

Monday, October 15, 1906

**Item from Susy's Biography about Sour Mash and the flies—
Mrs. Clemens's experiment for destroying the flies in the Hartford
house—Soap-bubble item from Susy's Biography; Mr. Clemens's
comments—Mr. Clemens's experience in learning to ride high
bicycle—Letters regarding his fiftieth birthday.**

From Susy's Biography.

Mamma is teaching Jean a little natural history and is making a little collection of insects for her. But mamma does not allow Jean to kill any insects she only collects those insects that are found dead. Mamma has told us all, particularly Jean, to bring her all the little dead insects that she finds. The other day as we were all sitting at supper Jean broke into the room and ran triumphantly up to Mamma and presented her with a plate full of dead flies. Mamma thanked Jean very enthusiastically although she with difficulty concealed her amusement. Just then Sour Mash entered the room and Jean believing her hungry asked Mamma for permission to give her the flies. Mamma laughingly consented and the flies almost immediately disappeared.

*September
9th, 1885*

Sour Mash's presence indicates that this adventure occurred at Quarry Farm. Susy's Biography interests itself pretty exclusively with historical facts; where they happen is not a matter of much concern to her. When other historians refer to the Bunker Hill Monument they know it is not necessary to mention that that monument is in Boston. Susy recognizes that when she mentions Sour Mash it is not necessary to localize her. To Susy, Sour Mash is the Bunker Hill Monument of Quarry Farm.

Ordinary cats have some partiality for living flies, but none for dead ones; but Susy does not trouble herself to apologize for Sour Mash's eccentricities of taste. This Biography was for *us*, and Susy knew that nothing that Sour Mash might do could startle us or need explanation, we being aware that she was not an ordinary cat, but moving upon a plane far above the prejudices and superstitions which are law to common catdom.

Once in Hartford the flies were so numerous for a time, and so troublesome, that Mrs. Clemens conceived the idea of paying George* a bounty on all the flies he might kill. The children saw an opportunity here for the acquisition of sudden wealth. They supposed that their mother merely wanted to accumulate dead flies, for some aesthetic or scientific reason or other, and they judged that the more flies she could get, the happier she would be; so they went into business with George on a commission. Straightway the dead flies began to arrive in such quantities that Mrs. Clemens was pleased beyond words with the success of her idea. Next, she was astonished that one house could furnish so many. She was paying an extravagantly high bounty, and it presently began to look as if by this addition to our expenses we were now probably living beyond our income. After a few days there was peace and comfort; not a fly was discoverable in the house; there wasn't a

*The colored butler.

straggler left. Still, to Mrs. Clemens's surprise, the dead flies continued to arrive by the plateful, and the bounty-expense was as crushing as ever. Then she made inquiry, and found that our innocent little rascals had established a Fly Trust, and had hired all the children in the neighborhood to collect flies on a cheap and unburdensome commission.

Mrs. Clemens's experience in this matter was a new one for her, but the governments of the world had tried it, and wept over it, and discarded it, every half-century since man was created. Any government could have told her that the best way to increase wolves in America, rabbits in Australia, and snakes in India, is to pay a bounty on their scalps. Then every patriot goes to raising them.

From Susy's Biography.

*September
10th, 1885*

The other evening Clara and I brought down our new soap bubble water and we all blew soap bubbles. Papa blew his soap bubbles and filled them with tobacco smoke and as the light shone on them they took very beautiful opaline colors. Papa would hold them and then let us catch them in our hand and they felt delightful to the touch the mixture of the smoke and water had a singularly pleasant effect.

It is human life. We are blown upon the world, we float buoyantly upon the summer air a little while, complacently showing off our grace of form and our dainty iridescent colors; then we vanish with a little puff, leaving nothing behind but a memory—and sometimes not even that. I suppose that at those solemn times when we wake in the deeps of the night and reflect, there is not one of us who is not willing to confess that he is really only a soap-bubble, and as little worth the making.

I remember those days of twenty-one years ago, and a certain pathos clings about them. Susy, with her manifold young charms and her iridescent mind, was as lovely a bubble as any we made that day—and as transitory. She passed, as they passed, in her youth and beauty, and nothing of her is left but a heart-break and a memory. That long-vanished day came vividly back to me a few weeks ago when, for the first time in twenty-one years, I found myself again amusing a child with smoke-charged soap-bubbles.

1885 Susy's next date is November 29th, 1885, the eve of my fiftieth birthday. It seems a good while ago. I must have been rather young for my age then, for I was trying to tame an old-fashioned bicycle nine feet high. It is to me almost unbelievable, at my present stage of life, that there have really been people willing to trust themselves upon a dizzy and unstable altitude like that, and that I was one of them. Twichell and I took lessons every day. He succeeded, and became a master of the art of riding that wild vehicle, but I had no gift in that direction and was never able to stay on mine long enough to get any satisfactory view of the planet. Every time I tried to steal a look at a pretty girl, or any other kind of scenery, that single moment of inattention gave the bicycle the chance it had been waiting for, and I went over the front of it and struck the ground on my head or my back before I had time to realize that something was happening. I didn't always go over the front way; I had other ways, and practised them all; but no matter which way was chosen for me there was always one monotonous result—the bicycle skinned

my leg and leapt up into the air and came down on top of me. Sometimes its wires were so sprung by this violent performance that it had the collapsed look of an umbrella that had had a misunderstanding with a cyclone. After each day's practice I arrived at home with my skin hanging in ribbons, from my knees down. I plastered the ribbons on where they belonged, and bound them there with handkerchiefs steeped in Pond's Extract, and was ready for more adventures next day. It was always a surprise to me that I had so much skin, and that it held out so well. There was always plenty, and I soon came to understand that the supply was going to remain sufficient for all my needs. It turned out that I had nine skins, in layers, one on top of the other like the leaves of a book, and some of the doctors said it was quite remarkable.

I was full of enthusiasm over this insane amusement. My teacher was a young German from the bicycle factory, a gentle, kindly, patient creature, with a pathetically grave face. He never smiled; never made a remark; he always gathered me tenderly up when I plunged off, and helped me on again without a word. When he had been teaching me twice a day for three weeks I introduced a new gymnastic—one that he had never seen before—and so at last a compliment was wrung from him, a thing which I had been risking my life for days to achieve. He gathered me up and said mournfully:

"Mr. Clemens, you can fall off a bicycle in more different ways than any person I ever saw before."

From Susy's Biography.

Papa will be fifty years old tomorrow, and among his numerous presents The Critick sent him a delightful notice of his semi centennial; containing a poem to him by Dr. Holmes a paragraph from Mr. F. R. Stockton, one from Mr. C. D. Warner, and one from Mr. J. C. Harris (Uncle Remus).

*November
29th, 1885*

Papa was very much pleased and so were we all. I will put the poem and paragraphs in here.

The Critic.

Mark Twain's Semi-Centennial.

MARK TWAIN will be half-a-hundred years old on Monday. Within the past half-century he has done more than any other man to lengthen the lives of his contemporaries by making them merrier, and it looks as if he were going to do even more good in this way within the next fifty years than in those just ended. We print below a few letters of condolence from writers whose pens, like his, have increased 'the stock of harmless pleasures,' and whom we have reminded of the approach of Mr. Clemens's first semi-centennial.

MY DEAR MR. CLEMENS:

In your first half-century you have made the world laugh more than any other man. May you repeat the whole performance and 'mark twain!' Yours very truly,

FRANK R. STOCKTON.

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA.

MY DEAR NEIGHBOR:

You may think it an easy thing to be fifty years old, but you will find it not so easy to stay there, and your next fifty years will slip away much faster than those just accomplished. After all, half a century is not much, and I wouldn't throw it up to you now, only for the chance of saying that few living men have crowded so much into that space as you, and few have done so much for the entertainment and good-fellowship of the world. And I am glad to see that you wear your years as lightly as your more abundant honors. Having successfully turned this corner, I hope that we shall continue to be near neighbors and grow young together. Ever your friend,

CHAS. DUDLEY WARNER.

Tuesday, October 16, 1906

**Reminiscences of Charles Dudley Warner and Uncle Remus—
Anecdote of Jim Wolf and the wasps.**

Warner is gone. Stockton is gone. I attended both funerals. Warner was a near neighbor, from the autumn of '71 until his death, nineteen years afterward. It is not the privilege of the most of us to have many intimate friends—a dozen is our aggregate—but I think he could count his by the score. It is seldom that a man is so beloved by both sexes and all ages as Warner was. There was a charm about his spirit, and his ways, and his words, that won all that came within the sphere of its influence. Our children adopted him while they were little creatures, and thenceforth, to the end, he was "Cousin Charley" to them. He was "Uncle Charley" to the children of more than one other friend. Mrs. Clemens was very fond of him, and he always called her by her first name—shortened. Warner died, as she died, and as I would die—without premonition, without a moment's warning.

Uncle Remus still lives, and must be over a thousand years old. Indeed I know that this must be so, because I have seen a new photograph of him in the public prints within the last month or so, and in that picture his aspects are distinctly and strikingly geological, and one can see that he is thinking about the mastodons and the plesiosaurians that he used to play with when he was young.

It is just a quarter of a century since I have seen Uncle Remus. He visited us in our home in Hartford and was reverently devoured by the big eyes of Susy and Clara,—for I made a deep and awful impression upon the little creatures, who knew his book by heart through my nightly declamation of its tales to them—by revealing to them privately that he was the real Uncle Remus whitewashed so that he could come into people's houses the front way.

He was the bashfullest grown person I have ever met. When there were people about he stayed silent, and seemed to suffer until they were gone. But he was lovely, nevertheless; for the sweetness and benignity of the immortal Remus looked out from his eyes, and the graces and sincerities of his character shone in his face.

It may be that Jim Wolf was as bashful as Harris. It hardly seems possible, yet as I look back fifty-six years and consider Jim Wolf, I am almost persuaded that he was. He