

# BRET HARTE AND MARK TWAIN IN THE 'SEVENTIES

## PASSAGES FROM THE DIARIES OF MRS. JAMES T. FIELDS

EDITED BY M. A. DeWOLFE HOWE

FIFTY years ago Bret Harte and Mark Twain, in their thirties, were beginning to make themselves known, as their earliest writings were already known, to friends and admirers in the East. For each of them the *Atlantic Monthly*, hospitable to newcomers in the field of letters, provided an important medium for reaching a new and larger circle of readers. With each of these contributors to the magazine, James T. Fields, its editor from 1861 to 1871, entered, as was his wont, into relations of cordial friendship. At the same time, and afterward, his wife was keeping a copious diary, in which she recorded, not merely her own sympathetic observations of the greater and lesser figures she was constantly encountering, — chiefly through the practice of a memorable hospitality, — but also many things recounted by her husband after his excursions into the world.

Of all the young Lochinvars of the pen who came out of the West while Mrs. Fields was thus engaged, Bret Harte and Mark Twain were the daring and dauntless gallants who most captured the imagination and have longest held it. To each of these she devoted a number of pages in her diary, to which they contributed elements of distinctive color.

From the pages relating to Bret Harte the passages immediately following are taken. — EDITOR.

### I

*Friday, March 10, 1871.* — Too many days full of interest have passed unrecorded. Chiefly I should record what I can recall of Francis Bret Harte, who has made his first visit to the East just now, since he went to San Francisco in his early youth. He is now apparently about thirty-five years old. His mind is full of the grand landscape of the West, and filled also with sympathetic interest in the half-developed natives who are to be seen there, nearer to the surface than in our Eastern cities.

He told me of a gambler who had a friend lying dead in the upper room of a gambling-house. The man went out to see about having services performed. 'Better have it at the grave,' said the parson to whom he applied. Jim shook his head, as if he feared the proper honors would not be paid his friend. The other then suggested they should find the minister and leave it to him. 'Well,' said Jim, 'yes, I wish you'd do just that, for I ain't much of a funeral "sharp" myself.' He told me also, as a sign of the wonderful recklessness which had pervaded San Francisco, that at one time there was a glut of tobacco in the market, and a block of houses going up at the same period, *the foundations of those houses were laid of boxes of tobacco.*

Bret Harte, as the world calls him, is natural, warm-hearted, with a keen

relish for fun, disposed to give just value to the strong language of the West, which he is by no means inclined to dispense with; at ease in every society, quick of sense and sight. Jamie, who saw him more than I, finds him lovable above all. We liked his wife, too, — not handsome but with good honest sense, appreciative of him, — and two children. She is said to sing well, but poor woman! the fatigues of that most distressing journey across the continent, the fêtes, the heat (for the weather is unusually warm), have been almost too much for her and she is not certainly at her best. They dined and took tea here last Friday.

*Tuesday, September 5.* — J. went to Boston. I wrote in the pastures and walked all the morning. Coming home, after dinner, came a telegram for me to meet J. and Bret Harte at Beverly station with the pony carriage. I drove hard to catch the train, but arrived in season, glad to take up the two good boys and show them Beverly shore. . . .

We sat and talked during the evening. Mr. Harte had much to say of the beautiful flowers of California, roses being in bloom about his own house there every month in the year. He found the cloudless skies and continued drought of California very hard to bear. For the first time in my life I considered how terrible perpetual cloudlessness would be! He thinks there is no beauty in the mountains of California, hard, bare, snowless peaks. Neither are there trees, nor any green grass.

He is delighted with the fragrant lawns of Newport and has, I believe, put into verse a delightful ghost story, which he told us.<sup>1</sup> He has taken a house of some antiquity in Newport, connected with which is the story of a lady who formerly lived there and who was

very fond of the odor of mignonette. The flower was always growing in her house; and after her death, at two o'clock every night, a strong odor has always been perceived passing through the house, as if wafted along by the garments of a woman. One night at the appointed hour, but entirely unconnected in his thought with the story Mr. Harte had long ago heard, he was arrested in his work by a strong perfume of mignonette which appeared to sweep by him. He looked about, thinking his wife might have placed a vase of flowers in the room, but finding nothing, he began to follow the odor, which seemed to flit before him. Then he recalled, for the first time, the story he had heard. He opened the door; the odor was in the hall; he opened the room where the lady died but there was no odor there; until returning, after making a circuit of the house, he found a faint perfume, as if she had passed, but not stayed, there also. At last, somewhat oppressed perhaps by the ghostliness of the place and hour, he went out and stood upon the porch. There his dream vanished. The sweet lawn and tree flowers were emitting an odor, as is common at the hour when dews congeal, more sweet than at any other time of day or night, and the air was redolent of sweets which might easily be construed into mignonette. The story was well told, and I shall be glad to see his poem.

Many good stories came off during the evening, some very characteristic of California, such as that of an uproar in a theatre and a man about to be killed, when someone shouts, 'Don't waste him, but kill a fiddler with him.' Also, one of the opening nights at the California theatre, the place packed, when a man who has taken too much whiskey makes a noise; immediately the manager, a strong executive man, catches him up with the help of a po-

<sup>1</sup> 'A Newport Romance,' published in the *Atlantic Monthly* for October, 1871.

liceman, and before anybody knows the thing is done, or the disturber what is the matter, he finds himself set down on the sidewalk outside in the street. 'Well,' said he with an oath, 'is this the way you do business here, raise a fellow before he has a chance to draw?'

Mr. Harte is a very sensitive and nervous man. He struggles against himself all the time. He sat on the piazza with J. and talked till a late hour. This morning at breakfast I found him most interesting. He talked of his early and best-loved books. It appears that at the age of nine he was a lover and reader of Montaigne. Certain writers, he says, seem to him to stand out as friends and brothers side by side in literature. Now Horace and Montaigne are so associated in his mind. Mr. Emerson, he thinks, never in the least approaches a comprehension of the character of the man. With an admiration for his great sayings, he has never guessed at the subtle springs from which they come. The pleasant acceding to both sides in politics, and other traits of like nature, gives him affinity with Hawthorne. By the way, he is a true appreciator of Hawthorne. He was moved to much merriment yesterday by remembering a passage in the notes, where he slyly remarks, 'Margaret Fuller's cows hooked the other cows.' Speaking of Dr. Bartol, he said, 'What a dear old man he is! A venerable baby, nothing more!' But Harte is most kindly and tender. His wife has been very ill and has given him cause for terrible anxiety. This accounts for much left undone, but he is an oblivious man oftentimes to his surroundings — leaves things behind!!

January 12, 1872. — Bret Harte was here at breakfast. It is curious to see his feeling with regard to society. For purely literary society with its affectations and contempts, he has no sympathy. He has at length chosen New

York as his residence, and among the Schuylers, Sherwoods, and their friends, he appears to find what he enjoys. There is evidently a *gêne* about people and life here, and provincialisms which he found would hurt him. He is very sensitive and keen, with a love and reverence for Dickens almost peculiar in this coldly critical age. Bryant he finds very cold and totally unwilling to lead the conversation, as he should do when they are together, as he justly remarks, he being so much younger — but never a word without cart and horses to fetch it.

Bret Harte has a queer absent-minded way of spending his time, letting the hours slip by as if he had not altogether learned their value yet. It is a miracle to us how he lives, for he writes very little. Thus far I suppose he has had money from J. R. O. & Co., but I fancy they have done with giving out money save for a *quid pro quo*.

Saturday, September 18, 1875. — Bret Harte came on the half-past 12 train. He came in good health, save a headache which ripened as the day went on; but he was bubbling over with fun, full of the most natural and unexpected sallies. He wished to know if I was acquainted with the Cochinchina hen. They had one at Cohasset. They had named him Benvenuto (after a certain gay Italian singer of strong self-appreciation, who came formerly to America). He said this hen's state of mind on finding a half-exploded fire-cracker and her depressed condition since its explosion were something extraordinary. His description was so vivid that I still see this hen perambulating about the house, first with pride, second with precipitation, fallen into disgrace among her fellows.

He said Cohasset was not the place to live in the summer if one wanted sea-breezes. They all came straight from Chicago!! He fancied the place, think-

ing it an old fishing village, not unlike Yarmouth. Instead of which they prided themselves upon never having 'any of your sea-smells,' and, being five miles from the doctor, could not be considered a cheerful place to live in with sick children. He said he was surprised to find J. T. F. without a sailor's jacket and collar. The actors among whom he had been living rather overdid the business; their collars were wider, their shirts fuller, and their trousers more bulgy than those of any real sailor he had ever observed, and the manner of hitching up the trousers was entirely peculiar to themselves and to the stage.

We went to call upon the Burlingames. In describing Harrisburg, Virginia, where he had lectured, he said a committee-man came to invite him to take a walk, and he was so afflicted with a headache that he was ready to take or give away his life at any moment; so he accepted the invitation and walked out with him. The man observed that Harrisburg was a very healthy place; only one man a day died in that vicinity. 'Oh!' said Harte, remembering the dangerous state of his own mind, 'has that man died yet today?' The man shook his head gravely, never suspecting a joke, and said he did n't know, but he would try to find out. Whereat Harte, to keep up the joke, said he wished he would. He went to the lecture, forgetting all about it, and saw this man hanging around without getting a chance to speak. The next morning, very early, he managed to get an opportunity to speak to him. 'I could n't find out exactly about that man yesterday,' he said. 'What man?' said H. 'Why, the one we were speaking of; the Coroner said he could n't say precisely who it was, but the one man would average all right.'

Harte said in speaking of Longfellow that no one had yet overpraised him. The delicate quality of humor, the

exquisite fineness in the choice of words, the breadth and sweetness of his nature were something he could hardly help worshipping. One day, after a dinner at Mr. Lowell's, he said, 'I think I will not have a carriage to return to town. I will walk down to the Square.' — 'I will walk with you,' said Longfellow. When they arrived at his gate, he said, he was so beautiful that he could only think of the light and whiteness of the moon, and, if he had stayed a moment longer, he should have put his arms around him and made a fool of himself then and there. Whereat he said good-night abruptly and turned away.

He brought his novel and play<sup>1</sup> with him, which are just now finished, for us to read. He has evidently enjoyed the play, and he enjoys the fame and the money they both bring him.

He is a dramatic, lovable creature, with his blue silk pocket-handkerchief and red dressing slippers, and his quick feelings. I could hate the man who could help loving him — or the woman either.

## II

In the passages touching upon Mark Twain, now to be copied from the journals, he is seen, not in Boston, but in Hartford. On the first of the two occasions recorded, Fields went alone to deliver a lecture in Hartford, and in answer to a post-card invitation, signed 'Mark,' stayed in the new house of the Clemenses. On the second occasion, three weeks later, Mrs. Fields accompanied him. After her husband's return from the first visit she wrote: —

April 6, 1876. — He found Mrs. Clemens quite ill. They had been in New York, where he had given four lectures, hoping to get money for Dr. Brown. He had never lectured there

<sup>1</sup> Probably *Gabriel Conroy* and *Two Men of Sandy Bar*.

before without making a great deal of money. This time he barely covered his expenses. He was very interesting and told J. the whole story of his life. They sat until midnight after the lecture, Mark drinking ale to make him sleepy. He says he can't sleep as other people do; his kind of sleep is the only sort for him — three or four hours of good solid comfort — more than that makes him ill; he can't afford to sleep all his thoughts away.

He described the hunger of his childhood for books, how the *Fortunes of Nigel* was one of the first stories which came to him while he was learning to be a pilot on a Mississippi boat. He hid himself with it behind a barrel, where he was found by the Master, who read him a lecture upon the ruinous effects of reading. 'I've seen it over and over agin,' he said. 'You need n't tell me anythin' about it; if ye're going to be a pilot on this river, yer need n't ever think of reading, for it just spiles all. Yer can't remember how high the tides was in Can's Gut three trips before the last now, I'll wager.' — 'Why no,' said Mark, 'that was six months ago.' — 'I don't care if 't was,' said the man. 'If you had n't been spiling yer mind by readin', ye'd have remembered.' So he was never allowed to read any more after that. 'And now,' says Mark, 'not being able to have it when I was hungry for it, I can only read the Encyclopedia nowadays.' Which is not true — he reads everything.

The story of his courtship and marriage, too, was very strange and interesting. A portion of this has, however, leaked into the daily papers, so I will not repeat it here. One point interested me very much, however, as showing the strength of character and rightness of vision in the man. He said he had not been married many months when his wife's father came to him one evening and said, 'My son, would n't you like to

go to Europe with your wife?' — 'Why, yes, sir,' he said, 'if I could afford it.' — 'Well then,' said he, 'if you will leave off smoking and drinking ale, you shall have ten thousand dollars this next year and go to Europe beside.' — 'Thank you, sir,' said Mark, 'this is very good of you, and I appreciate it, but I can't sell myself. I will do anything I can for you or any of your family, but I can't sell myself.' The result was, said Mark, 'I never smoked a cigar all that year nor drank a glass of ale; but when the next year came, I found I must write a book, and when I sat down to write I found it was n't worth anything. I must have a cigar to steady my nerves. I began to smoke, and I wrote my book; but then I could n't sleep and I had to drink ale to go to sleep. Now if I had sold myself, I could n't have written my book, or I could n't have gone to sleep, but now everything works perfectly well.'

He and his wife have wretched health, poor things! And in spite of their beautiful home must often have rather a hard time. He is very eccentric, disturbed by every noise, and it cannot be altogether easy to have care of such a man. It is a very loving household, though Mrs. Clemens's mother, Mrs. Langdon, hardly knows what to make of him sometimes, it is quite evident.

*Thursday, April 27, 1876.* — Welunched, and at 3 P.M. were *en route* for Hartford. I slept and read Mr. Tom Appleton's journal on the Nile, and looked out at the sunset and the torches of spring in the hollows, each in turn, doing more sleeping than either of the others, I fear, because I seem, for some unexplained reason, to be tired, as Mrs. Hawthorne used to say, far into the future. By giving up to it, however, I felt quite fresh when we arrived, at half-past seven o'clock, Mr. Clemens's (Mark Twain's) carriage waiting for us, to

take us to the hall where he was to perform, for the second night in succession, Peter Spyle in the *Loan of a Lover*. It is a pretty play, and the girl's part, Gertrude, was well done by Miss Helen Smith; but Mr. Clemens's part was a creation. I see no reason why, if he chose to adopt the profession of actor, he should not be as successful as Jefferson in whatever he might conclude to undertake. It is really amazing to see what a man of genius can do besides what is usually considered his legitimate sphere.

Afterward we went with Mr. Hammersley to the Club for a bit of supper — this I did not wish to do, but I was overruled of course by the decision of our host. We met at supper one of the clever actors who played in a little operetta called *The Artful Mendicants*. It was after twelve o'clock when we finally reached Mr. Clemens's house. He believed his wife would have retired, as she is very delicate in health; but there she was, expecting us, with a pretty supper-table laid. When her husband discovered this, he fell down on his knees in mock desire for forgiveness. His mind was so full of the play, and with the poor figure he felt he had made in it, that he had entirely forgotten all her directions and injunctions. She is a very small, sweet-looking, simple, finished creature, charming in her ways and evidently deeply beloved by him.

The house is a brick villa, designed by one of the first New York architects, standing in a lovely lawn, which slopes down to a small stream or river at the side. In this spring season the black-birds are busy in the trees and the air is sweet and vocal. Inside there is great luxury. Especially I delight in a lovely conservatory opening out of the drawing-room.

Although we had already eaten supper, the gentlemen took a glass of

lager beer to keep Mrs. Clemens company while she ate a bit of bread after her long anxiety and waiting. Meantime Mr. Clemens talked. The quiet earnest manner of his speech would be impossible to reproduce, but there is a drawl in his tone peculiar to himself. Also he is much interested in actors and the art of acting just now, and seriously talks of going to Boston next week to the debut of Anna Dickinson.

We were a tired company and went soon to bed and to sleep. I slept late, but I found Mr. Clemens had been re-reading Dana's *Two Years before the Mast* in bed early, and revolving subjects for his Autobiography. Their two beautiful baby girls came to pass an hour with us after breakfast — exquisite, affectionate children, the very fountain of joy to their interesting parents. . . .

Returning to lunch, I found our host and hostess and eldest little girl in the drawing-room. We fell into talk of the mishaps of the stage and the disadvantage of an amateur under such circumstances. 'For instance, on the first night of our little play,' said Mr. Clemens, 'the trousers of one of the actors suddenly gave way entirely behind, which was very distressing to him, though we did not observe it at all.'

I want to stop here to give a little idea of the appearance of our host. He is forty years old, with some color in his cheeks and a heavy light-colored moustache, and overhanging light eyebrows. His eyes are gray and piercing, yet soft, and his whole face expresses great sensitiveness. He is exquisitely neat also, though careless, and his hands are small, not without delicacy. He is a small man, but his mass of hair seems the one rugged-looking thing about him. I thought in the play last night that it was a wig.

To return to our lunch table — he proceeded to speak of his Autobiogra-

phy, which he intends to write as fully and simply as possible, to leave behind him. His wife laughingly said she should look it over and leave out objectionable passages. 'No,' he said, very earnestly, almost sternly, 'you are not to edit it — it is to appear as it is written, with the whole tale told as truly as I can tell it. I shall take out passages from it, and publish as I go along in the *Atlantic* and elsewhere, but I shall not limit myself as to space, and at whatever age I am writing about, even if I am an infant, and an idea comes to me about myself when I am forty, I shall put that in. Every man feels that his experience is unlike that of anybody else, and therefore he should write it down. He finds also that everybody else has thought and felt on some points precisely as he has done, and therefore he should write it down.'

The talk naturally branched to education, and thence to the country. He has lost all faith in our government. This wicked ungodly suffrage, he said, where the vote of a man who knew nothing was as good as the vote of a man of education and industry; this endeavor to equalize what God had made unequal was a wrong and a shame. He only hoped to live long enough to see such a wrong and such a government overthrown. Last summer he wrote an article for the *Atlantic*, printed without any signature, proposing the only solution of such evil of which he could conceive. 'It is too late now,' he continued, 'to restrict the suffrage; we must increase it — for this let us give every university man, let us say, ten votes, and every man with common-school education two votes, and a man of superior power and position a hundred votes, if we choose. This is the only way I see to get out of the false position into which we have fallen.'

At five, the hour appointed for dinner, I returned to the drawing-room,

where our host lay at full length on the floor, with his head on cushions in the bay-window, reading, and taking what he called 'delicious comfort.' Mrs. Perkins came in to dinner, and we had a cosy good time. Mr. Clemens described the preaching of a Western clergyman, a great favorite, with the smallest possible allowance of idea to the largest possible amount of words. It was so truthfully and vividly portrayed that we all concluded, perhaps, since the man was in such earnest, he moved his audience more than if he had troubled them with too many ideas. This truthfulness of Mr. Clemens, which will hardly allow him to portray anything in a way to make out a case by exaggerating or distorting a truth, is a wondrous and noble quality. This makes art and makes life, and will continue to make him a daily increasing power among us.

He is so unhappy and discontented with our government that he says he is not conscious of the least emotion of patriotism in himself. He is overwhelmed with shame and confusion, and wishes he were not an American. He thinks seriously of going to England to live, for a while, at least; and I think it not unlikely he may discover away from home a love of his country which is still waiting to be unfolded. I believe hope must dawn for us, that so much earnest endeavor of our statesmen and patriots cannot come to naught; and perhaps the very idea he has dropped, never believing that it can bring forth fruit, will be adopted in the end for our salvation. Certainly women's suffrage and such a change as he proposes should be tried. . . .

It is most curious and interesting to watch this growing man of forty — to see how he studies and how high his aims are. His conversation is always earnest and careful though full of fun. . . .

We sat talking, chiefly we women, after dinner, and looking at the sunset. Mr. Clemens lay down with a book and 'J' went to look over his lecture. I did not go to lecture, but after all were gone, I scribbled away at these pages and nearly finished Mr. Appleton's *Nile Journal*. They returned rather late; it was after ten. . . .

*Saturday morning.* — Dear J. was up early and out in the beautiful sunshine. I read and scribbled until breakfast at half-past nine. It was a lovely morning, and I had already ventured out of my window and round the house, to hear the birds sing and see the face of spring, before the hour came for breakfast. When I did go to the drawing-room, however, I found Mr. Clemens alone. He greeted me apparently as cheerfully as ever, and it was not until some moments had passed that he told me they had a very sick child upstairs. From that instant I saw, especially after his wife came in, that they could think of nothing else. They were half-distracted with anxiety. Their messenger could not find the doctor, which made matters worse. However, the little girl did not really seem very sick, so I could not help thinking they were unnecessarily excited. The effect on them, however, was just as bad as if the child were really very ill.

The messenger was hardly despatched the second time before Jamie and Mr. Clemens began to talk of our getting away in the next train, whereat he (Mr. C.) said to his wife, 'Why did n't you tell me of that?' etc., etc. It was all over in a moment, but in his excitement he spoke more quickly than he knew, and his wife felt it. Nothing was said at the time, indeed we hardly observed it; but we were intensely amused and could not help finding it pathetic,

too, afterward, when he came to us and said he spent the larger part of his life on his knees making apologies, and now he had got to make an apology to us about the carriage. He was always bringing the blood to his wife's face by his bad behavior, and here this very morning he had said such things about that carriage! His whole life was one long apology. His wife had told him to see how well we behaved (poor we!), and he knew he had everything to learn.

He was so amusing about it that he left us in a storm of laughter, yet at bottom I could see it was no laughing matter to him. He is in dead earnest, with a desire for growth and truth in life, and with such a sincere admiration for his wife's sweetness and beauty of character, that the most prejudiced and hardest heart could not fail to fall in love with him. She looked like an exquisite lily as we left her. So white and delicate and tender! Such sensitiveness and self-control as she possesses are very very rare.

*May Day.* — Jamie recalled one or two things 'Mark Twain' had said which I have omitted. When he lectured a few weeks ago in New York, he said he had just reached the middle of his lecture, and was going on with flying colors, when he saw in the audience just in front of him a noble gray head and beard. 'Nobody told me that William Cullen Bryant was there, but I had seen his picture and I knew that was the old man. I was sure he saw the failure I was making, and all the weak points in what I was saying, and I could n't do anything more — that old man just spoiled my work. Then they told me afterward that my lecture was good and all that; I could only say, "No, no, that fine old head spoiled all I had to say *that night*."'

# VÆ VICTORIBUS: A LESSON TO CONQUERORS

BY IVAN OSTROSHKI

## I

AFTER kissing me, she said, —

‘Oh, how glad to see you again. Do you know me, or have you forgotten me? I have changed so — disfigured as I am by sorrow, hunger, and all the sufferings inflicted by the enemy.’

‘Stoja, certainly I know you,’ I answered.

‘My dear, sweet Iko, I came to complain to you. Until to-day I managed somehow or other; but now I and my children are facing the end — we shall die like dogs of horrible hunger.’

‘What’s that you say! If your children are so in need, go tell my mother to give you two or three pounds of flour; as you know, I brought a little grain from Pec.’

‘No, dear Iko; indeed, your mother and I divided the last bit of bread and flour without your orders.’

‘And what of your husband?’

‘Don’t you remember? Did you hear?’

‘Oh, of course — I did. He lies dead at Stit.’

‘Yes, he is at Stit with his comrades, and I beg of you to help me,’ said Stoja, her eyes filled with tears.

‘My dear, don’t weep. Only tell me why you ask sight of a blind man. Don’t you realize my position? If the Austro-Hungarian army of occupation knew that I had fled from their prison-camp, they would tear me to pieces with their bayonets like a loaf of bread! But at any rate, tell me of your misery and what I can do for you.’

‘You remember it was long ago that our ever-proud Montenegro capitulated, and that King Nicholas fled to Italy. During those unforgetably dark days, the Austro-Hungarian troops entered our small and beloved country. They did not harm us women, nor the children and old men, but they robbed us of everything we had — animals, hay, grain, straw, and potatoes. For only one of all the animals they took did the Austrians give me a certificate. With this little paper I went several times to K——, where the military treasury is, trying to receive something for it in order to save my children. Again and again I went to K——, but again and again they did n’t pay me. Until to-day we have eaten food fit for animals, but we can’t exist on it any longer. Look at this false bill, and if you can’t help me — kill me!’

‘Is the enemy’s military treasury still at K——?’ I inquired.

‘Of course it is there, and they pay all bills of value — all, that is, of which the *Zettel*<sup>1</sup> is good.’

As I looked at the bill, written perhaps by a drunken Boche, an idea flashed through my head. Why had I studied German for more than eight years? Against brute force I should have to use deceit. I looked again and again at the bill, first on one side, then on the other. It was very small, about the size of a cigarette paper. One had written upon it in German, with a pen-

<sup>1</sup> Certificate of requisition.