

## Mark Twain excerpts-STI 2020

*Mrs. Mark Twain: The Life of Olivia Langdon Clemens, 1845-1904*

### **Influenza excerpt:**

In addition to influencing Mark's writing of Joan of Arc, Livy was kept busy in Europe by the never-ending moving, from one city to another, one country to another, and by visiting various doctors and spas to treat her never-ending list of ailments. When they were in Vienna Mark had taken something called Plasmon and he thought it made him feel stronger. He urged Livy, just after she suffered from an episode of influenza, to also take some.<sup>45</sup> Plasmon was a high-protein powder made from milk that could be mixed with any drink or food. One advertisement for the product said Plasmon "is the nutrition of pure, sweet milk in the form of a cream-colored powder. In its preparation all the nutritive qualities of milk are retained, freed from fat and sugar. One teaspoon is equivalent to an ordinary beefsteak. It will give increased nutritive value to all foods when added to them, without affecting their flavor." In the corner of the ad there was a quote from Mark Twain: "The only needful thing is to get the Plasmon into the stomach—dissolved or in clods or petrified or any way, so it gets there. The stomach will praise God and do the rest." The ad also showed a sketch of a very muscular man from behind standing next to a Greek column.<sup>46</sup> . . . Twain took \$25,000 of that and invested it in the English-owned company.<sup>47</sup> Livy as always failed to even attempt to dissuade him from his continuing addiction. Surprisingly, even Rogers did not try to stop him. Twain eventually became "acting president and vice president" of the American branch of the firm. Plasmon Company of America went bankrupt in 1907 and Twain said he had been "swindled" by the firm. He put his losses at \$32,000, although he added that most of those losses were due to bad business decisions and only a third of so them to being swindled.<sup>48</sup>

### **Tuberculosis excerpt:**

Laura E. Skandera-Trombley believes Livy had Pott's disease, also known as tuberculosis of the spine. Skandera in 1991 (the Trombley would be added to her name later) told Barbara Wiggans Taylor, a graduate student at Elmira College, about her Pott's disease theory. She later expanded on the theory in her 1994 book, *Mark Twain in the Company of Women*. Taylor, summarizing what Skandera told her, writes, "Because of the lack of diagnostic means, many people thought at the time that Pott's disease was caused by falls. Pott's disease can result in episodes similar to the one described by Julia Beecher to Isabella Hooker."<sup>64</sup> That last comment is a reference to the fact that at least once the Langdons seemed certain that Livy would die. The circumstances are contained in a letter from Julia Beecher, wife of the Rev. Thomas Beecher, to her sister-in-law Isabella Beecher Hooker. The letter is dated June 6, 1862, when Livy was 16. Julia Beecher writes: Mr. Langdon with his wife, Mary Lewis & Susy Crane are in New York attending upon Livy who was brought to Staten Island & then to the city—for a change—direct from Washington— New symptoms became at once acute. She retained nothing upon her stomach—vomited for days—blood at last accounts. She was continually delirious and they are almost certain now that they cannot keep her many more days. Susy went day before yesterday. Mr. Langdon had watched & all had till very weary— This is all I can tell you about the Langdons.<sup>65</sup>

### **Diphtheria excerpt:**

Mark sat next to his son as the driver rode them around the hills to the east of Elmira. Twain wrote decades later: It was a raw, cold morning, but he was wrapped about with furs and, in the hands of a careful person, no harm would have come to him. But I soon dropped into a reverie and forgot all about my charge. The furs fell away and exposed his bare legs. By and by the coachman noticed this, and I arranged the wraps again, but it was too late. The child was almost frozen. I hurried home with him. I was aghast at what I had done, and I feared the consequences. I have always felt shame for the

treacherous morning's work and have not allowed myself to think of it when I could help it. I doubt if I had the courage to make confession at that time. I think it most likely that I have never confessed until now.<sup>56</sup> The dictation of this event was made in 1906, 36 years after it occurred. He never told Livy what he had done. In late May, Livy, Mark, Langdon, and Susy went to Hartford. They intended to return to Elmira later in the year. Langdon's always present ill health seemed to worsen, and when Mark and Livy arrived in Hartford they contacted a doctor, who diagnosed the problem as diphtheria. Langdon was white-faced, coughed constantly, his neck was swollen, and from the way the doctor spoke Livy and Mark knew their son was close to death. Jervis. Emma Nye. Now little Langdon. The pattern produced inevitability. The boy, 19 months old, died on June 2, 1872. Twain's late-in-life confession that he caused his son's death is, without doubt, mistaken, more a result of grieving memory than factual accuracy. Diphtheria is a contagious disease that spreads by contact with someone already infected. If an infected person coughs or sneezes in the proximity of an uninfected person, it can spread. Or if infected saliva ends up on food or drink that is consumed by someone else. A cold carriage ride would not cause it.<sup>57</sup> Livy's grief resulted in failing health, and Mark feared she, too, might die.<sup>58</sup> Livy wanted Langdon buried in the family plot in Woodlawn Cemetery. But when he was interred next to his grandfather, for whom he had been named, neither Livy nor Mark could be present. Livy was too ill to make the trip, and Mark would not make it without her. Instead they went, with little Susy, to Saybrook, 43 miles south of Hartford, on the north shore of Long Island Sound. Orion and his wife, Mollie, stayed in the Hartford house.<sup>59</sup> Susan and Theodore Crane and members of the Langdon family attended the funeral services. Livy had learned a terrible truth. It was not Buffalo or any particular locale that brought tragedy. It was life.

#### **Influenza Excerpt:**

"[Something about Doctors] (Source: MS in CU-MARK, written in 1903)"

. . . "Went to our cousin's (Frau Generalin von Versen) ball, after the lecture; we all came home at 2 am., & I have been in bed ever since—three weeks—with congestion of lungs and influenza" (Notebook 31, TS p. 21, CU-MARK; see AD, 29 Mar 1906, note at 456.25–26)."

#### **Bronchitis:**

"Tuesday, March 20, 1906

About young John D. Rockefeller's Sunday-school talks—Mr. Clemens is asked, as honorary member, to talk to the Bible Class—His letter of refusal—He accepts invitation from General Fred Grant to speak at Carnegie Hall April 10th, for benefit of Robert Fulton Memorial Association—His letter of acceptance."

"But, after all, I can't go. I am fighting off my annual bronchitis, and the doctor has forbidden it. I am sorry, for I am sure I know more about lying than anybody who has lived on this planet before me. I believe I am the only person alive who is sane upon this subject. . . . I shall be unspeakably sorry if the bronchitis catches me, for that will mean six weeks in bed—my annual tribute to it for the last sixteen years."

Excerpt From

*Autobiography of Mark Twain, Volume 1*

Mark Twain, Harriet E. Smith, Benjamin Griffin, Victor Fischer & Michael Barry Frank

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**“Autobiographical Dictation, 6 December 1906”**

“310.12–20 a command from the Emperor of Germany to come to dinner . . . to get acquainted with but God] The dinner took place in Berlin on 20 February 1892 at the house of Clemens’s third cousin, Alice Clemens von Versen, and her husband, Maximilian, a Prussian cavalry general (see AutoMT1, 456, 645 n. 456.25–26, where the city is misidentified as Vienna). On 24 January Clemens had been forced by “congestion of lungs & influenza” to decline an earlier invitation she had conveyed from the emperor, Kaiser Wilhelm II, to visit the palace:

Frau von V. came again that day or the next & said the Emperor had commanded her to “prepare dinner for him & me in her house—the date of the dinner to be the day that I shd be well enough.

A day or two ago, Jean was overheard to say—after some talk about this approaching event—“I wish I could be in papa’s clothes”—pause & reflection—“but it wouldn’t be any use, I reckon the Emperor wouldn’t recognize me.” (Notebook 31, TS p. 21, CU-MARK)

Excerpt From

*Autobiography of Mark Twain, Volume 2*

Mark Twain, Benjamin Griffin, Harriet E. Smith, Victor Fischer & Michael Barry Frank

<https://books.apple.com/us/book/autobiography-of-mark-twain-volume-2/id786765537>

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**Consumption:**

“JOAN OF ARC”

ADDRESS AT THE DINNER OF THE SOCIETY OF ILLUSTRATORS, GIVEN AT  
THE ALDINE ASSOCIATION CLUB, DECEMBER 22, 1905”

“I was reminded of Jack because I came across a letter to-day which is over thirty years old that Jack wrote. Jack was doomed to consumption. He was very long and slim, poor creature; and in a year or two after he got back from that excursion, to the Holy Land he went on a ride on horseback through Colorado, and he did not last but a year or two.”

Excerpt From

*Mark Twain's Speeches*

Mark Twain

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