7

FIRST DIARY

HERE are extracts from a diary I kept in 1879, aged 14. I printed in large inky letters the following on the first page:

DIARY OF WILLIAM LYON PHELPS
CONTAINING WITHIN ITS PAGES A PERSONAL ACCOUNT OF
HIS EVENTFUL AND INTERESTING (to him) LIFE

I certainly had a happy childhood in Hartford. Over and over again I wrote, 'I had a splendid time all day.' 'Lots of fun today.' Occasionally these happy reflexions were interrupted by adverse comments on school and on my teachers, who for the most part, were kind enough. 'Miss K——, (big fool), thought I was doing something, and moved my seat. I think she is a FOOL. . . . Had a tremendous snowfight on Asylum Ave. After supper, sung some. I read *Little Lights Along Shore*. I finished the book. The next book I intend to read is the *Odyssey*.'

I attended a boys' prayer-meeting. 'I led. I read the 53d Chapter of Isaiah. We had 18 there. Sam Coit said, "How splended it would be if we could say, as Paul said, 'I have fought the good faith.'" He got matters mixed up.'

Saturday, Jan. 11, 1879. 'Played all day. Too tired to write any more.'

Sunday, Jan. 12. 'Went to church this morning, and Mr. Emerson preached, but I did not give good attention.'

Monday, Jan. 13. 'This evening, just before supper, I got caught in Berryman's sled, and accidentally, the word

(Damn) escaped my lips. Berryman said something about speaking in meeting. I told him I did not mean to swear, that the word was accidental, but I must see him some more about it.'

Tuesday, Jan. 14. 'Saw Berryman, and fixed it all right.'

Here are other entries for the same month.

'Studied a very little on my Algebra this evening, and could not get a single example. Yours truly.'

'This evening, a mouse ran in the buttery, and I nearly hit him with a boot. We must have a cat. When I think of the dear departed Thomas, I feel as tho' no cat could equal him in catlike beauty, skill and strength.'

I bought a book from my brother about this time, and on the flylcaf I wrote, 'Sold to him by his darling brother.'

The Principal of the Hartford High School was Joseph Hall, and he surprised me one day. 'However cross or strict Mr. Hall may be in school, he is a bully fellow out of it. At the junction, he and Joe came along in a sleigh, and Mr. Hall asked me if I did not want to hook on. He waited for me, and then we went off. I got off a little beyond the Congregational Church.' (Rev. Joseph Twichell's.)

Every day we took our sleds to school and tried to hook on sleighs. We usually succeeded and thus got hauled through the snow all the way to school and back again, both for morning and afternoon sessions; a method of locomotion not to be sneezed at.

The silver lining. 'It rained a good deal last night, spoiling the sleighing, but making it splendid for snowballing.'

And here is an entry (28 *Jan.* 1879) that, apart from the original spelling, expresses my present sentiments. 'Finished the *Odyssey* this evening. I like it very well, though it is not near as much to my liking as the ILEAD.'

Sunday, Feb. 2, 1879. 'Ed Tuller asked me to lead the young people's meeting, and after some hesitation, I accepted . . . I hope I shall lead well. My voice is changing.'

Feb. 6. 'Been sick all day, and did not go to school. I went out and snowballed a little this p.m. . . . I went to the Institute and got *Love me little, love me long*, and *Hard Cash*, both by Chas. Reade.'

Friday, Feb. 7. 'Headache still continues, and I did not go to school.'

Saturday, Feb. 8. 'Headache does not trouble me today. I went sliding on Dummy's Hill . . . At 9 o'clock p.m., I took a splendid bath, not having bathed since before Thanksgiving.'

Feb. 13. 'Drydie (my brother) brought home from the Institute *White Lies*, by Reade, and *Frank, the Young Naturalist*, by Fosdick. Mama will not let me read any more of Reade's, but I read the other nearly thro'.'

Feb. 19. 'I read the entire book of Psalms today. This morning I finished *Jean Teterol's Idea*, (by Cherbuliez), and in the afternoon and eve. read 2 books of *The Gunboat Series*. (*Frank on a Gunboat*, etc.) . . . Mama and Papa went to Governor Andrews' party, and Mama looked beautiful dressed in green silk.'

Feb. 21. 'This p.m. I finished my Bible for the 2nd time, and got $1.28 for it.'

Feb. 24. 'I don't know what *is* the matter with me. I have a headache every day from morning till night. To the horrors of headache was added the thick darkness of toothache.'

7 *March.* 'Went to prayer meeting at Tyng's house. Something was the matter with me, for I laughed all through. I felt very bad, but it could not be helped.'

2 *May.* Mr. and Mrs. John M.Ney took us with their children for a long drive to Glastonbury, where we got trailing arbutus and ate wintergreen. 'I think I shall always

remember this afternoon with pleasure, I had such a splendid, nobbie, bully, etc. time.' (And I always have remembered it.)

10 *May*. 'Yesterday Papa got me a bully spring suit, that only cost $5. I don't see how he got it so cheap. Everybody guesses about $10 as its price.'

14 *May* 1879. 'Miss Kipp, to whom we recite Grecian History, is bully. I thought she was going to be duced bad. We recite Caesar to Childs, who is quite good. Algebra to Knibloe. They have got an infernal idea in regard to Latin this year. They make us learn the Latin by heart. No use in it whatever.'

23 *May*. 'Bought and ate a pound of dried apples, which nearly made me puke and be sick.'

8 *June*. 'Ajax (our white cat) had a fight with a rat, killing him. Her eye is so swollen it is almost closed, and she is so weak and sick this morning, that she can hardly walk and won't eat. She is better this p.m., and eats. I hope she will live.'

9 *June*. 'I am about sure Ajax will live. *Beata et felix Felis!*'

10 *June*. At a church supper. 'After supper, some of the ladies played Fan Drill, charging 20 cents admission. Mama treated us to it, and I thought it was worth about 2 cts. They made over $20 on it.'

11 *June*. 'Bullard fell off a fence and hurt his arm, tomorrow or today, I forget which, as this diary was written some days after.'

9 *July*. Our literary club. 'Kellogg's composition was on Forepaugh's Difficulties in getting animals for his show. Bullard's was on The Youth of Washington. Mine was on Capt. Pedge Hash. Kellogg roared several times at his own wit. It was a pretty fair meeting.'

13 *July*. 'Finished *Litlte Men* this p.m. I think it spoilt both *Little Women* and *Little Men* not to have Jo marry Laurie.'

Wednesday, 16 *July* 1879. This was the day of the famous tornado at Wallingford, Conn., the only one in our history until 1938. 'Today it was the hottest day it has been in 25 years. It was intolerable. Bronson and I had our lemonade stand out at 7 o'clock, to get the start of Paton and Berryman. They were terrible mad when they found us there. We hauled in 63 cents. Went swimming at about 10'clock, and stayed in 2 hours and a half. The water was bully. The weather was still and hot, when suddenly the clouds covered the sky, and there was a tremendous wind. It was one of the most fearful winds I ever saw. A great tree was blown down across our swimming place and one near Cushman's factory. Anna Bullard was reading a book on her piazza, when the wind dashed the book out of her hand, for 5 or 4 feet. The Bullards gave me some lemon ice and cream, which was very good. There were several tornadoes out West, and heavy thunder-storms.'

17 *and* 18 *Oct.* 'This morning, George Peters (afterwards astronomer at the U.S. Naval Observatory in Washington) and I walked to Cottage Grove. We lugged a hatchet, two infernal blankets, lunch, and my gun, with ammunition. On the way, we killed a ground sparrow, a warbler. When we got there, we felled trees, and built a hut, in the thick woods. I killed a Downy Woodpecker. We slept comfortably all night. We heard an animal and loaded our gun in the night. The next morning shot a ground sparrow, a warbler, and a bluebird. We got home about one p.m. I shot an English sparrow on the way home. Had perfectly splendid fun.'

19 *Oct.* 'Dr. Stone's father was suddenly killed, and he has left town for the place where his father lived. So Mr. Minor preached today. I think he looks like an owl.'

31 *Oct.* 'Our Greek teacher, Mr. Perrin, is a bully fellow.'

17 *Nov.* 'Arthur and I have had headaches all day. Arthur got his from football. But I'll be darned if I know how I got mine.'

About this time my brother Arthur and I learned Hog Latin, where each word is spelled out and is unintelligible unless one knows the key; for example: SUSHASHYOUTUTYOUPUP means Shut up. 'As I was standing at the foot of the staircase in Batterson's Block, a group of factory or office girls came out together, and to my surprise they were all cursing and swearing in Hog Latin. GUGODUDDADAMUMYOU means G—— D—— you! As they did not imagine anyone could understand what they were saying, they were very much astonished when I called out in the same language, "Shut up!"'

24 *Nov.* 'I began a small manuscript paper this morning, entitled the *Hartford Daily*. I got 4 subscribers.'

26 *Nov.* 'Edited my paper this a.m. Kicked football this p.m.'

27 *Nov.* Thanksgiving. 'Had a bully day. Skated all the morning on Sharp's. It is splendid.' One of the boys who skated with us was Charlie Dillingham, who afterwards became the famous theatre manager. Even as a boy, he had the enthusiasm so characteristic of his later years. I remember his saying that day at Sharp's, 'I'd rather skate than eat.'

3 *Dec.* 'Read *Castle Foam* all day. It is a dreadfully melancholy book. If I owned it, I'd pitch it in the fire.'

11 *Dec.* 'Read *The Woman in White* all day, pretty near.'

28 *Dec.* A rather pessimistic story of this particular Sabbath Day. 'Went to Church, Sunday School, and both meetings in the evening. As old fool —— would not be superintendent any more, old Bullet-headed —— was elected. Other officers the same. Weather warm. A tremenjous thaw. Spoilt sleighing. Spoilt coasting. Spoilt skating.'

2 *Jan.* 1880. 'My birthday today. (15.) Got splendid presents. From Mama, a checker-board and men, a great box of tools, fifty cents, two books, and a candy. Dryden, an elegant pocket-book. From Papa, 1 doz. collars. From Arthur, figuring pack, his watch and key. Papa also gave me a watch chain.'

9 *Jan.* Here came melancholia, which lasted some weeks. 'This noon and afternoon I felt dreadfully. Awful bad, somehow. I was glad when Libbie came.' (My aunt Miss Elizabeth Linsley, who came for a visit from her home in Stratford.)

10 *Jan.* 'Had the same horrible feeling this a.m. Finished Jules Verne's *Tribulations of a Chinaman.* Went hunting with Al Talcott. Shot a nuthatch and a sparrow. I hope Libbie will stay a great while.'

15 *Jan.* 'Could not eat anything, hardly. A very sick feeling. Dr. G.Pierrepont Davis gave me a prescription, and after school, I got the stuff in the shape of one enormous pill. Had to wait for it about three-quarters of an hour, and wound up by losing it. Drydie got it over again in l'evening. Took huge pill. Went down like a bullet.'

16 *Jan.* 'O how much better I feel!'

2 *Feb.* 'February has 5 Sundays this month, which has not happened for 30 years, and will not happen again for forty years.' Forty years seemed an immense distance ahead, at that time. But the year 1920, which produced its five Sundays in February according to my prophecy, now seems a good while ago.

We never paid any attention to climate or to seasons but went out shooting in ice and snow and rain and mud.

28 *Feb.* 'Frank (Hubbard), Pete (George Peters) and I had a good hunt today. I killed two warblers, one bluebird, and a nuthatch. Frank knocked over a magnificent robin. He picked him on the wing. His breast and guts were a bright red. Frank also shot a bluebird and blue jay, the

latter falling into a mudpuddle, and receiving some hurt thereby. When we got home I stuffed Frank's bluebird and my robin which Frank gave me. I could not get the wire through the knee joint, so I did not mount them.'

Much of our shooting was done in what is now a densely populated part of Hartford. Curious that we should have found robins and bluebirds, etc., in February.

8 *March.* 'This morning I cleaned out my meadow-lark, preparatory to stuffing him. This noon I fixed his eyes with shoe-buttons. Fred Keep came over this evening and put the wires up his legs. I then finished him up, and mounted him on a board. He looks splendid, and is in a natural position.'

14 *March.* 'Read *Hal, the Story of a Clodhopper*, by W.M.F.Round, all the p.m.' Round was a popular author in those days.

People who lived in Hartford many years ago will remember that when the horse cars came up the hill from the railway station to the junction of Farmington and Asylum Avenues, an extra horse was put on for that brief climb. The man in charge of him had to walk back and begin over again with the next car. This he did all day, and it was not what one would call 'a rowdy life,' which may explain his ill temper.

18 *March.* 'Clad Wiley accidentally hit (with a snowball) the old Irishman that takes up the extra horse to go up the hill with the horsecar. The old devil immediately turned around, and picking up a couple of rocks, hurled one at my head. I managed to dodge it, but he came running up, and nabbing me by the throat, he drew back his fist, and I thought I was a gone-cat. I told him over and over again that I didn't hit him, but that only made him wilder. *Denique* he went away, leaving a track of mud across my face, where he had hit me. We got it off.'

20 *March.* 'Did not go hunting today. Why not? None of your bizness. Snowballed all day. Had bully fun. Finished *In Silk Attire*, by William Black.'

Beginning with January of this year 1880, my marks at school, which had been low for three years, suddenly jumped up to nearly perfect, and I never had any trouble with school or college marks the rest of my life (except that I was not good in mathematics in college).

25 *March.* 'Rec'd my marks for this month today. 9.9 in Latin, 9.9 in Algebra, 9.8 in Latin (another course), 9 in Reading. Reading does not count. Whole average, Nine-Nine!' Perfect was 10.

Thus one continual worry and terror, which had pursued me like Black Care for three years, was permanently eliminated.

1 *April.* 'Glory of glories! Miss Snowball Jackson Diable, alias Mrs. Tiger Tomcat, hatched precisely one kitten today! It is an image of its father, Mr. Tiger Tomcat. In the Geyser Box! The kitten's name is Epaminondas Alcibiades Pentacosiomedimni. It is awful cunning.'

17 *April.* 'Fished all day in West Hartford with Rich Hubbard. We caught 15 bullheads and three eels. One or two of the bullheads were a foot long.'

Some difficulties with a prayer-meeting at the High School.

25 *May.* 'We had a boys' meeting in the little German recitation room, as of yore. Jim Reynolds led, and Lou Robinson, Hiram Loomis, Wilson, Dan Bidwell, Shipman Major, Ned Fellowes and some others were present. The meeting was ruined by Dan, who made funny speeches, called Jim "Mr. Goodell," and so forth, throughout the meeting. I spoke and prayed.'

5 *June* 1880. 'I saw the ball game between Company K and the nine made up with Sedgwick pitcher, F.Johnson catcher, W.T.Redfield 1st base, Henry Welch, 2d base,

Rob Way 3d base, Dan Glazier shortstop, Deming left field, Arthur Shipman and later Jim Reynolds right field, and Kong, center-field. Company K came out one run ahead.' 'Hen' Redfield was one of the stars for Company K.

9 *June*. 'Went to Christian Home for supper tonight. Had stacks of fun. C.Abell, Goodnow, Derrick, Josh Allen, Frank and Charles Coolcy, Hooker etc. were there. Good supper.'

8

REFLEXIONS ON ANIMALS

PERHAPS the surest test of civilization is man's attitude toward animals. Ill treatment of animals is not necessarily the sign of deliberate cruelty in the torturer; it is more often an indication of a defective imagination, an inability to understand. Francis Parkman in *The Oregon Trail* spoke of the cruelty to birds and other animals by the Indians, especially by the Indian children, who showed no remorse or shame after those abominable practices. Many peasants with primitive minds treat animals badly; the paradox is that we call it brutality. Also, the sense of humour in some children needs cultivating; they laugh at insanity, at the sound of a foreign language, at a dog with a can tied to his tail.

Of course, it is possible for children to become over-sentimentalized. This attitude is well indicated by the familiar anecdote of the small boy looking at the picture of Christian martyrs delivered to the lions: 'Oh, look, Mama, that dear little lion in the corner isn't getting anything!' When I was a child, I woke up one night, and wept when I thought of the warm comfort of my bed and my kitten on the hard kitchen oilcloth. In the same way, those who condemn quail, partridge, and duck-shooting are, I think, over-sentimental. The only consistent attitude would be that of the vegetarian to abstain from fish, flesh, and fowl. And even then it would require only a slight stretch of the imagination to sympathize with potatoes which possibly suffer horribly when torn up by the roots.

If it is wicked to shoot quails for the table, then it is more wicked to eat chickens; for one keeps and feeds chickens only to betray them. One might easily work oneself into a frame of mind where one who eats chickens is a traitor and a murderer. After all, the child and men and women are of more importance and value than any animal; there is no sentimentality in the New Testament on this or on any other point. After reminding his audience that God never forgets a sparrow, Our Lord remarked that we are of more value than many sparrows.

When Robert Browning and others said that they would rather die than have any dog or cat suffer in order that they might be relieved from pain, these men of genius were not squarely meeting the issue. What they should have done was to balance their own children against dogs and cats.

Yet as we grow older, we are less and less willing to take the life of any animal wantonly. Why is this? Is it because we know the value of life, is it because toleration—live and let live—is the result of intellectual development, or what is the reason? Recently as we were playing golf, a large, harmless, black snake crawled across the fairway. The caddies were unanimous for death, and the four players for acquittal.

I used to wonder why it was as a small boy that I delighted in shooting and killing birds, any bird, edible or otherwise, for I was not cruel by nature, and could not bear to see any animal ill-treated or in pain. Yet, when I was too small to own a gun, I would get up at dawn, armed with David's implement, and try to kill robins and bluebirds. On the rare occasions when I succeeded, I felt thrills of joy, unshaded by regret. Later, when I owned a gun, it was much the same. It was only in riper years that I never shot except at something that I wanted to eat, or at something predatory. Apart from the pleasure of hunting, which

is instinctive in every boy, I finally found the true explanation; I found it in an early novel by Zona Gale. A girl is out walking with one of 'nature's noblemen,' and when he killed a beautiful bird, she rebuked him sharply, much to his bewilderment, for he was no more conscious of guilt than was Parsifal when he killed the swan. In response to her question, he said that he wanted to see the bird *nearer*. Zona Gale's explanation is the true one. Not only did I feel a thrill when I shot a bird, but another, keener and quite different thrill when I held the dead body in my hand. The bird is an elusive creature, apparently inaccessible; one never has him near enough to examine completely and leisurely; hence the desire to hold him.

Now those were the days before the Kodak; hunting with opera-glass and camera is better for the boy and much better for the birds. Yet that same element of destructiveness characteristic of boys is also characteristic of adults who have matured only bodily. Every deserted building has its windows broken. Small boys and stupid men really do love to smash things. I was impressed when a contractor, who employed thousands of workmen, told me that when his men were engaged in construction work of any kind, work that meant creating and developing something, most of them worked mechanically, slowly and without zeal; but when the order came to demolish a tall building, they worked with enthusiasm—smashing, tearing, destroying.

9

EARLY FRIENDSHIPS, MARK TWAIN, AND BILLIARDS

WHEN my parents in the Spring of 1876 decided to move to Hartford, they unconsciously arranged my marriage, which was to take place nearly seventeen years later. I first met my wife when I was eleven years old.

At the West Middle School in Hartford there was a boy two years older than I whose name was Frank Watson Hubbard. We became friends and there has never been a cloud on our friendship during sixty years.

His father, Langdon Hubbard, was living in Huron County, Michigan, whither he had gone originally from Connecticut as a pioneer, and was engaged in an extensive lumbering business. There were no facilities out there for education; hence he had sent his three children, Frank, Richard, and Annabel to Hartford, where they lived with three maiden aunts, and had entered the West Middle School.

Frank and I became inseparable. We were both fond of outdoor games and especially of shooting. He owned a long, single-barrel, muzzle-loading shotgun, and equipped with this primitive implement, we spent entire Saturdays in the pursuit of robins, meadowlarks, yellowhammers, and other songbirds, which, I hasten to add, we always brought home, cooked, and ate with relish. I remember one winter day, when we were out in the fields and woods, we became very hungry, and made an excellent meal off English sparrows. The wild country over which

we hunted extended from Woodland Street to Talcott Mountain.

The next year when I was twelve, my father allowed me to buy a double-barrelled muzzle-loading shot gun, which I bought from Charlie Shepard for six dollars. My conservative breast crossed by straps holding powderhorn and shotpouch, I thought I resembled Hawkeye.

It was owing to this gun that I became a criminal, sought by the police and by detectives, and that for the first and last time in my life, a price was set on my head. It happened in this way. I was shooting with a schoolmate, George Peters. We became separated in the woods along the banks of Hog River. Suddenly I saw, sweeping around a bend in the stream, a flock of white ducks, which I supposed to be wild. I let them have both barrels, killing two and mortally wounding three. Attracted by the report, George came up, and was overcome with horror. I fully expected him to be envious of my wonderful good luck; but instead of that, he cried, 'What have you done? Those are Mark Twain's prize ducks. If you are caught, he will put you in jail. Run for your life!'

My flush of joy turned to the icy sweat of fear. I slipped around through the woods to Frank Hubbard's house, and told him he was the only friend I had in the world. He advised me to reach home by roundabout ways, and not to come near Hog River for some time. I got home safely.

The next morning I read in the Hartford newspaper a prominently displayed notice from Mark Twain, offering a substantial financial reward for the apprehension of the 'miscreant' who had killed his white ducks. Here I was, a criminal, sought by the police, with a price set on my head. For several months I avoided Hog River and was in terror. Years later, when I became acquainted with Mark Twain, I never dared to tell him of this particular episode; for although he was the world's greatest living humorist, there

were certain subjects to which his sense of humour did not extend.

Mark Twain's house stood on Farmington Avenue, near Forest Street; his neighbours were Harriet Beecher Stowe, Charles Dudley Warner, and William Gillette. His house had been built according to his own ideas, with the kitchen in front, so that the cook and housemaids would not have to run through the living-rooms and hall to see a procession go by. The billiard room was on the top floor and a tiny balcony projected from one of the windows; nearly all dwellings built in the eighteen-seventies had abscesses of that kind. I often used to see Mark Twain standing in his shirt-sleeves on that balcony, the eternal cigar in his mouth and a billiard cue in his hand. While his opponent was playing, Mark would come out for air. Billiards was his only athletic exercise; he always said, 'Never stand up when you can sit down; never sit down when you can lie down.'

However, I frequently saw Mark Twain on the street; for although he was fond of driving with his wife and children in an open carriage, he must have walked down town every clear day, for I saw him often. He was so conspicuous that the jest of G. K. Chesterton applies perfectly. Some admirer said to the Englishman, 'It must be wonderful just to take a walk and have everybody know who you are.' 'Yes,' replied Chesterton, 'and if they don't know, they ask.' The Englishman had been made noticeable by nature; the American by deliberate choice. His dark brown hair was long, and fell in masses around his neck, having apparently received his personal attention. In cold weather, instead of an overcoat, he wore a jacket of sealskin, with the fur side outside; in walking, he had the rolling gait of a sailor. He was distinguishable a long way off. People stopped when he passed them, and remained as if hypnotized, staring after his diminishing figure. Those who had

seen him before found him well worth seeing again; those who had never seen him asked the nearest by-stander (sometimes me) who he was, and their already awakened curiosity received a lift by the answer.

Although the name Mark Twain was familiar to all Americans, he had in those days more notoriety than fame. I do not believe there was anyone in Hartford who knew then what we know now, that he is one of the world's great literary artists. He was a funny man, and people were fond of him because he made them laugh. His most intimate friend was the Reverend Joseph H. Twichell, pastor of the Asylum Avenue Congregational Church; and Mark, though he had lost all religious belief, usually attended church. Mr. Twichell was universally beloved in Hartford for his sincerity and courage.

At church-meetings, held on some weekday night, Mark frequently entertained the audience, which crowded the room every time it was announced that he would speak. I remember on one occasion, as Mr. Twichell preceded him up the stairs leading to the platform, the audience burst into tumultuous applause. Mark, pointing to Twichell's back, called out to the audience, 'He thinks it's for *him*.'

Three of these occasions I remember very well indeed, though none of us knew that we were listening to a man of genius. First, I heard him read in 1876 from the novel just published, *Tom Sawyer*; he chose the episode of Tom's fight with the citified boy. Second, I heard him read from *Huckleberry Finn* from manuscript, some time before the year 1885, when it was published. Third, I heard him recite his own ghost-story *The Golden Arm*, and I remember the shriek of surprised horror that rose from the audience when he reached the climax.

He was the greatest master of the art of public reading then living, though we did not know it. It was an art he studied with infinite pains, and later wrote about with

great detail, telling others who wished to cultivate it of the immense importance of the *pause*. The same scrupulous accuracy that made him so careful of dialect and italics in everything he prepared for publication (I have examined many of his pencilled notes on the margins of his proof-sheets) made him pay the utmost attention to the proper emphasis in reading aloud. He told us in *Tom Sawyer* and elsewhere of his disgust with pulpit-reading of the Bible and of hymns, where no attention was paid to the meaning of the passages.

In the seventies and eighties Mark's favourite poet was Browning; he used to say he could make any so-called obscure passage transparently clear merely by reading it aloud. His daughter Clara allowed me to examine his copies of Browning; they are covered with his pencil marks to indicate how they should be read. In Hartford a club was formed which met regularly to hear him read Browning's poetry. How I wish we had gramophone records!

On 23 February 1887, he wrote in pencil, 'Remark dropped after finishing "Easter Day"—& requested to "write it down."

'One's glimpses & confusions, as one reads Browning, remind me of looking through a telescope (the small sort which you must move with your hand, not clock-work): You toil across dark spaces which are (to your lens) empty; but every now & then a splendor of stars & suns bursts upon you & fills the whole field with flame.'

Here is a letter he wrote, first printed a few years ago by Benjamin De Casseres in a thin volume called *When Huck Finn Went Highbrow*—limited to 125 copies.

HARTFORD, DEC. 2/87

MY DEAR MRS. FOOTE:

Well, people & things do swap places in most unexpected ways in this world. Twenty years ago I was a platform-humorist & you a singer of plaintive Scotch ballads that were full of heart-break &

tears. And now we have changed places. You are platform-humorist (among other things), & I am reader to a Browning class! I can't imagine a completer reversal of roles than this. I hope you find your changes as pleasant as I do mine, and that you are as willing as I to let the thing remain as it is; for I wouldn't trade back for any money.

Now when you come to think of it, wasn't it a curious idea—I mean, for a dozen ladies of (apparently) high intelligence to elect me their Browning-reader? Of course you think I declined—at first; but I didn't. I'm not the declining sort. I would take charge of the constellations if I were asked to do it. All you need in this life is ignorance & confidence; then success is sure. I've been Browning-reader forty-two weeks, now, & my class has never lost a member by desertion. What do you think of that, for a man in a business he *wasn't* brought up to?

I wonder if—in one particular—your experience in your new avocation duplicates mine. For instance, I used to explain Mr. Browning—but the class won't stand that. They say that my reading imparts clear comprehension—& that is a good deal of a compliment, you know; but they say the poetry never gets obscure till I begin to explain it—which is only frank, & that is the softest you can say about it. So I've stopped being expounder, & thrown my heft on the reading. Yes, & with vast results—nearly unbelievable results. I don't wish to flatter anybody, yet I will say this much: put me in the right condition & give me room according to my strength, & I can read Browning so Browning himself can understand it. It sounds like stretching, but it's the cold truth. Moral: don't explain your author; read him right & he explains himself.

I wish you every possible success, & shall be as glad as your own heart to hear that you have won it.

Sincerely your friend

S.L. CLEMENS

It seems strange today that his literary reputation was so long delayed. He would undoubtedly have been more famous if he had not been so funny. Calvin Coolidge, who was Class Humorist on his graduation from Amherst, observed that funny men never got anywhere in politics; he made up his mind he would never be funny again.

Mark in the eighties and even in the nineties was so

generally regarded as a professionally funny man that contemporary critics and historians of American literature ranked him with Josh Billings and Artemus Ward and Petroleum V.Nasby, never where he belonged—with Emerson and Hawthorne.

Yet his humour often had an undertone of either common sense or philosophy or both. I can see him now as I saw him when I was thirteen years old, addressing the graduating class at the West Middle School, saying in his slow drawl, 'Boys and girls, the subject of my remarks today is Methusclah. Methuselah lived to be 969 years old; but what of that? There was nothing doing. He might as well have lived to be a thousand. You boys and girls will see more in the next fifty years than Methuselah saw in his whole lifetime.'

There was probably more universal interest in the personality of Mark Twain than in any other American writer, living or dead. The whole world read him and the whole world loved him. No other writer ever succeeded in making an assumed name so truly a household word. George Eliot and Anatole France had nothing like the range of his reputation nor do they seem so sure of immortality. George Eliot belongs to English literature and Anatole France belongs to French literature; Mark Twain belongs to the world.

Had he lived and died as a pilot on the Mississippi, his personality might have made him a legendary figure; had he succeeded in his mining enterprises in Nevada, he might now be remembered as one of our Western pioneers. It was only by an accident that he became a literary man; and it was only when the colossal force of his mighty genius found its full expression in *Tom Sawyer* and in *Huckleberry Finn* that he was able to produce imperishable masterpieces.

He did everything possible to escape his fate and fame. Had the Civil War not stopped passenger traffic on the

river, he would have continued contentedly as a pilot, for he had reached the summit of his ambition—the pilot was the king of the Mississippi. Had he not failed of becoming a mining millionaire by a few minutes, he would have enjoyed his fortune with his friends on the frontier.

Even as a writer, Mark Twain almost always miscast himself. He thought that *Joan of Arc* was his masterpiece, for he had done his best to make it so. (Barrett Wendell said shrewdly that Shakespeare probably thought his own finest work was *Coriolanus*.) Mark Twain wanted to be a philosopher, but somehow cheerfulness kept breaking in.

The worst case of stage-fright I have ever witnessed happened at Unity Hall one night in the presence of Mark Twain. George W. Cable, from the deep South, a writer quite unlike Erskine Caldwell or William Faulkner, had acquired a national reputation through his novels, *The Grandissimes* and others. He made his first appearance as a lecturer and reader in Hartford, and was brilliantly introduced to the crowded house by Mark Twain. The applause was deafening. Mr. Cable stood up, looked at the audience, and could not even open his mouth. He was petrified by fear. He stood there motionless for what seemed an eternity, and he would have been there yet if Mark Twain had not risen, seized one of Cable's books which was fortunately on the platform, opened it, found a place, thrust it into Cable's hand and told him to read.

The only respect in which I resembled Mark Twain was in my passion for billiards. Unfortunately billiards was inseparably associated with the saloon, where I went seldom and always furtively. But when I was fourteen, Frank Hubbard discovered a man who wished to sell a small billiard table—it had rubber tubes for cushions—but the price was prohibitive, twenty dollars. Our total assets were seventy-five cents. Frank told me that his younger sister, Annabel, had received from her father, on his latest visit, a

present of a twenty-dollar gold piece. He had vainly tried to induce her to part with it, for, as he said, of what possible use could it be to a girl? He made the tactical error of the brother-and-sister *motif*, and when that failed, he attempted stronger measures with even less success. Then he asked me to talk with her, saying 'You are more softhearted than I am.' He thought that while he had exhausted logic and threats, my powers of persuasion might be greater than his; and he thought accurately, for I subsequently persuaded her to become my wife.

I have never forgotten this diplomatic errand. It was Saturday night; pitch-dark and bitterly cold. I went to his front door, while he hid outside, and as she came to the door herself, I placed my face about two inches from hers, and began in tender whispers. I told her I knew how much she thought of that twenty dollars, and how natural it was for her to keep her money, after her brother had spent his; but that I myself felt it would be simply marvellous on her part to make this supreme sacrifice. 'Remember you are not doing it merely for him; my own happiness depends on getting this billiard table. We have no resources. I shall remember your kindness as long as I live.'

I made only one error in this entreaty. I told her we should regard it as a loan. The gentle expression on her face turned for a moment into one of incredulity; this was too much for even a girl to believe; we could no more have repaid that twenty dollars than we could have liquidated the national debt.

Instantly I saw that I was stating something which was not only incredible, but which also chilled the eternal woman's desire to sacrifice herself for a man. I went back to the wind-harp stop, and she whispered, 'Just wait a minute.' She went upstairs and returned with the twenty-dollar gold piece, actually looking almost as radiant as if she were receiving it. I gave her in return something of no

value; and I also told her there was no girl like her in the whole world.

Armed with this twenty dollars, we hired an expressman to transfer the table from the place of purchase to my house, we agreeing to pay seventy-five cents. He asked for more after the somewhat difficult move was made, but we had wisely made our contract beforehand. The table was hoisted up three flights of stairs, and placed in a small room. It was nearly midnight, too late to play. The next day being Sunday, I was not allowed to touch it, and on Monday morning I had to go to school, from which I was not free till four o'clock. Then we made straight for that billiard table, and played till eleven o'clock, not stopping for the evening meal.

We played for large sums of fictitious money. Frank was taking the regular course in Hannum's Business College, preparatory to a banking career in Michigan. As he was bookkeeper, he secured funds amounting to about thirty thousand dollars, which looked like real money; we divided this into three parts, one for me, one for Frank, and one for a schoolmate, Francis R. Pratt. We used to play billiards for stakes of anywhere from one hundred to five hundred dollars; and I remember on one afternoon Frank Pratt won all my money; whereupon I suggested that we shake dice. I got all my money back and then all of his; he went home penniless and in tears, I having won something like twelve thousand dollars.

If older people had known what we were doing, they would have predicted an evil fate for us in later years. But we had enough excitement gambling with this imitation money to last us for the rest of our lives. I have never played any game for money.

I have played billiards and pocket billards (pool) all my life and regard it as the best of indoor games. It seems strange to me that when we have taken so many sports

from England we should have taken billiards from France. The English game of billiards is almost unknown in America and I have never seen an English billiard table in the United States. Even cricket is more popular with Americans than British billiards.

Not only do I enjoy playing, but also there is no indoor game that I have more pleasure and excitement in watching. When Frank Hubbard and I were small boys in Hartford we saw a great match at the Allyn House between the famous French champion Vignaux and Jake Schaefer (father of the present expert) at the beautiful game of cushion caroms. The highest run ever made was 77, by Sexton, but that night Schaefer ran 70. The masters of billiards in those days were Schaefer, Slosson, Sexton, Sutton, and a little later Napoleon Ives, who some believe was the greatest of them all. The excitement of the game, the bad air, the chalk dust were not good for him; and he died of tuberculosis. He was, I believe, the first expert to use a heavy cue. In the twentieth century I saw many great games played by Willie Hoppe, Schaefer the younger, Horemans, Hagenlacher, Walker Cochran, and others. Willie Hoppe has probably had a longer career in the first flight than any other player in history and seems today unbeatable at 18.1. When he was in Michigan in 1937, he was kind enough to come over to our house and play on the worst table he had ever seen. On the same day he enjoyed golf much more. Like many men who have reached the top in any form of sport, he is a very interesting person, modest and unassuming, full of good talk.

I wish the cushion carom game might be revived. Long runs are sometimes monotonous; long runs are impossible in cushion caroms, and every shot is interesting.

Watching pocket billiards I find equally exciting. I attend the championship matches every year when they are held in New York. Greenleaf, Caras, Ponzi, Rudolph, and

others give me continuous thrills. Four hours of this spectacle seem like four minutes.

The champion billiard player, like the concert pianist (and the poet), is born and not made. Continuous practice is essential; but such co-ordination cannot possibly be acquired. I asked Willie Hoppe about this and he said all the practice in the world and from early childhood to maturity could not by itself make a champion.

The most famous men of letters whose sole recreation was billiards were Herbert Spencer and Mark Twain. I should like to have seen a match between them. Spencer I believe swore only once in his life; but the anecdote about his loss of a game to a young man is a classic. His billiard cue is preserved as a sacred relic in London. He was not devoid of humour; for when asked why he would not marry, he replied he was willing to marry any suitable woman. Accordingly they brought a woman to him saying she had a great mind; and left them together for several hours. Spencer said she wouldn't do at all. 'Instead of having a great mind, she has a small mind in constant activity.'