

MARK TWAIN'S BIG FRIGHT.

A Story of Old Times on the Mississippi,
Not in the Atlantic Monthly.

While sitting in front of the Southern Hotel, talking to a future great citizen about the old steamboat days of St. Louis, when captains, clerks, and pilots ran the town, and ran it under a full head of steam, an ancient mariner let up on whittling the arm of the next chair, turned toward us, and remarked: "You was speaking of the old river days?" "We was," I replied. "Perhaps, now, you have been reading some of Sam Clemens' yarns?" I held up a copy of the Atlantic, opened at Mark Twain's article, which had really brought about the conversation. "Yes, I thought so; well, he don't tell all he knows," said the social riverman, reaching over for a tobacco-pouch which a gentleman was passing to a friend. "There's one little affair he 'aint worked into print yet, and it 'aint likely he will."

The social stranger quit off on his reminiscence at this point, and talked generally about the bad outlook of the crops, and the universal disadvantages of dryness. Seeing that nothing but gin and sugar would start him anew, he was persuaded into a convenient bar room, and after hoisting in three fingers (held vertically), a handful of crackers and several chunks of cheese, he proceeded with his anecdote, interrupting himself a number of times to remark to the bar-keeper: "The same, pard."

"I was first engineer of the Alexander Scott when Sam Clemens (Mark Twain) was a cub in her pilot-house. He was a clipper young chap, with legs no bigger'n a casting line, and full of tricks than a mule colt. He worked off jokes on everybody abroad, from the skipper down to the roosters (darkey deck hands), but they were all taken in good part, but I lay by two or three to pay back. About the time Sam got the run of the river enough to stand alone at the wheel, the Scott went into the lower river trade, carrying cotton from Memphis to New Orleans. Perhaps, now, you never see a boat in the cotton trade barn? Well, you may cover your cotton, from stem to stern with tarpaulins, and keep your donkey engine steamed up, but if a spark of fire touches cotton enough to fill a tooth, your boat's a corpse. It's quicker'n gunpowder to burn, and no pilot can reach the lower deck from the texas in time to save himself, let alone his Saratoga. So, you see, everybody in that trade is on the watch, and an alarm of fire in a boat loaded with cotton will turn a man's hair gray quicker'n an alligator can swallow a nigger.

"Sam, being a young pilot, and new to the cotton trade, was told over and over again how the profession would lose a promising cub if ever a fire broke out on the Scott and the boy got nervous. My striker and me always managed to be in the lunch-room when Sam came off watch, and as he came in we would talk about the number of cotton boats that burnt in such a year, and how such a cub would have made a lightning pilot if he hadn't got burned up in the cotton trade; and we always noticed that Sam's appetite failed him after that, and instead of going to bed he would go prowling around the lower deck and peering about the hatchways, smelling at every opening like a pup that had lost its master.

"One day when we backed out of Memphis with a big cargo of cotton, I complained, in Sam's hearing, that the mate had loaded the boat too near the engines. The boy followed me into the engine room, and, without seeming to notice him, I told my striker I would do my level best to keep that cotton from catching fire, but that it was a slim chance with bales piled right up before the furnace doors. Sam got whiter'n a bulkhead, and went up to the texas, where he packed his Saratoga, ready for any business that might come before the meeting. When we went on watch I posted the second clerk to keep an eye on him. He hid behind a smoke-stack and saw Sam alone in the pilot-house, his hair on end, his face like a corpse's and his eyes sticking out so far you could have knocked them off with a stick. He danced around the pilot-house, turned up his nose like he was smelling for a polecat, pulled every bell, turned the boat's nose for the bank, and yelled "Fire!" like a Cherokee Indian on the warpath. That yell brought everybody on deck. We had a cargo of passengers, and the women screeched, the men rushed for cork pillows, and the crew yanked the doors off their hinges and rushed to the guards, ready to go overboard at the first moderation of weather. The skipper had hard work to make the crazy passengers believe that there wasn't any fire, but he brought them to reason finally. I paid no attention to Sam's frantic yells, so the boat didn't run her nozzle against the bank he aimed for.

The captain and pilot and a lot of passengers, after hunting all over the boat, couldn't find a sign of fire anywhere outside the furnaces, and then they went for Sam. He swore up and down that he smelt cotton burning; no use talking to him—he knew the smell of burning cotton, and, by thunder, he had smelt it. The first pilot said kind of soft and pityingly to Sam, "My boy, if you'd told me you was so near the jimjams I'd stood double watch for you. Now, you go and soak your head in a bucket of water and take a good sleep and you'll be all right by to-morrow. Sam just biled over at this, and when pretty young woman passenger said to the skipper, loud enough for Sam to hear, "So young and nice looking, too—how sad it would make his poor mother to hear how he drinks," he fairly frothed at the mouth. You never see a fellow so-toned down as Sam was after that and though the boys never quit running him, he never talked back, but looked kind of puzzled—as though he was trying to account for that smell of cotton smoke.

"And what was the cause of the smell?" I asked mine Ancient. He chuckled a full minute and then said: "You see there's a speaking tube running from the engine room to the pilot-house. I had in mind the tricks Sam had played on me, and having worked him to a nervous state about the fire, I waited till he was alone in the pilot-house, and then set fire to a little wad of cotton, stuffed it into the speaking tube, and the smell came out right under his nose. A little sugar on it, pard."—St. Louis Letter.

We have careful thought for the stranger,
And smiles for the sometimes guest,
But oft for our own be bitter tone,
Though we love our own the best.
Ah! lips with the curl impatient,
Ah! brow with the shade of scorn,
'Twere a cruel fate were the night too late,
To undo the work of the morn.

The Old Cabin Home.

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I am going far away,
Far away to leave you now,
To the Mississippi river I am going;
I will take my old banjo,
And I'll sing this little song,
Away down in my old cabin home.
CHORUS—Here is my old cabin home,
Here is my sister and my brother;
Here lies my wife, the joy of my life,
And my child in the grave with its mother
When old age comes on,
And my hair is turning gray,
I will hang up the banjo all alone;
I'll set down by the fire,
And I'll pass the time away,
Away down in my old cabin home.
'Tis there where I roam,
Away down on de old farm,
Where all the darkies am free;
Oh, merrily sound de banjo,
For de white folks round de room
Away down in my old cabin home.

"JENNIE KISSED ME."—Very few of the many who have read that pretty little thing of Leigh Hunt's, commencing, "Jennie kissed me when we met," are aware of its origin. Carlyle and Hunt were fast friends in their early life—a friendship drawn all the closer by pecuniary embarrassments.—At a time when Carlisle was lower down than ever, Hunt heard some good news for him, and carried it to his room, together with a couple of bottles of applejack, an article which Mrs. Carlisle (Jennie) much delighted in.—She was sitting in an arm chair when Hunt entered, completely borne down by their misfortunes. The applejack failed to move her; but when the good news came with its bright prospect of pecuniary relief, she sprang quickly up, threw her white arms around his neck and kissed him again and again with her rosy lips, more to his satisfaction than to that of her husband. With a roguish twinkle in his eye, Hunt snatched up a pen and paper, and left this immortal souvenir of the occasion: "Jennie kissed me when we met,
Springing from the chair she sat in;
Time, you thief, who love to get
Sweets into your book, put that in;—
Say I'm ugly, say I'm sad,
Say that health and wealth have missed me,
Say I'm growing old; but add—
Jennie kissed me.

ESSAY ON THE WHEELBARROW.—If you have occasion to use a wheelbarrow, leave it, when you are through with it, in front of the house with the handles towards the door. A wheelbarrow is the most complicated thing to fall over on the face of the earth. A man will fall over one when he never would think of falling over anything else; he never knows when he has got through falling over it either, for it will tangle his legs and arms, turn over with him and rear up in front of him, and just as he pauses in his profanity to congratulate himself, it takes a new turn and scoops more skin off of him, and he commences to evolve anew, and bump himself in fresh places. A man never ceases to fall over a wheelbarrow until it turns completely on its back, or brings up against something it cannot upset. It is the most inoffensive looking object there is, but it is more dangerous than a locomotive, and no man is secure unless he has a tight hold of its handles, and is sitting down on something. A wheelbarrow has its uses, without doubt, but in its leisure moments it is the great blithing curse on true dignity.