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## MARK TWAIN ON THE UPPER MISSISSIPPI

In the fall of 1874 William Dean Howells, then editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, importuned Mark Twain for something to put into the columns of that periodical for the coming year. Twain at first demurred, but later informed Howells that a mutual friend, the Reverend Joseph H. Twichell, had suggested that his early experiences as a pilot on the Mississippi would be "a virgin subject to hurl into a magazine!"<sup>1</sup> Acting upon this hint Twain sent an experimental paper to the editor of the *Atlantic*. Howells was enraptured and begged for more. The result was the series of papers printed monthly from January to June and in August of 1875 under the caption, "Old Times on the Mississippi." Thus it is interesting to note that neither the conception of nor the early stimulus for one of Mark Twain's greatest books was original with the author.

It was a labor of love, this setting down on paper the experiences of a cub pilot on the Father of Waters before the Civil War marked the end of the steamboating era. But Mark Twain was not content with mining in the treasure trove of reminiscence. He wished to revisit the great river, to write a book about it, to perpetuate in so far as he was able its history, its multiplicity of existence, its captivation. As early as 1875 he had urged Howells to accompany him on an exploratory trip, but Howells found the press of

<sup>1</sup>Quoted by Albert Bigelow Paine, in *Mark Twain, A Biography*, 2: 531 (New York and London, Harper and Brothers, 1912).

affairs too exacting.<sup>2</sup> Delay followed delay, and it was not until April, 1882, that the desire was finally realized. Twain's companions then were his publisher, James R. Osgood, and a Hartford stenographer, Roswell Phelps.<sup>3</sup>

The plan of the party was to travel by rail to St. Louis, then to transfer to a steamer and descend the river as far as New Orleans. After a brief visit there, including a talk with Joel Chandler Harris (whom Twain had futilely tried to induce to accompany him on a lecture tour), they were to ascend the Mississippi as far as St. Paul, the terminus of their trip. Originally Twain had intended to travel incognito, hoping by that method to observe the better and to gather the necessary information. He even went to the trouble of inventing an alias, C. L. Samuel, but found that neither the pseudonym nor his own reticence was a satisfactory disguise.<sup>4</sup> When he reached St. Paul he dropped both.

For a large part of the journey Twain was very happy. Besides renewing old acquaintances en route he stopped off at Hannibal, his boyhood home, and lingered there for three days in a kind of sentimental haze. But soon after, the weariness incident to a long trip of any kind began to tell on him, and even though he had never seen the upper river he commenced to show petulant irritation. Writing to his wife from Quincy on May 17, he admitted his homesickness and his fatigue; particularly he spoke of "this hideous trip to St. Paul."<sup>5</sup> The great sweep of the channel, however, still exerted a fascination over the old riverman, and he could not resist penning a tribute to the color that engulfed him. "The water above Dubuque is olive green, beautiful and semi-transparent with the sun on it. Upper Mississippi the home of superb sunsets." Nor was he unimpressed by the famous valley as his boat, the "Minneapolis," steamed

<sup>2</sup> Paine, *Mark Twain*, 2: 532.

<sup>3</sup> Paine, *Mark Twain*, 2: 735.

<sup>4</sup> Paine, ed., *Mark Twain's Letters*, 1: 417 (New York and London, Harper and Brothers, 1917).

<sup>5</sup> Paine, *Mark Twain*, 2: 740; Twain, *Letters*, 1: 419.

toward the Falls of St. Anthony. He commented later on the exquisite beauty of the bluffs above St. Paul:

Where the rough broken turreted rocks stand up against a sky above the steep verdant slope, they are inexpressibly rich and mellow in color — soft dark brown mingled with dull green — the very place to make an artist worship. Remind one of the old houses in Spanish New Orleans.

But even the scenery did not make Mark Twain forget his perennial interest, humanity, and he has left in his notebook a graphic picture of an immigrant family, impoverished and lonely:

Wretched poor family on boat going to the frontier — man on deck with wagon; woman and several little children allowed in cabin for charity's sake. They slept on sofas and floor in glare of lamps and without covering, must have frozen last night.

Perhaps these very immigrants recalled to the old pilot the days when the river teemed with life and when steamboat captains had difficulty in stowing away the cargoes that awaited them everywhere. How different things were in 1882! Empty landings greeted the traveler and the whistle of the arriving vessel produced no thunderous reception. "The romance of boating is gone now," Twain wrote sadly in his journal. "In Hannibal the steamboatman is no longer a god."<sup>6</sup>

The humorist arrived in St. Paul at seven o'clock in the morning on Sunday, May 21. Frigid weather welcomed him, the mercury having dropped to thirty-seven degrees, and in Iowa shortly afterward three inches of snow fell. The newspaper brethren were as a whole laconic about his presence, being much more interested in the arrival of the Duke of Manchester and a party of English nobles en route to Manitoba on a land-purchasing expedition. Thus the *Minneapolis Tribune* of May 21 devoted considerable space to the foreign party and seemed much impressed by the fact

<sup>6</sup> Paine, ed., *Mark Twain's Notebook*, 163, 164, 165 (New York and London, Harper and Brothers, 1935).

that the duke had engaged almost a whole floor at the Metropolitan Hotel; Mark Twain's registration in the same hostelry was apparently overlooked. One lone reporter penetrated the meaning of the signature "S. L. Clemens, Hartford" and under the caption "Mark Twain—Not Misrepresented" wrote a short account of his meeting with the humorist.

All along his present Mississippi river tour, Clemens has refused to be interviewed by newspaper men, on the ground that he has been misrepresented so many times, and that newspaper men in general were chronic fabricators. The reporter found the gentleman in bed at a late hour last evening, but discovered that the gentleman is of medium height, with full face, heavy moustache and hair tinged with gray; drawling in speech, but entertaining to the highest degree. No questions were asked, but voluntarily Mr. Clemens gave the desired information.

An explanation of his motives for undertaking the long journey followed. Questioned about St. Paul, Twain had "nothing to say, as he had seen but little of the city, but he is disgusted with yesterday's climate, and will leave to-day for his home in the East."<sup>7</sup> Apparently even fifty years ago the vagaries of Minnesota weather annoyed strangers!

The result of this journey in the spring of 1882 was *Life on the Mississippi* (1883), a book in which were reprinted with some alteration the chapters that had already appeared in the *Atlantic* supplemented by an account of the more recent voyage. Every reader of Mark Twain is aware of the difference between the two halves of the book, the one transfigured by memory, the other factual and specific. As Bernard De Voto well said, "Eight years elapsed between the writing of the two parts and in the second he could not recapture the glamour of the first, which is romance."<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, despite his brief visit to the upper river, the humorist recorded some interesting opinions of Minnesota.

<sup>7</sup> *St. Paul and Minneapolis Pioneer Press*, May 22, 1882.

<sup>8</sup> Bernard De Voto, *Mark Twain's America*, 107 (Chautauqua, New York, 1933).

His first impression was unfavorable, particularly since he had left New Orleans ten days before in the midst of roses and magnolias, only to find the northern river valley ornamented with snow. "In New Orleans we had caught an occasional withering breath from over a crater, apparently; here in St. Paul we caught a frequent benumbing one from over a glacier, apparently."<sup>9</sup> One infers that Twain, Missouri-born and Missouri-bred, preferred the crater.

St. Paul he held to be "a wonderful town."

It is put together in solid blocks of honest brick and stone, and has the air of intending to stay. Its post-office was established thirty-six years ago; and by and by, when the postmaster received a letter, he carried it to Washington, horseback, to inquire what was to be done with it.

In addition to similar facetious remarks Twain larded his account with statistics — statistics of population, of housing, of finance.

St. Paul's strength lies in her commerce — I mean his commerce. He is a manufacturing city, of course — all the cities of that region are — but he is peculiarly strong in the matter of commerce. Last year his jobbing trade amounted to upwards of \$52,000,000.

The city's schools, libraries, and churches, the new capitol then being constructed to replace the one which had recently burned — all these drew the writer's attention. Also, Twain observed,

There is an unusually fine railway station; so large is it, in fact, that it seemed somewhat overdone, in the matter of size, at first; but at the end of a few months it was perceived that the mistake was distinctly the other way. The error is to be corrected.

He noted that St. Paul was still being made, that building material littered the streets and was being transformed into houses as fast as possible. And then he began to philosophize upon the forces that produced civilization. The pioneer of culture, he said, was not the steamboat, nor the railroad, nor the newspaper, nor even the missionary — but whisky!

<sup>9</sup> *Life on the Mississippi*, 583 (Boston, 1883).

The missionary comes after the whiskey—I mean he arrives after the whiskey has arrived; next comes the poor immigrant, with axe and hoe and rifle; next, the trader; next, the miscellaneous rush; next, the gambler, the desperado, the highwayman, and all their kindred in sin of both sexes; and next, the smart chap who has bought up an old grant that covers all the land; this brings the lawyer tribe; the vigilance committee brings the undertaker. All these interests bring the newspaper; the newspaper starts up politics and a railroad; all hands turn to and build a church and a jail,—and behold, civilization is established forever in the land. But whiskey, you see, was the van-leader in this beneficent work. It always is. It was like a foreigner—and excusable in a foreigner—to be ignorant of this great truth, and wander off into astronomy to borrow a symbol. But if he had been conversant with the facts, he would have said,—

Westward the Jug of Empire takes its way.

And so Twain asserted that the arrival of Pierre Parrant, with a jug of civilizing liquid, marked the beginning of a progressive movement the fruition of which is to be found in the capital city of Minnesota.<sup>10</sup>

Of Minneapolis he was similarly observant, pointing out that it was already larger than its neighbor and growing fast, and predicting that the Siamese twins would eventually rival in prestige and numbers the metropolis at the other end of the great waterway, New Orleans. Twain then listed the sawmills, newspapers, schools, and railroads native to Minneapolis and praised the university, then numbering as many as four hundred students, because it was “not confined to enlightening the one sex.”<sup>11</sup> The environs of the Twin Cities also drew the visitor’s eye, and he singled out for terse comment such spots as Fort Snelling, Minnehaha Falls, and White Bear Lake. The book ends with the narration of a legend connected with the last-named place, followed by some remarks on the story characteristic of the humorist.

Mark Twain’s next visit to Minnesota came in 1886 when he chose the Great Lakes route to visit his aged mother,

<sup>10</sup> *Life on the Mississippi*, 584–587. Parrant arrived at Mendota in 1832, and he opened a whisky shop near Fountain Cave in 1838.

<sup>11</sup> *Life on the Mississippi*, 588, 589.

then living with Orion Clemens at Keokuk. Accompanied by his three daughters, Susie, Clara, and Jean,<sup>12</sup> the humorist traveled from Buffalo on the "India," a vessel carrying both passengers and merchandise. He arrived at Duluth on Monday, June 28, stopping at the St. Louis Hotel and again evading prospective interviewers. Indeed, the Duluth press commented on his inaccessibility:

Mark Twain is too old a bird to be caught with chaff, and he managed to avoid all newspaper men yesterday, but we would warn Mr. Clemmens [*sic*] that some enterprising reporter will catch him before he leaves Duluth, even if he has to black his face and sling hash at the Hotel St. Louis for a day.<sup>13</sup>

Apparently no such reporter was found before Twain left the head of the lakes, but upon his arrival in the Twin Cities on June 29 the press had been duly warned and he found further escape impossible. To the Ryan Hotel, where the Clemens family stopped, came emissaries from three Twin City newspapers, each eager to depict the visiting celebrity.

The *St. Paul Daily Globe* published no interview, but instead a rambling account of the humorist and his background. Twain's "lectures and readings for the present are at an end," said the *Globe* for June 30, "either as the whole show or a companion with G. W. Cable of New Orleans. He is now enjoying himself and will not enter the lecture field before next winter." The other local newspapers were more specific. The *Minneapolis Tribune* commented with acerbity on the handwriting of his signature, then described Twain as he lounged around the lobby of the Ryan: "a quiet man of medium height, attired in alligator slippers, a light gray suit, and a pearl colored high hat. In his mouth he had the stem of a corn cob pipe." In reply to questions about his destination Twain said that he had come west partly for the sake of a vacation but chiefly to see his mother, then

<sup>12</sup> So entered on the register of the St. Louis Hotel, according to the *Duluth Tribune* of June 29, 1886.

<sup>13</sup> *Duluth Tribune*, June 29, 1886.

eighty-three, and that he was leaving for Keokuk shortly. The talk then inevitably shifted to his work.

Mr. Clemens said that his intimate acquaintance, "Mark Twain," was now in the publishing business and consequently did not have much time for writing. Still he contemplated building a new book this summer. His contracts to publish other works ran four years ahead, and if issued, his book must be published by some one else. Said he: "I never wrote for the sake of publishing my books. I usually have two or three books on hand in an unfinished state, and I work on the one I am most interested in."<sup>14</sup>

A similar account save for certain discrepancies in detail appeared in the *Pioneer Press* for June 30. "White plug hat, gray, bushy hair, gray moustache, gray suit of clothes and an Arkansas corn cob pipe in his mouth, from which came wreathing curls of smoke" — thus was Mark Twain pictured. The account of the ensuing dialogue between Twain and his interviewer savors a little of the humorist's own writing:

Glad to meet you (puff). I and my family are on their way to Keokuk (puff), Iowa, to visit my mother, and we have chosen the lake route as the most pleasant by which to reach there, (Puff.) The benefit of coming by the lakes was that I got no news. I was (puff) five days in the heart of the United States, and did not see a newspaper. It was refreshing. That's what people take sea (puff) voyages for. To get away from the news; and when the New York Herald (puff) proposed to establish ocean life and news bureaus a thrill (puff) of horror went through the minds of many people, because the (puff) news would then go with them on their voyage.

Commenting on modern journalism, Twain remarked that "the metropolitan journalism of my day is the village journalism of to-day." The *Pioneer Press* account ended with the statement that the Clemens family had spent the preceding day driving around the city and out to Minnehaha Falls and that they were to depart on the "War Eagle" for Keokuk.

<sup>14</sup> *Minneapolis Tribune*, June 30, 1886. Twain at this time was interested in the Charles L. Webster and Company publishing firm and in the Paige typesetting machine. The Webster house had just issued General Grant's memoirs, which proved an extremely profitable venture.

Thus ended the second of Mark Twain's visits to the upper river. Despite the numerous packet ships that plied the great waterway in the eighties, traffic on the Mississippi was a far cry from what it had been in its heyday before the Civil War and the era of the railroads. Twain saw a declining medium of trade and a waning of interest in the river per se, but he was obviously impressed by the beauties of the valley, in many ways so different from the broad reaches farther south. Moreover, he envisaged a day when the Twin Cities and New Orleans would be the two termini of a great internal artery; and, if he never mastered the bars and snags north of St. Louis as well as those below the mouth of the Missouri, he at least became familiar with a river system that stretched full two thousand miles, at once dividing and uniting a continent.

Albert Bigelow Paine, Twain's official biographer, recounts an amusing anecdote of his trip from St. Paul to Keokuk. As the "War Eagle" steamed slowly down the Mississippi in the evening of that first day of July, 1886, it encountered a shoal crossing. Soon the leadsman, in reply to the booming of the forward bell, began to chant out the depth. As the water grew shallower the measurement came closer to the famous pseudonym of the vessel's most distinguished passenger. Suddenly the exact figure was reached and the cry "Mark twain" reverberated through the gloom. As the humorist stood on the hurricane deck, no doubt steeped in recollections of a long distant past, the figure of his small daughter Clara emerged from the shadows and called out reprovingly: "Papa, I have hunted all over the boat for you. Don't you know they are calling for you?"<sup>15</sup>

Mark Twain's first two visits to Minnesota were made chiefly as a traveler interested in new country and as a vacationist. But when he saw the upper Mississippi for the last time, in the summer of 1895, he came in the capacity of a

<sup>15</sup> Paine, *Mark Twain*, 3: 845.

public lecturer. A great change had taken place in his personal fortunes in the intervening years. The Webster publishing firm, in which he had invested his own money together with sixty thousand dollars furnished by his wife, had failed in April, 1894, with liabilities of two hundred thousand dollars; and the typesetting machine, which he had backed with all the promoting fervor of a Colonel Sellers, had proved to be far too complicated for daily use.<sup>16</sup> In addition, his health was shaken, and he had become perceptibly grayer. Nevertheless, like Sir Walter Scott over a half century before him, he resolved to shoulder the burdens of the bankrupt company as if they were his own. Twice before, in 1872 and in 1884, when in severe financial straits he had resorted to the lecture platform and had profited handsomely. And so once again he resolved to appear before the public as an entertainer and in this manner liquidate his obligations. He had always had an aversion to the formal lecture; he chose instead to give a series of readings from his own works, relying no doubt on his delivery and his infectious drawl as much as on the material for his effect.<sup>17</sup> In the spring of 1895, consequently, he arranged with Major J. B. Pond for an extensive lecture tour, one which was to take him not merely across the United States but around the world as well. It was in the course of this tour that he appeared before audiences in Duluth, Minneapolis, and St. Paul.

Once more Twain chose the Great Lakes route westward, embarking at Cleveland on the steamer "North West." He reached Duluth late on Monday, July 22, so late indeed that his audience in the First Methodist Church was kept waiting over an hour. The Duluth papers had printed various comments in anticipation of his coming, largely quotations from eastern journals relative to his platform behavior and to his readings. Proclaiming Mark Twain as "prob-

<sup>16</sup> Paine, *Mark Twain*, 3: 969, 984.

<sup>17</sup> Paine, *Mark Twain*, 2: 783.

ably the greatest of all American humorists," the *Duluth Evening Herald* for July 20 declared:

Few men have ever written whose humor has so many sides, such breadth or reach. His passages provoke the joyous laughter of young and old, of learned and unlearned, and may be read or heard the hundredth time without losing, but rather multiplying in power. Sentences and phrases that seem at first only made for the heartiest laughter yield, at closer view, a sanity and wisdom that is good for the soul. He is, too, a wonderful story-teller, and many will bear testimony that the very humor which has made him known around the world is sometimes swept along like the debris of a freshet by the current of his fascinating narrative. As a reader and speaker Mr. Clemens is utterly outside and beyond the reach of all conventional rule. But coming from his own lips his lines gather and convey innumerable new and charming significances.

The *News Tribune* for July 21 described Twain's entrance upon the stage.

The look upon his own features suggests that he has mislaid his eye-glasses and returned to look for them. Finding a number of persons present, he stops and has a long talk with them, during which they are the most willing listeners in the world. To describe his voice is next to impossible. It is a thoroughly down East nasal tone. There is not a sentence but what conceals a mirth provoker of some kind that jumps out at the most unexpected time and place.

Later Twain's awkwardness of gait, his homely language, and his peculiar drawl were remarked, as well as his facial inflexibility while recounting his inimitable stories. In an advertisement for his Duluth reading, his performance was captioned "Ninety Minutes Chat and Character Sketches." Prices ranged from a dollar to seventy-five and fifty cents a seat.<sup>18</sup>

As the Clemens party, including Mrs. Clemens, Clara Clemens, and Major and Mrs. Pond, reached the Duluth wharf, they spied Deacon R. R. Briggs feverishly awaiting their arrival. Hurrying them off the boat, he bundled them into a hackney coach and drove as fast as possible to the First Methodist Church. There the Reverend J. M. Thoburn escorted Twain to the platform, and the humorist al-

<sup>18</sup> *News Tribune* (Duluth), July 22, 1895.

luded to his delay in the briefest of introductions. "It looked for a time," said he, "as if I would be a few minutes late." The various selections followed without intermission, the story of the jumping frog, his boyhood visit to the office of his father late one night only to be horrified by the presence of a corpse on the floor, and several more anecdotes.<sup>19</sup>

The *Herald* described Twain as "a man of medium height and size with a rather calm and serene looking countenance. He wears an iron grey moustache and a bushy head of decidedly grey hair that makes one believe Twain is trying to rival Paderewski." The lecturer's drawl was also conspicuous. As to the effect of the entertainment, the *Herald* was skeptical. Perhaps, the account intimated, the anticipation had been too great.

The people started in to laugh at once as though they were there for that purpose and thought they ought to. After he had narrated a couple of his yarns, however, they subsided somewhat, and only occasionally broke out again. Twain did not seem to be able to get the audience under his control although he had the opportunity to do it very easily at the beginning.

The ease and informality of Twain's style were readily apparent, but not all his stories impressed one as being really funny. Some fell rather flat.<sup>20</sup>

Almost immediately after his Duluth lecture Mark Twain took the night train for Minneapolis, arriving there Tuesday morning, July 23, and stopping at the West Hotel. He was flooded with offers of entertainment and sight-seeing from loyal Minneapolitans who wished to do their share in feting their famous visitor, but he declined all on the score of ill health. Indeed he spent the time before his evening lecture in bed. The *Minneapolis Tribune* announced Twain's coming with a great flourish and predicted a splendid audience for "the most celebrated and widely known literateur that has ever visited this city in many years." But

<sup>19</sup> *News Tribune*, July 23, 1895.

<sup>20</sup> *Duluth Evening Herald*, July 23, 1895.

to a *Journal* reporter who visited Twain at his room and found him suffering from a carbuncle on his leg, the distinguished visitor did not seem very brilliant.

To the casual observer, as he lay there, running his fingers through his long, curly locks, now almost gray, he was anything but a humorist. On the contrary, he appeared to be a gentleman of great gravity, a statesman or a man of vast business interests. The dark blue eyes are as clear as crystal and the keenest of glances shoots from them whenever he speaks.

To his interviewer Twain spoke about his travels and about his plan to visit the Sandwich Islands, Australia, and Europe before returning to Hartford to spend the balance of his life in peace and quiet. Asked whether his daughter Clara was the one who had claimed she had never read her father's works, Twain smiled:

All my daughters ought to be pretty familiar with my works, seeing that they have edited my manuscript since they were 7 years old. They always sided with me whenever Mrs. Clemens thought that I had used some sentence or word that was a little too strong. But we never stood on that, because Madame was always in the majority, anyway.<sup>21</sup>

A large audience greeted the humorist at the Metropolitan Opera House the same evening, "one of the most brilliant audiences that ever crowded into the Metropolitan and sweltered in the heat of midsummer." Twain began with a short talk on moral courage, illustrating it with the account of his boyhood experience in Hannibal. The jumping frog story and excerpts from *Huckleberry Finn* followed in sequence. According to the *Journal*, the program excited no boisterous merriment but rather a quiet mirth which was often permeated by a rather unorthodox moral. Yet the audience was greatly pleased and felt that the ninety-minute program was too brief. As an encore Twain gave the "Whistling Story" and remained standing and bowing on the rostrum as the people filed out. Following the reading

<sup>21</sup> *Minneapolis Tribune*, July 23, 1895; *Minneapolis Journal*, July 23, 1895.

Twain was the guest of the Minneapolis Press Club and the Commercial Club at the quarters of the latter in the Kasota Block, where he was welcomed by Mayor Robert Pratt and other dignitaries and introduced to a score of the curious. The attendance at the reception was less than had been expected because of a misunderstanding of its semiprivate nature, but one can infer that the guest of honor, in anything but robust health, did not feel slighted. After refreshments had been served, the entertainment broke up and Twain was escorted back to his hotel.<sup>22</sup>

His final platform appearance in Minnesota was made at the People's Church in St. Paul, Wednesday evening, July 24. A reporter from the *St. Paul Dispatch*, finding him at the Ryan Hotel, questioned him about his lecture tour and observed that he was in need of rest and quiet.

His health is not what it once was, and his luck has not been of the best; but even these would be bearable were it not for the carbuncle that insists upon being his *compagnon de voyage*. A man does not fully realize what trouble is until he has entertained a carbuncle or a boil, and at present Mark is having a good deal of experience. Nevertheless, he is in trim to amuse and he is able to do it as few men can.

The *Pioneer Press*, too, praised the lecturer and announced his reading in enthusiastic tones. "An American author of universal fame should draw an American audience, even in summer, with his stories of American life."<sup>23</sup>

The program Wednesday evening included the familiar selections and found a large audience responsive. But the newspaper reports emphasized Twain's changed appearance and analyzed his humor. According to the *Pioneer Press* he seemed visibly older and rather less animated; yet his delivery had lost neither charm nor effect. The account of

<sup>22</sup> *Tribune*, July 24, 1895; *Journal*, July 24, 1895.

<sup>23</sup> *St. Paul Dispatch*, July 24, 1895; *St. Paul Pioneer Press*, July 24, 1895. In the issue of July 23, the *Pioneer Press* announced Twain's appearance and urged its readers to benefit by getting a little of the "philosophy of laughter." Moreover, it said, "Mr. Clemens will teach many new lessons and his musical Yankee drawl will put in fun where printer's ink has failed to make it appear."

his reading concluded with a shrewd discussion of his material.

Twain has never been classed so much with the wits as with the humorists. His function has been rather to say amusing things and put things in grotesque and telling ways than to be brilliant. One seldom finds him brilliant, and one never finds him dull.<sup>24</sup>

In other words, Twain's humor consisted of sudden changes from the commonplace to the ridiculous and of discrepancies of circumstance. Swift, revealing thrusts and the surprise ending so dear to O. Henry brought about his effects.

The Clemens itinerary, after the St. Paul program, included a side trip to Winnipeg and stops at Helena and Butte. On the Pacific coast Major and Mrs. Pond left the party, and Mark Twain, with his wife and daughter Clara, set out on the long trip to the Orient which was to occupy nearly a year. Minnesota never saw him again.

Minnesotans who heard Mark Twain in 1895 must have realized that their entertainer was a tired and ailing man. Harassed by financial pressure and physically weak, he obviously was in no condition to appear at his best on the rostrum. Yet there were few disgruntled murmurs from his auditors. People in general realized his plight and admired the courage which drove him back to the public platform in an effort to recoup his fortunes. Moreover, they liked the man himself and appreciated the pleasure which his books had given to multitudes. Twain, of course, was sincere in his effort to entertain and no doubt endured stonically a great many burdens under which a lesser man would have quailed. But curiously enough he never changed his program throughout his American tour, rarely even altered the sequence in which the selections were given. Instead of novelty he relied on the effects of delivery, of manner and tone.<sup>25</sup> And despite the fact that his material was ex-

<sup>24</sup> *Pioneer Press*, July 25, 1895.

<sup>25</sup> *Dispatch*, July 24, 1895. In the issue for July 20, Twain's complete program appears: "My First Theft," "The Jumping Frog," "Character

tremely familiar his readings were unqualified successes. One concludes, too, that many of the patrons, partly because of Twain's reputation and partly because of the advance advertising, came to laugh at the witticisms of the speaker whether they were really funny or not. A humorist, his fame once established, will seem amusing even when he is talking seriously. Twain's delivery, furthermore, was well calculated to appeal to his audiences, who delighted in the twinkling eye, the slow, pleasing drawl, and the simple language of this Yankee from Missouri. At any rate the lecture trip was highly profitable and gratified the impresario, Major Pond, as much as it satisfied the auditors.

Thus Mark Twain visited Minnesota and the upper river three times, twice as a traveler and once as a platform entertainer. His sojourns on each occasion were brief and probably, in perspective, not especially important. Nevertheless they merit more than the reticence or the casual allusions which are their portion in all the Clemens biographies. For they afford additional evidence of his humor, his alertness, his geniality and shrewdness, and they prove that he formed at least a partial acquaintanceship with the whole of that great river, a large section of which he learned to know in detail through Horace Bixby several years before the Civil War. Wherever Mark Twain went he made friends, and the above evidence suggests that Minnesota was not backward in welcoming one of the most magnetic men who ever trod the public rostrum.

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of the Bluejay," "A Fancy Dress Incident," "Bit Off More than He Could Chaw," and "Tom Sawyer's Crusade." A writer in the *Minneapolis Tribune* of July 24 considered the humorist's alteration of the order of his selections a change of major importance. Twain himself planned to make no change until he reached Australia.



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