

LECTURE TRIPS AND VISITS OF MARK TWAIN IN IOWA

[In the July issue of THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS Mr. Lorch told of the sojourn of Samuel L. Clemens at Muscatine and Keokuk. This installment deals with the visits of Mark Twain to Iowa as a lecturer and entertainer.]

THE LECTURE AT KEOKUK IN 1867

It was on April 5, 1867, that Samuel L. Clemens returned to Iowa after an absence of ten turbulent years.¹ He had left Keokuk in the fall of 1856 with dreams of South American adventure and wealth. Now he was returning, not with wealth, it is true, but with the memory of glorious days in the Sandwich Islands. Though still without a profession — Twain's most perplexing problem during these days — he was by no means obscure. He had not only made important friendships on the Pacific Coast, where he had attained popularity by way of journalism and the lecture platform, but he had in his pocket letters of endorsement to prominent men in the East.² Nor was his fame confined to the West. Already in January of 1867, only five months after his return to San Francisco from the Islands, we find at least one Iowa newspaper quoting "Mark Twain".³ And so if Sam Clemens had something of the feeling of a conquering hero at St. Louis, where he was visiting with his family, and if he experienced a thrill by offering himself to the admiration of his former fellow townsmen both at Hannibal and Keokuk — people, by the way, who had always been more or less dubious about Sam's

¹ *Keokuk Gate City* (Daily), April 6, 1867.

² Paine's *Mark Twain's Letters*, Vol. I, p. 122.

³ *The State Press* (Iowa City), January 9, 1867.

ability and future success — such feeling might certainly be excused.

Whether Mark Twain's trip to Keokuk was prompted by a desire to renew old acquaintances and to revisit old scenes or perhaps to replenish a rapidly diminishing purse in the easiest and most profitable way he knew is problematical. None of his immediate family then resided in Keokuk, but there were several relatives and friends. The Stottses, Orion's wife's people, were there, and the Pattersons, and the Starkweathers, and his old friend Ed. F. Brownell.⁴ Perhaps, more than any of these, he had hoped to see Annie Taylor again, but in this he must have been disappointed, for she was now, as we have seen, a teacher at Lindenwood College, St. Charles, Missouri.

It was on Thursday, April 4th, that the people of Keokuk were informed by posters stuck about on the street corners that "Sam. Clemens, the greatest humorist in America", was coming to lecture to them that same week.⁵ The next day Clemens arrived, and with characteristic psychological foresight registered at the Tepfer House, just completed and the most fashionable hotel in the city.⁶ That was on Friday, and the lecture was not until Monday evening.⁷ How Clemens spent the interval we are not told, but it is easy to surmise that he made the rounds of relatives and friends, swapping stories and telling of his western adventures. Very likely he took a peek at the rooms on the third floor on Main Street where Orion's print shop had been and where he had both worked and slept in the old days. Professor Isbell, whose music rooms had occupied the second story, was gone now, and Brownell's Book Store had moved

⁴ *Keokuk City Directory*, 1867.

⁵ *Keokuk Daily Constitution*, April 4, 1867.

⁶ *Keokuk Gate City* (Daily), April 6, 1867.

⁷ *Keokuk Gate City* (Daily), April 6, 1867.

to a new location. It is improbable, however, that Clemens wasted much sentiment in revisiting old Keokuk scenes. The future and not the past was the foremost thing in his thinking those days. For even if he was not yet certain at this time that the *Alta-Californian* would send him on the Quaker City Holy Land Excursion, he was looking forward to the trip with impatient expectation.⁸ Or even if that should fail, there were other projects.

The newspapers of Keokuk extended him a friendly welcome. "We congratulate them, (the people of Keokuk) as well as ourselves, on the opportunity we have of hearing one of his inimitably humorous and witty lectures. . . . His are not the wornout jests, and hackneyed phrases, repeated to satiety, but he is fresh and vigorous, full of life and spirit. . . . Years ago, before the war, Mark Twain that is now, was A. [sic] L. Clemens, one of the cleverest and most popular 'printer boys' in Keokuk. He returns to us now, a famous man, and proverbs or scripture to the contrary, we trust that our citizens will honor him with a rousing house on occasion of his lecture before the Library Association, at the Chatham Square Church, Monday night."⁹

Though there was probably not a rousing house, a "respectable audience" was in attendance.¹⁰ Robert F. Bower, President of the Keokuk Library Association, introduced Clemens. Speaking of the occasion years later, he remembers that Twain said in his preliminary remarks, "If I were as grand a specimen of manhood as the gentleman who has just introduced me, you might expect a magnificent lecture."¹¹

⁸ Paine's *Mark Twain: A Biography*, Vol. I, p. 310.

⁹ *Keokuk Gate City* (Daily), April 6, 1867.

¹⁰ *Keokuk Gate City* (Daily), April 9, 1867.

¹¹ *Keokuk Daily Constitution*, May 18, 1882.

Undoubtedly Ed. Brownell was in the audience that night, for during the lecture Twain took occasion to refer to his old friend in such a way as to delight the Keokuk audience. Twain had been speaking of the unreliability of the inhabitants of the Sandwich Islands. Spying Brownell he added, "The king is, I believe, one of the greatest liars on the face of the earth, except one; and I am very sorry to locate that one right here in Keokuk, in the person of Ed. Brownell."¹²

On the whole, the lecture was a success. The Keokuk audience was enthusiastic. "It has been many a day", reports the daily *Constitution*, "since our ribs were tickled so much as at listening to Sam Clemens's lecture last evening upon 'The Sandwich Islands'. . . . Those of our citizens who did not hear this lecture missed one of the richest treats of their lives."¹³ It was noted, however, that despite his original, quaint, and irresistible humor, his style of speaking and manner were too quiet and undemonstrative. "A little more voice and a little more nerve in his general delivery, would not be objectionable by way of variety."¹⁴

Financially, also, the lecture was fairly successful. At half a dollar a seat the Library Association netted \$34.75,¹⁵ which was considerably above what an Emerson lecture had brought in a few months earlier.

The following day Clemens left for Quincy, Illinois, where he was to give his last lecture before returning to St. Louis and the East.¹⁶ Fifteen years were to pass before the people of Keokuk were to see Mark Twain again.

¹² Paine's *Mark Twain: A Biography*, Vol. I, p. 107.

¹³ *Keokuk Daily Constitution*, April 9, 1867.

¹⁴ *Keokuk Gate City (Daily)*, April 9, 1867.

¹⁵ *Keokuk Daily Constitution*, April 7, 1867; *Keokuk Gate City (Daily)*, May 14, 1867.

¹⁶ By this time Clemens had probably heard from the *Alta-Californian* concerning the Quaker City Excursion to the Holy Land.—Paine's *Mark Twain: A Biography*, Vol. I, p. 310.

THE LECTURE AT DAVENPORT IN 1869

If Mark Twain felt that success was near in 1867 as he revisited the old Mississippi River towns he had once called home, he was becoming definitely certain of it in 1869. The Quaker City excursion articles had given him not only a national reputation as a journalist but had offered contacts with men of prominence and influence. His difficulties with regard to the publication of *Innocents Abroad* had been amicably and profitably settled, and the book itself was to appear in July of that year. In the meantime he was in demand as a lecturer and was playing before tremendously enthusiastic houses in the East. All in all, things were going swimmingly. There was, however, one difficulty — a portion of sour in his pound of sweet considerably larger than the proverbial ounce. He was contemplating marriage with a young lady whose family had not yet been persuaded as to his desirability. A provisional engagement was countenanced until Mr. Langdon, the girl's father, should have time to make inquiries concerning Twain's character. It was during this interval of suspense that Twain lectured at Davenport on January 14, 1869, and at Iowa City on January 15th.¹⁷

Twain's arrival in Davenport was not further noted than that his name appeared in the published lists of arrivals at the Burtis House.¹⁸ The ticket sale which had started the morning before, had progressed so rapidly that the lecture promised to be better attended than any previously given. The price of general admission was fifty cents. Reserved

¹⁷ Paine says, "He went as far west as Illinois, had crowded houses in Chicago, visited friends and kindred in Hannibal, St. Louis, and Keokuk, . . . and lecturing in old familiar haunts." But it is highly improbable that Twain visited Keokuk upon this occasion. In view of his recent phenomenal successes it is unbelievable that his presence in the city would have escaped notice; yet the newspapers are silent.—Paine's *Mark Twain: A Biography*, Vol. I, p. 376.

¹⁸ *The Davenport Democrat* (Daily), January 15, 1869.

seats were selling at seventy-five cents.¹⁹ By afternoon of the day of the lecture, Griggs, Watson, and Day reported that seat sales already amounted to seventy dollars. "Twain", announces one newspaper enthusiastically, "is a trump card."²⁰

It does not appear, however, that the people of Davenport were aware of Clemens's former connection with the State of Iowa; the promise of success indicated by the advance ticket sales is attributable rather to eulogistic press notices. In the East, it was observed, his appearance had been greeted with rapturous delight. Though witty he was without the vulgarity of Nasby.²¹

A glowing account of Twain's brilliant success in Chicago was copied at length by the *Davenport Democrat*. "As a humorous lecturer he is a success. There is nothing in his lecture, for he very properly sacrifices everything to make his audience roar, and they do it. His manner is peculiar; he hangs around loose, leaning on the desk, or flirting around the corners of it; then marching and countermarching in the rear of it, marking off the ground by the yard. His voice is a long monotonous drawl, well adapted to his style of speaking. The fun invariably comes in at the end of the sentence, after a pause."²²

Prepared for an evening of enjoyment, the Davenport audience which greeted Mark Twain was the "most select and largest that had yet greeted any lecturer on the course." Clemens succeeded at once in putting the audience in good humor and ready for anything he might say. "He was not exactly embarrassed, he said, to be introduced in so public a manner,— he rather liked it." And then for

¹⁹ *The Davenport Democrat* (Daily), January 11, 1869.

²⁰ *The Davenport Democrat* (Daily), January 14, 1869.

²¹ *The Davenport Democrat* (Daily), January 11, 1869.

²² *The Davenport Democrat* (Daily), January 12, 1869.

nearly two hours he talked, interesting his audience with descriptions, anecdotes, comparisons, and incidents which were frequently ridiculous and absurd.²³ Though prepared for something original in Mark Twain's manner and delivery, the reporter for the *Davenport Democrat* seemed greatly impressed with the man himself. "His body is lithe and muscular, set upon long legs with feet of no size within the ken of a shoemaker, and is surmounted by a round head. Fun lurks in the corners of his humorous mouth. His eyes are deep set, and twinkle like stars in a dark night. The brow overhangs the eyes and the head is eminently a good one, a laughing face beaming with humor and genuine good nature."²⁴

The lecture was unquestionably a success, a thing to be enjoyed if not remembered. And then, too, it paid handsomely.²⁵

THE LECTURE AT IOWA CITY

At Iowa City, "The American Vandal Abroad" was by no means so enthusiastically received. Whether the fault lay in the increasing tension with which Twain contemplated the progress of his love affair, or whether the apparent testiness of the editor of the *Iowa City Republican* was chiefly to blame is a matter of conjecture. In view of what happened, it might be of interest to give in full the notice of the lecture that appeared in the weekly edition of the *Republican*: "The first lecture of the season will be delivered on Friday evening of this week, at the Metropolitan Hall by the celebrated humorist Mark Twain. Subject: The American Vandal Abroad. We have never heard this lecturer, but judging from his reputation we shall antici-

²³ *The Davenport Democrat* (Daily), January 15, 1869.

²⁴ *The Davenport Democrat* (Daily), January 15, 1869.

²⁵ *The Davenport Democrat* (Daily), January 15, 1869.

pate a rich and rare discourse. The Association has selected him because he has succeeded in making such a reputation, judging rightfully, that he could not have made it without merit. We hope to see an old fashioned crowd in attendance on Friday evening. The net proceeds of the lecture will be devoted entirely to good works in our city. The time, the occasion, the man and the cause demand an overflowing house."²⁶

The house was not overflowing but a splendid audience confronted Twain at Metropolitan Hall. So far the editor's plea was answered, and as a consequence some "good works" in the city assured. But the lecture itself disappointed the editor greatly. Had he, however, read the reports of the lecture in the Chicago and Davenport papers with ordinary care he might have known what to expect, for the lack of substance was plainly stated.

"A splendid audience", he writes, "turned out to hear Mark Twain discourse about The American Vandal Abroad, and we fear were generally disappointed. As a lecture it was a humbug. As an occasion for laughter on very small capital of wit or ideas it was a success. There were one or two passages of some merit. His apostrophe to the Sphinx was decidedly good, as was also his description of the ruins of the Parthenon, and of Athens by moonlight. Some touches of Venice did very well, but it was impossible to know when he was talking in earnest and when in burlesque. It was amusing to see such a crowd of people laughing together even though we knew that half of them were ashamed that they were laughing at such very small witticisms. We were very much disappointed that there was so little substance to his lecture. We would not give two cents to hear him again."²⁷

²⁶ *Iowa City Republican*, January 13, 1869.

²⁷ *Iowa City Republican*, January 20, 1869.

But the editor's disappointment in Twain's lecture was as nothing compared with the indignation and disgust he experienced the following day when he learned from an irate landlord of Twain's conduct at the Clinton House, where Twain had spent the night. As ludicrous as the affair appears, even when we allow for the prejudice of the editor, it is well known that Twain was frequently subject to such outbursts of temper as that described below.²⁸

"But lest he might not have succeeded as a Vandal Abroad", complains the editor, "he illustrated the character at the Clinton House, where he stopped. The morning after the lecture nothing was seen of him up to nine o'clock, and the landlord in his kindness, went to his room to see if he might not be in want of something, but received a storm of curses and abuse for disturbing him. Of course the landlord retreated and left him. After a while a terrible racket was heard and unearthly screams, which frightened the women of the house. The landlord rushed to the room and there found a splendid specimen of the vandal and his works. There, before him, was the veritable animal, with his skin on at least, but not much else, and in a towering rage. He had kicked the fastenings from the door, not deigning to open it in the usual way — that would have been too much like other folks. He poured upon the landlord another torrent of curses, impudence and abuse. He demanded to know where the bell pull was. The landlord told him they were not yet up, as they had not yet got the house fully completed. His kicking the door open and his lung performance were his substitute for a bell. At two o'clock P. M. he had not dressed, and whether he did before he left on the five o'clock train we did not learn. The Y. M. C. A. were wretchedly imposed upon by Mark Twain,

²⁸ An amusing incident which absolutely betrays Twain's weakness in this respect is given in Paine's *Mark Twain: A Biography*, Vol. II, p. 789.

and so of course were the audience. He is the only one engaged for the course whose personal character was unknown. In great contrast will he be followed by the glorious Howard, the Christian Hero and soldier, who gave his own right arm to his country, and was ever true to her cause and the cause of the Great Master above."²⁹

That the editor of the *Republican* was utterly devoid of a saving sense of humor may be gathered from the fact that a week later we find him objecting to a musical performance by Alf Howard upon somewhat the same ground on which he had found fault with Twain. "He evoked sweeter music than we had ever before heard,— or supposed possible from a guitar, and had his concert not been marred by senseless and pointless attempts to delineate eccentric characters, it would have been a success."³⁰ And when we learn that not even "the glorious O. O. Howard, the Christian Hero and soldier", quite satisfied the editor, since he treated his subject "Christian Experience in the Army" differently from what was expected, we may understand³¹ the reluctance of the editor of the *Ottumwa Courier* to believe the Iowa City editor until he had heard Twain's side of the story.³²

John P. Irish, editor of the *State Press*, had very little to say of Twain's lecture, though what he said was favor-

²⁹ *Iowa City Republican*, January 20, 1869.

³⁰ *Iowa City Republican*, January 27, 1869.

³¹ *The Ottumwa Courier* (Daily), January 26, 1869. The Ottumwa editor, J. M. Hedrick, was obviously an admirer of Twain's humor. He followed his lecture tour with considerable interest and inserted many of Twain's humorous remarks and anecdotes in the columns of his paper.

³² *The Ottumwa Courier* (Daily), February 3, 1869. Professor Parvin of the University of Iowa, whose diary gives many interesting glimpses of the University in the early decades of its existence, was celebrating his birthday at the home of his sister the evening that Mark Twain lectured at Iowa City. He does not note the lecture in his diary, but on March 3, 1869, he wrote, "Lecture by Taylor, 'Failure, the Alphabet of Success'— best of the season." Parvin's interesting diary is to be found at the Masonic Library at Cedar Rapids.

able. "His style of humor is quite original and his sentiment, though mostly borrowed from 'Eothen', . . . was quite well rendered."³³

THE RIVER TRIP OF 1882

Clemens had long planned to complete his book on the Mississippi River, but it was the spring of 1882 before he could actually make a start. In April he and James R. Osgood, his publisher, and Roswell Phelps of Hartford, a stenographer engaged to take notes, left for St. Louis,³⁴ whence they intended to make the river trip to New Orleans and then back up the river all the way to St. Paul. In order to avoid distraction they planned to travel incognito,³⁵ but Twain was recognized as soon as he arrived in St. Louis. After that attempts at secrecy were abandoned, for the news of Twain's plans soon became known up and down the whole extent of the river.

On the return trip, Osgood, aware perhaps of Twain's plans to visit for three days in Hannibal, left the party at St. Louis, agreeing to pick them up again at Davenport.³⁶ It was on May 17th that Twain stepped aboard the *Minneapolis* at Hannibal to continue the trip. He was by no means happy. His visit with old Hannibal friends had

³³ *State Press* (Iowa City), January 20, 1869. *Eothen*, by Alexander William Kinglake, was published in England in 1844 and in America the following year. It was probably the most widely read and successful travel book prior to *Innocents Abroad*. The Century Classics Edition of *Eothen*, put out by the Century Company, New York, 1900, carries an introduction by no less a person than James Bryce.

³⁴ "Our idea is to strike across lots and reach St. Louis the 20th of April — thence we propose to drift southward, stopping at some towns a few hours or a night, every day, and making notes."—*Mark Twain's Letters*, Vol. I, p. 417.

³⁵ Clemens traveled as C. L. Samuel, of New York. "I don't know what Osgood's name will be but he can't use his own."—*Mark Twain's Letters*, Vol. I, pp. 417, 418.

³⁶ *Keokuk Daily Constitution*, May 18, 1882.

saddened him, and now, with Osgood gone, he had little heart to go on.³⁷ On the boat that day he wrote his wife: "Livvy darling, I am desperately homesick. But I have promised Osgood, and now I must stick it out; otherwise I would take the train at once and break for home. . . . Now I am under way again, upon this hideous trip to St. Paul with a heart brimming full of thoughts and images of you and Susie and Bay and the peerless Jean." The letter was sent from Quincy, Illinois.³⁸ The same evening, May 17th, the *Minneapolis* docked at Keokuk.

News of Twain's coming had, of course, preceded him, and upon the arrival of the boat, Judge Davis, Ed. F. Brownell, Al Patterson, and Dr. J. M. Shaffer went on board to greet him and to take him off for an hour or two, while the boat stopped, to talk over old times.³⁹ Though it is highly probable that the party went up to Orion's house to visit with the family, no mention is made of the fact in the Keokuk papers.

It had been 1867 on the occasion of his "Sandwich Islands" lecture that he had last been in Keokuk, and though the intervening fifteen years had brought many changes, the city was not altogether strange to him. "It was night, and we could not see details", he wrote in his *Life on the Mississippi*, "for which we were sorry, for Keokuk has the reputation of being a beautiful city. It was a pleasant one to live in years ago."⁴⁰

When the party returned to the boat, a reporter from the *Constitution* and one from the *Gate City* joined them. Chairs were drawn up on the deck, and for a little while longer the talk went on. Twain stated that he had visited

³⁷ Phelps came up with Twain.—*Keokuk Daily Constitution*, May 18, 1882.

³⁸ Paine's *Mark Twain's Letters*, Vol. I, p. 419.

³⁹ *Keokuk Daily Constitution*, May 18, 1882.

⁴⁰ Clemens's *Life on the Mississippi*, p. 556.

Keokuk last in 1867. He told them briefly of his purpose in making the river trip and confessed that he had not intended making it so extensive, but since Osgood had kept faith with him he would go through with it.

He expressed sorrow at not being able to stop at Keokuk for a few days and visit with old friends, but that, he said, would be impossible. When told, thereupon, that the Burlington papers had stated that Twain would probably spend a day or two there, he remarked in substance that they were mistaken, that he did not intend staying there longer than the boat did.⁴¹

Shortly after 11 o'clock, the *Minneapolis* pulled away⁴² and continued the journey up river, going over the Rapids by way of the canal, "A mighty work", says Twain, "which was in progress there in my day".⁴³

The following morning when the *Minneapolis* drew up at Burlington, Clemens took advantage of a delay and stepped ashore to get a glimpse at the town. He was met at the bank by Captain William Hillhouse, who in the early days had known Clemens as a cub pilot on the lower river. At Clemens's request, Hillhouse took a walk with him to North Hill, from which Hillhouse pointed out to him things of interest about the town. Twain was delighted with the scenery. The spirit of progress impressed him.⁴⁴ "In Burlington as in all these upper-river towns, one breathes a go-ahead atmosphere which tastes good in the nostrils." He noted the Burlington paid fire department and the new opera house, recently completed, in which three years later he and Cable were to delight Burlington audiences⁴⁵ with

⁴¹ *Keokuk Daily Constitution*, May 18, 1882.

⁴² *Keokuk Daily Constitution*, May 18, 1882.

⁴³ Clemens's *Life on the Mississippi*, p. 556.

⁴⁴ *The Burlington Hawkeye*, May 19, 1882.

⁴⁵ Clemens's *Life on the Mississippi*, p. 408.

their readings. Just before he returned to the boat, he stopped for a moment to call at the *Hawkeye* office, in the composing room of which, so the *Hawkeye* reports, Clemens worked before the war.⁴⁶

As a result of conflicting news items from down the river, the Muscatine papers, which had shown a lively interest in the coming of the great humorist, were unable to report exactly whether or not Clemens would be aboard the *Minneapolis*.⁴⁷ In spite of the uncertainty, a number of citizens, mostly young people, were at the landing when the boat arrived at five P. M. to get a glimpse of him. "He was not at first visible", the *Journal* article reports, "having retired to his stateroom, as he afterward admitted, to avoid being made a public spectacle. The senior editor of the *Journal*, however, with whom Mr. Clemens was employed as a printer in this place 28 years ago, sought him out and was at once recognized."⁴⁸ At the editor's invitation Clemens came out of his stateroom to take a look at the city. The place had greatly changed and on the whole had an unfamiliar look,⁴⁹ though not so much that he did not recognize some of the buildings. Among others he made out the old Ogilvie House, then known as the Commercial House.⁵⁰

Clemens remembered by name some of the older citizens

⁴⁶ This is highly improbable. If Clemens ever worked for the *Hawkeye* it must have been in the fall of 1854 after his departure from Muscatine and before his arrival in St. Louis, where he remained till he joined Orion at Keokuk in the late summer or fall of 1855. But neither Clemens nor Paine ever allude to the matter, nor does the present *Hawkeye* staff, according to Clay Waite, know anything of his early connection with the paper. The *Hawkeye* article, with a fine touch of local pride, goes on to say, "at that time he (Clemens) liked Burlington so well that even after he went down to Keokuk to work, he always came back here to spend Sunday."—*The Burlington Hawkeye*, May 19, 1882.

⁴⁷ *Muscatine Journal* (Daily), May 18, 1882.

⁴⁸ *Muscatine Journal* (Daily), May 19, 1882.

⁴⁹ Clemens's *Life on the Mississippi*, p. 562.

⁵⁰ *Muscatine Journal* (Daily), May 19, 1882.

and inquired after Mr. Burnett and Mr. Denison.⁵¹ As it happened, Mr. Denison was at the landing with his horse and buggy and invited Clemens to ride about the city with him, but there was not sufficient time.

The people of Muscatine who had come down to see Clemens were favorably impressed with his person and manner. It was noted that he was plainly dressed and that he was entirely free from ostentation. He greeted his old acquaintances cordially and expressed regret that his arrangements made a more extended visit impossible.⁵²

It was probably dark by the time the *Minneapolis* reached Davenport. It is doubtful if Twain stepped ashore, despite his statistical knowledge of Davenport's claim to progress and culture found in his *Life on the Mississippi*. Had he gone ashore or even made his presence known, the Davenport newspapers would certainly have noted the fact. It is probable, however, that Osgood, who had left him at St. Louis, again joined him at this point, as agreed, for when the *Minneapolis* docked at Dubuque the following afternoon Osgood is mentioned as a member of the party.⁵³

At Dubuque Twain probably spent a few hours ashore. Although his presence in the city was noted, no formal interview seems to have been obtained. The item about his visit is both brief and uninteresting.⁵⁴

TWAIN'S LECTURE TOUR OF 1884-1885

When in the fall of 1884 Twain found himself hard pressed for money, owing to the drain of many investments and the establishment of a publishing company, he con-

⁵¹ *Muscatine Journal* (Daily), May 19, 1882. Concerning Mr. Denison and Mr. Burnett see p. 416 of *THE IOWA JOURNAL OF HISTORY AND POLITICS* for July, 1929

⁵² *Muscatine Journal* (Daily), May 19, 1882.

⁵³ *The Dubuque Herald* (Daily), May 20, 1882.

⁵⁴ *The Dubuque Herald* (Daily), May 20, 1882.

ceived what he himself might have called a "gaudy" plan. "He proposed to Aldrich, Howells and Cable", says Paine, "that he charter a private car . . . and with their own housekeeping arrangements, cooking, etc., they could go swinging around the (lecture) circuit reaping a golden harvest." But the plan fell through, and only Cable, who up to this time had been stumping the country on his own account, joined him.⁵⁵ J. B. Pond, who had been engaged to manage the tour, arranged all matters of business and was to receive a percentage of gross receipts for his services. Twain, of course, owned the show and paid Cable a stipulated sum each week, and traveling expenses.⁵⁶

The program given by the two men⁵⁷ varied on occasion or when exigencies demanded but for the most part it was as follows:

PROGRAM

Riehling's Visit to Kate Riley

— Geo. W. Cable

King Sollermun

— Mark Twain

(a) Kate Riley and Ristofolo

(b) Narcisse in Mourning for "Lady Byron"

(c) Mary's Night Ride

— Geo. W. Cable

(a) Tragic Tale of the Fishwife

(b) A Trying Situation

(c) A Ghost Story

— Mark Twain

⁵⁵ Paine's *Mark Twain: A Biography*, Vol. II, pp. 783, 784.

⁵⁶ Paine's *Mark Twain: A Biography*, Vol. II, p. 784. Paine gives \$450.00 as the amount paid Cable. Pond in his book *Eccentricities of a Genius*, page 231, gives the amount as \$600. Kate O'Leary reports the sum of \$500.—Lawton's *A Life Time with Mark Twain*, p. 78.

⁵⁷ Paine's *Mark Twain: A Biography*, Vol. II, p. 785.

It was on Wednesday evening of January 15, 1885,⁵⁸ after they had been on the road since November, that the oddly matched pair arrived at Keokuk. A fierce blizzard was in progress. It was snowing hard and the temperature was plunging downward.⁵⁹ As the train which brought them from Hannibal arrived only a few minutes before the time for the performance to begin, Clemens found no opportunity to greet his mother and Orion and the other Keokuk kinfolk.⁶⁰ Cable began his reading at once by giving a selection from *Dr. Sevier*, but the constant commotion caused by late comers unfortunately prevented the audience from enjoying this portion of the program.

“Mark Twain came next, and the appearance of the ungainly body and the shaggy head was the signal for applause. . . . He called the audience friends and fellow townsmen, told them he was glad to resume an intercourse that had been broken off years ago, said he was very sorry to have been the cause of bringing them out upon such a night, but that they were no worse off than the people of some seventy-five cities already visited by them this season, that a storm generally preceded their coming, and if feeling well they always left a famine behind them.” Mark Twain then delighted his audience with his amusing description of the discussion between the darkey, Jim, and Huck Finn, on the relative merits and demerits of “King Sollermun”. Cable’s next reading, “Kate Riley and Ristofolo”, this time unspoiled by interruptions, was well received. In fact, considering the umbrage into which Cable was cast by the presence of Twain among the enthusiastic

⁵⁸ Robert J. Burdette was also lecturing in Iowa this week. It was arranged between him and Clemens not to show in the same towns on the same day.—*The Davenport Democrat* (Daily), January 17, 1885.

⁵⁹ *Keokuk Gate City* (Daily), January 15, 1885.

⁶⁰ *Keokuk Gate City* (Daily), January 16, 1885.

people of Keokuk, he appears to have come off remarkably well. His last selection, "Mary's Night Ride", was his best, and won hearty applause from the Keokuk audience.

Twain's most successful reading that evening was the history of his tussle with the German language. He narrated his lamentable failure to decline the adjectives properly and to master the intricacies of the German genders of nouns. The audience was convulsed. Again and again the audience demanded his reappearance. Twice Twain responded, reading first his very funny stuttering story, and then, to the entire satisfaction of the audience, a sailor's yarn. Before his final appearance he gave "A Trying Situation", and then, after Cable's final reading, Twain substituted as his last number some personal reminiscences of his days of roughing it in the West, particularly of his well-known duelling experience.⁶¹

"Following the Twain-Cable entertainment . . . there was a bit of recitation of which only a few who were straggling in the rear of the outsurging crowds were the auditors. . . . At the conclusion of the entertainment and after the usual handshaking with his old friends, the great humorist began stretching his neck toward the box his mother had occupied during the evening, but she had withdrawn and his eyes caught sight of the silver-haired old lady in the rear of the Opera House sitting among a circle of relatives and friends awaiting his coming. He came; and quickly.

" 'Why, Sam, I didn't know you', was the mother's greeting as he gave her a kiss and a hug.

" 'That's because I'm getting so good looking', was the reply as he performed the bear act." Twain's remark must have amused the *Gate City* reporter who was probably within earshot, for he writes, "If this is the fact, and it is

⁶¹ *Keokuk Gate City* (Daily), January 15, 1885.

generally understood that Mark Twain is truthful, we feel grateful that he didn't appear before us in his previous condition. As far as looks are concerned Twain would never capture a premium at a beauty show."⁶²

Then for a little while, as relatives and friends gathered about Clemens, there was an attempt at conversation, but Twain crowded it all out. Presently he led his aged mother to a waiting carriage, hugging and kissing her as they went along.

That night and all the next day Clemens spent in Keokuk visiting with his mother at Orion's home at 628 High Street. Many of his old friends and acquaintances came to call on him and were entertained in Twain's most jolly way. And there was no happier woman in all Keokuk that day, we are told, than Mrs. Jane Clemens. Though already in her eighty-second year she was still active and in good health.⁶³

Twain's great popularity and the fact that he was a former resident gave rise to many reminiscences of the days when Sam Clemens lived in Keokuk before the war and of his piloting experiences on the river. An old printer produced, as a curiosity, a copy of the old 1856 Keokuk directory which Orion had made up, and on which Sam had labored many an hour, and in which he had written himself down as "Antiquarian."⁶⁴ It was recalled that he was a constant joker in the early days. "At one time he made a speech on Main Street", recalled J. F. Fry, "in which he 'took off' all the lawyers in Keokuk."⁶⁵ Another episode lingering in the memories of some of the older men was the occasion of the printers' celebration of Ben Franklin's

⁶² *Keokuk Gate City* (Daily), January 16, 1885.

⁶³ *Keokuk Gate City* (Daily), January 16, 1885.

⁶⁴ *Keokuk Gate City* (Daily), January 16, 1885.

⁶⁵ *Keokuk Gate City* (Daily), January 16, 1885.

birthday when Sam made his first speech.⁶⁶ Another reminiscence concerning Mark Twain's military service was printed in the *Gate City* and is so amusing that it is given here in full.

While the Sherman-Davis controversy is before the people raking up old war issues, and while anecdotes of Mark Twain are pat in this locality, I think it proper that his war record should be known and I am surprised that he has not given it himself as it is a funny chapter in his history. I gathered the following from an old school mate and friend and can vouch for it all:

At the opening of the War Mark Twain was piloting a steamboat on the lower Mississippi but on one of his trips was stopped by a blockade and he returned to his boyhood home in Florida, Mo., and there joined a company of rebel soldiers. This company remained at this point until rumors of approaching Yankees induced them to go farther South. Mark Twain was mounted on a mule and the company moved off, making a slight detour and finally bringing up at Louisiana, Mo., where Mark Twain, tiring of the army, after a continuous service of fully three weeks, sold his mule for \$15 and resigned his position as a private. On being interrogated as to his cause of so soon leaving the army, he replied that the mule was too rough and he couldn't stand it any longer and that it hurt his feet to walk.

Thus because of a mule did the South lose a valiant soldier and the world gain an author, and should the house of Twain ever have an escutcheon, what better emblem could be emblazoned upon it than a mule.⁶⁷

The next evening, Thursday, January 15th, the "Twins of Genius" were to lecture at Burlington. Cable, fortunately, had arrived there Thursday morning, and when the time came to begin the program that evening he made his appearance promptly.⁶⁸ Twain, as we shall see, was greatly delayed and had a grievous time of it. By rare

⁶⁶ *Keokuk Gate City* (Daily), January 17, 1885.

⁶⁷ *Keokuk Gate City* (Daily), January 17, 1885.

⁶⁸ *The Burlington Hawkeye*, January 16, 1885.

good fortune one of the editors of the *Fort Madison Democrat*, who perhaps had gone to Keokuk to attend the Twain-Cable program, though he does not say so, gives us the story in great detail.

It was Thursday evening. The small 18 x 20 waiting room of the C. B. & Q. Road at Keokuk was filled to overflowing with people of all kinds, sizes and descriptions. There were ministers, advance agents for dramatic combinations, commercial men, stable men. . . . The few dim lights that made an effort to shine out through chimneys made black by constant use and inattention, were only made the more so by the mighty cloud of tobacco smoke that filled the room. The train that should have arrived at 5:50 to bear the subject of this sketch to Burlington (where his other half, Geo. W. Cable, was patiently awaiting him) and ourselves to our destination, Madison, was reported half an hour late, caused by the snow which was rapidly falling and constantly drifting upon the track. A half hour passed and signs there were none of the train. We heard a grunt. Our attention was attracted to a form, evidently that of a man, perched upon a high stool near a lunch counter, upon which doughnuts and other decrepit edibles found slow sale, or more properly an eternal abiding place. We looked at the form. It attracted our attention, perched as it was upon the elevated "settee", with its heels recklessly clinched on the top rung, which caused the knees to come in almost immediate contact with the chin. Closer examination convinced us that it was a man, and the occasional grunts that he was alive, though worried, perplexed, and disappointed. We spotted the personage as Mark Twain. A pair of heavy arctics covered his feet, while a slouch hat, pulled carelessly out of shape, protected his head. From under the brim peered out a few curly locks. Between this and a high collared over-coat was a face. The expression compared favorably with the growling emissions, so we knew that they came from none other than Mark Twain.

An hour later our discovery found the form dismounted and tusseling with a huge valise and a smaller parcel. The long expected train had come. The sight of it seemed to lift a wrinkle from the face of Mr. Twain, who made at once for the door of the dingy room, thence to the rear car, the sleeper. We followed him. He walked down the long platform, and with his eyes down bent or

half closed caused by the blowing snow. He failed to recognize the fact that platforms, as well as everything else have an end, and fell headlong into the snow bank, his grips going in opposite directions. We were not far behind and came near meeting with the same fate. At last we ventured to speak.

"Did you lose anything, Mr. Twain?"

"No, I guess I'm all here", he replied.

The car was finally reached and Mr. Twain was assigned a section directly opposite the one we made convenient to occupy. The humorist commenced taking off his outside wraps, and when the task was done he had undergone a complete metamorphosis. He wore a full evening suit of black. The open fronted vest exhibited a newly laundered shirt front from the collar of which article fell a soft black tie. The clear yellow light of the porcelain shaded lamps of the car presented to us a different appearing man than the form before mentioned. Mr. Twain is a man of medium height, light weight, well formed shoulders, heavy curly gray hair, a prominent mustache slightly silvered, and a face that is a study. Perhaps the expression he wore was his best; for 'twas a compound of expectancy, eagerness, disappointment and regret, certainly one interesting to behold.

Mr. Twain was not in a pleasant position; he knew it, he felt it. He knew that 9 o'clock was but a few minutes distant, and he was only fairly started with forty-three miles to go. Had we better brave the lion in his wrath, thought we; was it wise to interrupt the lethargy into which he had fallen? An interview which to us would be so pleasant, so satisfactory, would to him be dull, uninteresting and stupid. . . . and yet that love for "self" quite overcame us. We made the break.

"Mr. Twain allow us to introduce ourselves. We can readily tell that we are addressing the proper person and believe that we can guess your frame of mind." We handed him our business card.

"Sit down," he said, pointing to a seat in his section and extending his hand.

We sat.

He spied the name of "Potowonok" on our card (it was one of some that we had left), and upon inquiry as to its meaning, we told him all that we knew about it, and considerable that we guessed, and the conversation drifted upon the Indian race. He remarked about the scarcity of the red man within the last few

years, or at least of his becoming so rapidly civilized, and of so few who kept their blankets, feathers, etc., in constant use.

He conversed on other topics as well. Survived a well meant compliment on his famous volumes, etc., etc.

We inquired as to his success in his present pursuit, and he replied that his reception had been favorable since his commencement last fall. Reaching Velie Station he said, "I must have a porter go ashore and send a telegram; excuse me, please."

We said, "certainly," and suggested that the message might be called a "Cable-gram".

Whether or not he appreciated the pun we were not able to decide, as we changed our section to the farther end of the car and had only the courage to nod a farewell when the train pulled into the station.⁶⁹

At what time Twain reached Burlington can only be surmised, but it was probably as late as half past ten.⁷⁰ Cable by this time had given his usual program and probably more. Finally, when the audience had given up hope of seeing Twain, the long awaited humorist made his appearance ambling onto the stage, his head thrust forward, his eyes half closed and his hands rolling around, one in the other. He then stepped to the footlights, leaned his head forward and in his well-known drawl addressed his audience.⁷¹

The *Burlington Hawkeye*, which reported the program at length, gives Twain's humorous explanation for the cause of his delay:

He said he had stopped through the day with his mother in

⁶⁹ *The Fort Madison Democrat*, January 21, 1885. Ed. M. Roberts was then senior editor of the *Democrat*. His son, N. C. Roberts of Fort Madison, after a careful reading of the news article, is quite certain his father did not write it. Nor does he believe it bears the imprint of his younger brother, Ed. M. Roberts, Jr., who was city editor of the *Democrat* at that time. It was, he is quite sure, the work of his older brother, the late Doctor Frank C. Roberts. — Personal letter from N. C. Roberts, Fort Madison, dated May 9, 1928.

⁷⁰ *The Burlington Hawkeye*, January 16, 1885.

⁷¹ *The Burlington Gazette*, January 16, 1885.

Keokuk. She was eighty-two years old; she was the only mother he had; their homes being a thousand miles apart he might never see her again. He thought he could trust the St. Louis train, but his trust was betrayed. It started from Keokuk an hour late and had been getting an hour later ever since. On the way they broke something. A dispute arose as to what it was that was broken. It took forty minutes to decide the dispute, and five minutes to repair the damage.⁷²

Thereupon Twain began his readings, limiting his selections, it appears, to his disastrous experiences with the German language, the "Tragic Tale of the Fishwife", and "A Trying Situation". The audience would greatly have enjoyed the selection from *Huckleberry Finn*, but the time was too short.⁷³

It was a late hour when the entertainment finally ended, but the audience went home greatly pleased. Cable had charmed them. "He is small and delicate, with finely molded features and form. He is the embodiment of grace in speech, diction, and manner", wrote the *Hawkeye* reporter. And Twain, who in contrast with Cable appeared large, awkward, and inclined to be uncouth, exceeded their expectations.⁷⁴

The size of the audience which had attended the entertainment was, however, as we discover later, not exceedingly large. "In point of numbers it was a fair Burlington lecture audience. . . . Still it was not what the reputation of the combination should have drawn nor what their performance deserved. But it was an intelligent and appreciative audience; as good in this respect, perhaps, as the city can turn out."⁷⁵ Although the price of admission does not seem to have been considered too high (\$1.00, 75¢,

⁷² *The Burlington Hawkeye*, January 16, 1885.

⁷³ *The Burlington Hawkeye*, January 16, 1885.

⁷⁴ *The Burlington Hawkeye*, January 16, 1885.

⁷⁵ *The Burlington Hawkeye*, January 16, 1885.

and 50¢), at least two other factors operated against attendance. The storm was still raging and the snow was so deep that many of the older people did not venture out;⁷⁶ and two other entertainments of a popular nature were given the same evening.⁷⁷

J. B. Pond, Twain's manager, was undoubtedly aware of the possibilities which might result from competing programs for he advertised extensively in both the *Hawkeye* and the *Gazette*, inserting in addition to the regular matter, a line of blurb in nearly every column of the local news page. It is highly probable also that Pond had sent on to Burlington several days in advance some terra cotta bas-reliefs of George W. Cable and Mark Twain, for two days before the lecture a number of these were on exhibition throughout the city.⁷⁸ But it was quite by accident, as far as Twain was concerned, that a woman engaged in the sale of his *Life on the Mississippi*, happened into Burlington on the day of the lecture. It was predicted that she would be detained in the city several days.⁷⁹

That the Twain-Cable appearance was a notable event to the people of Burlington may, as a final word, be inferred from the number and nature of the comments that continued to appear in the Burlington papers two days after the performance. Two of these show the type: "Cable's Creole Songs are Rich", and "Twain and Cable are a Pair to draw to."⁸⁰

An item in the *Davenport Gazette* to the effect that an effort should be made to have Twain and Cable visit Davenport, suggests that Pond had not booked that city on the

⁷⁶ *The Burlington Gazette*, January 16, 1885.

⁷⁷ *The Burlington Hawkeye*, January 15, 16, 1885.

⁷⁸ *The Burlington Gazette*, January 13, 1885.

⁷⁹ *The Burlington Hawkeye*, January 16, 1885.

⁸⁰ *The Burlington Hawkeye*, January 17, 1885.

itinerary.⁸¹ The effort was evidently made, for on January 31, 1885, two weeks after their appearance at Burlington, they made their appearance in Davenport, having been out of the State during the entire interval. They arrived in the morning and registered at the Kimball House. Cable spent the day quietly in his room, but Twain indulged his passion for billiards, apparently undisturbed by the curiosity of the onlookers.⁸²

That evening a thousand or more people greeted the entertainers at the Burtis Opera House.⁸³ With customary promptness, almost before the audience had assembled, Cable stepped out on the platform. "I propose, if it suits your pleasure, to commence at once. I hope the audience will feel no embarrassment and that the auditors will be kind enough to give me one eye apiece at least and I will commence the programme. I mention my novel 'Dr. Sevier', so you will not think that I am Mark Twain. It would hurt his feelings."⁸⁴ When Cable had finished his first selection, there was only slight applause, owing probably to the disturbance created by the late comers.⁸⁵ Twain's appearance was greeted by vociferous cheering. His manner of coming on the stage, which was generally remarked by audiences everywhere, impressed the Davenport auditors also. "He has a peculiar manner of walking side wise and looking up at the gallery", wrote one newspaper reporter.⁸⁶ Another observed, "He starts on in a funny little jog trot half sideways, with eyes cast up to the gallery, with a comical look of inquiry and half appeal.

⁸¹ *The Davenport Gazette* (Daily), January 15, 1885.

⁸² *The Davenport Democrat* (Daily), January 31, 1885.

⁸³ *The Davenport Sunday Democrat*, February 1, 1885.

⁸⁴ *The Davenport Gazette* (Daily), January 31, 1885.

⁸⁵ *The Davenport Gazette* (Daily), February 1, 1885.

⁸⁶ *The Davenport Gazette* (Daily), February 1, 1885.

Then he begins to deliver his humorous conceits with an expression of placid and child-like innocence that is almost as ludicrous as the words he is uttering. His gestures are eloquent if not graceful and would make any audience laugh, even if Mark Twain had nothing to say."⁸⁷

He read first from *Huckleberry Finn* and delighted his audience so immensely that the entire assembly were ready at the touch to respond to either humor or pathos whether from Cable or Twain. Throughout the performance, as Twain and Cable alternated, each was repeatedly encored. The selection "Mary's Night Ride" was probably Cable's most acceptable effort, though all of his selections after the first were highly appreciated. It would be difficult to say which of Twain's readings gave the most pleasure so generally enthusiastic does the audience appear to have been. *Huckleberry Finn* received the most newspaper space, though that may have been because the narrative was easy to follow. Certainly the "Tragic Tale of the Fishwife", with its humorous assault upon the intricacies of the German inflections, convulsed the auditors.⁸⁸

The program had taken place on a Saturday evening, and since Cable had conscientious scruples about traveling on Sunday, he decided to remain in Davenport till Monday. Sunday morning he attended the First Presbyterian Church, the church of his faith. "A portion of the afternoon and the evening he passed with the family of Mr. George W. Cable of Davenport — the same name and same descent — and attended evening services at the Congregational Church."⁸⁹ He left for Chicago Monday morning.

Twain had left Davenport Saturday night at eleven

⁸⁷ *The Davenport Sunday Democrat*, February 1, 1885.

⁸⁸ *The Davenport Gazette* (Daily), February 1, 1885, and *The Davenport Sunday Democrat*, February 1, 1885.

⁸⁹ *The Davenport Gazette* (Daily), February 1, 1885.

o'clock, immediately after the performance. Pond may have been with him, as reported by the *Davenport Gazette*,⁹⁰ but that is unlikely. While at Milwaukee the manager had suffered a heart attack that had confined him to his bed for several days. On February 5th, the *Milwaukee Journal* reports Pond slowly recovering and that he would be able to attend to business shortly.

When Twain had lectured in Davenport in 1869 his presence in town had scarcely been noted, but in 1885 his movements were carefully observed by the reporters. The *Davenport Democrat* prints the following interesting interview with Twain:

"Cable and I started on this raid the day after the presidential election and have been on the road ever since," replied Mr. Clemens, in his peculiar drawl in answer to a question. "Two years ago I got some such plan as this in my head. I wanted to get a larger menagerie together, Howells, T. B. Aldrich, 'Uncle Remus', Cable and myself, so that we could all go on the stage together, and each read two minutes or so and pose as 'the happy family' between times. But Howells had to go to Italy on a commission from the Century, which will take him a year to fulfill; and the others couldn't join us for one reason or another, and so Cable and I started out alone. I suppose I might have gone out on some such expedition all by myself, but I'm afraid it wouldn't be pleasant. I want somebody to keep me in countenance on the stage, and to help me impose on the audience. But more than that I want good company on the road and at the hotels. A man can start out alone and rob the public, but it's dreary work, and it's a cold blooded thing to do."

"That's a fact," asserted Mr. Cable. "Last year I travelled and read alone, but it was lonesome."⁹¹

A FAMILY REUNION — 1886

If the penetrating little Susie Clemens had continued her biography but a week more, our knowledge of the visit

⁹⁰ *The Davenport Gazette* (Daily), February 1, 1885.

⁹¹ *The Davenport Democrat* (Daily), February 2, 1885.

Clemens and his family paid to Grandma Clemens at Keokuk in the summer of 1886 would not only be more complete but infinitely more intimate. "We have arrived in Keokuk after a very pleasant"—runs the unfinished sentence, the last that Susie ever wrote in her biography.⁹² Could it have been that Susie, overwhelmed by the abundance of experiences crowded into those five glorious summer days at "Uncle Orion's", felt unequal to the task of recording them until the biographic urge had given way to others? Certainly she could have found no time to write while at Keokuk; and had she found time, the crowded condition of the household could scarcely have afforded opportunities.

The occasion of Twain's visit to Keokuk was a family reunion.⁹³ Grandma Clemens was in her eighty-third year, and though physically she was yet very active, mentally she was already suffering those lapses which during the last years of her life almost completely clouded her memory. Orion and Pamela, both older than Sam, were well past middle age—in fact old people. It was high time for a family reunion. Accompanying Twain were his wife and the three children—Susie, Clara, and Jean—and a German governess.⁹⁴ They came by way of the Lakes to St. Paul, from which point Clemens had planned a river trip to Keokuk.⁹⁵

It is easy to imagine the great delight with which Clemens thus initiated his family into Mississippi steamboating. And the children, who had often been thrilled by their father's fascinating stories of early days on the Missis-

⁹² Paine's *Mark Twain: A Biography*, Vol. II, p. 845.

⁹³ *Keokuk Gate City*, July 1, 1886.

⁹⁴ Paine's *Mark Twain's Letters*, Vol. II, p. 470. Information about the governess was supplied by a personal letter from Mrs. Margaret Collisson of Keokuk who was a neighbor of the Clemens family and at whose house the children and the governess stayed at night during the visit.

⁹⁵ Paine's *Mark Twain: A Biography*, Vol. II, p. 844.

sippi, must have regarded the experiences as a dream that had come true. Only one incident of the river trip has been preserved. It occurred on the evening of the first day. The boat had entered a shoal crossing. "Clemens, standing alone on the hurricane deck, heard the big bell forward boom out the call for leads. Then came the leadsman's long-drawn chant, once so familiar, the monotonous repeating in river parlance of the depths of water. Presently the lead had found that depth of water signified by his *nom de plume* and the call of 'Mark Twain, Mark Twain' floated up to him like a summons from the past. All at once a little figure came running down the deck, and Clara confronted him, reprovingly:

" 'Papa,' she said, 'I have hunted all over the boat for you. Don't you know they are calling for you?' " ⁹⁶

That was on the evening of July first. Earlier in the day Twain had sent Orion a telegram stating the fact that he had left St. Paul on the *War Eagle*.⁹⁷ It was not until ten o'clock the following evening that the boat pulled up at the Keokuk landing.⁹⁸

If on the following morning Twain expected a long morning's rest in bed, as was customary with him, he was greatly disappointed. The Fourth of July fell on Sunday and the celebration of the event was advanced to the third. The day, dawning bright and clear, was ushered in with the ringing of bells, the reports of explosives, and the detonations of cannon. As the morning advanced the city was profusely decorated. An industrial parade, headed by Wittick's Second Regimental Band, moved up Main Street, the fire department followed, and finally came the wagons and teams representing the business interests. It was esti-

⁹⁶ Paine's *Mark Twain: A Biography*, Vol. II, p. 845.

⁹⁷ *Keokuk Gate City*, July 1, 1886.

⁹⁸ *Keokuk Gate City*, July 3, 1886.

mated that the number of strangers in the city was between eight and ten thousand.

At two o'clock the exercises began at Rand Park. An immense crowd had gathered there, and despite the favorable position of the park, situated as it is on a high bluff overlooking the river, the weather was too hot for comfort.

Since Orion was on the program, it is likely that the family went out to the park in a group. When Mark Twain appeared and was recognized, a murmur of "There he is" ran through the crowd and people edged up to get a closer view. He was dressed entirely in white duck with a tall white hat. To the people of Keokuk, unfamiliar with Twain's love of distinctiveness of attire, his appearance must have been unusually interesting.

The exercises consisted of the customary Fourth of July prayers and speeches. After the Hon. Gibson Browne, president of the day, had called the assemblage to order and the Reverend R. C. McIlwain had offered prayer, Orion Clemens read the Declaration of Independence in a clear and distinct manner. Then followed a stirring speech by the Honorable Thomas Hedge of Burlington, the chief orator of the day, rousing the people to the ideals of democratic institutions. At the conclusion of the oration Samuel Clemens was called for. He was introduced amid enthusiastic applause. His talk, though short, was no doubt a happy relief from the oppressive heat of the day and from the heightened emotional effect of Hedge's studied oration.

He little thought, Clemens is reported to have begun, when the boys awoke him at 4 o'clock in the morning that he would be called upon to add to that noise. The audience had heard all there was to be heard, the evidence was all in, and all that remained for him was to deliver the verdict. They had heard the Declaration of Independence read, which had lasted through all the Fourth of July's in the

past and would for all time to come. They had heard the orator of the day and the noble tribute he had paid to the fathers of the country and the happy sketch which he gave of the nation's history. It was a successful day. "I stand here", said Twain, "to thank the committee for the opportunity of standing face to face with the men and women whom I knew thirty years ago. Keokuk was then a city of 3000 inhabitants and they drank 3000 barrels of whiskey per year. They drank it in public then; now they don't. (Laughter) Vast strides have been made during the past thirty years. A poet has said, 'Better fifty years of England than all the cycles of Cathay.' But I say better one decade of this period than the 900 years of Methusaleh. There is more done now in a year than he ever saw in all his life. Methusaleh lived over 900 years but he never saw a barbed wire fence. (Laughter) I know that the man who makes the last speech on an occasion like this has the best of the other speakers, as he has the last word to say, which falls like a balm on the audience — though this audience has not been bored today — and though I can't say that last word, I will do the next best thing I can and that is to sit down."

When Twain had retired amid hearty applause and the clapping of hands, and the Reverend T. H. Cleland had pronounced the benediction, the ceremonies at Rand Park ended for the afternoon.⁹⁹

Only a few glimpses are granted us of what took place at the Clemens home during the next two days. The children — Susie, Clara, and Jean — and the German governess, on account of the congestion at Orion's, were quartered at McElroy's, a near neighbor. The weather, especially at night, was insufferably hot, for we hear of Jean and Clara sitting up in bed there crying about the heat. Jean, we

⁹⁹ *Keokuk Gate City*, July 6, 1886.

learn, had one day fallen and hurt her arm, and Dr. Jenkins, an old friend of the family, who lived just across the street, had very tenderly attended to it and had managed to get the pain out quickly.¹⁰⁰

It was during these days, perhaps at the suggestion of the McElroys, that a time was set at Orion's for an exchange of autographs.¹⁰¹ Those of the children and of Mark Twain have been preserved. They are now in the Mark Twain Room in the Iowa Mutual Insurance Building at Keokuk. A diversion exclusively for the children was planned by a cousin of Dr. Jenkins who happened to be visiting in Keokuk at the time. She gave all of the neighborhood children a delightful picnic at Rand Park. The picnic was in honor of the visiting Clemens children.¹⁰²

It was probably during these days also that Sam talked with Orion about securing a nurse for their mother and about a house more satisfactorily arranged, in view of the increasing burden resting upon Orion and his wife by their mother's infirmity. Whether or not the large brick house diagonally across the intersection was then already in prospect is a matter of conjecture, but the property was later purchased,¹⁰³ and it was there, four years later, that Jane Clemens died.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Paine's *Mark Twain's Letters*, Vol. II, pp. 470, 471.

¹⁰¹ Information from a personal letter from Mrs. Margaret McElroy Collisson of Keokuk, dated April 2, 1928.

¹⁰² Personal letter from Mrs. Margaret McElroy Collisson of Keokuk, dated April 2, 1928.

¹⁰³ The deed was dated January 7, 1889.—Page 98, No. 54 Deed Record from 1888-1890. In the property transfer Twain's name does not appear, though it is practically certain that he furnished all or a major portion of the money.

¹⁰⁴ At the death of Mrs. Orion Clemens, a tiny music box formerly belonging to Jane Clemens, came among other effects into the possession of Mrs. John Carpenter of Keokuk. Mrs. Carpenter reports that Sam Clemens had sent the box to his mother following the 1886 visit. It is about four inches wide, six

On Tuesday evening, July 6th, between the hours of eight and ten a reception was tendered Clemens and his wife at Orion's. Over four hundred invitations had been sent out and a large number took advantage of the occasion and were present.¹⁰⁵ The residence and the grounds were decorated with Chinese lanterns,¹⁰⁶ and many of the guests who found no room inside moved about on the lawn. In the front parlor Grandma Clemens, Orion, and his sister, Pamela, Mrs. P. A. Moffett of San Francisco, received guests, while Mark, in spotless white duck, his wife, and Mrs. Orion Clemens received in the library. It was a proud moment for Grandma Clemens. For the first time in fifteen years she had all of her children and most of her grand children with her. Only Mrs. Charles L. Webster and Pamela's son, Samuel E. Moffett, then one of the editors of the *San Francisco Post*, were absent.¹⁰⁷

While Clemens was entertaining his guests indoors, Ed. Brownell, Clemens's old friend of Keokuk days, sat out on the lawn, surrounded by a number of guests, and told what he knew of Twain's early life and of his extraordinary rise to fame. A reporter of the *Constitution* who listened as Brownell talked tells how the story impressed the group. "As we sat last evening at the home of Mr. Clemens's hospitable brother, and listened to the incidents of a career, seemingly having no counterpart except in imagination, it needed occasional glimpses of the man himself through the throng there to do him honor to believe it was not some

inches long, and less than two inches high. When wound up it still plays three old fashioned melodies with such a quaint tinkling sound that it is little wonder Jane Clemens took such great delight in it. The box is still in the possession of Mrs. John Carpenter.—Information given by Mrs. John Carpenter of Keokuk.

¹⁰⁵ *The Keokuk Constitution*, July 10, 1886.

¹⁰⁶ *Keokuk Gate City*, July 7, 1886.

¹⁰⁷ *The Keokuk Constitution*, July 10, 1886.

fairy web well-spun lightsome and airy by the fluent and always entertaining Brownell. The story was a long one — from the days when the two were young men together here in Keokuk, through the continent, on the placid Pacific, across the Atlantic, early state making, marriage, journalism, lecturing, hardships, business successes, literary triumphs, and the world's acclaim — till the crowd thinned and Twain came out in the garden, where we were, and made the story real by his presence and an hour's delightful companionship."¹⁰⁸

Neither the little circle of friends who sat with Twain that night, nor Ed. Brownell, and least of all Clemens himself could know that even then Twain was entering a period of financial hazard on the type setting machine which a few years later was to send his entire financial structure crashing down about him. But that is another story.

The day following the reception was the day set for leave taking. With characteristic care for the comfort of his family, and perhaps with an irrepressible love of display, Clemens had ordered a special pullman for the trip. At 4:40 the family boarded the C. B. & Q. and departed for Elmira, New York, their summer home.¹⁰⁹

AN INVITATION TO VISIT KEOKUK — 1887

It was four years before Iowa saw Mark Twain again, although an attempt was made to get him to visit Keokuk the following winter. The occasion for the proposed visit was the first annual ball which the Keokuk Printers' Union was planning to celebrate at Ayres Hall on February 10, 1887. In connection with the ball was to be a type-setting contest in which a team representing Keokuk was to compete with a team representing Burlington.

¹⁰⁸ *The Keokuk Constitution*, July 7, 1886.

¹⁰⁹ *The Keokuk Constitution*, July 7, 1886.

A number of nationally prominent men who had been printers at one time in their lives were invited to participate. Among these were Eugene Field, Bob Burdette, and Mark Twain.¹¹⁰ William F. Douglas, then secretary of the Union, in writing to Twain, related the tradition existent in Keokuk that Twain had assisted at a much earlier printers' celebration on the occasion of Benjamin Franklin's birthday.¹¹¹ In reply to Douglas's invitation Twain sent the following letter of regret:

Hartford, Jan. 24, 1887,—My dear Sir: It was 1855, if I remember rightly, and the occasion was not a typesetting contest. It was a struggle over a dinner table. The table did not win.

I thank the Union very much for the compliment of their invitation, and I should like to help at the present competition, but it wouldn't be any use. I couldn't get the prize, unless 600 leaded bourgeois might fetch it.

Truly yours,

S. L. Clemens.¹¹²

The letter was printed in a small four-page leaflet called the Proof Sheet which was circulated at the ball as an "extra".¹¹³ The following morning the letter was reprinted in the *Gate City* among the letters of regret.

THE LAST VISIT IN IOWA

When Clemens visited Keokuk in 1886 he knew very well that his mother was rapidly nearing the end of her life. Her memory was playing her sad tricks and her health was steadily giving way. Her care was a great problem. Mrs.

¹¹⁰ Information from a personal letter from C. C. Baldock, dated February 2, 1928. Mr. Baldock states that the minutes of the Keokuk Printers' Union prior to 1894 are lost.

¹¹¹ Information from a personal letter from William F. Douglas, dated February 5, 1928.

¹¹² *Keokuk Gate City*, February 11, 1887.

¹¹³ Information from a personal letter from C. C. Baldock, dated February 2, 1928.

Margaret McElroy Collisson, a close neighbor of the Clemens family, reports that matters were complicated by a strong desire on the part of Grandma Clemens to run away. "She was like a child. She had a great desire to run away and was always hunting her little chickens. All the children of the neighborhood started out as soon as the word came that she was missing." Some of the older children, says Mrs. Collisson, were so concerned about it that they held a council and decided to help even more, so they formed a club and got up mornings as early as Grandma Clemens and invited her to go walking, escorting her sometimes as far as Rand Park. But when the club failed to cure her in this manner, it died out.¹¹⁴

During the summer of 1890 the aged woman's health broke down completely. In August, when an especially severe attack struck her, Twain was called for by telegram. He came immediately. His arrival in Keokuk was not noted, and only the briefest notice of his presence in the city appeared in the paper for August 19th.¹¹⁵ Nothing is said of the illness of Mrs. Clemens. The following day, however, a brief announcement informs us that she had materially improved and that Twain had departed for his home. This trip, lasting perhaps not over twenty-four hours, was Mark Twain's last visit to Iowa.

The rally was very brief. In October Mrs. Clemens suffered a relapse and on the twenty-seventh of that month she died. Twain did not, however, come to Keokuk, for the burial was to be at Hannibal and it was there he met the funeral party.¹¹⁶ It was observed that Twain's hair was

¹¹⁴ Personal letter from Mrs. Margaret McElroy Collisson, dated April 21, 1928.

¹¹⁵ *Keokuk Gate City*, August 19, 1890.

¹¹⁶ The funeral party was made up of Mr. and Mrs. Orion Clemens, Mrs. Starkweather, Mr. and Mrs. A. H. Moody, and Mrs. W. A. Brownell.—*Keokuk Gate City*, November 2, 1890.

much grayer and that he appeared to be in poor health. When the time came for the party to return to Keokuk, Twain boarded the same train but went straight on through to Chicago.¹¹⁷ It was the last time he saw Orion alive.

DEATH OF ORION

When Orion died on December 11, 1897, Twain was living in Vienna. A cablegram was sent immediately and by four o'clock the same afternoon his reply came: "All send deepest sympathy." But that evening, in Vienna, he wrote the following letter to Molly Clemens:

Hotel Metrople
Vienna, Dec., 11/97.

Dear Molly:

It is 10 in the evening. We sent you our cablegram of sympathy half an hour ago and it is in your hands by this time, in the wintry mid-afternoon of the heaviest day you have known since we saw Jenny escape from this life thirty-three years ago, and were then too ignorant to rejoice at it.¹¹⁸

We all grieve for you; our sympathy goes out to you from experienced hearts, and for Orion, I rejoice. He has received life's best gift.

He was good — all good, and sound: there was nothing bad in him, nothing base, nor any unkindness. It was unjust that such a man against whom no offence could be charged, should have been sentenced to live 72 years. It was beautiful, the patience with which he bore it.

The bitterness of death — that is for the survivors, and bitter beyond all words, it is. We hunger for Susy, we suffer and pine for her; and if by asking I could bring her back, I could stoop to that treachery, so weak am I, and so selfish are we all. But she and Orion are at peace, and no loyal friend should wish to disturb them in their high fortune.

I and all of us offer to you what little we have — our love and our compassion.

Sam.

¹¹⁷ *Keokuk Gate City*, November 2, 1890.

¹¹⁸ Jennie Clemens, the only child of Mr. and Mrs. Orion Clemens, died on February 1, 1864, at Carson City, Nevada.—*Molly's Note Book*.

The letter quoted above was the only one that survived the general destruction of the voluminous correspondence which, after the death of Molly Clemens in 1904, came into the hands of Mr. John Carpenter of Keokuk who was appointed administrator. One day, after he had made an inventory of most of Molly's effects, he found in a woodshed to the rear of the house an old trunk. He opened it and found it filled with letters from Sam Clemens and from other members of the family. Many of the letters from Sam were to his mother, and most of them carried a little note near the bottom "Burn this letter". Jane Clemens, however, had not heeded Sam's request but had laid them away in the trunk where they remained till Mr. Carpenter found them. Mr. Carpenter reports that he looked the letters over, noted Sam's postscript, and burned them all. He now feels that many might legitimately have been preserved, but explains that at the time he failed to realize the literary importance of the letters, and consequently destroyed them.

At Mark Twain's request all of Orion's papers — letters, manuscripts, etc.— were packed and sent to Fredonia, New York, to await his return from Europe. Included in the packet were probably Orion's biographical papers, a great number of literary odds and ends representing ten or fifteen years of spasmodic attempts in a variety of literary ventures, sermons, political tracts, and lectures.¹¹⁹ The fate of these papers is not known, but they are no longer available. The loss of these letters and the destruction of the hundreds of letters from Samuel L. Clemens to his family at Keokuk explains the lack of documentary evidence for those who are interested in the investigation of Twain's visits to the State of Iowa.

¹¹⁹ For a partial list of Orion's attempts at fame via literature see Twain's letter to William Dean Howells in Paine's *Mark Twain's Letters*, Vol. I, pp. 352-355.

CONCLUSION

We find, if we except the doubtful visit of 1861, that after Clemens left Keokuk in 1856, he returned to the State of Iowa seven times. It is interesting to note, however, that in only one instance — on the occasion of the family reunion in 1886 — was his return chiefly a matter of his own volition. In all other cases, even in that of 1867, his appearance was incidental to other purposes. Yet in view of the fact that his only brother Orion lived in Keokuk for twenty-five years and died there, and that after 1882 his mother also made her home there until her death in 1890, and that he kept up a lively correspondence with both of them, there can be little doubt that he regarded the little Mississippi River town in which he himself had lived in the fifties as his western home.

More important, however, than the family ties which served to relate Mark Twain to the State of Iowa were the experiences and the influences that came to him during his own residence at Muscatine and particularly at Keokuk. At Muscatine, as we have seen, though his sojourn was very short, he gravitated toward those men — Mahin, Burnett, and Denison — who would be most likely to influence him culturally just at the moment when the tendency was strong to drift back into the carefree, sloven, frontier-town existence from which he had recently escaped at Hannibal. There were, however, in a real sense, no beginnings made at Muscatine. It is at Keokuk that we find those. It was there that he made his first after-dinner speech, as a result of which he was induced to join a debating class to increase his facility as a speaker — certainly a beginning for one of America's greatest public entertainers. It was there, urged on by the hopelessness of prospects with Orion and by the stirrings of ambition resulting from his feeling for Annie Taylor, his sweetheart at Iowa Wesleyan College,

that he first conceived and planned the Snodgrass letters. These humorous travel sketches, despite their crudeness, definitely indicate the type of literary effort upon which Twain's fame so largely rests.

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