

CHAPTER VI

Those Famous White Clothes

From the earliest moment that I can remember, Father wore white linen suits in summer, and it was a bright picture to see him start off in the morning for his "study" with a quick, short step and a pile of pads or papers under his arm. He often gave a little caper of delight as he left the house, and laughed one of his affectionate laughs. One knew that that was good-by for the day unless something out of the ordinary were to happen, like the arrival of an unusual guest—Henry W. Beecher, Kipling, or some one else of equal importance.

Aunt Sue tried many times to prevail on Father to return to the house at noon and eat his favorite "dishes" cooked in the old Southern way by her colored cook, but even this great temptation rarely proved strong enough to wean him away from his work. In fact, eating never seemed of much importance to him. Once he wrote in a letter to Mother:

"I take only one meal a day just now and would keep this up if you permitted it. It consists of four boiled eggs and coffee. I stir in a *lot* of salt and then keep on dusting and stirring in black pepper till the eggs look dirty—then they're booming with fire and energy and you can taste them all the way down and even after they get there."

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He had no determined method of writing. Sometimes he made out the skeleton of a plot beforehand. Again, he allowed the plot to grow as he wrote. Once he said in a letter to Mother:

"I am trying to think out a short story. I've got the closing sentence of it all arranged and it is good and strong, but I haven't got any of the rest of the story yet. I don't know where to locate it, nor what it is to be about."

In another letter, he says:

"Yesterday I worked all day on a plan for a story. I got the plan all written down—two pages of note-paper and it was a very satisfactory day's work. I got to work at two in the afternoon and by six-thirty had written 2,500 words, the first chapter and part of the second, and the story already under swift movement. I read over the M.S. and made scarcely a correction in it; it read as I wanted it to, although written so fast."

Father's mind, always alive with some interest, took pleasure in making little inventions, also. Among others, he thought up an instructive game whereby my sisters and I might learn the dates of the reigns of the kings of England. He made use of a large circular plot of ground in front of the house which was bounded by a road. Stakes were driven into the ground at varying intervals, suggesting the longer or shorter reigns of kings, and each stake bore the name of a king. Now the game consisted in racing past the stakes and calling out names and dates

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of the numerous kings and their reigns. The panting aspirant was pronounced victor according to the lack of mistakes his voice made while his feet led the pace. We used to get very much excited over that game and were willing to play it by the hour. Father's curly hair waved in the breeze, caused by the speed of his rapid feet. He was picturesque in all circumstances.

He also thought out a very practical scrapbook which was even put on the market. A little later, he wrote about it in a letter to Mother:

"Well, Sweetheart, I am full of business today, on the Slote-scrapbook matter; it is coming along pretty promisingly. In fact, if that firm do not go back on the verbal agreement just this moment entered into with me in the presence of Webster and my lawyer, we shall close that old sore up Monday morning with a new contract which will give me my *rights*. That is to say, they have this morning agreed to

"Pay me royalty on the 'Art' Scrapbooks from the beginning.

"Pay all my lawyers' bills and other expense growing out of my attempts to reconstruct the Scrapbook contract.

"And, from this day henceforth and forever they will pay over to me one-third of the profits on each and every Scrapbook sold by them.

"It's a fine stroke of business and worth coming to New York for, although it does not give me all my rights. Still, it is a great deal better than I came down prepared for; I did not hope or expect to get a future

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third of the profits; but a cracking steam-radiator woke me at dawn this morning, and at once my anger sought an object to wreak itself upon. My thoughts fell upon the Scrapbook swindle and at the end of an hour I was in a fine rage. As a result I went to the appointed conference determined to require a third of the profits and allow nothing to turn me from that decision. And so I stood through all argument, being supported by the irritation engendered by that confounded radiator."

Father was always happiest when at work, and though he insisted upon calling himself a lazy man because he considered nothing work which was a pleasure, my impression is very strong that he often forced himself to go to work when he was not at all in the mood. Naturally, once he started the machine going, he found delight in its action. Apropos of this question, he wrote a letter to Mother:

"I'm glad Clara is banging away on the piano—work is the darlinest recreation in this world and whomsoever Nature has fitted to love it, is armed against care and sorrow."

In order more thoroughly to refute his own idea that he was lazy, I can point to the fact that although he was not practical or business-like by nature, he forced himself to such continued attention to the matter of a typesetting machine which Mr. Paige had invented, that he finally arrived at a point when his mind easily picked up business ideas and even formed original ones. As proof of this I will quote from a letter Father wrote Mother in

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which he repeats words of praise he had received on his business capacity from no less a person than the great oil magnate, H. H. Rogers. Father writes:

“Do you remember how we laughed, upwards of twenty years ago when Twichell told us Henry W. Sage had warmly praised me to him as a person of extraordinary business ability? Well, the other day Mr. Rogers said to Dr. Rice in substance—‘Clemens has a very remarkable business head for large things, but absolutely none for small. He has an eagle-vision for wide business horizons, but he can't take in the details that lie between and it frets him to try. To see his mind go to wreck and ruin over a poor little complexity that wouldn't puzzle a child—why, it's pathetic!’ ”

It may be that any fine intellect can grasp certain big, practical or business ideas without effort. Yet my conviction is that my father conquered a part of this intellectual area through labor more than innate talent. His energy was always of cosmic quality—fiery, determined, possessive. His relations with Mr. H. H. Rogers were of the most delightful. He enjoyed his ready sense of humor. He profoundly admired him as a man and appreciated his intellectual gifts. The great generosity Mr. Rogers showed in lavish expenditure of time and thought on Father's troubles could not be surpassed. The valuable advice which Father received from him at the time when his business affairs were in bad shape, saved him from complete financial defeat. The proofs of friendship Mr. Rogers gave were innumerable, and neither Father nor any member of his family could fail to thrill at the name

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of Henry Rogers as long as life should last. I will quote from a letter of Father's to Mother:

“Who achieved the miracle for us? Who has saved us from separations, unendurable toil on the platform and public bankruptcy? HENRY ROGERS. And he was the only man in America who both could and cheerfully would. His name is music in my ear.”

This did not mean that Father was saved from all platform labor, for he was obliged to tour the world, lecturing, in order to recover some of his losses. But it did mean that Mr. Rogers, by giving him expert advice and counsel, had saved him from having to sacrifice the rest of his life that way.

Usually we spent about three and a half months at Quarry Farm, Elmira, arriving there the middle of June. Those days were happy and serene. It seems remarkable to me now that such peace could reign in a house full of varying temperaments and even races. My mother brought German and Irish maids with her, while my aunt employed colored and American servants. There were perhaps two causes for the organ-point of serenity, holding up the symphonic structure of our lives. These causes were Aunt Sue and my mother. This makes me think of a letter written by our good friend the well-known manager, Major Pond, who so successfully directed Father's lecture tours. I will give a quotation from his letter:

“To travel with people is to know them. It is seldom a party sets out for a tour that there is not some *one* in

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the party that does not possess annoying traits, but *this* party seems to have been just right all round. It may be that there was a controlling power concentrated in some *one* of us that accounted for so much gentleness, amiability, sweetness and good sense. It may be there was some *one* in the troupe that possessed these qualities. If so, it was not I, nor Mr. Clemens, nor Mrs. Pond, but it *was* some *one* of the party. Perhaps now you can guess that it was Mrs. Clemens, the most noble example of woman I have ever had the honor to know."

If "storms" went on at Quarry Farm, they were certainly not evident to us children. Faces were lit with the same joyful spirit that pervaded the scenery. There was sun-dipped harmony in field, sky, and home. Sometimes there were invasions, however, from the outside, when uninvited and undesired callers sprinkled discord into the atmosphere. Father describes his feelings on such an occasion in a letter to his brother:

"... If I seem to write in a chafed and unsaccharine vein, take no note of it. All the old cats in Christendom seem to have chosen this particular day to visit here. It never rains disagreeable people but it pours them. Miss S. (whom I delight to hate) called first, and she was no sooner gone than Mrs. B. (whom to hate is an unspeakable luxury) came. When I get a sight of either of these women I am 'done' for that day. When they both come in one evening I degenerate into pure lunacy."

We used to call Father the "spitting gray kitten" because in many of his spurts of irritation he kept a soft,

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fuzzy quality in his demeanor that reminded us of a little kitten with its fur all ruffled. We enjoyed this spectacle, and were inclined to inspire it whenever we could. When his performance was ended, we would exclaim, "Oh, you bad, spitting gray kitten!" and he would laugh a gay little laugh and shake his leonine head of gray curls. He showed love differently from other people because he was a bit afraid of it. To express affection seemed to embarrass him, which gave him a youthful, sheepish little look that added charm to his bearing. He would stand near Mother and surreptitiously take her hand. Then, while squeezing it with vehement devotion, he would look around to see if any of the children were noticing. If his glance met our eyes, he gave a tiny toss of his head and a half-embarrassed little laugh. We found great pleasure in pretending not to see anything until it was too late for Father to escape. Then suddenly we disclosed our interest in the love-scene, to the confusion of our bashful parent. We certainly were little devils, all three of us. Father used to call me "the sassmill," but on the whole I think he relished my "sass."

Apropos of his style of kitten-spitting as it appeared on paper now and then, I shall here insert a letter about a toy.

"Livy darling, that express-package you write me about is a cussed game of some kind which G.P.L. wants Webster and Co. to publish; and, of course (being an author, that is to say a jackass) he bundles it off to Elmira instead of first inquiring if that is the right place to send it to. An author always jumps to conclusions, always acts upon suppositions; never knows ANY-thing, and

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doesn't want to; he'd just as soon suppose, and rather; I never saw an author who was aware that there is any dimensional difference between a fact and a surmise. They ought all to be damned. And when you get along down to people who are not authors at all but only half-breeds, like L., it is thoroughly offensive to have them sporting the symbolical assnesses of the fullbloods, this way. Next, he will be crying for his Toy—it's the only one he's got; it's his patent office model; that's the reason he takes so much author-like pains to send it to the wrong place; and dern him he never shall have it again, for I will burn it when I get there. When one's character begins to fall under suspicion and disfavor, how swift, then, is the work of disintegration and destruction. Until this hour I have never heard a whisper against L., of any sort; and yet now I am perfectly satisfied that he opened the Johnstown dam, as I am of anything in the world. I love you."

And to quote a sentence from another letter:

"I have been to St. Nicholas to curse the proof-reader's attempts to improve my spelling and punctuation. He had also written some suggestions in the margin. But Clarke will have the matter set according to copy hereafter and see that the proof-reader retains his suggestions in the mush of his decayed brain."

His bark was far worse than his bite except in important matters, and the bark was accompanied by a cunning twinkle in his brilliant eyes.

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Finally, on the happy peace of these summers fell two heavy shadows. Death robbed us of my lovely grandmother, and, not long afterward, of my uncle Theodore Crane, in whose home we spent our summers. Both were losses greatly felt and they were the first sorrows my sisters and I had suffered in our youth. Although but children, our natures responded with sharp feeling to the mysterious change the unknown power of death creates. The Langdon home, Quarry Farm, could never be the same again. One volume was closed. Another was about to be opened, but we were a little slow to cut the leaves.

It happened at this time that Father found himself in serious financial difficulties. A few years before he had sunk most of his earnings in the Charles L. Webster Publishing Company, for a time a successful concern. Owing to bad business years, bad investments and mismanagement, however, the publishing house was rapidly losing ground. Its fall would cause my father financial losses, grave losses, indeed. Therefore, it was decided we should go to Europe, where we could live more reasonably until something should be done to improve our straitened situation.

Pulling up anchor and sailing away from our beloved Hartford was a sorrowful episode. We adored our home and friends. We had to leave so much treasured beauty behind that we could not look forward with any pleasure to life abroad. We all regarded this break in a hitherto smooth flow of harmonious existence as something resembling a tragedy. We had showered love on the home itself—the library; the conservatory sweet with the perfume of flowers; the bright bedrooms; and, outside, the

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trees, the tender eyebrights, the river reflecting clouds and sky. These were our friends. They belonged to us; and we to them. How could we part?

Our schoolroom provided memories never to be repeated. Snowstorms raging about the many windows, against which a fire on the hearth cozily defended us. And our Shakespeare club! Oh, the wonderful plays we produced with a larger cast of actors than auditors! Memory tests of books we had read and hated. Recitations of poetry we adored. Concerts performed on our baby upright. But, best of all, popcorn and roasted chestnuts! All these royal pleasures in a room modestly called the schoolroom. Could Europe compete with these? Instinctively, we felt that life would never be more vivid or bright than it had been during these years of childhood. We passed from room to room with leaden hearts, looked back and lingered—lingered. An inner voice whispered we should never return, and we never did.

We scanned the faces of friends, servants, pets. We spoke that heart-breaking word "Good-by," and, tear-blinded, passed, for the last time, through the front door and away to unknown lands.

We sailed on the French-line and went straight to Paris; from there to Switzerland for most of the summer; and finally to Marienbad.

We all fell in love with Marienbad, which, as a watering-place, can hardly be surpassed. The great pine woods offered poetic walks without number, and there was plenty of entertainment provided by people of many types that congregated from all lands to heal their maladies. Fortunately, there were many young people present, and in the early morning, when files of travelers strolled

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along the promenade which led to the health-giving spring, numerous bright uniforms were visible. These uniforms filled our hearts with satisfaction; naturally I refer to my sisters' hearts and mine. What a world of romance lay in those braided coats and plumed helmets! Could the man himself compete with his own array of colored cloth and shining crown?

Among the foreigners who called on Father was an old Russian lady. She was very fat, self-assured, and penetrating. That is to say, she was penetrating in the sense that she allowed no desire or thought of hers to be brushed aside. She could get into a room where no one else managed to set foot, and she could sing a song by force, no matter what the odds might be against her. Father was still at the stage when only one kind of music was welcome to his ears, and that was negro songs such as he performed himself. But here comes an overwhelming woman, speaking English with a strong accent and dropping frequently into French and German, who draws from under her cloak a large package of songs with the clear intention of singing them all to my helpless father. As soon as he gathers the drift of her outpouring and voluble announcement, he hastens to explain that he knows nothing of music and cannot accept the compliment of her intended performance.

But Father might just as well have been in another city, so little did the great intruder heed what he said. On she rattled in a vibrant voice while she laid off her hat, her gloves, her coat, finally unloosening her collar, too. Then she opened the door into the corridor and pulled in a young girl by the hand whom she hastily

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pushed onto the piano-stool. Father made one or two more desperate efforts to head off this catastrophe, but what could the poor man do against that Amazon? Standing near the piano, she commanded the girl to start, and then let loose such a blast herself that Father instinctively pushed back his chair several feet.

Encouraged by this compliment to her power, she accompanied the next emission of noise with the most coquettish of smiles and compelling gaze. Father moved restlessly in his chair and shifted his eyes to and from her glance. One had to think of a serpent and a bird. My sisters and I sat in a row on the sofa, consumed with the giggles. It was a new experience to see Father's positive temperament yielding to all this vulgar vanity. Physical size, in itself, is often impressive, and the white-haired, bewrinkled, and determined lady had plenty of that. She looked as strong as a German hussar. She kept on singing and fixing Father with her coquettish eyes until he grew pale and left the room. He returned with support. Having accosted a strange guest of the hotel in the corridor, he drew him into the slough, and, begging him to make himself comfortable, escaped to the farthest corner of Marienbad. The Russian lady continued singing, but asked intermittently when Father was coming back. As no one knew, she finally contented herself with departing, having sung most of the songs, anyway.

I shall tell another small incident in spite of its rather personal character, because it reveals an unexpected side of Father.

During the latter part of our stay in that charming town, Mother went to Berlin to look for rooms and took

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my elder sister with her. Father, Jean, and our good maid, Katie, were left behind. It so happened that an invitation came to attend a large military ball which was going to be an important and picturesque affair; picturesque, that is, to a foreigner. Father seemed to forget that I had never been permitted to go to a ball, and did not even possess a ball-dress. I certainly did not remind him of these facts when I saw that he was considering taking me to such a brilliant social event. Oh no! Out of the hotel I ran, with Katie (no longer in her teens) trying to follow my hop, skip, and jump.

A gown, a gown, a beautiful evening gown, my very first! Katie insisted that for my childish years only something very simple would be suitable. I did not agree with her. Then Katie explained that funds were limited, too. This she whispered in my ear, for such a hideous fact must not be known to the shopkeeper. Finally she persuaded me to take a most insignificant-looking pink frock, so slightly *décolleté* that I blushed with shame. At last the great day came, and long before the proper hour I persuaded my father to start for the ball.

We arrived shamefully early. But Father did not seem to mind this. He led me to seats by the wall from which we could watch the guests as they made their entrance. What a dazzling occasion! Such uniforms defied description, and the bearing of these gentlemen in their gaudy coverings—ah, me!

Father seemed to be having as good a time as I—at the beginning of the evening. But, as he did not dance, his interest faded before mine did. After I had whirled about for a couple of hours he took me home. Very

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promptly after breakfast the next morning a visitor was announced. It was one of the officers who had danced with me several times at the ball. He wore a sky-blue coat heavily embroidered in gold, and a white plume waved from his helmet. He had come now to pay his respects. *To me!* The least important member of the family! This was upsetting. I did not know how to speak to him. After a few moments I excused myself and ran to Katie.

"For Heaven's sake, Katie, tell Father to come right to the parlor! An officer is calling on me and I don't know what to say to him," I pleaded in a panic.

"Miss Clara, one of them grand officers you described to me at breakfast?"

"Yes, yes, the grandest of them all. Hurry and tell Father to come."

Sometimes one acts too quickly—Father came. Indeed, he came, but without his usual ray of sunshine. He looked the dapper soldier up and down, as much as to say, "What did you come for?" Father started to speak a few words in German, but either the language or the looks of the caller discouraged him. He stopped short in the middle of his sentence and lapsed into silence. Oh dear! I was more embarrassed than ever! Even the officer began to wriggle in his chair. Father's gray eyes could take on a lofty expression that would make a mastodon shrink to a mouse. First the officer lost a grip on his tongue, then his smile faded, and at last his proud military bearing wilted—pitifully. Then he departed.

But at lunch-time, in the dining-room, who should be seated at the table next to ours but the selfsame officer.

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When Father caught me exchanging glances with the fascinating young man he was incensed, but refrained from expressing his feelings until we got upstairs. I didn't agree with his criticism. I thought the officer very good-looking.

That evening at dinner, my persistent friend was again at the neighboring table. Now the storm began to lower. This was a desperate situation, and Father had to manage it alone, since Mother was in Berlin. What could he do? He decided to proceed radically. I was to be locked up and Katie was to bring me my meals.

At first I thought it was a joke. Some kind of a joke. Surely I could not be incarcerated like a damsel of the Middle Ages. Yet that was just what happened. Fortunately, Katie was also romantically inclined, so she not only brought me my meals, but messages from my friend. Somehow she managed to find him in the lobby of the hotel and he sent urgent requests that I should go to my window and exchange glances with him. Of course this helped, but still imprisonment grew tiresome as the days passed. When at last Mother arrived she found a lackadaisical daughter in one room and a fiercely irritated Father in another. She brought us together and listened to our vibrating stories. Father's was a bit exaggerated, but so impressive that I expected Mother to pour out words of indignant condemnation, when to my amazement, she burst with peals of laughter till her cheeks were bathed in tears. That was the most victorious moment of my life. The donkey and I had scored one. On that occasion Father had been filled with the spirit of strict conventions which struck Mother as highly

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ludicrous. But I think there was also another impulse prompting his actions—an ingrained objection to foreign suitors. Later, however, his attitude changed entirely—at least in the case of Ossip Gabrilowitsch, whom he held in high esteem and was happy to welcome into the family.

CHAPTER VII

A Winter Abroad

From Marienbad we went straight to Berlin and there spent the winter. As Father's financial affairs were still in a bad condition we were obliged to economize, so Mother had selected a cheap apartment in a disagreeable quarter of the city. The street was always full of dirty children playing noisy games. Unkempt, half-clad women were continually leaning out of the windows opposite us, their elbows propped on comfortable cushions. They feared missing a street fight or two.

Father's presence was now needed in America to look after the Webster Publishing Company and the Paige typesetting machine, which seemed irrevocably lost. We greatly envied Father preparing to return to that beloved land! Should we ever become accustomed to this dismal apartment? And think of it as home?

We did not have to remain there very long, however. After we had endured it two or three months, Father cabled that he could afford to send us to a better abode. We moved with gay hearts to a comfortable, if simple, hotel on Unter den Linden, where I personally was perfectly happy because I could stand at the window and watch the German Emperor drive by. He was a most romantic and brilliant figure and we never tired of hearing stories about him.

Father soon rejoined us and was occupied much of the