he was a gallant boy. If it had only been Huck Brown

he would have spelled that and all the other months backward, to show off. There were moments of triumph that almost made school worth while; the rest of the time it was prison and servitude.

But then one day came freedom. Judge Clemens, who, in spite of misfortune, had never lost faith in humanity, indorsed a large note for a neighbor, and was obliged to pay it. Once more all his property was taken away. Only a few scanty furnishings were rescued from the wreck. A St. Louis cousin saved the home, but the Clemens family could not afford to live in it. They moved across the street and joined housekeeping with another family.

Judge Clemens had one hope left. He was a candidate for the clerkship of the surrogate court, a good office, and believed his election sure. His business misfortunes had aroused wide sympathy. He took no chances, however, and made a house-to-house canvas of the district, regardless of the weather, probably undermining his health. He was elected by a large majority, and rejoiced that his worries were now at an end. They were, indeed, over. At the end of February he rode to the county seat to take the oath of office. He returned through a drenching storm and reached home nearly frozen. Pneumonia set in, and a few days later he was dying. His one comfort now was the Tennessee land. He said it would make them all rich and happy. Once he whispered:

"Cling to the land; cling to the land and wait. Let nothing beguile it away from you."

He was a man who had rarely displayed affection for his children. But presently he beckoned to Pamela, now a lovely girl of nineteen, and, putting his arm around her neck, kissed her for the first time in years.

"Let me die," he said.

He did not speak again. A little more, and his worries had indeed ended. The hard struggle of an upright, impractical man had come to a close. This was in March, 1847. John Clemens had lived less than forty-nine years.

The children were dazed. They had loved their father and honored his nobility of purpose. The boy Sam was overcome with remorse. He recalled his wildness and disobedience—a thousand things trifling enough at the time, but heartbreaking now. Boy and man, Samuel Clemens was never spared by remorse. Leading him into the room where his father lay, his mother said some comforting words and asked him to make her a promise.

He flung himself into her arms, sobbing: "I will promise anything, if you won't make me go to school! Anything!"

After a moment his mother said: "No, Sammy, you need not go to school any more. Only promise me to be a better boy. Promise not to break my heart!"

He gave his promise to be faithful and industrious and upright, like his father. Such a promise was a serious matter, and Sam Clemens, underneath all, was a serious lad. He would not be twelve until November, but his mother felt that he would keep

his word.

Orion Clemens returned to St. Louis, where he was receiving a salary of ten dollars a week—high wage for those days—out of which he could send three dollars weekly to the family. Pamela, who played the guitar and piano very well, gave music lessons, and so helped the family fund. Pamela Clemens, the original of Cousin Mary, in "Tom Sawyer," was a sweet and noble girl. Henry was too young to work, but Sam was apprenticed to a printer named Ament, who had recently moved to Hannibal and bought a weekly paper, "The Courier." Sam agreed with his mother that the printing trade offered a chance for further education without attending school, and then, some day, there might be wages.

VII.

THE APPRENTICE

The terms of Samuel Clemens's apprenticeship were the usual thing for that day: board and clothes—"more board than clothes, and not much of either," Mark Twain used to say.

"I was supposed to get two suits of clothes a year, but I didn't get them. I got one suit and took the rest out in Ament's old garments, which didn't fit me in any noticeable way. I was only about half as big as he was, and when I had on one of his shirts I felt as if I had on a circus-tent. I had to turn the trousers up to my ears to make them short enough."

Another apprentice, a huge creature, named Wales McCormick, was so large that Ament's clothes were much too small for him. The two apprentices, fitted out with their employer's cast-off garments, were amusing enough, no doubt. Sam and Wales ate in the kitchen at first, but later at the family table with Mr. and Mrs. Ament and Pet McMurry, a journeyman printer. McMurry was a happy soul, as one could almost guess from his name. He had traveled far and learned much. What the two apprentices did not already know, Pet McMurry could teach them. Sam Clemens had promised to be a good boy, and he was so, by the standards of boyhood. He was industrious, regular at his work, quick to learn, kind, and truthful. Angels could

hardly be more than that in a printing-office. But when food was scarce, even an angel—a young printer-angel—could hardly resist slipping down the cellar stairs at night, for raw potatoes, onions, and apples, which they cooked in the office, where the boys slept on a pallet on the floor. Wales had a wonderful way of cooking a potato which his fellow apprentice never forgot.

How one wishes for a photograph of Sam Clemens at that period! But in those days there were only daguerreotypes, and they were expensive things. There is a letter, though, written long afterward, by Pet McMurry to Mark Twain, which contains this paragraph:

"If your memory extends so far back, you will recall a little sandy- haired boy of nearly a quarter of a century ago, in the printing- office at Hannibal, over the Brittingham drug-store, mounted upon a little box at the case, who used to love to sing so well the expression of the poor drunken man who was supposed to have fallen by the wayside, 'If ever I get up again, I'll stay up—if I kin.'"

And with this portrait we must be content—we cannot doubt its truth.

Sam was soon office favorite and in time became chief stand-by. When he had been at work a year, he could set type accurately, run the job press to the tune of "Annie Laurie," and he had charge of the circulation. That is to say, he carried the papers—a mission of real importance, for a long, sagging span of telegraph-wire had reached across the river to Hannibal,

and Mexican-war news delivered hot from the front gave the messenger a fine prestige.

He even did editing, of a kind. That is to say, when Ament was not in the office and copy was needed, Sam hunted him up, explained the situation, and saw that the necessary matter was produced. He was not ambitious to write—not then. He wanted to be a journeyman printer, like Pet, and travel and see the world. Sometimes he thought he would like to be a clown, or "end man" in a minstrel troupe. Once for a week he served as subject for a traveling hypnotist-and was dazzled by his success.

But he stuck to printing, and rapidly became a neat, capable workman. Ament gave him a daily task, after which he was free. By three in the afternoon he was likely to finish his stint. Then he was off for the river or the cave, joining his old comrades. Or perhaps he would go with Laura Hawkins to gather wild columbine on the high cliff above the river, known as Lover's Leap. When winter came these two sometimes went to Bear Creek, skating; or together they attended parties, where the old-fashioned games "Ring-around-Rosy" and "Dusty Miller" were the chief amusements.

In "The Gilded Age," Laura Hawkins at twelve is pictured "with her dainty hands propped into the ribbon-bordered pockets of her apron . . . a vision to warm the coldest heart and bless and cheer the saddest." That was the real Laura, though her story in that book in no way resembles the reality.

It was just at this time that an incident occurred which may be

looked back upon now as a turning-point in Samuel Clemens's life. Coming home from the office one afternoon, he noticed a square of paper being swept along by the wind. He saw that it was printed—was interested professionally in seeing what it was like. He chased the flying scrap and overtook it. It was a leaf from some old history of Joan of Arc, and pictured the hard lot of the "maid" in the tower at Rouen, reviled and mistreated by her ruffian captors. There were some paragraphs of description, but the rest was pitiful dialogue.

Sam had never heard of Joan before—he knew nothing of history. He was no reader. Orion was fond of books, and Pamela; even little Henry had read more than Sam. But now, as he read, there awoke in him a deep feeling of pity and indignation, and with it a longing to know more of the tragic story. It was an interest that would last his life through, and in the course of time find expression in one of the rarest books ever written.

The first result was that Sam began to read. He hunted up everything he could find on the subject of Joan, and from that went into French history in general—indeed, into history of every kind. Samuel Clemens had suddenly become a reader—almost a student. He even began the study of languages, German and Latin, but was not able to go on for lack of time and teachers.

He became a hater of tyranny, a champion of the weak. Watching a game of marbles or tops, he would remark to some offender, in his slow drawling way, "You mustn't cheat that boy."

And the cheating stopped, or trouble followed.

VIII.

ORION'S PAPER

A Hannibal paper, the "Journal," was for sale under a mortgage of five hundred dollars, and Orion Clemens, returning from St. Louis, borrowed the money and bought it. Sam's two years' apprenticeship with Ament had been completed, and Orion felt that together they could carry on the paper and win success. Henry Clemens, now eleven, was also taken out of school to learn type-setting.

Orion was a better printer than proprietor. Like so many of his family, he was a visionary, gentle and credulous, ready to follow any new idea. Much advice was offered him, and he tried to follow it all.

He began with great hopes and energy. He worked like a slave and did not spare the others. The paper was their hope of success. Sam, especially, was driven. There were no more free afternoons. In some chapters written by Orion Clemens in later life, he said:

"I was tyrannical and unjust to Sam. He was swift and clean as a good journeyman. I gave him 'takes,' and, if he got through well, I begrudged him the time and made him work more."

Orion did not mean to be unjust. The struggle against opposition and debt was bitter. He could not be considerate.

The paper for a time seemed on the road to success, but Orion worked too hard and tried too many schemes. His enthusiasm waned and most of his schemes turned out poorly. By the end of the year the "Journal" was on the down grade.

In time when the need of money became great, Orion made a trip to Tennessee to try to raise something on the land which they still held there. He left Sam in charge of the paper, and, though its proprietor returned empty-handed, his journey was worth while, for it was during his absence that Samuel Clemens began the career that would one day make him Mark Twain.

Sam had concluded to edit the paper in a way that would liven up the circulation. He had never written anything for print, but he believed he knew what the subscribers wanted. The editor of a rival paper had been crossed in love, and was said to have tried to drown himself. Sam wrote an article telling all the history of the affair, giving names and details. Then on the back of two big wooden letters, used for bill-printing, he engraved illustrations of the victim wading out into the river, testing the depth of the water with a stick.

The paper came out, and the demand for it kept the Washington hand-press busy. The injured editor sent word that he was coming over to thrash the whole Journal staff, but he left town, instead, for the laugh was too general.

Sam also wrote a poem which startled orthodox readers. Then Orion returned and reduced him to the ranks. In later years Orion saw his mistake.

"I could have distanced all competitors, even then," he wrote, "if I had recognized Sam's ability and let him go ahead, merely keeping him from offending worthy persons."

Sam was not discouraged. He liked the taste of print. He sent two anecdotes to the Philadelphia Saturday Evening Post. Both were accepted—without payment, of course, in those days—and when they appeared he walked on air. This was in 1851. Nearly sixty years later he said:

"Seeing them in print was a joy which rather exceeded anything in that line I have ever experienced since."

However, he wrote nothing further for the "Post." Orion printed two of his sketches in the "Journal," which was the extent of his efforts at this time. None of this early work has been preserved. Files of the "Post" exist, but the sketches were unsigned and could hardly be identified.

The Hannibal paper dragged along from year to year. Orion could pay nothing on the mortgage—financial matters becoming always worse. He could barely supply the plainest food and clothing for the family. Sam and Henry got no wages, of course. Then real disaster came. A cow got into the office one night, upset a type-case, and ate up two composition rollers. Somewhat later a fire broke out and did considerable damage. There was partial insurance, with which Orion replaced a few necessary articles; then, to save rent, he moved the office into the front room of the home on Hill Street, where they were living again

at this time.

Samuel Clemens, however, now in his eighteenth year, felt that he was no longer needed in Hannibal. He was a capable workman, with little to do and no reward. Orion, made irritable by his misfortunes, was not always kind. Pamela, who, meantime, had married well, was settled in St. Louis. Sam told his mother that he would visit Pamela and look about the city. There would be work in St. Louis at good wages.

He was going farther than St. Louis, but he dared not tell her. Jane Clemens, consenting, sighed as she put together his scanty belongings. Sam was going away. He had been a good boy of late years, but her faith in his resisting powers was not strong. Presently she held up a little Testament.

"I want you to take hold of the other end of this, Sam," she said, "and make me a promise."

The slim, wiry woman of forty-nine, gray-eyed, tender, and resolute, faced the fair-cheeked youth of seventeen, his eyes as piercing and unwavering as her own. How much alike they were!

"I want you," Jane Clemens said, "to repeat after me, Sam, these words: I do solemnly swear that I will not throw a card or drink a drop of liquor while I am gone."

He repeated the vow after her, and she kissed him.

"Remember that, Sam, and write to us," she said.

"And so," writes Orion, "he went wandering in search of that comfort and advancement, and those rewards of industry, which he had failed to find where I was—gloomy, taciturn, and selfish.

I not only missed his labor; we all missed his abounding activity and merriment."

IX.

THE OPEN ROAD

Samuel Clemens went to visit his sister Pamela in St. Louis and was presently at work, setting type on the "Evening News." He had no intention, however, of staying there. His purpose was to earn money enough to take him to New York City. The railroad had by this time reached St. Louis, and he meant to have the grand experience of a long journey "on the cars." Also, there was a Crystal Palace in New York, where a world's exposition was going on.

Trains were slow in 1853, and it required several days and nights to go from St. Louis to New York City, but to Sam Clemens it was a wonderful journey. All day he sat looking out of the window, eating when he chose from the food he carried, curling up in his seat at night to sleep. He arrived at last with a few dollars in his pocket and a ten-dollar bill sewed into the lining of his coat.

New York was rather larger than he expected. All of the lower end of Manhattan Island was covered by it. The Crystal Palace—some distance out—stood at Forty-second Street and Sixth Avenue—the present site of Bryant Park. All the world's newest wonders were to be seen there—a dazzling exhibition. A fragment of the letter which Sam Clemens wrote to his sister

Pamela—the earliest piece of Mark Twain's writing that has been preserved—expresses his appreciation of the big fair:

"From the gallery (second floor) you have a glorious sight—the flags of the different countries represented, the lofty dome, glittering jewelry, gaudy tapestry, etc., with the busy crowd passing to and fro—'tis a perfect fairy palace—beautiful beyond description.

"The machinery department is on the main floor, but I cannot enumerate any of it on account of the lateness of the hour (past one o'clock). It would take more than a week to examine everything on exhibition, and I was only in a little over two hours to-night. I only glanced at about one-third of the articles; and, having a poor memory, I have enumerated scarcely any of even the principal objects. The visitors to the Palace average 6,000 daily—double the population of Hannibal. The price of admission being fifty cents, they take in about \$3,000.

"The Latting Observatory (height about 280 feet) is near the Palace. From it you can obtain a grand view of the city and the country around. The Croton Aqueduct, to supply the city with water, is the greatest wonder yet. Immense pipes are laid across the bed of the Harlem River, and pass through the country to Westchester County, where a whole river is turned from its course and brought to New York. From the reservoir in the city to Westchester County reservoir the distance is thirty-eight miles, and, if necessary, they could easily supply every family in New York with one hundred barrels of water a day!

"I am very sorry to learn that Henry has been sick. He ought to go to the country and take exercise, for he is not half so healthy as Ma thinks he is. If he had my walking to do, he would be another boy entirely. Four times every day I walk a little over a mile; and working hard all day and walking four miles is exercise. I am used to it now, though, and it is no trouble. Where is it Orion's going to? Tell Ma my promises are faithfully kept; and if I have my health I will take her to Ky. in the spring. I shall save money for this.

"(It has just struck 2 A.M., and I always get up at six and am at work at 7.) You ask where I spend my evenings. Where would you suppose, with a free printers' library containing more than 4,000 volumes within a quarter of a mile of me, and nobody at home to talk to?"

"I shall write to Ella soon. Write soon.

"Truly your Brother,

"SAMY.

"P.S.—I have written this by a light so dim that you nor Ma could not read by it."

We get a fair idea of Samuel Clemens at seventeen from this letter. For one thing, he could write good, clear English, full of interesting facts. He is enthusiastic, but not lavish of words. He impresses us with his statement that the visitors to the Palace each day are in number double the population of Hannibal; a whole river is turned from its course to supply New York City with water; the water comes thirty-eight miles, and each family could use a hundred barrels a day! The letter reveals his personal

side—his kindly interest in those left behind, his anxiety for Henry, his assurance that the promise to his mother was being kept, his memory of her longing to visit her old home. And the boy who hated school has become a reader—he is reveling in a printers' library of thousands of volumes. We feel, somehow, that Samuel Clemens has suddenly become quite a serious-minded person, that he has left Tom Sawyer and Joe Harper and Huck Finn somewhere in a beautiful country a long way behind.

He found work with the firm of John A. Gray & Green, general printers, in Cliff Street. His pay was four dollars a week, in wild-cat money—that is, money issued by private banks—rather poor money, being generally at a discount and sometimes worth less. But if wages were low, living was cheap in those days, and Sam Clemens, lodging in a mechanics' boarding-house in Duane Street, sometimes had fifty cents left on Saturday night when his board and washing were paid.

Luckily, he had not set out to seek his fortune, but only to see something of the world. He lingered in New York through the summer of 1853, never expecting to remain long. His letters of that period were few. In October he said, in a letter to Pamela, that he did not write to the family because he did not know their whereabouts, Orion having sold the paper and left Hannibal.

"I have been fooling myself with the idea that I was going to leave New York every day for the last two weeks," he adds, which sounds like the Mark Twain of fifty years later. Farther along, he tells of going to see Edwin Forrest, then

playing at the Broadway Theater:

"The play was the 'Gladiator.' I did not like part of it much, but other portions were really splendid. In the latter part of the last act. . . the man's whole soul seems absorbed in the part he is playing; and it is real startling to see him. I am sorry I did not see him play 'Damon and Pythias,' the former character being the greatest. He appears in Philadelphia on Monday night."

A little farther along he says:

"If my letters do not come often, you need not bother yourself about me; for if you have a brother nearly eighteen years old who is not able to take care of himself a few miles from home, such a brother is not worth one's thoughts."

Sam Clemens may have followed Forrest to Philadelphia. At any rate, he was there presently, "subbing" in the composing-rooms of the "Inquirer," setting ten thousand ems a day, and receiving pay accordingly. When there was no vacancy for him to fill, he put in the time visiting the Philadelphia libraries, art galleries, and historic landmarks. After all, his chief business was sight-seeing. Work was only a means to this end. Chilly evenings, when he returned to his boarding-house, his roommate, an Englishman named Sumner, grilled a herring over their small open fire, and this was a great feast. He tried writing—obituary poetry, for the "Philadelphia Ledger"—but it was not accepted.

"My efforts were not received with approval" was his

comment long after.

In the "Inquirer" office there was a printer named Frog, and sometimes, when he went out, the office "devils" would hang over his case a line with a hook on it baited with a piece of red flannel. They never got tired of this joke, and Frog never failed to get fighting mad when he saw that dangling string with the bit of red flannel at the end. No doubt Sam Clemens had his share in this mischief.

Sam found that he liked Philadelphia. He could save a little money and send something to his mother—small amounts, but welcome. Once he inclosed a gold dollar, "to serve as a specimen of the kind of stuff we are paid with in Philadelphia." Better than doubtful "wild-cat," certainly. Of his work he writes:

"One man has engaged me to work for him every Sunday till the first of next April, when I shall return home to take Ma to Ky If I want to, I can get subbing every night of the week. I go to work at seven in the evening and work till three the next morning. . . . The type is mostly agate and minion, with some bourgeois, and when one gets a good agate 'take,' he is sure to make money. I made \$2.50 last Sunday."

There is a long description of a trip on the Fairmount stage in this letter, well-written and interesting, but too long to have place here. In the same letter he speaks of the graves of Benjamin Franklin and his wife, which he had looked at through the iron railing of the locked inclosure. Probably it did not occur to him

that there might be points of similarity between Franklin's career and his own. Yet in time these would be rather striking: each learned the printer's trade; each worked in his brother's office and wrote for the paper; each left quietly and went to New York, and from New York to Philadelphia, as a journeyman printer; each in due season became a world figure, many-sided, human, and of incredible popularity.

Orion Clemens, meantime, had bought a paper in Muscatine, Iowa, and located the family there. Evidently by this time he had realized the value of his brother as a contributor, for Sam, in a letter to Orion, says, "I will try to write for the paper occasionally, but I fear my letters will be very uninteresting, for this incessant night work dulls one's ideas amazingly."

Meantime, he had passed his eighteenth birthday, winter was coming on, he had been away from home half a year, and the first attack of homesickness was due. "One only has to leave home to learn how to write interesting letters to an absent friend," he wrote; and again. "I don't like our present prospect for cold weather at all."

He declared he only wanted to get back to avoid night work, which was injuring his eyes, but we may guess there was a stronger reason, which perhaps he did not entirely realize. The novelty of wandering had worn off, and he yearned for familiar faces, the comfort of those he loved.

But he did not go. He made a trip to Washington in January—a sight-seeing trip—returning to Philadelphia, where he worked

for the "Ledger" and "North American." Eventually he went back to New York, and from there took ticket to St. Louis. This was in the late summer of 1854; he had been fifteen months away from his people when he stepped aboard the train to return.

Sam was worn out when he reached St. Louis; but the Keokuk packet was leaving, and he stopped only long enough to see Pamela, then went aboard and, flinging himself into his berth, did not waken until the boat reached Muscatine, Iowa, thirty-six hours later.

It was very early when he arrived, too early to rouse the family. He sat down in the office of a little hotel to wait for morning, and picked up a small book that lay on the writing-table. It contained pictures of the English rulers with the brief facts of their reigns. Sam Clemens entertained himself learning these data by heart. He had a fine memory for such things, and in an hour or two had those details so perfectly committed that he never forgot one of them as long as he lived. The knowledge acquired in this stray fashion he found invaluable in later life. It was his groundwork for all English history.

X.

A WIND OF CHANCE

Orion could not persuade his brother to remain in Muscatine. Sam returned to his old place on the "Evening News," in St. Louis, where he remained until the following year, rooming with a youth named Burrough, a journeyman chair-maker with literary taste, a reader of the English classics, a companionable lad, and for Samuel Clemens a good influence.

By spring, Orion Clemens had married and had sold out in Muscatine. He was now located in Keokuk, Iowa. When presently Brother Sam came visiting to Keokuk, Orion offered him five dollars a week and his board to remain. He accepted. Henry Clemens, now seventeen, was also in Orion's employ, and a lad named Dick Hingham. Henry and Sam slept in the office; Dick and a young fellow named Brownell, who roomed above, came in for social evenings.

They were pretty lively evenings. A music-teacher on the floor below did not care for them—they disturbed his class. He was furious, in fact, and assailed the boys roughly at first, with no result but to make matters worse. Then he tried gentleness, and succeeded. The boys stopped their capers and joined his class. Sam, especially, became a distinguished member of that body. He was never a great musician, but with his good nature, his

humor, his slow, quaint speech and originality, he had no rival in popularity. He was twenty now, and much with young ladies, yet he was always a beau rather than a suitor, a good comrade to all, full of pranks and pleasantries, ready to stop and be merry with any that came along. If they prophesied concerning his future, it is not likely that they spoke of literary fame. They thought him just easy-going and light-minded. True, they noticed that he often carried a book under his arm—a history, a volume of Dickens, or the tales of Poe.

He read more than any one guessed. At night, propped up in bed—a habit continued until his death—he was likely to read until a late hour. He enjoyed smoking at such times, and had made himself a pipe with a large bowl which stood on the floor and had a long rubber stem, something like the Turkish hubble-bubble. He liked to fill the big bowl and smoke at ease through the entire evening. But sometimes the pipe went out, which meant that he must strike a match and lean far over to apply it, just when he was most comfortable. Sam Clemens never liked unnecessary exertion. One night, when the pipe had gone out for the second time, he happened to hear the young book-clerk, Brownell, passing up to his room on the top floor. Sam called to him:

"Ed, come here!"

Brownell poked his head in the door. The two were great chums.

"What will you have, Sam?" he asked.

"Come in, Ed; Henry's asleep, and I'm in trouble. I want somebody to light my pipe."

"Why don't you light it yourself?" Brownell asked.

"I would, only I knew you'd be along in a few minutes and would do it for me."

Brownell scratched a match, stooped down, and applied it.

"What are you reading, Sam?"

"Oh, nothing much—a so-called funny book. One of these days I'll write a funnier book myself."

Brownell laughed. "No, you won't, Sam," he said. "You're too lazy ever to write a book."

Years later, in the course of a lecture which he delivered in Keokuk, Mark Twain said that he supposed the most untruthful man in the world lived right there in Keokuk, and that his name was Ed Brownell.

Orion Clemens did not have the gift of prosperity, and his printing-office did not flourish. When he could no longer pay Sam's wages he took him into partnership, which meant that Sam got no wages at all, though this was of less consequence, since his mother, now living with Pamela, was well provided for. The disorder of the office, however, distressed him. He wrote home that he could not work without system, and, a little later, that he was going to leave Keokuk, that, in fact, he was planning a great adventure—a trip to the upper Amazon!

His interest in the Amazon had been awakened by a book. Lynch and Herndon had surveyed the upper river, and Lieutenant

Herndon's book was widely read. Sam Clemens, propped up in bed, pored over it through long evenings, and nightly made fabulous fortunes collecting cocoa and other rare things—resolving, meantime, to start in person for the upper Amazon with no unnecessary delay. Boy and man, Samuel Clemens was the same. His vision of grand possibilities ahead blinded him to the ways and means of arrival. It was an inheritance from both sides of his parentage. Once, in old age, he wrote:

"I have been punished many and many a time, and bitterly, for doing things and reflecting afterward When I am reflecting on these occasions, even deaf persons can hear me think."

He believed, however, that he had reflected carefully concerning the Amazon, and that in a brief time he should be there at the head of an expedition, piling up untold wealth. He even stirred the imaginations of two other adventurers, a Dr. Martin and a young man named Ward. To Henry, then in St. Louis, he wrote, August 5, 1856:

"Ward and I held a long consultation Sunday morning, and the result was that we two have determined to start to Brazil, if possible, in six weeks from now, in order to look carefully into matters there and report to Dr. Martin in time for him to follow on the first of March."

The matter of finance troubled him. Orion could not be depended on for any specified sum, and the fare to the upper Amazon would probably be considerable. Sam planned different

methods of raising it. One of them was to go to New York or Cincinnati and work at his trade until he saved the amount. He would then sail from New York direct, or take boat for New Orleans and sail from there. Of course there would always be vessels clearing for the upper Amazon. After Lieutenant Herndon's book the ocean would probably be full of them.

He did not make the start with Ward, as planned, and Ward and Martin seem to have given up the Amazon idea. Not so with Samuel Clemens. He went on reading Herndon, trying meantime to raise money enough to get him out of Keokuk. Was it fate or Providence that suddenly placed it in his hands? Whatever it was, the circumstance is so curious that it must be classed as one of those strange facts that have no place in fiction.

The reader will remember how, one day in Hannibal, the wind had brought to Sam Clemens, then printer's apprentice, a stray leaf from a book about "Joan of Arc," and how that incident marked a turning-point in his mental life. Now, seven years later, it was the wind again that directed his fortune. It was a day in early November—bleak, bitter, and gusty, with whirling snow; most persons were indoors. Samuel Clemens, going down Main Street, Keokuk, saw a flying bit of paper pass him and lodge against a building. Something about it attracted him and he captured it. It was a fifty-dollar bill! He had never seen one before, but he recognized it. He thought he must be having a pleasant dream.

He was tempted to pocket his good fortune and keep still. But

he had always a troublesome conscience. He went to a newspaper office and advertised that he had found a sum of money, a large bill.

Once, long after, he said: "I didn't describe it very particularly, and I waited in daily fear that the owner would turn up and take away my fortune. By and by I couldn't stand it any longer. My conscience had gotten all that was coming to it. I felt that I must take that money out of danger."

Another time he said, "I advertised the find and left for the Amazon the same day." All of which we may take with his usual literary discount —the one assigned to him by his mother in childhood. As a matter of fact, he remained for an ample time, and nobody came for the money. What was its origin? Was it swept out of a bank, or caught up by the wind from some counting-room table? Perhaps it materialized out of the unseen. Who knows?

XI.

THE LONG WAY TO THE AMAZON

Sam decided on Cincinnati as his base. From there he could go either to New York or New Orleans to catch the Amazon boat. He paid a visit to St. Louis, where his mother made him renew his promise as to drink and cards. Then he was seized with a literary idea, and returned to Keokuk, where he proposed to a thriving weekly paper, the "Saturday Post," to send letters of travel, which might even be made into a book later on. George Reese, owner of the "Post," agreed to pay five dollars each for the letters, which speaks well for his faith in Samuel Clemens's talent, five dollars being good pay for that time and place—more than the letters were worth, judged by present standards. The first was dated Cincinnati, November 14, 1856, and was certainly not promising literature. It was written in the ridiculous dialect which was once thought to be the dress of humor; and while here and there is a comic flash, there is in it little promise of the future Mark Twain. One extract is enough:

"When we got to the depo', I went around to git a look at the iron hoss. Thunderation! It wasn't no more like a hoss than a meetin'—house. If I was goin' to describe the animule, I'd say it looked like—well, it looked like—blamed if I know what it looked like, snorting fire and brimstone out

of his nostrils, and puffin' out black smoke all 'round, and pantin', and heavin', and swellin', and chawin' up red-hot coals like they was good. A feller stood in a little house like, feedin' him all the time; but the more he got, the more he wanted and the more he blowed and snorted. After a spell the feller ketched him by the tail, and great Jericho! he set up a yell that split the ground for more'n a mile and a half, and the next minit I felt my legs a-waggin', and found myself at t'other end of the string o' vehickles. I wasn't skeered, but I had three chills and a stroke of palsy in less than five minits, and my face had a cur'us brownish-yaller-greenbluish color in it, which was perfectly unaccountable. 'Well,' say I, 'comment is super-flu-ous.'"

How Samuel Clemens could have written that, and worse, at twenty-one, and a little more than ten years later have written "The Innocents Abroad," is one of the mysteries of literature. The letters were signed "Snodgrass," and there are but two of them. Snodgrass seems to have found them hard work, for it is said he raised on the price, which, fortunately, brought the series to a close. Their value to-day lies in the fact that they are the earliest of Mark Twain's newspaper contributions that have been preserved—the first for which he received a cash return.

Sam remained in Cincinnati until April of the following year, 1857, working for Wrightson & Co., general printers, lodging in a cheap boarding-house, saving every possible penny for his great adventure.

He had one associate at the boarding-house, a lank, unsmiling

Scotchman named Macfarlane, twice young Clemens's age, and a good deal of a mystery. Sam never could find out what Macfarlane did. His hands were hardened by some sort of heavy labor; he left at six in the morning and returned in the evening at the same hour. He never mentioned his work, and young Clemens had the delicacy not to inquire.

For Macfarlane was no ordinary person. He was a man of deep knowledge, a reader of many books, a thinker; he was versed in history and philosophy, he knew the dictionary by heart. He made but two statements concerning himself: one, that he had acquired his knowledge from reading, and not at school; the other, that he knew every word in the English dictionary. He was willing to give proof of the last, and Sam Clemens tested him more than once, but found no word that Macfarlane could not define.

Macfarlane was not silent—he would discuss readily enough the deeper problems of life and had many startling theories of his own. Darwin had not yet published his "Descent of Man," yet Macfarlane was already advancing ideas similar to those in that book. He went further than Darwin. He had startling ideas of the moral evolution of man, and these he would pour into the ears of his young listener until ten o'clock, after which, like the English Sumner in Philadelphia, he would grill a herring, and the evening would end. Those were fermenting discourses that young Samuel Clemens listened to that winter in Macfarlane's room, and they did not fail to influence his later thought.

It was the high-tide of spring, late in April, when the prospective cocoa-hunter decided that it was time to set out for the upper Amazon. He had saved money enough to carry him at least as far as New Orleans, where he would take ship, it being farther south and therefore nearer his destination. Furthermore, he could begin with a lazy trip down the Mississippi, which, next to being a pilot, had been one of his most cherished dreams. The Ohio River steamers were less grand than those of the Mississippi, but they had a homelike atmosphere and did not hurry. Samuel Clemens had the spring fever and was willing to take his time.

In "Life on the Mississippi" we read that the author ran away, vowing never to return until he could come home a pilot, shedding glory. But this is the fiction touch. He had always loved the river, and his boyhood dream of piloting had time and again returned, but it was not uppermost when he bade good-by to Macfarlane and stepped aboard the "Paul Jones," bound for New Orleans, and thus conferred immortality on that ancient little craft.

Now he had really started on his voyage. But it was a voyage that would continue not for a week or a fortnight, but for four years—four marvelous, sunlit years, the glory of which would color all that followed them.

XII.

RENEWING AN OLD AMBITION

A reader of Mark Twain's Mississippi book gets the impression that the author was a boy of about seventeen when he started to learn the river, and that he was painfully ignorant of the great task ahead. But this also is the fiction side of the story. Samuel Clemens was more than twenty-one when he set out on the "Paul Jones," and in a way was familiar with the trade of piloting. Hannibal had turned out many pilots. An older brother of the Bowen boys was already on the river when Sam Clemens was rolling rocks down Holliday's Hill. Often he came home to air his grandeur and hold forth on the wonder of his work. That learning the river was no light task Sam Clemens would know as well as any one who had not tried it.

Nevertheless, as the drowsy little steamer went puffing down into softer, sunnier lands, the old dream, the "permanent ambition" of boyhood, returned, while the call of the far-off Amazon and cocoa drew faint.

Horace Bixby,² pilot of the "Paul Jones," a man of thirty-two, was looking out over the bow at the head of Island No. 35 when

² Horace Bixby lived until 1912 and remained at the wheel until within a short time of his death, in his eighty-seventh year. The writer of this memoir visited him in 1910 and took down from his dictation the dialogue that follows.

he heard a slow, pleasant voice say, "Good morning."

Bixby was a small, clean-cut man. "Good morning, sir," he said, rather briskly, without looking around.

He did not much care for visitors in the pilothouse. This one entered and stood a little behind him.

"How would you like a young man to learn the river?" came to him in that serene, deliberate speech.

The pilot glanced over his shoulder and saw a rather slender, loose-limbed youth with a fair, girlish complexion and a great mass of curly auburn hair.

"I wouldn't like it. Cub pilots are more trouble than they're worth. A great deal more trouble than profit."

"I am a printer by trade," the easy voice went on. "It doesn't agree with me. I thought I'd go to South America."

Bixby kept his eye on the river, but there was interest in his voice when he spoke. "What makes you pull your words that way?" he asked—"pulling" being the river term for drawling.

The young man, now seated comfortably on the visitors' bench, said more slowly than ever: "You'll have to ask my mother—she pulls hers, too."

Pilot Bixby laughed. The manner of the reply amused him. His guest was encouraged.

"Do you know the Bowen boys?" he asked, "pilots in the St. Louis and New Orleans trade?"

"I know them well—all three of them. William Bowen did his first steering for me; a mighty good boy. I know Sam, too, and

Bart."

"Old schoolmates of mine in Hannibal. Sam and Will, especially, were my chums."

Bixby's tone became friendly. "Come over and stand by me," he said.

"What is your name?"

The applicant told him, and the two stood looking out on the sunlit water.

"Do you drink?"

"No."

"Do you gamble?"

"No, sir."

"Do you swear?"

"N-not for amusement; only under pressure."

"Do you chew?"

"No, sir, never; but I must—smoke."

"Did you ever do any steering?"

"I have steered everything on the river but a steamboat, I guess."

"Very well. Take the wheel and see what you can do with a steamboat.

Keep her as she is—toward that lower cottonwood snag."

Bixby had a sore foot and was glad of a little relief. He sat on the bench where he could keep a careful eye on the course. By and by he said "There is just one way I would take a young man to learn the river—that is, for money."

"What—do you—charge?"

"Five hundred dollars, and I to be at no expense whatever."

In those days pilots were allowed to carry a learner, or "cub," board free. Mr. Bixby meant that he was to be at no expense in port or for incidentals. His terms seemed discouraging.

"I haven't got five hundred dollars in money," Sam said. "I've got a lot of Tennessee land worth two bits an acre. I'll give you two thousand acres of that."

Bixby shook his head. "No," he said, "I don't want any unimproved real estate. I have too much already."

Sam reflected. He thought he might be able to borrow one hundred dollars from William Moffett, Pamela's husband, without straining his credit.

"Well, then," he proposed, "I'll give you one hundred dollars cash, and the rest when I earn it."

Something about this young man had won Horace Bixby's heart. His slow, pleasant speech, his unhurried, quiet manner at the wheel, his evident simplicity and sincerity—the inner qualities of mind and heart which would make the world love Mark Twain. The terms proposed were accepted. The first payment was to be in cash; the others were to begin when the pupil had learned the river and was earning wages. During the rest of the trip to New Orleans the new pupil was often at the wheel, while Mr. Bixby nursed his sore foot and gave directions. Any literary ambitions that Samuel Clemens still nourished waned rapidly. By the time he had reached New Orleans he had

almost forgotten he had ever been a printer. As for the Amazon and cocoa, why, there had been no ship sailing in that direction for years, and it was unlikely that any would ever sail again, a fact that rather amused the would-be adventurer now, since Providence had regulated his affairs in accordance with his oldest and longest cherished dream.

At New Orleans Bixby left the "Paul Jones" for a fine St. Louis boat, taking his cub with him. This was a sudden and happy change, and Sam was a good deal impressed with his own importance in belonging to so imposing a structure, especially when, after a few days' stay in New Orleans, he stood by Bixby's side in the big glass turret while they backed out of the line of wedged-in boats and headed up the great river.

This was glory, but there was sorrow ahead. He had not really begun learning the river as yet he had only steered under directions. He had known that to learn the river would be hard, but he had never realized quite how hard. Serenely he had undertaken the task of mastering twelve hundred miles of the great, changing, shifting river as exactly and as surely by daylight or darkness as one knows the way to his own features. Nobody could realize the full size of that task—not till afterward.

XIII.

LEARNING THE RIVER

In that early day, to be a pilot was to be "greater than a king." The Mississippi River pilot was a law unto himself—there was none above him. His direction of the boat was absolute; he could start or lay up when he chose; he could pass a landing regardless of business there, consulting nobody, not even the captain; he could take the boat into what seemed certain destruction, if he had that mind, and the captain was obliged to stand by, helpless and silent, for the law was with the pilot in everything.

Furthermore, the pilot was a gentleman. His work was clean and physically light. It ended the instant the boat was tied to the landing, and did not begin again until it was ready to back into the stream. Also, for those days his salary was princely—the Vice-President of the United States did not receive more. As for prestige, the Mississippi pilot, perched high in his glass inclosure, fashionably dressed, and commanding all below him, was the most conspicuous and showy, the most observed and envied creature in the world. No wonder Sam Clemens, with his love of the river and his boyish fondness for honors, should aspire to that stately rank. Even at twenty-one he was still just a boy—as, indeed, he was till his death—and we may imagine how elated he was, starting up the great river as a real apprentice pilot,

who in a year or two would stand at the wheel, as his chief was now standing, a monarch with a splendid income and all the great river packed away in his head.

In that last item lay the trouble. In the Mississippi book he tells of it in a way that no one may hope to equal, and if the details are not exact, the truth is there—at least in substance.

For a distance above New Orleans Mr. Bixby had volunteered information about the river, naming the points and crossings, in what seemed a casual way, all through his watch of four hours. Their next watch began in the middle of the night, and Mark Twain tells how surprised and disgusted he was to learn that pilots must get up in the night to run their boats, and his amazement to find Mr. Bixby plunging into the blackness ahead as if it had been daylight. Very likely this is mainly fiction, but hardly the following:

Presently he turned to me and said: "What's the name of the first point above New Orleans?"

I was gratified to be able to answer promptly, and I did. I said I didn't know.

"Don't know!"

His manner jolted me. I was down at the foot again, in a moment. But I had to say just what I had said before.

"Well, you're a smart one," said Mr. Bixby. "What's the name of the next point?"

Once more I didn't know.

"Well, this beats anything! Tell me the name of any point or place I told you."

I studied awhile and decided that I couldn't.

"Look here! What do you start from, above Twelve Mile Point, to cross over?"

"I—I—don't know."

"You—you don't know," mimicking my drawling manner of speech.

"What do you know?"

"I—I—Nothing, for certain."

Bixby was a small, nervous man, hot and quick-firing. He went off now, and said a number of severe things. Then:

"Look here, what do you suppose I told you the names of those points for?"

I tremblingly considered a moment—then the devil of temptation provoked me to say: "Well—to—to—be entertaining, I thought."

This was a red flag to the bull. He raged and stormed so (he was crossing the river at the time) that I judged it made him blind, because he ran over the steering-oar of a trading-scow. Of course the traders sent up a volley of red-hot profanity. Never was a man so grateful as Mr. Bixby was, because he was brimful, and here were subjects who would talk back. He threw open a window, thrust his head out, and such an irruption followed as I had never heard before When he closed the window he was empty.

Presently he said to me, in the gentlest way:

"My boy, you must get a little memorandum-book, and every time I tell you a thing, put it down right away. There's only one way to be a pilot, and that is to get this entire river by heart. You have to know it just like A-B-C."

The little memorandum-book which Sam Clemens bought, probably at the next daylight landing, still exists—the same that he says "fairly bristled with the names of towns, points, bars, islands, bends, reaches, etc."; but it made his heart ache to think he had only half the river set down, for, as the watches were four hours off and four hours on, there were the long gaps where he had slept.

It is not easy to make out the penciled notes today. The small, neat writing is faded, and many of them are in an abbreviation made only for himself. It is hard even to find these examples to quote:

MERIWETHER'S BEND

One-fourth less 3³—run shape of upper bar and go into the low place in the willows about 200 (ft.) lower down than last year.

OUTSIDE OF MONTEZUMA

Six or eight feet more water. Shape bar till high timber on towhead gets nearly even with low willows. Then hold a little open on right of low willows—run 'em close if you want to, but come out 200 yards when you get nearly to head

³ Depth of water. One-quarter less than three fathoms.

of towhead.

The average mind would not hold a single one of these notes ten seconds, yet by the time he reached St. Louis he had set down pages that to-day make one's head weary even to contemplate. And those long four-hour gaps where he had been asleep—they are still there; and now, after nearly sixty years, the old heartache is still in them. He must have bought a new book for the next trip and laid this one away.

To the new "cub" it seemed a long way to St. Louis that first trip, but in the end it was rather grand to come steaming up to the big, busy city, with its thronging waterfront flanked with a solid mile of steamboats, and to nose one's way to a place in that stately line.

At St. Louis, Sam borrowed from his brother-in-law the one hundred dollars he had agreed to pay, and so closed his contract with Bixby. A few days later his chief was engaged to go on a very grand boat indeed—a "sumptuous temple," he tells us, all brass and inlay, with a pilot-house so far above the water that he seemed perched on a mountain. This part of learning the river was worth while; and when he found that the regiment of natty servants respectfully "sir'd" him, his happiness was complete.

But he was in the depths again, presently, for when they started down the river and he began to take account of his knowledge, he found that he had none. Everything had changed—that is, he was seeing it all from the other direction. What with the four-hour gaps and this transformation, he was lost completely.

How could the easy-going, dreamy, unpractical man whom the world knew as Mark Twain ever have persisted against discouragement like that to acquire the vast, the absolute, limitless store of information necessary to Mississippi piloting? The answer is that he loved the river, the picturesqueness and poetry of a steamboat, the ease and glory of a pilot's life; and then, in spite of his own later claims to the contrary, Samuel Clemens, boy and man, in the work suited to his tastes and gifts, was the most industrious of persons. Work of the other sort he avoided, overlooked, refused to recognize, but never any labor for which he was qualified by his talents or training. Piloting suited him exactly, and he proved an apt pupil.

Horace Bixby said to the writer of this memoir: "Sam was always good-natured, and he had a natural taste for the river. He had a fine memory and never forgot what I told him."

Yet there must have been hard places all along, for to learn every crook and turn and stump and snag and bluff and bar and sounding of that twelve hundred miles of mighty, shifting water was a gigantic task. Mark Twain tells us how, when he was getting along pretty well, his chief one day turned on him suddenly with this "settler":

"What is the shape of Walnut Bend?"

He might as well have asked me my grandmother's opinion of protoplasm. I replied respectfully and said I didn't know it had any particular shape. My gun-powdery chief went off with a bang, of course, and then went on

loading and firing until he was out of adjectivesI waited. By and by he said:

"My boy, you've got to know the shape of the river perfectly. It is all that is left to steer by on a very dark night. Everything else is blotted out and gone. But mind you, it hasn't got the same shape in the night that it has in the daytime."

"How on earth am I going to learn it, then?"

"How do you follow a hall at home in the dark? Because you know the shape of it. You can't see it."

"Do you mean to say that I've got to know all the million trifling variations of shape in the banks of this interminable river as well as I know the shape of the front hall at home?"

"On my honor, you've got to know them better than any man ever did know the shapes of the halls in his own house."

"I wish I was dead!"

But the reader must turn to Chapter VIII of "Life on the Mississippi" and read, or reread, the pages which follow this extract—nothing can better convey the difficulties of piloting. That Samuel Clemens had the courage to continue is the best proof, not only of his great love of the river, but of that splendid gift of resolution that one rarely fails to find in men of the foremost rank.

XIV.

RIVER DAYS

Piloting was only a part of Sam Clemens's education on the Mississippi. He learned as much of the reefs and shallows of human nature as of the river-bed. In one place he writes:

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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