

Mark Twain's Golden Years in the Elmira of Yesterday

At the request of many readers, The Sunday Telegram today publishes an abstract of the address Monday by W. Charles Barber at the Mark Twain Festival. An Elmira newspaperman for more than 30 years, Mr. Barber is regarded by many as the city's foremost authority on Samuel L. Clemens' life in Elmira.

By W. Charles Barber

We in Elmira walk in the long shadow of two remarkable men destined by fate to live beyond the grave. They were strikingly different and yet they had a great deal in common.

One was not known too far beyond this county. The other became known and loved wherever men and women yearned to lay down their cares for a few blessed minutes and laugh at their own frailties, learn an honest and homely lesson and look deep into a wonderful man's heart.

One man was saintly, educated, fearless, a doer of good, a man of compassion, understanding and sweetness. The other was a genius blessed with infinite wit, self-educated, fearless, a man with a short temper, a master of invective, sometimes profane, sometimes earthy; a man also of compassion and understanding capable of deep sentiment and unbelievable goodness—a mixture of kindness and cussedness whose like I have never met in real life or in reading. Both were liberals and both knew and loved young people and did their finest work for them.

The bust of one is in the Hall of Fame. A statue of the other stands in Wisner Park. A grateful nation dedicated the bust. Grateful school children gathered pennies and nickels to erect the statue.

ONE MAN was Thomas K. Beecher. The other was his good friend Samuel Langhorne Clemens—Mark Twain. It is in the latter's honor that we are assembled here tonight and it is about him and something of his association with Elmira, his gifts, his accomplishments, his virtues and his flaws that I would like to speak.

Elmira gave to Mark Twain the greatest force for good his adult years knew: Olivia Langdon, the beloved "Livvy" whose frail body held a heart of boundless goodness and love and whose soft voice could ease his heartaches and make itself heard above the clamor of his anger and drown it in a chuckle. Mark Twain, strange, wonderful, terribly human and 10 years her senior was always "Youth" to "Livvy."

'Livvy' and 'Youth' Married Here Feb. 2, 1870

THE STORY of Mark Twain and Olivia Langdon is one of the most beautiful love stories I know. It covered 34 years of their lives and it lives on still in all its charm and tenderness.

In Elmira were passed some of the happiest days Mark Twain ever knew—days of courtship and gaiety and high hopes before sorrow struck and bitterness jostled for a place within him.

Here "Livvy" and "Youth" were married on Feb. 2, 1870.

Here was done some of the finest work to flow from his industrious pen—some of the greatest and most durable writing ever done in America.

Here he rested and reveled in the company of his family.

Here youthful Rudyard Kipling sought him out for an interview so searching and so lively that it persuaded Mark Twain that between them he and Kipling knew everything worth knowing.

Here Mark Twain scattered watering troughs bearing the names of his children along the road leading to Quarry Farm, a sentimental and richly humane act whose beneficiaries had only their eyes to express their thanks.

And here on a shady knoll in Woodlawn he lies beside "Livvy" and three of their four children: Langdon who died in infancy in 1872; Olivia Susan—Susy—who died in 1892 and Jean Lampton who passed on in 1908 two years before her father and four years after her mother. The fourth child, Clara Clemens Sammons, is still alive.

I know no place more laden with memories than this spot in which rests a man who stood lonely in his last years upon the stage of the world's adulation, the place where Mark Twain laid his heart six years before his body went to join it.

Friends of Every Kind, Especially Feline

IN MY MIND is a composite picture of Mark Twain which many sources have helped to paint—Mark Twain the unforgettable man who wrote in a quaint little octagonal study overlooking Elmira, who used to hang out in The Advertiser office, plays billiards at the Rath- bun and various clubs, walk about town, ride in the Langdon carriage and sometimes in a dray, speak to local groups, take part in local affairs and spend hours with friends whose pions were strong enough to keep up with his flights, these friends including the aforementioned Beecher. It was in Beecher's defense that he wrote for The Advertiser a wrathful paragraph signed "Scat" when Beecher was dismissed from the ministerial society. I look upon it as the greatest and certainly the best known editorial The Advertiser

has been privileged to print in the 101 years of its history.

Mark Twain was a most gregarious fellow and his friends, like those any rare and entertaining person inevitably draws to him, were of every kind. A drayman hauling stone from East Hill; a newspaper worker or two; a troupe of billiard-playing cronies; the town's greatest preacher; a young woman who was an excellent listener—and how Mark Twain loved an excellent listener! a dentist who didn't seem to hear or to mind if he did hear the indelicate things Mark Twain said about dentistry when the old-time dental burr laid bare a nerve; the doctors at the Gleason Health Resort; an elderly man who burst into hurricanes of delighted laughter whenever Clemens walked up to see him, while the elderly man's wife, who obviously didn't know an immortal when she saw one, remained indoors and wondered how a man could get so much smoke out of a cigar and so much to make her husband laugh out of an anecdote which she didn't think was very nice. And cats! Whenever I see a cat anywhere near East Hill I wonder if I am in the presence of a pardonably proud descendant of one of the cats Mark Twain carried about on his shoulders and loved and understood and guided through some of their nine lives. Susy said these cats matched her father's gray eyes and gray suits and it's possible that Clemens took cat hairs into consideration in selecting his clothing.

Through the years I have read thousands of words by and about Mark Twain and listened to many thousands more. With some of the things I've heard I could write a book which would deserve to hit the top of the fiction poll within a week.

Susy Clemens Was Best Biographer of Twain

TO AVOID the pitfalls of these overstatements I came to depend heavily on Jervis Langdon whose death in 1952 robbed me of a good and patient friend. He helped me to assay a great deal of ore I dug up in prospecting for Mark Twain nuggets hereabouts. Elmira is heavily in Jervis Langdon's debt. He gave Elmira College the Mark Twain study and he had a plan for the Langdon property at Main and Church Sts.—but this leads to a subject which blood pressure makes it infeasible for me to discuss.

In my belief Mark Twain's most interesting biographer and surely the one dearest to him was not Albert Bigelow Paine—and I mean no disrespect to that gifted and understanding man—but rather Susy Clemens, his observant and forthright daughter. Excerpts from her biography, which makes up in candor what it lacks in grammatical perfection, appear often in Mark Twain's autobiography. Mark Twain was a hero to this little writer-daughter. If a greater compliment could be paid to Mark Twain, I don't know what it would be. She didn't try to gloss him over, didn't try to minimize his faults or magnify his virtues. Neither did he. And neither shall I.

Clemens Fell in Love With Olivia's Picture

IT WAS A strange and gifted man who didn't realize he was a celebrity on the threshold of enduring fame who came to Elmira early in 1868 to court Olivia Langdon. He was 32 years old, the author of the greatest travel book ever written or ever likely to be, a writer whose pen name was a Mississippi River term which meant two fathoms or safe water and a name which had won swift popularity across the United States. He was a lecturer whose slow, soft speech and explosive wit made people everywhere eager to hear him and, having heard him, eager to hear him again and again.

He was a buoyant, uninhibited man of remarkable charm, of medium height with bushy brows, drooping mustache and an abundance of untamed wavy, reddish hair which grew more striking as the years turned it to gray and then to white. He had gray eyes which could be icy and needle sharp one instant and glow with warmth and fun the next. He had the strong, purposeful hands which mark creative men and a step described by Kipling as light as a girl's. A look or a word from him could be convulsively funny. Obviously he was a man who was going to hang out in The Advertiser office, plays billiards at the Rath- bun and various clubs, walk about town, ride in the Langdon carriage and sometimes in a dray, speak to local groups, take part in local affairs and spend hours with friends whose pions were strong enough to keep up with his flights, these friends including the aforementioned Beecher. It was in Beecher's defense that he wrote for The Advertiser a wrathful paragraph signed "Scat" when Beecher was dismissed from the ministerial society. I look upon it as the greatest and certainly the best known editorial The Advertiser

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A Mark Twain Today Would Do Us All Good

THE TIME in which Mark Twain lived was right for his writer's genius and lecturer's gift. His was a leisurely, unsophisticated day while ours is a day of nagging concerns and uncertainties and laughter often forced and too loud to be genuine. His was a day of humor, ours the day of the quickly-forgotten wise-



AT QUARRY FARM—This photograph of Samuel L. Clemens and his faithful servant Louis is one of many in the permanent collections at Elmira's Steele Memorial Library.

crack. The people of his day had not been anesthetized by the bridge table, chilled by cold wars, impoverished by hot ones which engulf the world or seduced by the uneasy peace which follows either kind. They had yet to win a continent. They were ignorant of the sound of the automobile horn or the fury and the unimaginable idiocies of the highway. They knew not the bedlam of the juke box nor the blare and babble which the radio achieves so often to mar their marvels. And they were innocent of what can be brought into the dim, expectant quiet of today's homes including baseball's earnest evangelists who have to show us the way, preach the gospel of blade, razor and lather with chime background and exhort us to seek while yet there is time the sleek-jowled salvation of sharpness. Neither had they heard the mezzos whose chant bids us several times a day to turn our faces toward Milwaukee and give obeisance to its foam.

Mother Fairbanks, Olivia Understanding Critics

BUT HE MADE friends aboard the Quaker City and of their number Langdon and Mrs. Fairbanks were the most influential. Mrs. Fairbanks saw his rich talents and knew their worth for she was a writer and a good one. She it was who spruced up his appearance and moderated the more spectacular torchlight parades of his anger, parades which could light up the country for miles around. She introduced him to restraint and he cultivated the acquaintance to such effect that in deference to her offended taste he tore up at least one of his letters to the newspapers which footed the bill for his trip. It took something potent to persuade him to make Mark Twain destroy his work. He was just as jealous of his words as any other person who puts them on paper. Mrs. Fairbanks—Mother Fairbanks he called her—and a little later Olivia Langdon were the most understanding literary critics he ever had. They prepared him to win and deserve the esteem of William Dean Howells and others whose names counted in the world of letters. To them belongs credit for much of his greatness as a writer. Without them, and particularly without Olivia Langdon, his work would have suffered. They imparted taste and balance and restraint to what he wrote and out and polished the diamond which was his skill. It was a rough jewel when they started the job and they did their work so well that they didn't ruin it. Some "experts" will tell you otherwise. Don't believe 'em.

Hope for Permanent Clemens Display

ELMIRA abounds in memories of Mark Twain and with me, mentees, too. Some day, I hope, the owners of these items will make them available for a permanent display so they can be seen and savored by all our people. I hope that we will dwell upon the goodness which was the real Mark Twain. It was a goodness which Helen Keller could feel through a leather glove. She could neither see nor hear Mark Twain but she knew more about him than many who both saw and heard him. I don't mean that we should glorify Mark Twain or twitter over him. Simply tell the truth. The truth is wonderful where he is concerned. Let's in heaven's name quit trying to figure out ways to disconnect Elmira and Mark Twain. The record is clear. The displays of pictures this festival has brought out into the open and the work the world knows he did here—if some of us don't—should be our proud heritage. Let's talk more about the books written all or in part in Elmira over the more than 30 years between 1871 and 1903. Let's even read or reread some of these wonderful books. This list includes "Roughing It," "Adventures of Tom Sawyer," "Colonel Mulberry Sellers," "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn," "The Prince and the Pauper," "Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court," and "A Dog's son and by him made available

here tonight is one of the finest ever made. It shows Clemens at about the age Crandall last saw him and about the time Waid took his memorable photograph. The head is widely known. A photograph of it appears in the current issue of a Swedish art publication. Youngsters in Sweden, by the way, are brought up on Mark Twain's books. They know all about Tom and Huck and Jim and how a fence in Hannibal, Mo., got whitewashed one day.

Elmira Could Stand More Pride in Twain

IT WILL do us no harm—at least no permanent harm—to become a little sentimental and a lot more proud of Mark Twain's connection with Elmira. Here he did his courting. Here he married an Elmira girl. Here did some of his greatest work. Here he spent many a summer working in a study which still stands and which we are free to enter. Here three of his four children were born. And here "Youth" and "Livvy" and three of their four children are buried. If all this doesn't constitute a substantial claim on Mark Twain and one of which this community should be proud, indeed, I am most greatly in error and ask forgiveness.

Katy Leary, mentioned before, came into the Clemens family in Elmira and lived with its members for many years as friend and confidante. The Clemenses held her in deep affection. She was a motherly soul whose arms cradled the children and whose heart was with them always. Katy Leary was never a servant. She was a member of the family. Wonderful, too, was the Clemens family's relationship with Patrick McAleer, the coachman who joined them at Buffalo and grew old in their company. The affection they showed Katy Leary, McAleer, George whose gifts Clemens praised so lavishly and others were true and deep. Small wonder they idolized the Clemenses.

Newspapermen Recall Talking with Twain

I KNOW few pictures of Mark Twain so fine as the one Roy Waid, then of The Sunday Telegram, snapped at Quarry Farm around 1905. Roy walked up Watercure Hill burdened with a camera half the size of an apartment refrigerator and found Clemens in his little octagonal study. He posed readily and casually—Mark Twain loved to have his picture taken—his wonderful eyes quizzical and sharp, his eyebrows bristling, his face striking and handsome and loaded with character. Only a few prints of this picture exist. The negatives of it and others Roy took that day were lost in The Telegram fire of 1913.

Ed Rose's Story And Other Anecdotes

THE HEAD of Mark Twain made in 1934 by Ernfred Anderson and by him made available

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beautiful line Mark Twain ever wrote.

Francis R. Parker's Beautiful Epitaph

IN 1938, at the time the shaft Ernfred Anderson designed was dedicated at Woodlawn by Clara Clemens to the memory of her father and her husband, Osip Gabrilowitsch, who was buried at Mark Twain's feet, Francis R. Parker the beloved principal of Elmira Free Academy was inspired to write these beautiful lines:

A granite shaft two fathoms high—
Fitting mark 'neath which to lie.
Echoes of laughter, boyish pranks,
Grief for loved ones too soon departed,
Sorrow for the world's deep wrongs—
All these will linger round that sacred spot,
Peace to thee, Great Master of irony and wit,
Death hath no sting, the grave no victory,
Thy valiant soul lives ever in our grateful memory.

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