

Mark Twain as an Editor

The late Mark Twain spent two years of his life in Buffalo, including the "honeymoon" period, for it was while he was editor of the Buffalo Express (1869-1870) that he married Miss Olivia Langdon of Elmira, N. Y.

On assuming the editorship of the Express on August 21, 1869, the man who was afterwards to become one of the world's greatest humorists, said editorially:

"I only wish to assure parties having a friendly interest in the prosperity of this journal that I am not going to hurt the paper deliberately and intentionally, at any time. I am not going to introduce any startling reform or in any way attempt to make trouble. I am simply going to do my plain, unpretending duty--when I cannot get out of it. I shall work diligently and honestly and faithfully at all times and upon all occasions, when privation and want shall compel me to do so. In writing I shall always confine myself strictly to the truth, except when it is attended with inconvenience. I shall witheringly rebuke all forms of crime and misconduct, except when committed by the party inhabiting my own vest. I shall not make any use of slang or vulgarity upon any occasion or in any circumstances, and shall never use profanity except in discussing house rent and taxes. Indeed, upon second thought, I will not even then, for it is inelegant, un-Christian and degrading. I shall not often meddle with politics, because we have a political editor who is already excellent and only needs a term in the penitentiary to be perfect. I shall not write any poetry unless I conceive a spite against the subscribers."

One day Mark took an invitation to furnish a mental photograph as a text for half a column.

"I have but little character," he wrote, "but what I have I am willing to part with for the public good. I would have been a better man if I had had a chance, but things have always been against me. I never had any parents, hardly--only just a father and mother--and so I have had to struggle along the best way I could." Then he went on to answer the questions put to him. Some of these questions were:

What is your favorite object in Nature? A dumb belle.

Where would you like to live? In the moon, because there is no water there.

If not yourself, who would you rather be? The Wandering Jew with a nice annuity.

What is your idea of happiness? Finding the buttons on.

What do you most dread? Exposure.

What is your aim in life? To endeavor to be absent when the time comes.

What are the sweetest words in the world? Not guilty.

What is your motto? Be virtuous and you will be eccentric.

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A RACE WITH FIRE CARS

A Story of the Civil War

By EDWIN C. TRASK

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When one morning just before sunrise we swept down on Turnerville, taking the place by surprise, we found three locomotives and twenty freight cars standing in the railroad yard.

A train was made up, loaded with troops, and I, having been a locomotive engineer, was put in the cab. Before starting the general said to me:

"Sergeant, the success of this expedition depends upon you. Colonel Parker is in command, but has nothing to do with running the train. That's in your hands. As soon as the Confederates know we're here they'll send a force to cut us off. But they'll need the bridge at B., and I want you to get these men there before daylight in the morning to burn it. But you must keep a sharp lookout for snags. The citizens on the line you will pass over are all hostile, and they'll strain every nerve to wreck your train. Remember, not only the lives of the men in these cars, but the safety of the whole command depends upon you."

The first ten miles we did by daylight. Then it grew dark, and I had nothing to see by but the lantern, which lit the track dimly. My head was thrust far out the cab window, and my hand was on the throttle. Twice I stopped her within a few feet of a tie wedged in between a rail and the ties, and once I bumped a tree that had been felled across the track, having not quite stopped before reaching it. On an elevation I struck a junction and a lot of people standing about staring at us as we passed. I didn't like their looks. But the telegraph wires had been cut, and I didn't see how they could send word ahead. There were half a dozen freight cars on a sidetrack, but no locomotive.

Soon after leaving the junction I shut off steam and let her roll down the long declivity. I was nearly at the foot on a short upward grade when I had a break--the engine was only fit for a junk heap--and spent half an hour at a standstill while I patched it. As I remounted the cab Corporal Bob Jenkins, who was acting as fireman, pointed up the hill with a look of horror. I saw a bright light, and a moment later a short string of freight cars shot from out a cut. I knew at once what it meant. The citizens at the junction had started the cars I had seen on the sidetrack, first having set them alight with the hope that they would smash us on catching us and if there was anything left of our train burn it. I jumped into the cab and pulled the throttle.

The grade behind us wasn't less than 30 degrees, and the fire train was coming like lightning. I had a few train lengths to go on nearly a level, then a straightaway track on a slight decline. The fire train was coming at a rate of a mile in forty-five seconds, and the best my old wheezer could do was a mile in two minutes. If I couldn't haul away far enough before the cars behind reached a place where they would lose momentum they would ruin us.

Then began the race of my life. I could have stopped, let the men out of the cars and permitted the smashup, but the bridge wouldn't be burned and our force at Turnerville would be cut off. I remembered the pressure of the hand the general had given me, and I tightly grasped the throttle, resolved to get away from those fire cars or get wrecked.

I held my eyes front, while Bob Jenkins kept me posted on the fire cars. "They're gaining on us mighty fast!" "Only a mile away!" "They'll catch us sure!" "They're coming like a streak of lightning!" These were the unassuming words Bob gave me while my locomotive puffed and sputtered and dragged along at what seemed to us a snail's pace.

Then suddenly turning a curve I saw a light ahead. Great heavens! Were we to have fire both in front and behind us? Running on a straight track, I saw men kindling a small bridge. They had got the fire well going, but I didn't believe they had burned the stringers sufficiently to let us down. At any rate, I determined to risk it. Leaving on full speed--I couldn't put on any more--I dashed into the flames. My locomotive crossed safely, and I was congratulating myself that the train was all over when I felt a shock. We went a short distance and stopped.

The bridge had gone down under the last two cars. Several men were badly injured, but no one killed. All were got out before the fire cars plunged in on the wreck and stopped there to mingle their burning with that of the other material.

The men of the last two cars got into those cars that had crossed, carrying the wounded. I mounted my engine, and we steamed on for the rest of the night, reaching the bridge at B. just before dawn. My work was done. I leaned out of the cab window, watching the men carry the wood and petroleum and distribute them along the structure. Then suddenly there was a flash, and from one end to the other all was aflame. I never looked at destruction before with such comfort and delight.

When I got back to camp I got a warm pressure of the hand from the general, and it was not long before, through his influence, I was given a commission. But the best work I did in the war was the night before those fire cars.

FORCED TO PROPOSE

By ANNA WOODBRIDGE

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It was in the reign of King Edward of England, the fourth of that name, that John Ochiltree, a young farmer living in the county of Kent, met a lass called Mary Griggs at a Maying and conceived a strong passion for her. He danced with her around the Maypole and looked at her languishingly, but his modesty and the strength of his love tied his tongue so that he could say nothing to her.

Mary had been keeping company with Richard Doyle, a maker of armor, but the moment he laid eyes on John Ochiltree, Doyle saw that she was lost to him in favor of his rival. He drew away sulky, thus leaving the field to the man who had supplanted him.

The day after the Maying John waited for Mary to come out of her father's thatched cottage and joined her. He managed to wish her "good morning" and said that the crops promised to be good and that one of his cows had calved, but besides this he said nothing. Mary was a girl of spirit and would not help him on. She said to herself that he should talk to her like any other man or she would have none of him. He continued to show her by his expression that he was enamored of her, and when he looked at her his eyes had a melancholy expression.

Now, as soon as John got away from her his tongue was unloosed, and he could say what he liked. He told his mother of his trouble and convinced her that it was impossible that he should tell Mary his love and ask her to marry him.

"Then," said his mother, "Mary must propose to you."

"She will never do that," sighed John.

"She must be made to. My son wishes her for a wife, and he must have her. Besides, Mary is a good girl and will have a good dowry. I wish her for a daughter-in-law. I have made up my mind that, since you are unable to ask Mary to be your wife, she shall claim you for her husband."

"And how will you do that, mother?"

"Never mind, so that I do it. We women have to get through the world by exercising our wits. We are not men, to force our way, so we have to plan."

Things went from bad to worse between John and Mary. Determined to force him to declare himself, she encouraged her former suitor. This made John ill, and so great was his ailment that his mother feared he would die. She went to Mary and, telling her of John's condition and the cause, begged her to do that which was expected of the sterner sex--ask John to be her husband. Mary vowed that she would have no man's wife who had not the courage to ask her, and, though John might die, she would not do his part for him.

Not long after this a sheep belonging to a neighbor was found in John Ochiltree's fold. John was arrested for sheep stealing and thrown into prison. "The lad has lost his mind for love of you," said John's mother to Mary. The lass was secretly troubled, but tossed her head and said that a man who was afraid of a girl had no mind to lose.

John was tried and convicted and sentenced to be hanged.

Then Mary began to regret that she had refused to be persuaded. But it was now too late. She had driven John into insanity, for she believed what his mother said, or she had unintentionally bewitched him so that he had stolen a sheep. She sat at home mourning her sad fate at loving a man so defective. John's mother brought a request from her son that Mary would be present at his execution. Mary declared that she could not endure such a sight and would not go. But she was at last persuaded to grant this last boon to a man she was now persuaded she had driven to the scaffold, and on the morning of the hanging she went there with her lover's mother.

A crowd was gathered around the culprit. John, with the rope around his neck, had ascended a few steps of the ladder. He stopped and, seeing Mary below, said to her:

"Mary, save me."

"How can I do that, John?"

"It is the law that if one about to be executed be claimed in marriage by any woman he shall go free."

"Is that so?" Mary asked of the sheriff.

"If you claim this man in marriage I dare not hang him."

"Oh, Mary," cried John, "have mercy on me."

"Save him," whispered the culprit's mother.

Mary hesitated. "No," she said at last; "let him hang."

John staggered, then seemed relieved. He climbed nimbly up the other rungs of the ladder, and the sheriff was about to swing him off when Mary cried:

"Hold! I claim this man in marriage."

John was taken down, and the lovers, of whom the one couldn't and the one wouldn't till death was imminent, fell into each other's arms.

John's mother had stolen the sheep and placed it in her fold to bring about the result and force Mary to make the proposition. And yet we are told that women have not the heads that men have to accomplish results.

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