

The  
**PALIMPSEST**  
OCTOBER 1929  
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ORION CLEMENS

FRED W. LORCH

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THE EDITOR

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## THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE

THE PALIMPSEST, issued monthly by the State Historical Society of Iowa, is devoted to the dissemination of Iowa History. Supplementing the other publications of this Society, it aims to present the materials of Iowa History in a form that is attractive and a style that is popular in the best sense—to the end that the story of our Commonwealth may be more widely read and cherished.

BENJ. F. SHAMBAUGH

*Superintendent*

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## THE MEANING OF PALIMPSESTS

In early times palimpsests were parchments or other materials from which one or more writings had been erased to give room for later records. But the erasures were not always complete; and so it became the fascinating task of scholars not only to translate the later records but also to reconstruct the original writings by deciphering the dim fragments of letters partly erased and partly covered by subsequent texts.

The history of Iowa may be likened to a palimpsest which holds the records of successive generations. To decipher these records of the past, reconstruct them, and tell the stories which they contain is the task of those who write history.

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# THE PALIMPSEST

EDITED BY JOHN ELY BRIGGS

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## The Tradition

The persistent popularity of Orion Clemens in the Mississippi River towns of southeastern Iowa may have its origin in the fact that he was the brother of Mark Twain. But surely he is still remembered lovingly for his own sake by those who knew him intimately as neighbors and friends, especially the older people of Keokuk. So gentle, so whimsically charming, and in his later years so delightfully forgetful was he that he scarcely needed the fame of his illustrious brother to make him a memorable figure in Keokuk.

Unfortunately the impression has gone abroad that Orion Clemens was a rather ridiculous person. This opinion, however, is based upon a mistaken assumption that people laughed at him instead of with him. Orion was not ridiculous, nor was he even funny. But that he was witty, absent-minded, and often humorously inconsistent is attested by many

an anecdote. Somehow his more peculiar characteristics have come to be accepted as wholly indicative of the kind of man he really was.

There is the story about his wedding trip from Keokuk to Muscatine in the winter of 1854 when Orion, having stepped into the stagecoach and carefully arranged his bundles, leaned back in comfort to await the departure of the vehicle only to be apprised by a friend that his newly acquired bride, standing near-by on the platform with her bundles, was also to accompany him on the trip. Orion himself loved to tell this story and it later found its way into Albert Bigelow Paine's biography of Mark Twain.

But some of the modern versions are scarcely recognizable, having taken on curious accretions which tend toward the ludicrous. For instance, it has been alleged that Orion, happening one day to be in Keokuk, casually married there. Such casualness in so important an event would be interesting, indeed, if true, but much more interesting is the exquisite little note which disproves it — the note in which Orion asks for the hand of the young lady he wished for his bride.

Muscatine, Iowa, Nov. 21, 1854.

Mr. and Mrs. Wm. Stotts:

The object of this note furnishes a subject so entirely novel to me, that I hope I shall be excused for any blunders or awkwardness in writing.

Without further preface, I venture to inform you of my

attachment to your daughter, Miss Mary Ellen, and to ask your consent to our union in a few weeks.

An early answer is respectfully solicited.

Most respectfully yours,

Orion Clemens.

Then there is the story, with many variations, of the time Mrs. Clemens went to afternoon tea. Before leaving she told Orion there was a cup of salad for him in the pantry, which he was to eat in case she returned late. Heeding his wife's instructions, which, as gossip reports, he was in the habit of doing, he went to the pantry, took down a cup with something in it, and ate. Presently his wife returned and asked him if he had eaten his salad.

"Yes," replied Orion, "but it didn't taste very good, so I beat up an egg in it."

"And then how did it taste?" asked Molly suspiciously, as she stepped to the pantry.

"Rather yeasty," Orion said sheepishly as it dawned on him that he had eaten a cup of yeast by mistake — "sunshine vitamins" and all.

Molly's somewhat rigorous management of her husband is the theme of an anecdote that also reveals Orion's sense of humor. One day Orion was in the back yard cleaning a pair of trousers when Molly called out, "Orion, what are you doing?"

No answer.

"Orion, what are you doing?"

Still no answer.

"Orion, tell me what you are doing?"

Then rather meekly from the yard, "Molly, I am cleaning *our* pantaloons."

Or there is the story, again with many variations, of Orion's method of keeping books. One time when he had charge of the church funds, his books got into a hopeless tangle, so he went to an auditor to have them straightened out. Shortly afterward, when the two men met on the street, the auditor inquired of Clemens how he kept the church books. "Well, I put down everything I pay out," replied Orion, "and trust my memory for everything that is paid in."

Numerous incidents relate to Orion's law practice. One year when the city of Keokuk was involved in some important litigation, Clemens volunteered his services in behalf of the city without pay. The city accepted. Thenceforth it seems to have been as difficult to keep Clemens at work and to expurgate his jokes from the record as it was to win the case.

Stories of this nature the visitor at Keokuk encounters abundantly the moment he evinces an interest in the Clemens family. But if he is fortunate enough to talk with some of the older people who knew Orion, and if he is discerning, he can not fail to sense that there is affection in the telling of them.

FRED W. LORCH

## Molly Clemens's Note Book

When Molly Clemens died in 1904, having outlived her husband about seven years, there was found among her effects an old note book which she began in 1862 while she was in Keokuk waiting for Orion to send for her. Orion, it will be seen, had the year before been appointed Secretary of Nevada Territory. That his sudden rise from the position of an obscure country-town lawyer to that of a man prominently engaged in State-building should have prompted her to jot down a bit of family history is entirely excusable. The note book is interesting not only for the sketch of Orion's career, with the steps leading up to his appointment, but also for its references to Sam Clemens who accompanied Orion and for whom the western trip proved the threshold for a literary career. Except for minor changes to insure clearness the entries are rendered as found.

Married, Orion Clemens, to Miss Mary E. Stotts, Dec. 19th 1854. By Rev. J. T. Umsted, Pastor of the Westminster Church.

Orion Clemens, lived in Muscatine, Iowa, when we were married. The river being closed we had to take our trip, or rather return to his home from Keokuk, in the stage. We left K Dec 20 arrived at M Dec 21st. I returned to Keokuk on my first visit March 18, I was taken sick about the last of April and was sick a long time. My Mother was

sent for. She came and staid 10 days. In June Mr. Clemens bought the "Ben Franklin" book and job office, of Ogden & Delaplain. We moved to Keokuk on the 9th of June 1855. Our little Jennie was born Sept 14, 1855. On the 19th of Dec following, we went to board at Pa's. Remained there until February 2nd 1857. In June of 1857, Mr. Clemens sold the printing office to H. H. Belding. On the 25 of September 1857, we started to Tennessee to spend the winter and to see a large amount of mountain land. We spent 10 days in St. Louis, with Mr. Wm. A. Moffett. Belle Stotts went with us. We all attended the "Great Fair of the West." We spent 10 days in Adair Co. Ky. visiting relatives, and friends of our parents. We then proceeded to Tenn. by private conveyance.

I left Tennessee on the 24 of March 1858. We went to Wayne Co. Ky — the present position of a large army. I staid until the 12 of April then went to Columbia Ky. There I remained 8 days, received a letter urging my speedy return to Iowa on account of my mothers illness. I arrived in Keokuk on the 27 of April. Found my mother better. Spent one day in St. Louis on my return.

Mr. Clemens returned to Keokuk on the 7 of July. He came by Memphis Tenn, to see and perhaps wait on & relieve his poor and unfortunate brother Henry Clemens who was second clerk on the steamboat Pennsylvania, which exploded her boilers, on the Mississippi river 60 miles below Memphis, Tenn on the 13, 1858.

Henry died on the 20 of June, one week from the time he was injured. No one of his friends reached him excepting Sam Clemens, his brother who was steersman at that time; but from a difficulty which took place between Sam C and the other pilot named Brown, on Henry's account

Sam had left the Penn and was to go on her again as soon as they arrived at Saint Louis, where Brown was to be discharged. Brown was killed by the explosion.

We staid at Wm Stotts'es from July 7 'til the following July, when we went to housekeeping. On Feb 1st 1860, we moved to town. In May Orion concluded to go to Memphis Missouri, to practice law. (I will say he was admitted to the bar in Jamestown Tenn. examined by Judge Goodall) He moved his family over in August, 1860. In Jan. 1861, he went to St. Louis to see Judge Edward Bates who had accepted an appointment in Abraham Lincoln's Cabinet as Atty General.

Mr. Clemens was successful, he received the appointment of Secretary of Nevada Territory, a new Territory organized in the session of 1860 & 61.

Mr. Clemens received notice of his appointment on the 27 of March, received his papers on the 20 of April. We then left Memphis on the 26, reached Keokuk again on the 27. Mr. C started to St. Louis that night. He left Keokuk on the 4 of July to visit his sister P. A. Moffett in St. Louis. There he met and prevailed on his brother Sam to go to his new home with him. They left Saint Louis on the 18 of July on the Sioux City, for St. Joe. There they took passage in the overland coach a mail conveyance which began to run daily between St Joe Missouri and Sacramento California.

They left St. Joe, on the 26 of July, arrived in Carson City, Nevada Territory on the 14 of Au. 1700 miles from St. Joe, and 580 miles west of Great Salt Lake City.

M. E. Clemens

It is unfortunate that the note book consists so largely of mere chronology. Of Orion's experiences

in Muscatine there is practically no mention, nor of the reason for the removal to Keokuk. The reader may surmise that Molly's long illness in the spring of 1855 made her anxious to be near her parents again, and so, when a business opportunity in the form of a printing shop appeared in Keokuk, Orion at once accepted.

But there was probably another reason why Clemens was glad to move to Keokuk. That very summer the Gate City saw the beginning of the biggest boom in its history. Property suddenly rose to fabulous prices, and the town went wild in an orgy of buying and selling lots. Within a year the population almost doubled. Strangers from abroad came in hordes. Speculators in real estate crowded the hotels and street corners. So permanent did the era of prosperity seem to be that by the summer of 1856 the newspapers of Keokuk were extending condolences to the neighboring towns for their sad lack of progress. Even St. Louis stood in danger of an eclipse.

Something of the exultation and vast pride in the city's growth is shown in the item that announced Orion Clemens's purchase of the printing office. "We are informed that Messrs. Ogden and Delaplain have sold out their job office to Mr. O. Clemens of Muscatine. Mr. Clemens is not blind to the advantages and prospects of Keokuk. Wonder if there 'ain't' a number of such persons of that place, and also at Burlington, who would come here if they

could. 'One horse towns' won't win in this age of railroads and steam. Men who would thrive must be in a thriving place.'

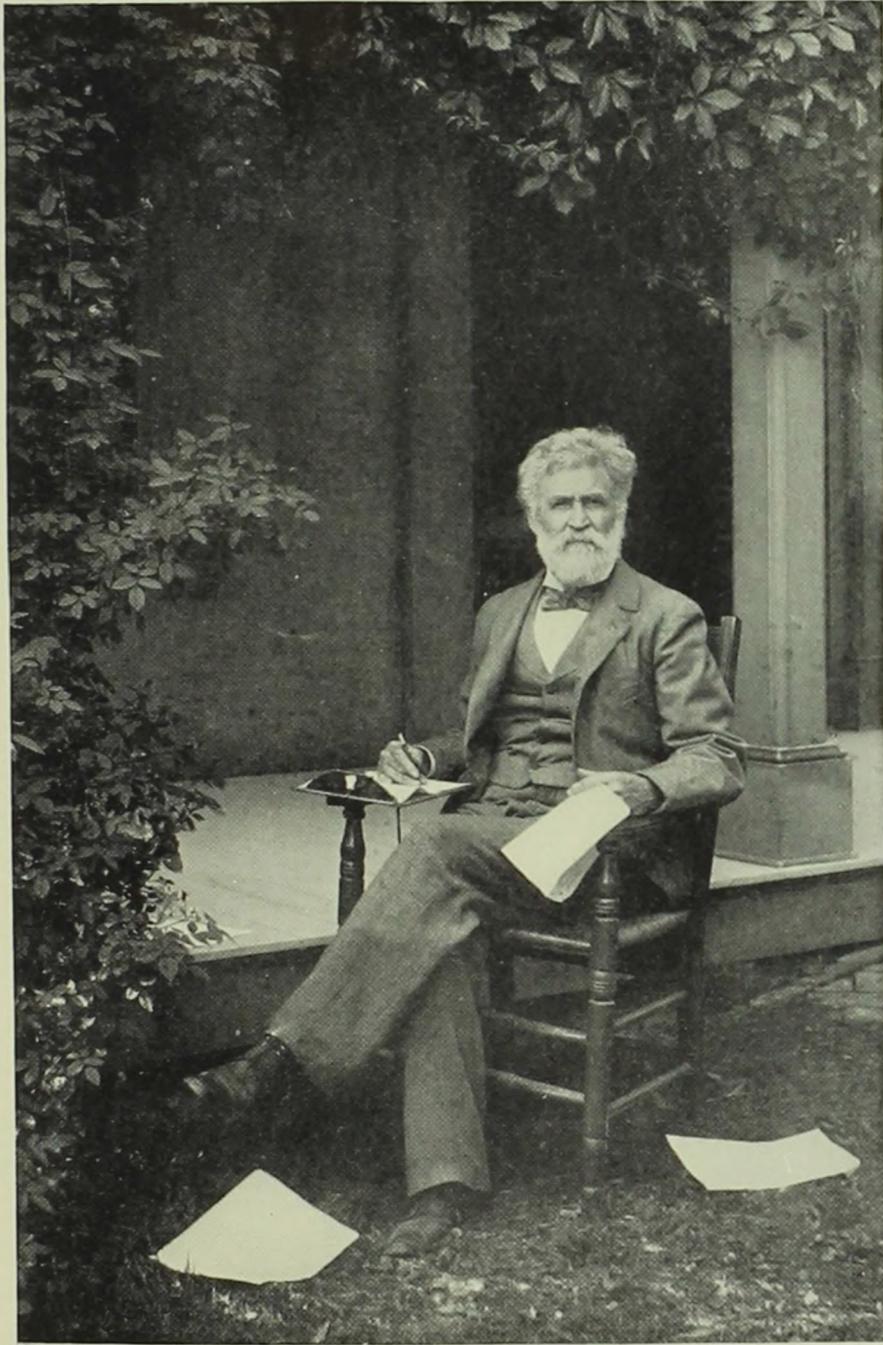
Mark Twain, who worked with Orion at the Ben Franklin Print Shop during these boom years, reports that Orion did not thrive, however, on account of his lack of business sense which resulted in the failure that overtook him in 1857. Molly merely records the event. It would be unfair to accept Twain's indictment at face value, however, for his own lamentable lack of business acumen is a matter of common knowledge, and he fails to add the significant fact that Orion's failure came during the great slump of 1857 when the boom utterly collapsed and left Keokuk gasping at the suddenness and extent of the catastrophe.

The note book item of the birth of Jennie will remind old friends of the Clemens family in Keokuk of the mute pathos of an empty little rocking chair. Jennie died in Nevada Territory on February 1, 1864. At the time of her death she was only eight years of age. For forty years afterward, up to the time of Molly's death, the little girl's chair was kept in the living room of the Clemens home.

Those familiar with Mark Twain's *Autobiography* will have no difficulty in identifying "the large amount of mountain land" which Orion and Molly went to see in the fall of 1857. This enormous tract of land, comprising seventy-five thousand acres, had been purchased by Orion's father in the hope that

some day it would bring fabulous wealth to his children. It actually became, instead, the worry of three generations. Once, in the early days, when Orion was Territorial Secretary, a development scheme that promised large returns was about to be consummated. It involved the importation of wine-growers and wine-makers from Europe, and settling them on the land. All that was needed was Orion's signature. But Orion, opposed to the liquor interests, refused to become a party to the scheme and so the project was abandoned. Many years later Mark Twain, speaking of the land, said that it had been created under a misapprehension, that his father had loaded himself up with it under a misapprehension, that he had unloaded it upon his children under a misapprehension, and that he himself should be glad to be rid of the accumulated misapprehensions as soon as possible.

Of the death of Henry Clemens, Molly's account agrees in detail with that given by Sam. He was three years younger than Sam and a favorite with all the members of the Clemens family. In 1853 he had gone up to Muscatine with Orion, and while there had worked as a clerk in Burnett's book store. Later he had followed Orion to Keokuk and had become a printer's apprentice in his shop. After Orion's failure in 1857, Henry had gone on the river with Sam. He was a clean, good-looking boy, and so generally beloved that Sam was often jealous of him, though he, too, loved him deeply as his wildly



COURTESY OF JESSE BENJAMIN

ORION CLEMENS

pathetic letter to Molly shows, written when Henry was dying.

Orion's appointment as Secretary of Nevada Territory was a political plum, a doubtful boon when first presented, but a position which might have proved exceedingly desirable had Orion played his cards right. He had received the post for his energetic support of Lincoln's first candidacy in a stumping tour of northern Missouri. Judge Edward Bates of St. Louis, who secured him the appointment, was an old friend.

For five years Orion prospered. Then the Territory became a State. At the first election he announced his candidacy for the office of Secretary of State. But at the last moment, according to Mark Twain, when there was no doubt of his nomination, he suddenly took it into his head not to go near the convention because his presence there might be an unfair and improper influence. This, together with the fact that he just as suddenly changed to an unfriendly attitude toward whisky in a country where whisky was popular, was enough to eliminate him. Having lost his political job he was forced to turn to law for a livelihood. In 1866 he returned to the Mississippi Valley, never to become a candidate for office again.

FRED W. LORCH

## Literary Apprenticeship

None of the gossip touching Orion Clemens is more intriguing than that which associates him with authorship. Many are the stories of his habit of secluding himself for days in a little room in the upper part of the house and laboring over great heaps of manuscript. But what the nature of this manuscript was not even the nearest neighbors seem to have known. In general the impression was that Orion was writing fiction, but since nothing appeared in the magazines under his name, the belief finally became established that he was writing under a pseudonym. Had gossip stopped there, it would have been at least within hailing distance of probability. But curiously enough a new impression began to gain currency, namely, that Orion Clemens was not only writing fiction, but that he had a hand in writing some of Mark Twain's best books.

How much of truth lies at the foundation of such gossip is pretty much a matter of record. Of immediate interest are the definitely tangible evidences of Orion's attempts at literary expression. That he entertained through the years an ambition for excellence in writing is unquestionable.

The earliest piece of writing from the hand of Orion Clemens is a letter still preserved in the old files of the *Muscatine Journal* of 1854. It is dated

March 10th from Hannibal, Missouri, where he had gone, presumably on business. Only an extract is given below — a description of his trip down the river on the steamboat — but the attempt at literary effectiveness is obvious.

On Tuesday night, pale-faced Fog, that white robed messenger of Delay stealthily crept around our boat like a winding sheet. It spread out from shore to shore; it hid the river; it stole upon the deck; it hovered over the boat; it wreathed up between the chimneys; it was everywhere, gently whispering "Stop!" The Captain obeyed this noiseless, but superior power. Thus the wide world over, firm gentleness is always powerful.

After several hours the fog sailed off, leaving air, woods, and water clear. Then the McKee's head was turned down stream, and she was soon again pushing on toward Montrose. But ere long we were obliged to encounter another opponent. The wind rushed against our boat, shrieking and howling; threatening to throw down our chimneys, or lift off the cabin. It tossed the water into large waves, and at every stroke of the paddle-wheels it roared "Stop!" The Captain obeyed this boisterous superior power. Thus the wide world over, what gentleness fails to accomplish, force must.

A more widely known bit of writing, especially to Iowans, is Orion Clemens's brief "History of the Half Breed Tract". It was written in 1856 and served, quite appropriately, as introductory matter for his *Directory* of Keokuk, the first directory ever made for that city. The history is compact, clear,

and excellently written, and serves as an indication of Orion's possibilities in literary craftsmanship.

Whether in the early years Orion and Sam wrote each other occasional "literary" letters can only be conjectured, but certain it is that each was conscious of the good qualities in the letters of the other. Orion sensed Sam's descriptive talent as early as 1853 when he printed in the *Muscatine Journal* a portion of a letter from his younger brother, describing in great detail the water-works at Fairmont Park, Philadelphia, and immediately invited him to correspond regularly for the *Muscatine* paper.

And likewise, a few years later, Sam expressed his admiration for a letter he has just received from Orion. "It reminds me strongly", he wrote, "of Tom Hood's letters to his family. . . . But yours only remind me of his, for although there is a striking likeness, your humor is much finer than his, and far better expressed. Tom Hood's *wit*, (in his letters) has a savor of *labor* about it which is very disagreeable. Your letter is good. That portion of it wherein the old sow figures is the very best thing that I have seen lately. Its quiet style resembles Goldsmith's 'Citizens of the World,' and 'Don Quixote,' — which are my *beau ideals* of fine writing."

Again in 1871 Sam commended Orion for his writing. At the time Orion was the editor of the *Publisher*, a Hartford, Connecticut, newspaper, while Sam was still in the flush of nation-wide popularity as the author of *Innocents Abroad*. What it

was that Orion had written is not apparent, nor is it a matter of particular importance. More significant is the fact that the younger brother, then a recognized craftsman, was pleased with Orion's efforts as a writer.

Some months before this, Mark Twain had contracted to produce a new book. Naturally the publishers wanted something in the nature of travel literature to follow up the phenomenal success of *Innocents Abroad*. Twain did not have long to hunt for suitable material. Ten years previously he had made a thrilling trip overland in a stagecoach from St. Joseph, Missouri, to Carson City, Nevada Territory. The occasion of the trip was Orion's appointment as Territorial Secretary, and his journey west to fill the office. Sam, it will be remembered, accompanied Orion, acting, in a measure, as secretary to the Secretary. But since Sam had made the trip in a free spirit of adventure, he had taken no notes. Now, although his general impressions of the experience were vivid enough, he lacked detail. The new book had to be out in six months.

There was nothing to do but to write to Orion in the hope that he might be able to send a page of notes with the names of places where they had stopped, the names of people they had met, and such incidents and adventures on the trip as he might recall. Orion rummaged around and finally produced a little memorandum book that he had kept on the journey. It contained in abundance just the

sort of material that Mark Twain wanted but had despaired of finding. He was greatly delighted, for Orion's help would simplify his labors immensely. In return for this aid he promised Orion one of the first thousand dollar installments that should come to him from his publisher. Such, as far as the records show, was the nature and extent of Orion's collaboration in the volume that was later called *Roughing It*, and there is little reason to believe that here or elsewhere was his aid more extensive or more direct.

Mark Twain's meteoric rise in literature during the seventies must have produced in Orion an eager desire to try his hand at the same sort of career. He undoubtedly felt that he could write as well as Sam, but that Sam, like occasional prospectors he had known in Nevada, had struck a good lead and had suddenly become rich. In Mark Twain's letters of this period are frequent indications that Orion had sent him bundles of manuscript hoping to get the benefit of his brother's criticism and the stimulation of his suggestions. Unfortunately these contributions from Orion reached Twain at unhappy moments. In fact most moments were unhappy for this sort of business, for during those years Twain was in a frenzy of work and the least distraction irritated him.

But occasionally he took time off and wrote to Orion at considerable length. In one of these letters the fact is revealed that Orion had been piling up

manuscript on an ambitious burlesque of Jules Verne. Twain's comment seems sound, but the tone of it unpleasantly impatient. He objects to two hell scenes, which Orion apparently had treated at great length, on the ground of indiscreet manipulation. Next he proceeds to warn Orion that a novice can not hope to do what a seasoned writer like himself has been laboring for years to achieve.

The same letter instructs Orion how to get into print and recalls the gossip about Orion's use of a *nom de plume*. "If the N. Y. Weekly people know you are my brother, they will turn that fact into an advertisement — a thing valuable to them, but not to you and me. This must be prevented. I will write them a note to say you have a friend near Keokuk, Charles S. Miller, who has a MS for sale which you think is a pretty clever travesty of Verne; and if they want it they might write to him in your care. Then if any correspondence ensues between you and them, let Molly write for you and sign your name — your own handwriting representing Miller's. Keep yourself out of sight till you make a strike on your own merits." It is not likely that Orion acted upon his brother's suggestion. The modifications suggested by Twain would have involved tremendous labor even if he had had the heart to do it. But it is probable that the letter discouraged him and that he gave up the project altogether.

When Kipling visited America for the first time in 1889, he called at Elmira, New York, to pay his

respects to Mark Twain. The conversation between the two men finally turned upon autobiography and the possibility of a man sticking rigidly to the facts when writing about himself. "I made an experiment once," said Twain. "I got a friend of mine — a man painfully given to speak the truth on all occasions — a man who wouldn't dream of telling a lie — and I made him write his autobiography for his amusement and mine. He did it. The manuscript would have made an octavo volume, but — good honest man that he was — in every single detail of his life that I knew about he turned out, on paper, a formidable liar."

The author of that autobiography was Orion Clemens, and as far as can be ascertained it was the very last ambitious piece of literary work he attempted. It was also unquestionably his best. In the earlier stages of its composition Mark Twain not only spoke of it as model biography but was so enthusiastic that he sent portions of it to William Dean Howells, then editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, with a view to its publication in that magazine. Howells read the manuscript, but so soul-revealing were many passages that he felt haggard when he had finished and could not consent to publish it. It was all of two thousand pages in length. The best parts, according to Howells, were those that dealt with his illustrious brother. These, he believed, would eventually be valuable for their biographical information about Mark Twain, a prediction which

proved correct, for Paine admits that he found the manuscript almost indispensable for an adequate treatment of Twain's early life.

Practically nothing of Orion Clemens's extensive literary effort now exists. At least little is accessible. At Orion's death, according to relatives of the family, most of his papers were boxed and shipped East at Twain's request. Paine claims it was Mark Twain's wish that most of them should be destroyed, and is of the opinion that they have been. Such odds and ends as remain are deep in the dusty obscurity of a safe deposit and are not available. What a deal of interest many Iowans would find in a glimpse at those papers!

FRED W. LORCH

## Adrift for Heresy

Orion Clemens's desire for public recognition manifested itself no less picturesquely in matters of religion than in matters of politics. To Mark Twain, far removed and feverishly engaged in his own projects, literary and otherwise, the incidents that featured Orion's progress toward agnosticism must have been perplexing indeed. Aware of the major events which marked this progress, he did not understand, and probably never troubled himself to discover the precise nature of Orion's attitude toward orthodoxy. All he could see was that "Orion is a field which grows richer and richer the more he mulches it with each new topdressing of religion or other guano."

As a matter of fact Orion was always unwaveringly religious, and the topdressings were not so much mulches as manifestations of Orion's vital religious experience. He sought to satisfy his religious nature by church membership. For many years he was a member of the Presbyterian church, having united with that denomination in 1864 while he was Secretary of Nevada Territory. He not only belonged to the church, but was, in Keokuk, one of its most active members. Yet from the first he was not fundamentally orthodox. It is true that he supported the church faithfully, for he looked upon it as

an institution capable of great good, but he questioned some of the principles upon which it professed to offer salvation.

If the impulse came to Orion in the earlier years to give public expression to his views, the straight-laced orthodoxy of his mother and the desire for social tranquillity on the part of his wife must have restrained him. By 1876, however, it appears that Orion was no longer inclined to remain silent. The occasion which prompted the explanation and defense of his faith is not now known, but the following letter to his mother is entirely creditable to Orion. It shows not only the orderliness of his thinking, despite the phrenology, but a fine and sensitive nature as well.

Keokuk, Aug. 10, 1876.

My dear mother :

It grieves me to see you and Mollie so distressed over a difference of opinion. It is not as if I believed in crime; it is merely that I question that certain facts reported to have occurred a long time ago really occurred. There is nothing in this to indicate depravity. But if I profess to believe certain facts to have taken place when I do not believe it — this is hypocrisy in religion. A hypocrite who is right by accident in his profession is worse than one who honestly professes wrong views, for he is merely wrong by accident — the accident of a wrong mental vision. Belief in the facts recorded in the old and new testament, may grow out of a combination of circumstances, both outside of and inside of the mind. These operating together through a long series of years, mentally acquire a con-

sistency, a complexion, and an aspect as peculiar to the individual, and as distinctly marking him, as the circumstances of shape, exposure and age, mark, tan, or freckle, and wrinkle the face of an individual, so that he can be like himself and no other. For instance, it is now impossible for you to believe in the Catholic religion. You once had the power, if you had properly cultivated it, but it is now lost. So you may put your finger on Catholics who have similarly lost the power, which they all had in greater or less degree when young to believe in Christianity. This formation of a believing character is the work of books, of association, and of phrenological bumps, taking those bumps as insignia of separate faculties of the brain. Do not misunderstand what I say. Do not suppose that I allude to anything occurring to myself in childhood. The books I had and the influences around me were towards belief in all that is in both the old and new testament. But I am thankful that I have always felt free, whatever I might openly say, to think and read on both sides of any question which was sufficiently supplied with two sides to become a question. It thus happens that in the exercise of an unchained, God-given freedom, I have looked at both sides, and ventured to question what was backed by insufficient evidence. In doing this I cast aside the mere characteristics that might have adhered to me merely because I brushed past them in life, and have thought upon the subject. Hence, I say there are some things in the old and new testament concerning which I cannot say "I believe," because the evidence has not been sufficient to command my belief.

I do not therefore necessarily throw aside belief in God or a future state. I only question whether God and the

future have been interpreted to us aright. I fear that we have in those venerable books but the works of successive ages, each of which has said — Let us make God in our image. If we study the character of Moses, and the character of God interpreted by Moses, we find the two characters agree at every point. Moses passed in and out among the idolaters, saying “Let every man slay his brother, and there fell that day three thousand.” God commanded Moses to leave not one inhabitant of Canaan alive. We find the characters, both of God and Moses, as developed in the early history of the Jews, precisely agreeing.

When Christ came, his character and that of God precisely agreed, and were both at all points antagonistic to the characters of Moses and of the God whom he depicts. Can Christ himself have been a God whose character should have totally changed in a few thousand years? How much more reverent to God to suppose that the change was in man and not in Him! The change in the character of God marks the progress of man through the centuries, for, as he was himself he painted God. As Moses was, a barbarian, with a powerful fraternal and national love, to the scorn of all other nations, and all other rights of man, he made God, an enlarged, but exact image of himself — a magnified photograph. Barbarism was at its end when Christ came to lead the van of a civilization founded on love and self-sacrifice for others, for which I sincerely love and adore him. But the photograph of God copied from himself is the civilized man’s God, and not the Barbarian’s.

Let us be thankful for the Christian religion, for our hopes of a future, and for all we are taught in the Bible, without being compelled to believe that Christ, who taught

us to love one another, was the God who taught the Jews to hate and murder and rob their neighbors.

Our cow had a little calf yesterday afternoon. I have to feed it with a bottle.

Glad to hear Annie and the baby are doing so well, and that Sammie has gone into Greek.

Orion.

Holding such opinions, it is evident from what followed that Orion voiced them from time to time until finally he was "earnestly counseled and repeatedly besought by the Presbyterian session not to give utterance to these views."

Early in May, 1879, affairs culminated in an episode still memorable to the older people of Keokuk. On the evening of May 6th Orion engaged himself for a lecture at Red Ribbon Hall, the subject of the lecture being "Man the Architect of Our Religion". Members of the Presbyterian session must have suspected what the nature of his remarks would be, for several of them were in the audience that night with pencil and pad to record the heresies of their church brother.

That was on Monday night. The very next day Orion received a citation from the session to appear before it and answer the charges preferred against him. A copy of the charges was appended to the citation in order that the matter might be heard and immediately decided. Orion acknowledged acceptance the same day, and on Wednesday evening he presented himself at the pastor's study where the

session was assembled. In addition to Doctor W. G. Craig, the pastor, there were in the room P. T. Lomax, clerk of session, George B. Smyth, prosecutor, and four others who had attended the lecture and upon whose testimony the charges had been drawn up. In brief the charges were as follows:

First, that he denied the presence of the supernatural in the Old Testament scriptures by asserting that the last six commandments of the decalogue were moral rules, always practiced by mankind, the formal statement of which was like naming a river for a mountain.

Second, that he denied the doctrine of the church that the Old Testament scriptures are the inspired word of God, by asserting that inspiration is simply a higher development of thought in a special direction, or a dream; that there was nothing in the Old Testament indicating a belief of its writers that anything thought, said, or done in this life would affect the condition of the soul in the life to come, and that Abraham was a sun and fire worshiper.

Third, that he had avowed sentiments contrary to the fundamental doctrines of the Presbyterian church in that he had denied the divinity of Christ and the sanctity of the Sabbath day.

The four witnesses were then called upon to testify what they had heard Orion say and what they had understood him to mean. The charges were repeated with greater elaboration. Presently the moderator asked Orion, "Did you feel impelled by a

sense of duty and privilege to give public utterance to these views?"

"Yes," replied Orion. "I consider it the duty of every man to think soberly upon these subjects, to make up his views satisfactorily to himself and then express them to others, in order that if he be in error he may be corrected and the truth reached through free, full and open discussion."

"Were you earnestly counseled and repeatedly besought by the session *not* to give utterance to these views?"

"I was."

"Do you understand the views enunciated in your lecture and freely expressed here to be directly contrary to the fundamental teaching of the Presbyterian church?"

"I do."

"Have we, the session, according to our best ability, sought to resolve your doubts?"

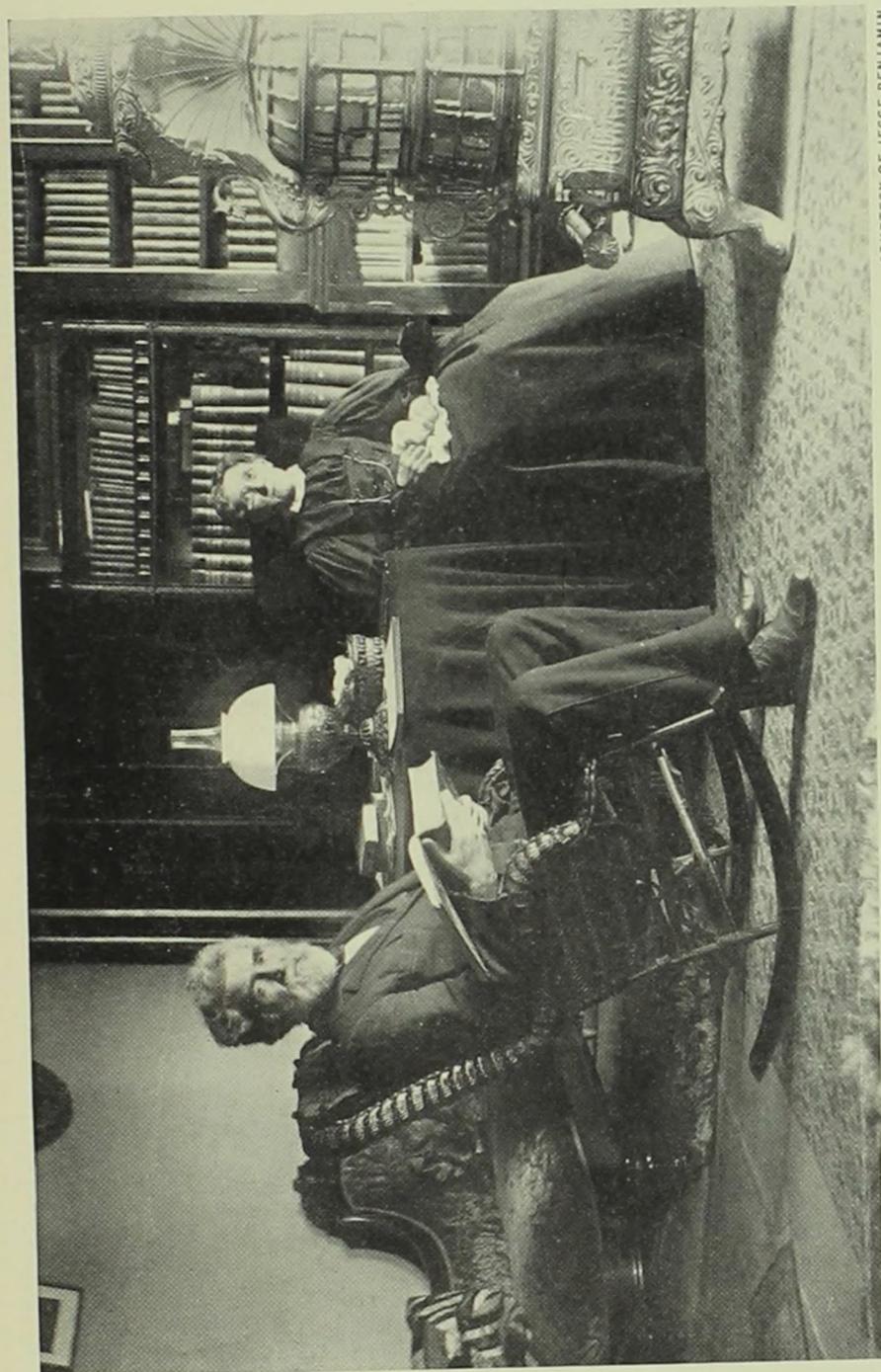
"You have sought to resolve my doubts. You will have to judge as to the best of your ability."

"That is a correct answer."

Two days later Orion was apprised of the decision of the session when he received through the mail a notice of excommunication. It read as follows:

Mr. Orion Clemens:

Dear Sir — I have to inform you that the session on Wednesday evening last, unanimously found you guilty under the charges tabled against you, and their sentence was that you should therefore be excommunicated from the



COURTESY OF JESSE BENJAMIN

ORION AND MOLLY CLEMENS AT HOME

church, and said excommunication be pronounced at morning service on Sabbath next.

Very respectfully,

P. T. Lomax, clerk of session.

That Orion Clemens was sufficiently curious to attend Presbyterian services the next Sunday to hear Doctor Craig's sermon, adapted to the occasion, and to listen to the formal announcement of his excommunication is extremely doubtful. Had he been there he would have heard the minister narrate the steps leading to the excommunication, showing the authority of the church to cast out unworthy members, pointing out the nature, use, and consequence of the censure, and finally he would have heard him warn the congregation to avoid all unnecessary intercourse with Clemens that they might not be contaminated by his opinions.

But Orion Clemens was apparently undaunted. On Monday the local papers informed the public that "Orion Clemens will repeat his lecture on 'Man the Architect of Our Religion', at Red Ribbon Hall, on Monday evening May 19. Admission 25 cents." In view of the fact that the first lecture was given with free admission, it would be interesting to know whose idea it was to have the lecture repeated and to charge admission. Perhaps Orion was not quite so destitute of business acumen after all.

In the meantime the newspapers printed contributions of people commending Clemens for his frank expression of opinion. "Is it wise," asked

one person addressing himself to the church, "to so commit yourself to any religious creed that you expel really honest and worthy men from your church simply because their thinking has been too free? Should not character and character alone, be the test of church membership?"

Whether or not Doctor Craig's warning against contamination actually served as a deterrent, the fact remains that despite the publicity which Orion Clemens received in the newspapers the second lecture was not well attended. In closing, Orion referred briefly to his expulsion from the church. He claimed that no attempt had been made to refute his statements, but that the session had merely determined that he had formed incorrect conclusions from his materials owing to his weakness of mind, and that because of that weakness he was accused of heresy and sent where he would catch worse than a sick headache. As a parting shot he said he did not desire to advise people not to associate with Doctor Craig, but trusted that every one would associate with him as heretofore.

If Orion Clemens ventured again to express his religious opinions publicly, it is not a matter of record.

FRED W. LORCH

## The Closing Years

Orion Clemens was well over fifty before the hope of achieving more than local distinction or of earning a comfortable competence for himself definitely waned. He had tried business and had failed, and politics and lecturing and authorship. To each of these in turn he had brought much industry and enthusiasm. But somehow, though success often hovered at his very finger tips, the consummation of it always eluded his grasp just when he seemed most likely to attain it.

How far the causes for Orion's failures were the result of his own deficiencies of character and personality it is difficult to say. If Mark Twain's presentation of his older brother may be trusted the answer is not difficult to find, for his letters to Howells and his *Autobiography* supply not only an elaborate catalogue of Orion's follies and vagaries, but many references to his capricious and ill-regulated mind and to his instability of character in all matters save those touching his fundamental principles. It is true that now and again Sam expressed an appreciation of the fine qualities of Orion's character, and recognized the fact that Providence and unfavorable circumstances too frequently interfered with his success. Yet far oftener he was brutally disparaging.

But it would be unsafe to rely upon Sam's estimate of Orion. Although Mark Twain's spirit may have been of the very fabric of truth so far as moral intent was concerned, he made no real pretense to accuracy in his earlier autobiographic writings, while in later years an ever vivid imagination and a capricious memory made history difficult, even when his effort was in the direction of fact.

Furthermore, it is well to remember that Mark Twain had very little direct knowledge of Orion's later years. He knew of some of his plans and ambitions, for of these Orion had written Sam unreservedly. And he knew of some of his disappointments. But he did not know, and could not know at a distance, of the growing beauty of Orion's character. Only the people of Keokuk knew that, his neighbors and friends who saw daily evidences of it. For it appears that as Orion's long-cherished ambitions died out, his nature, always genial and kindly, developed in these qualities until during the closing years his person came to be regarded in Keokuk as a symbol of cheerful contentment and the virtues of charity, optimism, and good humor.

Many people still remember those last kindly years of Orion's life. "I boarded in Orion's home for a number of years and my association with him and his wife was very close", writes Jesse Benjamin, formerly of Keokuk and now of Washington, D. C. "I was well acquainted with his and Twain's mother. Orion and Molly commenced keeping

friendly roomers soon after the mother's death. I took the rooms formerly occupied by her. A little later, they commenced boarding us, — the widowed wife of our former Congregational minister, his daughter, and myself. Some 'pinch' seemed to prompt this, tho their sensitiveness about it was covered in the rare home spirit in which we tried to help them."

Others speak of Orion's devotion to his mother and of his fond care for her in those last years when the infirmities of life rested heavily upon her. Her child-like mind frequently made her, it is said, a difficult taskmaster, but if Orion ever displayed impatience or uttered an unkind word, the memory of it has entirely faded from the minds of those friends who were privileged with more than casual glimpses into Orion's home life.

Something of the affection old friends had for Orion and Molly Clemens is reflected in the following poem, the unknown author of which was one of the guests at the occasion of their fortieth wedding anniversary in 1894. The poet announces in a little prefatory note that "the many who have enjoyed the hospitality of that home will find my title a sufficient identity." Orion's well-known love for sugar in his coffee and the allusion in the last stanza to "the bride left by the way" serve as a further means of identification, while the whole poem expresses the kindly, whimsical good nature that was personified in the character of Orion Clemens.

**The Keokuk Pilgrim**

Put in a heaping spoonful, now, —  
You needn't stir it up,  
For you know I like the sugar  
At the bottom of the cup.  
It somehow so reminds me  
As I sip my coffee, wife,  
Of the sweets found near the bottom  
Of the bitter cup of life.

Forty years since first you sugared  
My morning cup for me, —  
Forty years since first you sweetened  
The days then yet to be.  
Put in another spoonful,  
And, while I drink it low, —  
Our minds will watch life's phantoms  
As they swiftly come and go.

Forty years! I can remember, —  
Not much, though I'll be blessed,  
About that day, — except I know  
How queerly you were dressed.  
Queer as dress in these days —  
A big sleeved, low necked gown,  
With waves and bands and folds  
Of white and gold and brown.

Of myself I don't remember —  
Forgetfulness is kind;  
A few points have, however,  
Been kept green in my mind.

I'd forget, though, if you'd let me,  
How on our wedding day,  
I started for my honey-moon  
My bride left by the way.

Orion Clemens died on December 11, 1897, aged seventy-two years. He had got up early in the morning, as was his custom, to build a fire in the kitchen stove. The end came quietly while he was waiting for the house to warm and was in the act of jotting down some notes on a brief for a case then pending in court.

His passing was deeply mourned. Newspapers from Muscatine to St. Louis noted his death and gave tribute to his lovable character. Typical of such tributes is that of the Reverend W. L. Byers, of the Congregational church, an old friend of the Clemens family. "I knew him for a genial, happy, kind-hearted man who said no ill word, did no wanton unkindness, and who went through the world making it brighter. . . . What worry he had he locked in his own breast and gave to his fellows only and ever a smile and a sunny word. He was the man who walked through the snow to buy wheat for the sparrows when the days were cold and bleak. That is the parable of what he was at home and everywhere."

Mark Twain was in Vienna when the cablegram announcing Orion's death reached him. That night he penned Molly the note which follows. It was

undoubtedly sincere, even in its utter pessimism, and many of his friends wish that it might have stood as Twain's final expression concerning that unique and lovable character.

Hotel Metropole  
Vienna, Dec. 11/97.

Dear Molly:

It is 10 in the evening. We sent you our cablegram of sympathy half an hour ago & 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, & were then too ignorant to rejoice at it.

We all grieve for you; our sympathy goes out to you from experienced hearts, & with it our love; & with Orion, & 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 & pine for her; & if by asking I could bring her back, I could stoop to that treachery, so weak am I, & so selfish are we all. But she & Orion are at peace, & no loyal friend should wish to disturb them in their high fortune.

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

Sam.

FRED W. LORCH

## Comment by the Editor

### THE FIRST DIRECTORY OF KEOKUK

In a small "book and job printing" shop on the third floor of a building at 52 Main Street the first *General Directory of the Citizens* of Keokuk was compiled and published by Orion Clemens in 1856. It was a credit to the shop and to the city. Printed clearly from clean type on fine rag paper, the directory was a good example of commercial printing at that time. And after nearly three-quarters of a century the paper is still white and soft and the ink is as black as ever. Orion Clemens had a right to be proud of the contents, typography, make up, and press work.

Besides containing a list of Keokuk residents (though very few women were mentioned), the directory was prefaced with a "Sketch of the Black Hawk War and History of the Half Breed Tract" and included statistics of commercial prosperity as well as the inaugural address of Mayor Samuel R. Curtis. Despite a seductive title, as long as the name of a Puritan theological dissertation, the supplementary material in the directory was reasonably conservative and entirely dignified.

Mr. Clemens's history was accurate and fair, while the optimistic implications of remarkable business developments were balanced by the sound poli-

cies of Mayor Curtis who curbed his municipal vision with sensible circumspection. Indeed, so much care was taken to avoid exaggeration and "tell the plain, simple truth, without any varnish at all" that the publisher was criticised for making the list of civic improvements five hundred per cent too small. Nevertheless people bought enough directories at a dollar a copy and advertisers contributed sufficient life-blood to justify a bigger and better *Business Mirror* in 1857.

While Orion Clemens was adventuring on the perilous frontier of book publishing, his younger brothers, Henry and Sam, bore the burden of the job work. One night Mark Twain (to be) stood manfully at his "little press until nearly 2 o'clock" while the "flaring gas light" over his head "attracted all the varieties of bugs which are to be found in natural history". What he thought at first was only a local bug picnic turned out to be a gigantic entomological mass meeting. A venerable beetle that occupied a prominent position on his head sounded the key note of a grand chorus sung by 47,000 mosquitoes (treble), 23,000 house flies (alto), 32,000 locusts (tenor), and 97,000 pinch bugs (bass). The next morning Sam combed 976 beetles out of his hair, "every one of whose throats was stretched wide open, for their gentle spirits had passed away while yet they sang".

J. E. B.

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