

Life On The Mississippi, Part 7.

Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens)

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by Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens)

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LIFE ON THE MISSISSIPPI

BY MARK TWAIN

Part 7.

Chapter 31 A Thumb-print and What Came of It

WE were approaching Napoleon, Arkansas. So I began to think about my errand there. Time, noonday; and bright and sunny. This was bad--not best, anyway; for mine was not (preferably) a noonday kind of errand. The more I thought, the more that fact pushed itself upon me--now in one form, now in another. Finally, it took the form of a distinct question: is it good common sense to do the errand in daytime, when, by a little sacrifice of comfort and inclination, you can have night for it, and no inquisitive eyes around. This settled it. Plain question and plain answer make the shortest road out of most perplexities.

I got my friends into my stateroom, and said I was sorry to create

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annoyance and disappointment, but that upon reflection it really seemed best that we put our luggage ashore and stop over at Napoleon. Their disapproval was prompt and loud; their language mutinous. Their main argument was one which has always been the first to come to the surface, in such cases, since the beginning of time: 'But you decided and AGREED to stick to this boat, etc.; as if, having determined to do an unwise thing, one is thereby bound to go ahead and make TWO unwise things of it, by carrying out that determination.

I tried various mollifying tactics upon them, with reasonably good success: under which encouragement, I increased my efforts; and, to show them that I had not created this annoying errand, and was in no way to blame for it, I presently drifted into its history--substantially as follows:

Toward the end of last year, I spent a few months in Munich, Bavaria. In November I was living in Fraulein Dahlweiner's PENSION, 1a, Karlstrasse; but my working quarters were a mile from there, in the house of a widow who supported herself by taking lodgers. She and her two young children used to drop in every morning and talk German to me--by request. One day, during a ramble about the city, I visited one of the two establishments where the Government keeps and watches corpses until the doctors decide that they are permanently dead, and not in a trance state. It was a grisly place, that spacious room. There were thirty-six corpses of adults in sight, stretched on their backs on slightly slanted boards, in three long rows--all of them with wax-white, rigid faces, and all of them wrapped in white shrouds. Along the sides of the room were deep alcoves, like bay windows; and in each of these lay several marble-visaged babes, utterly hidden and buried under banks of fresh flowers, all but their faces and crossed hands. Around a finger of each of these fifty still forms, both great and small, was a ring; and from the ring a wire led to the ceiling, and thence to a bell in a watch-room yonder, where, day and night, a watchman sits always alert and ready to spring to the aid of any of that pallid company who, waking out of death, shall make a movement--for any, even the slightest, movement will twitch the wire and ring that fearful bell. I imagined myself a death-sentinel drowsing there alone, far in the dragging watches of some wailing, gusty night, and having in a twinkling all my body stricken to quivering jelly by the sudden clamor of that awful summons! So I inquired about this thing; asked what resulted usually? if the watchman died, and the restored corpse came and did what it could to make his last moments easy. But I was rebuked for trying to feed an idle and frivolous curiosity in so solemn and so mournful a place; and went my way with a humbled crest.

Next morning I was telling the widow my adventure, when she exclaimed--

'Come with me! I have a lodger who shall tell you all you want to know. He has been a night-watchman there.'

He was a living man, but he did not look it. He was abed, and had his head propped high on pillows; his face was wasted and colorless, his deep-sunken eyes were shut; his hand, lying on his breast, was talon-like, it was so bony and long-fingered. The widow began her introduction of me. The man's eyes opened slowly, and glittered wickedly out from the twilight of their caverns; he frowned a black frown; he lifted his lean hand and waved us peremptorily away. But the widow kept straight on, till she had got out the fact that I was a stranger and an American. The man's face changed at once; brightened, became even eager--and the

next moment he and I were alone together.

I opened up in cast-iron German; he responded in quite flexible English; thereafter we gave the German language a permanent rest.

This consumptive and I became good friends. I visited him every day, and we talked about everything. At least, about everything but wives and children. Let anybody's wife or anybody's child be mentioned, and three things always followed: the most gracious and loving and tender light glimmered in the man's eyes for a moment; faded out the next, and in its place came that deadly look which had flamed there the first time I ever saw his lids unclose; thirdly, he ceased from speech, there and then for that day; lay silent, abstracted, and absorbed; apparently heard nothing that I said; took no notice of my good-byes, and plainly did not know, by either sight or hearing, when I left the room.

When I had been this Karl Ritter's daily and sole intimate during two months, he one day said, abruptly--

'I will tell you my story.'

A DYING MAN'S CONFESSION

Then he went on as follows:--

I have never given up, until now. But now I have given up. I am going to die. I made up my mind last night that it must be, and very soon, too. You say you are going to revisit your river, by-and-bye, when you find opportunity. Very well; that, together with a certain strange experience which fell to my lot last night, determines me to tell you my history--for you will see Napoleon, Arkansas; and for my sake you will stop there, and do a certain thing for me--a thing which you will willingly undertake after you shall have heard my narrative.

Let us shorten the story wherever we can, for it will need it, being long. You already know how I came to go to America, and how I came to settle in that lonely region in the South. But you do not know that I had a wife. My wife was young, beautiful, loving, and oh, so divinely good and blameless and gentle! And our little girl was her mother in miniature. It was the happiest of happy households.

One night--it was toward the close of the war--I woke up out of a sodden lethargy, and found myself bound and gagged, and the air tainted with chloroform! I saw two men in the room, and one was saying to the other, in a hoarse whisper, 'I told her I would, if she made a noise, and as for the child--'

The other man interrupted in a low, half-crying voice--

'You said we'd only gag them and rob them, not hurt them; or I wouldn't have come.'

'Shut up your whining; had to change the plan when they waked up; you done all you could to protect them, now let that satisfy you; come, help rummage.'

Both men were masked, and wore coarse, ragged 'nigger' clothes; they had a bull's-eye lantern, and by its light I noticed that the gentler robber had no thumb on his right hand. They rummaged around my poor cabin for a

moment; the head bandit then said, in his stage whisper--

'It's a waste of time--he shall tell where it's hid. Undo his gag, and revive him up.'

The other said--

'All right--provided no clubbing.'

'No clubbing it is, then--provided he keeps still.'

They approached me; just then there was a sound outside; a sound of voices and trampling hoofs; the robbers held their breath and listened; the sounds came slowly nearer and nearer; then came a shout--

'HELLO, the house! Show a light, we want water.'

'The captain's voice, by G--!' said the stage-whispering ruffian, and both robbers fled by the way of the back door, shutting off their bull's-eye as they ran.

The strangers shouted several times more, then rode by--there seemed to be a dozen of the horses--and I heard nothing more.

I struggled, but could not free myself from my bonds. I tried to speak, but the gag was effective; I could not make a sound. I listened for my wife's voice and my child's--listened long and intently, but no sound came from the other end of the room where their bed was. This silence became more and more awful, more and more ominous, every moment. Could you have endured an hour of it, do you think? Pity me, then, who had to endure three. Three hours--? it was three ages! Whenever the clock struck, it seemed as if years had gone by since I had heard it last. All this time I was struggling in my bonds; and at last, about dawn, I got myself free, and rose up and stretched my stiff limbs. I was able to distinguish details pretty well. The floor was littered with things thrown there by the robbers during their search for my savings. The first object that caught my particular attention was a document of mine which I had seen the rougher of the two ruffians glance at and then cast away. It had blood on it! I staggered to the other end of the room. Oh, poor unoffending, helpless ones, there they lay, their troubles ended, mine begun!

Did I appeal to the law--I? Does it quench the pauper's thirst if the King drink for him? Oh, no, no, no--I wanted no impertinent interference of the law. Laws and the gallows could not pay the debt that was owing to me! Let the laws leave the matter in my hands, and have no fears: I would find the debtor and collect the debt. How accomplish this, do you say? How accomplish it, and feel so sure about it, when I had neither seen the robbers' faces, nor heard their natural voices, nor had any idea who they might be? Nevertheless, I WAS sure--quite sure, quite confident. I had a clue--a clue which you would not have valued--a clue which would not have greatly helped even a detective, since he would lack the secret of how to apply it. I shall come to that, presently--you shall see. Let us go on, now, taking things in their due order. There was one circumstance which gave me a slant in a definite direction to begin with: Those two robbers were manifestly soldiers in tramp disguise; and not new to military service, but old in it--regulars, perhaps; they did not acquire their soldierly attitude, gestures, carriage, in a day, nor a month, nor yet in a year. So I

thought, but said nothing. And one of them had said, 'the captain's voice, by G--!'--the one whose life I would have. Two miles away, several regiments were in camp, and two companies of U.S. cavalry. When I learned that Captain Blakely, of Company C had passed our way, that night, with an escort, I said nothing, but in that company I resolved to seek my man. In conversation I studiously and persistently described the robbers as tramps, camp followers; and among this class the people made useless search, none suspecting the soldiers but me.

Working patiently, by night, in my desolated home, I made a disguise for myself out of various odds and ends of clothing; in the nearest village I bought a pair of blue goggles. By-and-bye, when the military camp broke up, and Company C was ordered a hundred miles north, to Napoleon, I secreted my small hoard of money in my belt, and took my departure in the night. When Company C arrived in Napoleon, I was already there. Yes, I was there, with a new trade--fortune-teller. Not to seem partial, I made friends and told fortunes among all the companies garrisoned there; but I gave Company C the great bulk of my attentions. I made myself limitlessly obliging to these particular men; they could ask me no favor, put upon me no risk, which I would decline. I became the willing butt of their jokes; this perfected my popularity; I became a favorite.

I early found a private who lacked a thumb--what joy it was to me! And when I found that he alone, of all the company, had lost a thumb, my last misgiving vanished; I was SURE I was on the right track. This man's name was Kruger, a German. There were nine Germans in the company. I watched, to see who might be his intimates; but he seemed to have no especial intimates. But I was his intimate; and I took care to make the intimacy grow. Sometimes I so hungered for my revenge that I could hardly restrain myself from going on my knees and begging him to point out the man who had murdered my wife and child; but I managed to bridle my tongue. I bided my time, and went on telling fortunes, as opportunity offered.

My apparatus was simple: a little red paint and a bit of white paper. I painted the ball of the client's thumb, took a print of it on the paper, studied it that night, and revealed his fortune to him next day. What was my idea in this nonsense? It was this: When I was a youth, I knew an old Frenchman who had been a prison-keeper for thirty years, and he told me that there was one thing about a person which never changed, from the cradle to the grave--the lines in the ball of the thumb; and he said that these lines were never exactly alike in the thumbs of any two human beings. In these days, we photograph the new criminal, and hang his picture in the Rogues' Gallery for future reference; but that Frenchman, in his day, used to take a print of the ball of a new prisoner's thumb and put that away for future reference. He always said that pictures were no good--future disguises could make them useless; 'The thumb's the only sure thing,' said he; 'you can't disguise that.' And he used to prove his theory, too, on my friends and acquaintances; it always succeeded.

I went on telling fortunes. Every night I shut myself in, all alone, and studied the day's thumb-prints with a magnifying-glass. Imagine the devouring eagerness with which I pored over those mazy red spirals, with that document by my side which bore the right-hand thumb-and-finger-marks of that unknown murderer, printed with the dearest blood--to me--that was ever shed on this earth! And many and many a time I had to repeat the same old disappointed remark, 'will they NEVER correspond!'

But my reward came at last. It was the print of the thumb of the forty-third man of Company C whom I had experimented on--Private Franz Adler. An hour before, I did not know the murderer's name, or voice, or figure, or face, or nationality; but now I knew all these things! I believed I might feel sure; the Frenchman's repeated demonstrations being so good a warranty. Still, there was a way to MAKE sure. I had an impression of Kruger's left thumb. In the morning I took him aside when he was off duty; and when we were out of sight and hearing of witnesses, I said, impressively--

'A part of your fortune is so grave, that I thought it would be better for you if I did not tell it in public. You and another man, whose fortune I was studying last night,--Private Adler,--have been murdering a woman and a child! You are being dogged: within five days both of you will be assassinated.'

He dropped on his knees, frightened out of his wits; and for five minutes he kept pouring out the same set of words, like a demented person, and in the same half-crying way which was one of my memories of that murderous night in my cabin--

'I didn't do it; upon my soul I didn't do it; and I tried to keep HIM from doing it; I did, as God is my witness. He did it alone.'

This was all I wanted. And I tried to get rid of the fool; but no, he clung to me, imploring me to save him from the assassin. He said--

'I have money--ten thousand dollars--hid away, the fruit of loot and thievery; save me--tell me what to do, and you shall have it, every penny. Two-thirds of it is my cousin Adler's; but you can take it all. We hid it when we first came here. But I hid it in a new place yesterday, and have not told him--shall not tell him. I was going to desert, and get away with it all. It is gold, and too heavy to carry when one is running and dodging; but a woman who has been gone over the river two days to prepare my way for me is going to follow me with it; and if I got no chance to describe the hiding-place to her I was going to slip my silver watch into her hand, or send it to her, and she would understand. There's a piece of paper in the back of the case, which tells it all. Here, take the watch--tell me what to do!'

He was trying to press his watch upon me, and was exposing the paper and explaining it to me, when Adler appeared on the scene, about a dozen yards away. I said to poor Kruger--

'Put up your watch, I don't want it. You shan't come to any harm. Go, now; I must tell Adler his fortune. Presently I will tell you how to escape the assassin; meantime I shall have to examine your thumbmark again. Say nothing to Adler about this thing--say nothing to anybody.'

He went away filled with fright and gratitude, poor devil. I told Adler a long fortune--purposely so long that I could not finish it; promised to come to him on guard, that night, and tell him the really important part of it--the tragical part of it, I said--so must be out of reach of eavesdroppers. They always kept a picket-watch outside the town--mere discipline and ceremony--no occasion for it, no enemy around.

Toward midnight I set out, equipped with the countersign, and picked my way toward the lonely region where Adler was to keep his watch. It was so dark that I stumbled right on a dim figure almost before I could get

out a protecting word. The sentinel hailed and I answered, both at the same moment. I added, 'It's only me--the fortune-teller.' Then I slipped to the poor devil's side, and without a word I drove my dirk into his heart! YA WOHL, laughed I, it WAS the tragedy part of his fortune, indeed! As he fell from his horse, he clutched at me, and my blue goggles remained in his hand; and away plunged the beast dragging him, with his foot in the stirrup.

I fled through the woods, and made good my escape, leaving the accusing goggles behind me in that dead man's hand.

This was fifteen or sixteen years ago. Since then I have wandered aimlessly about the earth, sometimes at work, sometimes idle; sometimes with money, sometimes with none; but always tired of life, and wishing it was done, for my mission here was finished, with the act of that night; and the only pleasure, solace, satisfaction I had, in all those tedious years, was in the daily reflection, 'I have killed him!'

Four years ago, my health began to fail. I had wandered into Munich, in my purposeless way. Being out of money, I sought work, and got it; did my duty faithfully about a year, and was then given the berth of night watchman yonder in that dead-house which you visited lately. The place suited my mood. I liked it. I liked being with the dead--liked being alone with them. I used to wander among those rigid corpses, and peer into their austere faces, by the hour. The later the time, the more impressive it was; I preferred the late time. Sometimes I turned the lights low: this gave perspective, you see; and the imagination could play; always, the dim receding ranks of the dead inspired one with weird and fascinating fancies. Two years ago--I had been there a year then--I was sitting all alone in the watch-room, one gusty winter's night, chilled, numb, comfortless; drowsing gradually into unconsciousness; the sobbing of the wind and the slamming of distant shutters falling fainter and fainter upon my dulling ear each moment, when sharp and suddenly that dead-bell rang out a blood-curdling alarum over my head! The shock of it nearly paralyzed me; for it was the first time I had ever heard it.

I gathered myself together and flew to the corpse-room. About midway down the outside rank, a shrouded figure was sitting upright, wagging its head slowly from one side to the other--a grisly spectacle! Its side was toward me. I hurried to it and peered into its face. Heavens, it was Adler!

Can you divine what my first thought was? Put into words, it was this: 'It seems, then, you escaped me once: there will be a different result this time!'

Evidently this creature was suffering unimaginable terrors. Think what it must have been to wake up in the midst of that voiceless hush, and, look out over that grim congregation of the dead! What gratitude shone in his skinny white face when he saw a living form before him! And how the fervency of this mute gratitude was augmented when his eyes fell upon the life-giving cordials which I carried in my hands! Then imagine the horror which came into this pinched face when I put the cordials behind me, and said mockingly--

'Speak up, Franz Adler--call upon these dead. Doubtless they will listen and have pity; but here there is none else that will.'

He tried to speak, but that part of the shroud which bound his jaws, held firm and would not let him. He tried to lift imploring hands, but they were crossed upon his breast and tied. I said--

'Shout, Franz Adler; make the sleepers in the distant streets hear you and bring help. Shout--and lose no time, for there is little to lose. What, you cannot? That is a pity; but it is no matter--it does not always bring help. When you and your cousin murdered a helpless woman and child in a cabin in Arkansas--my wife, it was, and my child!--they shrieked for help, you remember; but it did no good; you remember that it did no good, is it not so? Your teeth chatter--then why cannot you shout? Loosen the bandages with your hands--then you can. Ah, I see--your hands are tied, they cannot aid you. How strangely things repeat themselves, after long years; for MY hands were tied, that night, you remember? Yes, tied much as yours are now--how odd that is. I could not pull free. It did not occur to you to untie me; it does not occur to me to untie you. Sh--! there's a late footstep. It is coming this way. Hark, how near it is! One can count the footfalls--one--two--three. There--it is just outside. Now is the time! Shout, man, shout!--it is the one sole chance between you and eternity! Ah, you see you have delayed too long--it is gone by. There--it is dying out. It is gone! Think of it--reflect upon it--you have heard a human footstep for the last time. How curious it must be, to listen to so common a sound as that, and know that one will never hear the fellow to it again.'

Oh, my friend, the agony in that shrouded face was ecstasy to see! I thought of a new torture, and applied it--assisting myself with a trifle of lying invention--

'That poor Kruger tried to save my wife and child, and I did him a grateful good turn for it when the time came. I persuaded him to rob you; and I and a woman helped him to desert, and got him away in safety.' A look as of surprise and triumph shone out dimly through the anguish in my victim's face. I was disturbed, disquieted. I said--

'What, then--didn't he escape?'

A negative shake of the head.

'No? What happened, then?'

The satisfaction in the shrouded face was still plainer. The man tried to mumble out some words--could not succeed; tried to express something with his obstructed hands--failed; paused a moment, then feebly tilted his head, in a meaning way, toward the corpse that lay nearest him.

'Dead?' I asked. 'Failed to escape?--caught in the act and shot?'

Negative shake of the head.

'How, then?'

Again the man tried to do something with his hands. I watched closely, but could not guess the intent. I bent over and watched still more intently. He had twisted a thumb around and was weakly punching at his breast with it. 'Ah--stabbed, do you mean?'

Affirmative nod, accompanied by a spectral smile of such peculiar devilishness, that it struck an awakening light through my dull brain,

and I cried--

'Did I stab him, mistaking him for you?--for that stroke was meant for none but you.'

The affirmative nod of the re-dying rascal was as joyous as his failing strength was able to put into its expression.

'O, miserable, miserable me, to slaughter the pitying soul that, stood a friend to my darlings when they were helpless, and would have saved them if he could! miserable, oh, miserable, miserable me!'

I fancied I heard the muffled gurgle of a, mocking laugh. I took my face out of my hands, and saw my enemy sinking back upon his inclined board.

He was a satisfactory long time dying. He had a wonderful vitality, an astonishing constitution. Yes, he was a pleasant long time at it. I got a chair and a newspaper, and sat down by him and read. Occasionally I took a sip of brandy. This was necessary, on account of the cold. But I did it partly because I saw, that along at first, whenever I reached for the bottle, he thought I was going to give him some. I read aloud: mainly imaginary accounts of people snatched from the grave's threshold and restored to life and vigor by a few spoonfuls of liquor and a warm bath. Yes, he had a long, hard death of it--three hours and six minutes, from the time he rang his bell.

It is believed that in all these eighteen years that have elapsed since the institution of the corpse-watch, no shrouded occupant of the Bavarian dead-houses has ever rung its bell. Well, it is a harmless belief. Let it stand at that.

The chill of that death-room had penetrated my bones. It revived and fastened upon me the disease which had been afflicting me, but which, up to that night, had been steadily disappearing. That man murdered my wife and my child; and in three days hence he will have added me to his list. No matter--God! how delicious the memory of it!--I caught him escaping from his grave, and thrust him back into it.

After that night, I was confined to my bed for a week; but as soon as I could get about, I went to the dead-house books and got the number of the house which Adler had died in. A wretched lodging-house, it was. It was my idea that he would naturally have gotten hold of Kruger's effects, being his cousin; and I wanted to get Kruger's watch, if I could. But while I was sick, Adler's things had been sold and scattered, all except a few old letters, and some odds and ends of no value. However, through those letters, I traced out a son of Kruger's, the only relative left. He is a man of thirty now, a shoemaker by trade, and living at No. 14 Konigstrasse, Mannheim--widower, with several small children. Without explaining to him why, I have furnished two-thirds of his support, ever since.

Now, as to that watch--see how strangely things happen! I traced it around and about Germany for more than a year, at considerable cost in money and vexation; and at last I got it. Got it, and was unspeakably glad; opened it, and found nothing in it! Why, I might have known that that bit of paper was not going to stay there all this time. Of course I gave up that ten thousand dollars then; gave it up, and dropped it out of my mind: and most sorrowfully, for I had wanted it for Kruger's son.

Last night, when I consented at last that I must die, I began to make ready. I proceeded to burn all useless papers; and sure enough, from a batch of Adler's, not previously examined with thoroughness, out dropped that long-desired scrap! I recognized it in a moment. Here it is--I will translate it:

'Brick livery stable, stone foundation, middle of town, corner of Orleans and Market. Corner toward Court-house. Third stone, fourth row. Stick notice there, saying how many are to come.'

There--take it, and preserve it. Kruger explained that that stone was removable; and that it was in the north wall of the foundation, fourth row from the top, and third stone from the west. The money is secreted behind it. He said the closing sentence was a blind, to mislead in case the paper should fall into wrong hands. It probably performed that office for Adler.

Now I want to beg that when you make your intended journey down the river, you will hunt out that hidden money, and send it to Adam Kruger, care of the Mannheim address which I have mentioned. It will make a rich man of him, and I shall sleep the sounder in my grave for knowing that I have done what I could for the son of the man who tried to save my wife and child--albeit my hand ignorantly struck him down, whereas the impulse of my heart would have been to shield and serve him.

Chapter 32 The Disposal of a Bonanza

'SUCH was Ritter's narrative,' said I to my two friends. There was a profound and impressive silence, which lasted a considerable time; then both men broke into a fusillade of exciting and admiring ejaculations over the strange incidents of the tale; and this, along with a rattling fire of questions, was kept up until all hands were about out of breath. Then my friends began to cool down, and draw off, under shelter of occasional volleys, into silence and abysmal reverie. For ten minutes now, there was stillness. Then Rogers said dreamily--

'Ten thousand dollars.'

Adding, after a considerable pause--

'Ten thousand. It is a heap of money.'

Presently the poet inquired--

'Are you going to send it to him right away?'

'Yes,' I said. 'It is a queer question.'

No reply. After a little, Rogers asked, hesitatingly:

'ALL of it?--That is--I mean--'

'Certainly, all of it.'

I was going to say more, but stopped--was stopped by a train of thought

which started up in me. Thompson spoke, but my mind was absent, and I did not catch what he said. But I heard Rogers answer--

'Yes, it seems so to me. It ought to be quite sufficient; for I don't see that he has done anything.'

Presently the poet said--

'When you come to look at it, it is more than sufficient. Just look at it--five thousand dollars! Why, he couldn't spend it in a lifetime! And it would injure him, too; perhaps ruin him--you want to look at that. In a little while he would throw his last away, shut up his shop, maybe take to drinking, maltreat his motherless children, drift into other evil courses, go steadily from bad to worse--'

'Yes, that's it,' interrupted Rogers, fervently, 'I've seen it a hundred times--yes, more than a hundred. You put money into the hands of a man like that, if you want to destroy him, that's all; just put money into his hands, it's all you've got to do; and if it don't pull him down, and take all the usefulness out of him, and all the self-respect and everything, then I don't know human nature--ain't that so, Thompson? And even if we were to give him a THIRD of it; why, in less than six months--'

'Less than six WEEKS, you'd better say!' said I, warming up and breaking in. 'Unless he had that three thousand dollars in safe hands where he couldn't touch it, he would no more last you six weeks than--'

'Of COURSE he wouldn't,' said Thompson; 'I've edited books for that kind of people; and the moment they get their hands on the royalty--maybe it's three thousand, maybe it's two thousand--'

'What business has that shoemaker with two thousand dollars, I should like to know?' broke in Rogers, earnestly. 'A man perhaps perfectly contented now, there in Mannheim, surrounded by his own class, eating his bread with the appetite which laborious industry alone can give, enjoying his humble life, honest, upright, pure in heart; and BLEST!--yes, I say blest! blest above all the myriads that go in silk attire and walk the empty artificial round of social folly--but just you put that temptation before him once! just you lay fifteen hundred dollars before a man like that, and say--'

'Fifteen hundred devils!' cried I, 'FIVE hundred would rot his principles, paralyze his industry, drag him to the rumshop, thence to the gutter, thence to the almshouse, thence to ----'

'WHY put upon ourselves this crime, gentlemen?' interrupted the poet earnestly and appealingly. 'He is happy where he is, and AS he is. Every sentiment of honor, every sentiment of charity, every sentiment of high and sacred benevolence warns us, beseeches us, commands us to leave him undisturbed. That is real friendship, that is true friendship. We could follow other courses that would be more showy; but none that would be so truly kind and wise, depend upon it.'

After some further talk, it became evident that each of us, down in his heart, felt some misgivings over this settlement of the matter. It was manifest that we all felt that we ought to send the poor shoemaker SOMETHING. There was long and thoughtful discussion of this point; and we finally decided to send him a chromo.

Well, now that everything seemed to be arranged satisfactorily to everybody concerned, a new trouble broke out: it transpired that these two men were expecting to share equally in the money with me. That was not my idea. I said that if they got half of it between them they might consider themselves lucky. Rogers said--

'Who would have had ANY if it hadn't been for me? I flung out the first hint--but for that it would all have gone to the shoemaker.'

Thompson said that he was thinking of the thing himself at the very moment that Rogers had originally spoken.

I retorted that the idea would have occurred to me plenty soon enough, and without anybody's help. I was slow about thinking, maybe, but I was sure.

This matter warmed up into a quarrel; then into a fight; and each man got pretty badly battered. As soon as I had got myself mended up after a fashion, I ascended to the hurricane deck in a pretty sour humor. I found Captain McCord there, and said, as pleasantly as my humor would permit--

'I have come to say good-bye, captain. I wish to go ashore at Napoleon.'

'Go ashore where?'

'Napoleon.'

The captain laughed; but seeing that I was not in a jovial mood, stopped that and said--

'But are you serious?'

'Serious? I certainly am.'

The captain glanced up at the pilot-house and said--

'He wants to get off at Napoleon!'

'Napoleon?'

'That's what he says.'

'Great Caesar's ghost!'

Uncle Mumford approached along the deck. The captain said--

'Uncle, here's a friend of yours wants to get off at Napoleon!'

'Well, by ---?'

I said--

'Come, what is all this about? Can't a man go ashore at Napoleon if he wants to?'

'Why, hang it, don't you know? There ISN'T any Napoleon any more.'

Hasn't been for years and years. The Arkansas River burst through it, tore it all to rags, and emptied it into the Mississippi!

'Carried the WHOLE town away?-banks, churches, jails, newspaper-offices, court-house, theater, fire department, livery stable EVERYTHING ?'

'Everything. just a fifteen-minute job.' or such a matter. Didn't leave hide nor hair, shred nor shingle of it, except the fag-end of a shanty and one brick chimney. This boat is paddling along right now, where the dead-center of that town used to be; yonder is the brick chimney-all that's left of Napoleon. These dense woods on the right used to be a mile back of the town. Take a look behind you--up-stream--now you begin to recognize this country, don't you?'

'Yes, I do recognize it now. It is the most wonderful thing I ever heard of; by a long shot the most wonderful--and unexpected.'

Mr. Thompson and Mr. Rogers had arrived, meantime, with satchels and umbrellas, and had silently listened to the captain's news. Thompson put a half-dollar in my hand and said softly--

'For my share of the chromo.'

Rogers followed suit.

Yes, it was an astonishing thing to see the Mississippi rolling between unpeopled shores and straight over the spot where I used to see a good big self-complacent town twenty years ago. Town that was county-seat of a great and important county; town with a big United States marine hospital; town of innumerable fights--an inquest every day; town where I had used to know the prettiest girl, and the most accomplished in the whole Mississippi Valley; town where we were handed the first printed news of the 'Pennsylvania's' mournful disaster a quarter of a century ago; a town no more--swallowed up, vanished, gone to feed the fishes; nothing left but a fragment of a shanty and a crumbling brick chimney!

Chapter 33 Refreshments and Ethics

IN regard to Island 74, which is situated not far from the former Napoleon, a freak of the river here has sorely perplexed the laws of men and made them a vanity and a jest. When the State of Arkansas was chartered, she controlled 'to the center of the river'--a most unstable line. The State of Mississippi claimed 'to the channel'--another shifty and unstable line. No. 74 belonged to Arkansas. By and by a cut-off threw this big island out of Arkansas, and yet not within Mississippi. 'Middle of the river' on one side of it, 'channel' on the other. That is as I understand the problem. Whether I have got the details right or wrong, this FACT remains: that here is this big and exceedingly valuable island of four thousand acres, thrust out in the cold, and belonging to neither the one State nor the other; paying taxes to neither, owing allegiance to neither. One man owns the whole island, and of right is 'the man without a country.'

Island 92 belongs to Arkansas. The river moved it over and joined it to Mississippi. A chap established a whiskey shop there, without a Mississippi license, and enriched himself upon Mississippi custom under

Arkansas protection (where no license was in those days required).

We glided steadily down the river in the usual privacy--steamboat or other moving thing seldom seen. Scenery as always: stretch upon stretch of almost unbroken forest, on both sides of the river; soundless solitude. Here and there a cabin or two, standing in small openings on the gray and grassless banks--cabins which had formerly stood a quarter or half-mile farther to the front, and gradually been pulled farther and farther back as the shores caved in. As at Pilcher's Point, for instance, where the cabins had been moved back three hundred yards in three months, so we were told; but the caving banks had already caught up with them, and they were being conveyed rearward once more.

Napoleon had but small opinion of Greenville, Mississippi, in the old times; but behold, Napoleon is gone to the cat-fishes, and here is Greenville full of life and activity, and making a considerable flourish in the Valley; having three thousand inhabitants, it is said, and doing a gross trade of \$2,500,000 annually. A growing town.

There was much talk on the boat about the Calhoun Land Company, an enterprise which is expected to work wholesome results. Colonel Calhoun, a grandson of the statesman, went to Boston and formed a syndicate which purchased a large tract of land on the river, in Chicot County, Arkansas--some ten thousand acres--for cotton-growing. The purpose is to work on a cash basis: buy at first hands, and handle their own product; supply their negro laborers with provisions and necessaries at a trifling profit, say 8 or 10 per cent.; furnish them comfortable quarters, etc., and encourage them to save money and remain on the place. If this proves a financial success, as seems quite certain, they propose to establish a banking-house in Greenville, and lend money at an unburdensome rate of interest--6 per cent. is spoken of.

The trouble heretofore has been--I am quoting remarks of planters and steamboatmen--that the planters, although owning the land, were without cash capital; had to hypothecate both land and crop to carry on the business. Consequently, the commission dealer who furnishes the money takes some risk and demands big interest--usually 10 per cent., and 2{half} per cent. for negotiating the loan. The planter has also to buy his supplies through the same dealer, paying commissions and profits. Then when he ships his crop, the dealer adds his commissions, insurance, etc. So, taking it by and large, and first and last, the dealer's share of that crop is about 25 per cent. '{footnote ['But what can the State do where the people are under subjection to rates of interest ranging from 18 to 30 per cent., and are also under the necessity of purchasing their crops in advance even of planting, at these rates, for the privilege of purchasing all their supplies at 100 per cent. profit?']--EDWARD ATKINSON.]}

A cotton-planter's estimate of the average margin of profit on planting, in his section: One man and mule will raise ten acres of cotton, giving ten bales cotton, worth, say, \$500; cost of producing, say \$350; net profit, \$150, or \$15 per acre. There is also a profit now from the cotton-seed, which formerly had little value--none where much transportation was necessary. In sixteen hundred pounds crude cotton four hundred are lint, worth, say, ten cents a pound; and twelve hundred pounds of seed, worth \$12 or \$13 per ton. Maybe in future even the stems will not be thrown away. Mr. Edward Atkinson says that for each bale of cotton there are fifteen hundred pounds of stems, and that these are very rich in phosphate of lime and potash; that when ground and

mixed with ensilage or cotton-seed meal (which is too rich for use as fodder in large quantities), the stem mixture makes a superior food, rich in all the elements needed for the production of milk, meat, and bone. Heretofore the stems have been considered a nuisance.

Complaint is made that the planter remains grouty toward the former slave, since the war; will have nothing but a chill business relation with him, no sentiment permitted to intrude, will not keep a 'store' himself, and supply the negro's wants and thus protect the negro's pocket and make him able and willing to stay on the place and an advantage to him to do it, but lets that privilege to some thrifty Israelite, who encourages the thoughtless negro and wife to buy all sorts of things which they could do without--buy on credit, at big prices, month after month, credit based on the negro's share of the growing crop; and at the end of the season, the negro's share belongs to the Israelite, the negro is in debt besides, is discouraged, dissatisfied, restless, and both he and the planter are injured; for he will take steamboat and migrate, and the planter must get a stranger in his place who does not know him, does not care for him, will fatten the Israelite a season, and follow his predecessor per steamboat.

It is hoped that the Calhoun Company will show, by its humane and protective treatment of its laborers, that its method is the most profitable for both planter and negro; and it is believed that a general adoption of that method will then follow.

And where so many are saying their say, shall not the barkeeper testify? He is thoughtful, observant, never drinks; endeavors to earn his salary, and WOULD earn it if there were custom enough. He says the people along here in Mississippi and Louisiana will send up the river to buy vegetables rather than raise them, and they will come aboard at the landings and buy fruits of the barkeeper. Thinks they 'don't know anything but cotton;' believes they don't know how to raise vegetables and fruit--'at least the most of them.' Says 'a nigger will go to H for a watermelon' ('H' is all I find in the stenographer's report--means Halifax probably, though that seems a good way to go for a watermelon). Barkeeper buys watermelons for five cents up the river, brings them down and sells them for fifty. 'Why does he mix such elaborate and picturesque drinks for the nigger hands on the boat?' Because they won't have any other. 'They want a big drink; don't make any difference what you make it of, they want the worth of their money. You give a nigger a plain gill of half-a-dollar brandy for five cents--will he touch it? No. Ain't size enough to it. But you put up a pint of all kinds of worthless rubbish, and heave in some red stuff to make it beautiful--red's the main thing--and he wouldn't put down that glass to go to a circus.' All the bars on this Anchor Line are rented and owned by one firm. They furnish the liquors from their own establishment, and hire the barkeepers 'on salary.' Good liquors? Yes, on some of the boats, where there are the kind of passengers that want it and can pay for it. On the other boats? No. Nobody but the deck hands and firemen to drink it. 'Brandy? Yes, I've got brandy, plenty of it; but you don't want any of it unless you've made your will.' It isn't as it used to be in the old times. Then everybody traveled by steamboat, everybody drank, and everybody treated everybody else. 'Now most everybody goes by railroad, and the rest don't drink.' In the old times the barkeeper owned the bar himself, 'and was gay and smarty and talky and all jeweled up, and was the toniest aristocrat on the boat; used to make \$2,000 on a trip. A father who left his son a steamboat bar, left him a fortune. Now he leaves him board and lodging; yes, and washing, if a shirt a trip

will do. Yes, indeed, times are changed. Why, do you know, on the principal line of boats on the Upper Mississippi, they don't have any bar at all! Sounds like poetry, but it's the petrified truth.'

Chapter 34 Tough Yarns

STACK ISLAND. I remembered Stack Island; also Lake Providence, Louisiana--which is the first distinctly Southern-looking town you come to, downward-bound; lies level and low, shade-trees hung with venerable gray beards of Spanish moss; 'restful, pensive, Sunday aspect about the place,' comments Uncle Mumford, with feeling--also with truth.

A Mr. H. furnished some minor details of fact concerning this region which I would have hesitated to believe if I had not known him to be a steamboat mate. He was a passenger of ours, a resident of Arkansas City, and bound to Vicksburg to join his boat, a little Sunflower packet. He was an austere man, and had the reputation of being singularly unworldly, for a river man. Among other things, he said that Arkansas had been injured and kept back by generations of exaggerations concerning the mosquitoes here. One may smile, said he, and turn the matter off as being a small thing; but when you come to look at the effects produced, in the way of discouragement of immigration, and diminished values of property, it was quite the opposite of a small thing, or thing in any wise to be coughed down or sneered at. These mosquitoes had been persistently represented as being formidable and lawless; whereas 'the truth is, they are feeble, insignificant in size, diffident to a fault, sensitive'--and so on, and so on; you would have supposed he was talking about his family. But if he was soft on the Arkansas mosquitoes, he was hard enough on the mosquitoes of Lake Providence to make up for it--'those Lake Providence colossi,' as he finely called them. He said that two of them could whip a dog, and that four of them could hold a man down; and except help come, they would kill him--'butcher him,' as he expressed it. Referred in a sort of casual way--and yet significant way--to 'the fact that the life policy in its simplest form is unknown in Lake Providence--they take out a mosquito policy besides.' He told many remarkable things about those lawless insects. Among others, said he had seen them try to vote. Noticing that this statement seemed to be a good deal of a strain on us, he modified it a little: said he might have been mistaken, as to that particular, but knew he had seen them around the polls 'canvassing.'

There was another passenger--friend of H.'s--who backed up the harsh evidence against those mosquitoes, and detailed some stirring adventures which he had had with them. The stories were pretty sizable, merely pretty sizable; yet Mr. H. was continually interrupting with a cold, inexorable 'Wait--knock off twenty-five per cent. of that; now go on;' or, 'Wait--you are getting that too strong; cut it down, cut it down--you get a leetle too much costumery on to your statements: always dress a fact in tights, never in an ulster;' or, 'Pardon, once more: if you are going to load anything more on to that statement, you want to get a couple of lighters and tow the rest, because it's drawing all the water there is in the river already; stick to facts--just stick to the cold facts; what these gentlemen want for a book is the frozen truth--ain't that so, gentlemen?' He explained privately that it was necessary to watch this man all the time, and keep him within bounds; it would not do to neglect this precaution, as he, Mr. H., 'knew to his sorrow.' Said

he, 'I will not deceive you; he told me such a monstrous lie once, that it swelled my left ear up, and spread it so that I was actually not able to see out around it; it remained so for months, and people came miles to see me fan myself with it.'

Chapter 35 Vicksburg During the Trouble

WE used to plow past the lofty hill-city, Vicksburg, down-stream; but we cannot do that now. A cut-off has made a country town of it, like Osceola, St. Genevieve, and several others. There is currentless water --also a big island--in front of Vicksburg now. You come down the river the other side of the island, then turn and come up to the town; that is, in high water: in low water you can't come up, but must land some distance below it.

Signs and scars still remain, as reminders of Vicksburg's tremendous war experiences; earthworks, trees crippled by the cannon balls, cave-refuges in the clay precipices, etc. The caves did good service during the six weeks' bombardment of the city--May 8 to July 4, 1863. They were used by the non-combatants--mainly by the women and children; not to live in constantly, but to fly to for safety on occasion. They were mere holes, tunnels, driven into the perpendicular clay bank, then branched Y shape, within the hill. Life in Vicksburg, during the six weeks was perhaps--but wait; here are some materials out of which to reproduce it:--

Population, twenty-seven thousand soldiers and three thousand non-combatants; the city utterly cut off from the world--walled solidly in, the frontage by gunboats, the rear by soldiers and batteries; hence, no buying and selling with the outside; no passing to and fro; no God-speeding a parting guest, no welcoming a coming one; no printed acres of world-wide news to be read at breakfast, mornings--a tedious dull absence of such matter, instead; hence, also, no running to see steamboats smoking into view in the distance up or down, and plowing toward the town--for none came, the river lay vacant and undisturbed; no rush and turmoil around the railway station, no struggling over bewildered swarms of passengers by noisy mobs of hackmen--all quiet there; flour two hundred dollars a barrel, sugar thirty, corn ten dollars a bushel, bacon five dollars a pound, rum a hundred dollars a gallon; other things in proportion: consequently, no roar and racket of drays and carriages tearing along the streets; nothing for them to do, among that handful of non-combatants of exhausted means; at three o'clock in the morning, silence; silence so dead that the measured tramp of a sentinel can be heard a seemingly impossible distance; out of hearing of this lonely sound, perhaps the stillness is absolute: all in a moment come ground-shaking thunder-crashes of artillery, the sky is cobwebbed with the crisscrossing red lines streaming from soaring bomb-shells, and a rain of iron fragments descends upon the city; descends upon the empty streets: streets which are not empty a moment later, but mottled with dim figures of frantic women and children scurrying from home and bed toward the cave dungeons--encouraged by the humorous grim soldiery, who shout 'Rats, to your holes!' and laugh.

The cannon-thunder rages, shells scream and crash overhead, the iron rain pours down, one hour, two hours, three, possibly six, then stops; silence follows, but the streets are still empty; the silence continues;

by-and-bye a head projects from a cave here and there and yonder, and reconnoitres, cautiously; the silence still continuing, bodies follow heads, and jaded, half smothered creatures group themselves about, stretch their cramped limbs, draw in deep draughts of the grateful fresh air, gossip with the neighbors from the next cave; maybe straggle off home presently, or take a lounge through the town, if the stillness continues; and will scurry to the holes again, by-and-bye, when the war-tempest breaks forth once more.

There being but three thousand of these cave-dwellers--merely the population of a village--would they not come to know each other, after a week or two, and familiarly; insomuch that the fortunate or unfortunate experiences of one would be of interest to all?

Those are the materials furnished by history. From them might not almost anybody reproduce for himself the life of that time in Vicksburg? Could you, who did not experience it, come nearer to reproducing it to the imagination of another non-participant than could a Vicksburger who did experience it? It seems impossible; and yet there are reasons why it might not really be. When one makes his first voyage in a ship, it is an experience which multitudinously bristles with striking novelties; novelties which are in such sharp contrast with all this person's former experiences that they take a seemingly deathless grip upon his imagination and memory. By tongue or pen he can make a landsman live that strange and stirring voyage over with him; make him see it all and feel it all. But if he wait? If he make ten voyages in succession--what then? Why, the thing has lost color, snap, surprise; and has become commonplace. The man would have nothing to tell that would quicken a landsman's pulse.

Years ago, I talked with a couple of the Vicksburg non-combatants--a man and his wife. Left to tell their story in their own way, those people told it without fire, almost without interest.

A week of their wonderful life there would have made their tongues eloquent for ever perhaps; but they had six weeks of it, and that wore the novelty all out; they got used to being bomb-shelled out of home and into the ground; the matter became commonplace. After that, the possibility of their ever being startlingly interesting in their talks about it was gone. What the man said was to this effect:--

'It got to be Sunday all the time. Seven Sundays in the week--to us, anyway. We hadn't anything to do, and time hung heavy. Seven Sundays, and all of them broken up at one time or another, in the day or in the night, by a few hours of the awful storm of fire and thunder and iron. At first we used to shin for the holes a good deal faster than we did afterwards. The first time, I forgot the children, and Maria fetched them both along. When she was all safe in the cave she fainted. Two or three weeks afterwards, when she was running for the holes, one morning, through a shell-shower, a big shell burst near her, and covered her all over with dirt, and a piece of the iron carried away her game-bag of false hair from the back of her head. Well, she stopped to get that game-bag before she shoved along again! Was getting used to things already, you see. We all got so that we could tell a good deal about shells; and after that we didn't always go under shelter if it was a light shower. Us men would loaf around and talk; and a man would say, 'There she goes!' and name the kind of shell it was from the sound of it, and go on talking--if there wasn't any danger from it. If a shell

was bursting close over us, we stopped talking and stood still;-- uncomfortable, yes, but it wasn't safe to move. When it let go, we went on talking again, if nobody hurt--maybe saying, 'That was a ripper!' or some such commonplace comment before we resumed; or, maybe, we would see a shell poisoning itself away high in the air overhead. In that case, every fellow just whipped out a sudden, 'See you again, gents!' and shoved. Often and often I saw gangs of ladies promenading the streets, looking as cheerful as you please, and keeping an eye canted up watching the shells; and I've seen them stop still when they were uncertain about what a shell was going to do, and wait and make certain; and after that they sa'ntered along again, or lit out for shelter, according to the verdict. Streets in some towns have a litter of pieces of paper, and odds and ends of one sort or another lying around. Ours hadn't; they had IRON litter. Sometimes a man would gather up all the iron fragments and unburst shells in his neighborhood, and pile them into a kind of monument in his front yard--a ton of it, sometimes. No glass left; glass couldn't stand such a bombardment; it was all shivered out. Windows of the houses vacant--looked like eye-holes in a skull. WHOLE panes were as scarce as news.

'We had church Sundays. Not many there, along at first; but by-and-bye pretty good turnouts. I've seen service stop a minute, and everybody sit quiet--no voice heard, pretty funeral-like then--and all the more so on account of the awful boom and crash going on outside and overhead; and pretty soon, when a body could be heard, service would go on again. Organs and church-music mixed up with a bombardment is a powerful queer combination--along at first. Coming out of church, one morning, we had an accident--the only one that happened around me on a Sunday. I was just having a hearty handshake with a friend I hadn't seen for a while, and saying, 'Drop into our cave to-night, after bombardment; we've got hold of a pint of prime wh--.' Whiskey, I was going to say, you know, but a shell interrupted. A chunk of it cut the man's arm off, and left it dangling in my hand. And do you know the thing that is going to stick the longest in my memory, and outlast everything else, little and big, I reckon, is the mean thought I had then? It was 'the whiskey IS SAVED.' And yet, don't you know, it was kind of excusable; because it was as scarce as diamonds, and we had only just that little; never had another taste during the siege.

'Sometimes the caves were desperately crowded, and always hot and close. Sometimes a cave had twenty or twenty-five people packed into it; no turning-room for anybody; air so foul, sometimes, you couldn't have made a candle burn in it. A child was born in one of those caves one night, Think of that; why, it was like having it born in a trunk.

'Twice we had sixteen people in our cave; and a number of times we had a dozen. Pretty suffocating in there. We always had eight; eight belonged there. Hunger and misery and sickness and fright and sorrow, and I don't know what all, got so loaded into them that none of them were ever rightly their old selves after the siege. They all died but three of us within a couple of years. One night a shell burst in front of the hole and caved it in and stopped it up. It was lively times, for a while, digging out. Some of us came near smothering. After that we made two openings--ought to have thought of it at first.

'Mule meat. No, we only got down to that the last day or two. Of course it was good; anything is good when you are starving.

This man had kept a diary during--six weeks? No, only the first six

days. The first day, eight close pages; the second, five; the third, one--loosely written; the fourth, three or four lines; a line or two the fifth and sixth days; seventh day, diary abandoned; life in terrific Vicksburg having now become commonplace and matter of course.

The war history of Vicksburg has more about it to interest the general reader than that of any other of the river-towns. It is full of variety, full of incident, full of the picturesque. Vicksburg held out longer than any other important river-town, and saw warfare in all its phases, both land and water--the siege, the mine, the assault, the repulse, the bombardment, sickness, captivity, famine.

The most beautiful of all the national cemeteries is here. Over the great gateway is this inscription:--

"HERE REST IN PEACE 16,600 WHO DIED FOR THEIR COUNTRY IN THE YEARS 1861 TO 1865"

The grounds are nobly situated; being very high and commanding a wide prospect of land and river. They are tastefully laid out in broad terraces, with winding roads and paths; and there is profuse adornment in the way of semi-tropical shrubs and flowers,' and in one part is a piece of native wild-wood, left just as it grew, and, therefore, perfect in its charm. Everything about this cemetery suggests the hand of the national Government. The Government's work is always conspicuous for excellence, solidity, thoroughness, neatness. The Government does its work well in the first place, and then takes care of it.

By winding-roads--which were often cut to so great a depth between perpendicular walls that they were mere roofless tunnels--we drove out a mile or two and visited the monument which stands upon the scene of the surrender of Vicksburg to General Grant by General Pemberton. Its metal will preserve it from the hackings and chippings which so defaced its predecessor, which was of marble; but the brick foundations are crumbling, and it will tumble down by-and-bye. It overlooks a picturesque region of wooded hills and ravines; and is not unpicturesque itself, being well smothered in flowering weeds. The battered remnant of the marble monument has been removed to the National Cemetery.

On the road, a quarter of a mile townward, an aged colored man showed us, with pride, an unexploded bomb-shell which has lain in his yard since the day it fell there during the siege.

'I was a-stannin' heah, an' de dog was a-stannin' heah; de dog he went for de shell, gwine to pick a fuss wid it; but I didn't; I says, "Jes' make you'seff at home heah; lay still whah you is, or bust up de place, jes' as you's a mind to, but I's got business out in de woods, I has!"'

Vicksburg is a town of substantial business streets and pleasant residences; it commands the commerce of the Yazoo and Sunflower Rivers; is pushing railways in several directions, through rich agricultural regions, and has a promising future of prosperity and importance.

Apparently, nearly all the river towns, big and little, have made up their minds that they must look mainly to railroads for wealth and upbuilding, henceforth. They are acting upon this idea. The signs are, that the next twenty years will bring about some noteworthy changes in the Valley, in the direction of increased population and wealth, and in the intellectual advancement and the liberalizing of opinion which go

naturally with these. And yet, if one may judge by the past, the river towns will manage to find and use a chance, here and there, to cripple and retard their progress. They kept themselves back in the days of steamboating supremacy, by a system of wharfage-dues so stupidly graded as to prohibit what may be called small RETAIL traffic in freights and passengers. Boats were charged such heavy wharfage that they could not afford to land for one or two passengers or a light lot of freight. Instead of encouraging the bringing of trade to their doors, the towns diligently and effectively discouraged it. They could have had many boats and low rates; but their policy rendered few boats and high rates compulsory. It was a policy which extended--and extends--from New Orleans to St. Paul.

We had a strong desire to make a trip up the Yazoo and the Sunflower--an interesting region at any time, but additionally interesting at this time, because up there the great inundation was still to be seen in force--but we were nearly sure to have to wait a day or more for a New Orleans boat on our return; so we were obliged to give up the project.

Here is a story which I picked up on board the boat that night. I insert it in this place merely because it is a good story, not because it belongs here--for it doesn't. It was told by a passenger--a college professor--and was called to the surface in the course of a general conversation which began with talk about horses, drifted into talk about astronomy, then into talk about the lynching of the gamblers in Vicksburg half a century ago, then into talk about dreams and superstitions; and ended, after midnight, in a dispute over free trade and protection.

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