

# LETTER FROM "MARK TWAIN."

[Number 26.]

[SPECIAL TRAVELLING CORRESPONDENT OF THE ALTA.]

**A Journalist in Pursuit of Knowledge---He Seeks Philosophers and Finds Roughts--- Makes the Acquaintance of "Bladder-nosed Jake"---Sold Again---The Excursion to Palestine---Sherman Don't Go--- Who Does Go---Twain Blase---The Raft "Nonpariel."**

NEW YORK, June 6th, 1867.  
Harry Hill's.

Among the many attractive and fashionable places of resort with which New York is so well stocked, I wish to call particular attention to Mr. Harry Hill's Club House in Crosby street, two or three blocks from Broadway. It is a retired spot, and is cheerful and peculiar. I was coming down street with a couple of friends last night, and they suggested that we drop in at Harry Hill's. It was in my head somehow that Harry Hill's was where the savants were in the habit of meeting to commune upon abstruse matters of science and philosophy—men like Agassiz and Ericsson and people of that stamp. I felt in a reflective mood, and I said I would like to go to Harry Hill's and hear those great men talk much better than to trifle away the time in the follies of gayer localities.

We started through a little sawdusted den of a tenth-rate rum-hole, and I said: "This is just like the eccentricities of those wonderful intelligences—we never find them surrounded by gilded trappings and pretentious display."

As we passed through a door at the other end, a mashed-nosed athlete in his shirt-sleeves shouted to some one whom I could not see: "Now's yer time, gents, the wizard of the mountings is on next in his inimicable feats of magic!"

The wise men are seeking to sound the capabilities of human ingenuity, I thought, and I admired this evidence of their sympathy with matters of mere minor importance when they could busy themselves with abstruse problems in mechanics and astronomy, if they chose.

We went up stairs, and found a great many gentlemen, and also a great many ladies. I was glad to see ladies encouraging science with their inspiriting presence. I like to pick out great men in a crowd by the sign and seal of superiority which nature imprints upon their features. In this case I was troubled to select Agassiz, and hesitated long. Finally I said: This man is he—this must be he, though, to say truly, he hath all the seeming of a murderer; and this is Ericsson—this surely is Ericsson, albeit in another place I might take him for a burglar; and this must be Professor Morse, I think, notwithstanding the sneaking villainy in his eye; and this—

Here there was a sound of music, and I marvelled greatly to see the wise men take each a lady and spin her in the giddy waltz. The ladies, too, did spin around with such thoughtless vehemence that I was constrained to place my hat before my eyes. When they had finished, the great Ericsson embraced his lady publicly, and kissed her; Professor Morse sat down, and took his lady on his lap (she not observing that her hoops weremightily elevated), and Professor Agassiz conveyed his lady to a small bar which I had not before noticed, and called for drinks for the crowd! I shuddered. I could not help it, because these things seemed so out of keeping with the grave characters I had thought all philosophers possessed. So I turned me away, and perused certain placards that hung upon the walls. One read:

"OBSCENE LANGUAGE AND PROFANITY NOT PERMITTED HERE."

Another read:

"PEOPLE WHO ARE DRUNK MUST LEAVE THE PREMISES."

And still another read:

"LOVERS NOT WANTED HERE—ROOM FOR SUCH OUTSIDE."

And yet another:

"ALL EQUALITY HERE—ALL TREATED ALIKE—ALL SOCIABLE—NO LOVERS ALLOWED."

Then, in big letters:

"OBSCENE LANGUAGE AND PROFANITY MOST POSITIVELY FORBIDDEN."

These are all good, wholesome rules, I said within myself—surely I can find no fault with them. But how dreadfully irregular these philosophers must be to render such ordinances necessary. There were also large placards adorned with verses of poetry, but the excellence of it seemed questionable to me, though I could not believe otherwise than that Mr. Longfellow or Mr. Bryant must have written it, of course. It was chiefly laudatory of the merits and attractions of the place.

Presently a man came out on a stage and sang "Twas a Cold Winter's Night, and the Tempest was Snarling," and several parties accompanied him upon violins and a piano. After him came a remarkably black negro, whose clothes were ragged, and danced a boisterous dance and sang "I'm a happy contraband," though all his statements regarding himself would have warranted a different condition, I thought.

After him came a man who mimicked fighting cats, and the buzzing of mosquitoes, and the squealing of a pig. Then a homely young man in a Highland costume entered upon the stage and danced—and he ought to have danced moderately, because he had nothing in the wide world on but a short coat and short stockings. This was apparent every time he whirled around. However, no one observed it but me. I knew that, because several handsomely dressed young ladies, from thirteen to sixteen and seventeen years of age, went and sat down under the foot-lights, and of course they would have moved away if they had noticed that he was only partly dressed.

I had a great desire to become acquainted with Professor Agassiz, and so I went over and spoke respectfully to a young lady, a very charming girl barely out of her teens, and said:

"Pardon me, Mademoiselle, but—I suppose that gentleman yonder is the great philosopher, the renowned Agassiz?"

She gazed upon me with great interest awhile, and then she said:

"You're sick, ain't you, sonny?"

I was surprised at the remark. I hesitated a little, and then I said:

"I—I am not well, as you have deigned to observe, but if that is Mr. Agassiz—"

"Oh, that be —. It's Bladder-nose Jake."

I thought I should sink through the floor with mortification. I was going to excuse myself and bid the young person good-evening, when she interrupted with great spirit, and said:

"Oh, if you want to shoot your gab, take me up to the bar, and pizen me, and then you can yelp till you rot."

I never felt so badly in my life. I purchased her a drink—it was nothing more harmful than soda-water—and then she wanted me to buy her an orange, which I did; next she desired me to waltz with her, but I excused myself because I began to have some suspicions about her; and finally she asked me to see her home, which I refused to do.

I wanted to get away from there, and my friends consented. When we got outside, I said,

"Is it possible that old Agassiz and those philosophers go to that place and carry on that way every night?"

"Philosophers?" said they: "why, there was never a philosopher there in the world! That is Harry Hill's, one of the worst dens in all New York. Those men were a very hard lot, except those country bumpkins that were skirmishing around there—flies in the web, and didn't know it—and the young girls were street-walkers, and the most abandoned in the city."

When I found that I, a newspaper man, had been drawn into such a place as that, my indignation knew no bounds, and I said we would go and hunt up another one.

### The Holy Land Excursion.

Everything is ready, and to-morrow, at 3 P. M., the ship will sail. To-night all the passengers are to gather themselves together at the house of Mr. Beecher, in Brooklyn, to consult concerning the voyage, and to get acquainted. I hope we shall have a pleasant time of it. My creditors hold a social reunion last night, and I am sure that they had a pleasant time of it at any rate—at least it was as cheerful as the circumstance of parting with me could make it—and you know I have been an old stand-by with them. I was the salvation of one of those people. He was a collector. His business became reduced till he hadn't a bill left to collect except one against me. That kept him in employment till a brighter day dawned for him. But all through the long night of his distress that one solitary wash-bill was a beacon of hope that never, never went out. Never showed any signs of going out. Never even flickered, I may say. Naturally, that man reveres my name and looks upon me as his benefactor. I have been a benefactor to a good many of his class. I have never mentioned it before. I have gone about doing good in this unostentatious way, and have never said one word about it until this moment.

These people drank wine and made merry, last night, until I was ready to go; then they wept, and presented me with the following beautiful memorial, wrought upon parchment:

MR. MARK TWAIN.

To Mrs. O'Shaughnessy and 9 children. Dr.

To washing, which the same had not been paid for..... \$18 45

To Hope Restaurant for sustenance..... 65 25

To subscription to dinner for benefit of Orphan's Fund, 50 cents, and to difference between subscription and amount of dinner consumed by subscriber..... 6 30

Several more items of this nature were in the memorial, and also a nice blank place for "RECEIVED PAYMENT." The blank mars the beauty of the thing to some extent, but still I suppose it will answer the way it is. Usually, blanks are unsightly because they are so meaningless, but this one is full of expression.

### A Specimen Brick.

I can give you a specimen of our passengers, if you like, but I am glad to say he is the only specimen of the kind on the list—at least he is the only one left now. When he heard that General Sherman was going to remain in the States, he howled fearfully. Indeed, he almost shed tears. He said:

"There, I just thought so, all along. I just knew how it would be. I tell you the trip has lost all its charms! I wouldn't give two straws to go now. I had rather have lost my right arm than that this should have happened."

This fellow had tried to stipulate that his wife should be introduced to Miss Sherman early, and have a seat next her at table, and that he should be permitted to sit next the General himself! And next, I suppose this flunkey would have waited to hold the General's hat while he washed his teeth. General Sherman ought to congratulate himself upon his escape from five months' worship by this bred-and-born slave. If that man goes in the ship and you hear that somebody has fallen overboard in a dark and mysterious manner, some night, you can calculate that it is he.

Another passenger—a solemn, unsmiling, sanctimonious old iceberg that looked like he was waiting for a vacancy in the Trinity, as Henry Clapp said of Rev. Dr. Osgood—walked in the other day and stood around for some time, and finally said he had forgotten, when he took passage, to inquire if the excursion would come to a halt on Sundays. Captain Duncan replied that he hardly expected to anchor the ship in the middle of the Atlantic, but that on shore everybody would be free—no restrictions—free to travel on Sunday or not, just as they saw fit; and he had no doubt that some would do one and some the other. The questioner did not groan audibly, but I think he did inwardly. Then he said it would be well for people to calculate their chances before doing wrong; that he had always got into trouble when he travelled on the Sabbath, and that he should do so no more when he could avoid it; that he lately travelled with a man in Illinois who would not lay by on Sunday because he could not afford the time, but he himself laid by and still beat the sinner and got to the end of the journey first.

Now I respected that man's repugnance to violating the Sabbath until he betrayed that he would violate it in a minute if he were not afraid the lightning would strike him, or something else would happen to him, and then I lost my reverence for him. I thought I perceived that he was not good and holy, but only sagacious, and so I turned the key on my valise and moved it out of his reach. I shall have to keep an eye on that fellow.

### Satisfied Curiosity.

I have a large share of curiosity, but I believe it is satisfied for the present. I have seen the horse "Dexter" trot a race—but then I know but little about horses, and I did not appreciate the exhibition; I was present at the great annual meeting of the Quakers a week ago, but between you and I it was excessively dull; I went to a billiard tournament where Phelan and McDevitt played, but I knew beforehand what to expect, and so there was no chance to get up a revivifying astonishment; I have been to these Sunday Schools and have heard all the great gobs of the New York pulpit preach, and so that department is exhausted; I have been through the dens of poverty, crime and degradation that hide from the light of day

in the Five Points and infinitely worse localities—but I, even I, can blush, and must decline to describe them; I have been in the Bible House, and also in the Station House—pleasant experiences of a day, but nothing worth a second visit; I have gone the rounds of the newspaper offices and the theatres, and have contrasted the feverish turmoil of Broadway with the still repose of Greenwood Cemetery; I have seen Barnum's Museum, and time and again have looked upon the summer loveliness of Central Park and stood upon its high grounds and wondered how any landscape could be so beautiful as that which stretches abroad right and left over Jersey and far up the river, and yet have no sign of a mountain about it; I have seen Brooklyn, and the ferry-boats, and the Dunderberg, and the boat-blacks, and Staten Island, and Peter Cooper, and the Fifth Avenue, and the Academy of Design, and Rosa Bonheur's Horse Fair; and have compared the noble architecture of Old Trinity church with the cluster of painted shower baths, they call young Dr. Tyng's church (they don't dare to call it the church of God, notwithstanding it has got a safety-iron fence on its roof, and sixty-two lightning rods,) and behold I have tried the Russian bath, and skated while the winter was here, and did contract to go up in a balloon, but the balloon didn't go. I have seen all there was to see—even the "Black Crook"—and yet, I say it, that shouldn't say it—all is vanity! There has been a sense of something lacking, something wanting, every time—and I guess that something was the provincial quietness I am used to. I have had enough of sights and shows, and noise and bustle, and confusion, and now I want to disperse. I am ready to go.

### The Life-Raft.

The departure of Capt. Mikes for Europe on a life-raft was the sensation of the week. This raft is a thing made of three cylinders, 25 feet long, each, and 26 inches in diameter, made fast together, side by side. We have all heard of shipwrecked men drifting for days and days together, in mid-ocean, on such contrivances not very dissimilar to this, but why any man should want to start to Europe on a one, when he could travel in a ship and still have an ome, when the hope of never getting there, is a mystery to me. If Capt. Mikes thought this would be a shrewd method of beating the life insurance companies he missed it a good deal, because they promptly barred the life-raft. The Captain rigged five sails on his little hen-coop, and took forty days' rations of water and provisions for himself and his two men. He expects to reach Havre in twenty-five to thirty days, but somehow the more I looked at that shaky thing the more I felt satisfied that the old tar was on his last voyage. He is going to run in the usual route of the ships, and somebody will run over him some murky gray night, and we shall never hear of the bold Prussian any more.

### To Whom It May Concern.

I shall write very often to the ALTA on this Palestine excursion, of course. The various issues of the ALTA have a very wide circulation over the great Plains, the Pacific Coast, the islands of the South Seas, and in China and Japan, and through my efforts I trust that these diversified peoples will yet know more about the Holy Land than the Holy Landers do themselves. I am peculiarly fitted to deal with that patriarchal country because of my personal experience of life in Great Salt Lake City.

Good-bye, MARK TWAIN.