

MARK TWAIN AMONG SCENES OF HIS EARLY LIFE.

Met at the Station in St. Louis by Captain Horace Bixby, Whom He Paid as a Boy to "Learn Him the River"—He Greets Old Pilot Friends—His Career on the Mississippi.

Mark Twain has been revisiting the scenes of his early life. He arrived at St. Louis a few days ago, and was met at the train by Capt. Horace Bixby, who is described in "Life on the Mississippi," and is prominent among the "river men" of St. Louis, and who, away back in the fifties, endeavored to teach the pilot business to Mark Twain.

"Why, Horace, you are as young as ever," said Mark Twain as he grasped the hand of his friend. "It's a curious thing to leave a man thirty-five years old, and come back at the end of twenty-one years and find him still thirty-five."

The two friends went to the Planters' Hotel and had a long chat. The news got around St. Louis that Mark Twain was in town, and later in the day, when he descended to the lobby of the hotel, he held a "reception," which, said The St. Louis Republic, looked as if "some official dignitary were visiting St. Louis." Then he went across Fourth Street from the Planters' to the rooms of the Pilots' Society. There the river men had gathered in force, and royally they welcomed back a long-lost brother. A short address was made, and a handshake exchanged all round.

Capt. Bixby escorted him to meet the pilots, among whom were Capt. Ed. L. Fulkerson, Capt. Beckjolley, Joe Carroll, "Commodore Rollingpin" Carter, Capt. Jesse Jameson, Capt. Bill Kelly, Capt. Ed. Callahan, Capt. Tony Burbuck, Capt. Fred Walsh, and Capt. Ed. West—nearly all of whom were associated with Sam Clemens on the river forty years ago.

At noon George J. Tansey, President of the Merchants' Exchange, escorted Mark Twain to the exchange, where he was introduced to many, and where he made a short address. He said that the sudden call upon him had found him without a text upon which to base his remarks. Of Mr. Tansey's introductory words Mark Twain said:

MARK TWAIN'S SPEECH.

"It is very embarrassing to listen to personal compliments, but doubly embarrassing when the recipient of them feels that they are deserved. Mr. Tansey said very many nice things about me, but there are many other things which he might have said, but which, no doubt, slipped his mind."

After lunching at the Planters' Mark Twain took a cab for Union Station, where he departed for Hannibal, his boyhood home. He looked forward with much interest to his two or three days' stay in Hannibal, and hoped there to meet many other old friends, and perhaps seek out the localities which are the setting for much of "Huckleberry Finn."

Asked before leaving what he thought of St. Louis, he replied that it was like coming to a strange American city.

"Everything is changed," said he. "The high massive buildings have made quite a different place of it. When I was here last, in '84, there were still some vestiges of the city which I knew before the war. These are now gone."

As his train sped along the elevated tracks and the broad river came within view, he gazed upon it pensively. Asked what he thought of it now, he replied:

"It's very natural; it's the same river."

He seemed impressed with the dignity of becoming a Doctor of Laws, which degree is to be conferred upon him June 4 by Missouri State University, and he was especially flattered since he did not have to work for it. "That is the colossal thing about it," said he.

HE DOCTORED LAWS.

"Have you ever doctored laws?" he was asked.

"Yes, cab laws," he said. "I doctored the cab laws in London and New York. The cabbies overcharged and I simply made them come down by calling official attention to the fact. The truth is, however, that the laws do not need to be doctored so much as the enforcement of them needs to be doctored."

Mark Twain emphatically denies that he

was a bad pilot. Asked concerning this report, he said:

"Who is it that claims I was a bad pilot? The fellow that said that never was a pilot himself. He don't know anything about me or piloting. He don't know where the Missouri empties into the Mississippi. He don't know a lumber raft from a packet."

The story of Mark Twain's years upon the river, when he sought to rise high in the ranks of pilotism, is the story of a man with a sense of humor who tackled a "tough proposition."

LEARNING PILOTING.

There are more kinks in a pilot's business than kinks in the Mississippi itself, yet in addition the pilot must know all these twists of the river—which Mark found out to his sorrow. He had some notion of the printing business when he met Capt. Bixby on the Ohio River in 1857. Having left his Hannibal home in search of both a career and adventure, he had landed in Cincinnati, and at Cincinnati had conceived the idea of a voyage to Central America, or South America, either one, with a vision of an expedition up the Amazon prospecting for Eldorado or some more tangible gold mine.

He set out upon his voyage with \$50 capital. He was to go from Cincinnati to New Orleans upon the steamer Paul Jones, which many years after he dubbed an "ancient tub." "For the sum of \$16," said he, "I had the scarred and tarnished splendors of 'her' main saloon principally to myself, for she was not a creature to attract the eye of wiser travelers."

Nevertheless, dawdling down to New Orleans on the Paul Jones must have awakened fascination for the great yellow torrent of mud which is facetiously named the "Father of Waters." In "Life on the Mississippi" Mark Twain explains that South American fortune seemed further away at New Orleans than at Cincinnati; that his \$50 capital was almost exhausted, and that he was forced to look about for a ready-money job. Probably for the several reasons indicated, when he found that his friend, the Paul Jones, was about to start for St. Louis, he "besieged a pilot," with whom he had scraped up an acquaintance on the down trip, and "after three hard days" the pilot surrendered. This pilot was Capt. Bixby. The Captain has his own way of telling of this siege.

BIXBY'S STORY.

"A pretty good-looking young fellow," said he, "was always hanging round the pilot house. Said he was going down in Central America or somewhere. But when we got down to New Orleans he came round to me and said that he thought he'd like to learn piloting; didn't think he'd go to Central America after all; asked if I wanted to teach him the river. I said that young fellows like him round were more trouble than use; couldn't think of it."

"He kept after me anyhow, and finally I agreed. He was to pay me \$500 for teaching him the river between St. Louis and New Orleans. We drew up a contract, which was put away in the safe of the boat, and neither he nor I have seen it to this day. Well, I was with him pretty much all the time for the next three years, or until he got his certificate as pilot. I know some say he didn't make much of a pilot, but I think he was about as good as any young fellow of his age—he was about twenty when I first met him."

"He was a quiet sort of boy at the time. Of, course, he had some of that famous drollery and humorous way of looking at things which is celebrated in his writings. I remember when I undertook to teach him I questioned him about his antecedents and other matters."

MARK'S HABITS.

"How are your habits?" I asked
"Fair," he mumbled.
"Do you chew?"
"No, don't chew," very deliberate.
"Do you drink?"

"No, don't drink! At this he seemed a little uneasy, and with a slight twinkle of the eye he continued: 'But I must smoke.'

"He must smoke to this day."

"After he left me in the latter part of '59 I saw little of him. He was on board the Alonzo Childs; was caught by the Confederates and had quite a time of it. Then he went out to Nevada and California, then to Honolulu, then to New York, and all over the world."

"How about the five hundred?" a reporter asked Capt. Bixby; "did he pay that?"

"Paid three hundred," responded the Captain. "You see the war came on and there wasn't much money to be had. He didn't have any and I didn't. So we just called the other two hundred off."

"Life on the Mississippi" is Mark Twain's narrative of his experiences on the river, and Capt. Bixby's name frequently enters. Like Capt. Bixby, Mark Twain has his own way of describing that three years' grapple with the science of piloting.

"I supposed," said Mark Twain, "that all a pilot had to do was to keep his boat in the river, and I did not consider that that could be much of a trick since it was so wide."

THE RIVER'S HABITS.

But it proved to be more of a trick and nearer a science than the pilot novitiate thought. Each eccentric bend in the stream had a name, each of hundreds of reefs had landings, which had names. The would-be steamboat guide was expected to load his mind with all these names, and with a mass of extraneous but practical information about each locality. Moreover, the river's course was constantly changing, new reefs were forming, and there were an endless number of boat-destroying snags which were sure to find positions, bayonetlike, in the most unexpected places.

At times Mark Twain was moved to give up the task of acquiring so much dry information. But he was encouraged by Mr. Bixby, who, according to Mark, said: "When I say I'll learn a man the river I mean it. And you can depend on it I'll learn him or kill him."

J. E. K. Stotts of St. Louis, a close friend of Mark Twain in war times, now past seventy years old, and who had not seen him since 1862, was late in getting down town and missed his friend at the Planters. Though elderly, Mr. Stotts set out in pursuit, and was just able to board the Burlington train which was bearing Mark Twain away from the city. He rode with him around to the Washington Avenue Station, talking of the time when they were boys together.

"Sam Clemens was a mighty queer boy, we all thought," said Mr. Stotts. "He was a quiet fellow who always drawled in his talk so long that it took twice the time in which another man would say a thing. He was always a good friend, though."

OTHER OLD FRIENDS.

William G. Waite, now a printer in The St. Louis Republic composing room, worked with Mark Twain in the early fifties, when he, too, was a printer. They were employed in the old Evening News office in St. Louis, and the future author worked a year in that capacity.

"He was a good printer," said Waite, "but mighty independent. He was always called 'that boy' by Charles G. Ramsey, proprietor and editor of The News. He'd get down late once in a while, and Ramsey would say: 'Here's that — boy late again.' Clemens didn't say anything to this for a long time, but one morning he turned on Ramsey and replied: 'Take your dashed situation, and go to (a warm country)! He left the office and we heard nothing of him for several years.'"

Mark Twain was born at the Village of Florida, not far west of Hannibal, Mo., and it was at Hannibal that he spent his boyhood days.