

Introduction

THIS VOLUME opens precisely where the previous one left off—on 1 January 1869, with Clemens at the Cleveland home of Mary Mason Fairbanks, enjoying a brief holiday respite from the lecture tour he had begun some six weeks earlier. The 188 letters included here, the majority of them published for the first time, are all that are known to survive from 1869. They document the continuation of the drive toward security, respectability, and literary recognition that Clemens had begun in 1868, a mission whose specific goals were: marriage to Olivia L. Langdon; the acquisition of a partnership in a thriving urban newspaper; and the publication of *The Innocents Abroad*.

Of these three compelling purposes the first, marriage to Olivia, was predominant, giving focus to the restless pursuit of means and vocation that had engaged Clemens since adolescence. Nearly half of the courtship letters he wrote to Olivia between September 1868, when she refused his initial proposal, and February 1870, when they were married, have been lost. Those that survive from 1869 are the longest letters Clemens ever wrote, constituting the bulk of his extant correspondence for the year. In them, although he and Olivia had been informally engaged since November 1868, Clemens continued his often anxious campaign to assure her, and her family and friends, of his Christian worthiness and dependability. The effort proved successful when the engagement was formalized on 4 February 1869, allowing him to boast to his sister, with the confidence of hindsight: "She said she never could or would love me—but she set herself the task of making a Christian of me. I said she would succeed, but that in the meantime she would unwittingly dig a matrimonial pit & end by tumbling into it—& lo! the prophecy is fulfilled" (p. 85). Yet even after this triumph, Clemens, separated from Olivia for long intervals, felt pressed to bolster her commitment to him with a nearly unbroken stream of daily letters. Frequently

he joked with her and chatted about family matters, but more than once he reported fearful dreams of their estrangement, and, to counter her lingering doubts, besieged her with idyllic images of their future home life. He subordinated himself to her "higher wisdom" and called her "my best friend, my wise helpmeet, my teacher of the Better Way" (pp. 153, 163), devotion indeed coming from a man of his long and varied experience of the world to a woman ten years his junior with virtually no experience of life outside her household. For despite the conventional, almost formulaic, aspect of his persistent, and inevitably confining, idealization of Olivia, the depth and sincerity of his feelings are beyond doubt. Intending theirs to be a full partnership, he implored her to give him her complete trust and to let him share her "every grief . . . every disturbing thought," and he invited her to become his most intimate advisor, literary as well as personal: "So, just read whatever you please, Livy darling, & make yourself entirely at home—plunge your dainty fingers into my affairs just as much as you want to" (pp. 61, 172).

Clemens's affairs are manifest everywhere here. In letters to his family and associates, as in those to Olivia, he captures the hardships of the lecture circuit—grueling travel, sleepless nights, poor accommodations, immovable audiences—but also the triumphs, for example, his rousing success in Toledo, Ohio, the home of a respected rival lecturer and soon-to-be friend, Petroleum V. Nasby. His own reports of his lectures and the responses of local newspaper reviewers, some of which he clipped and enclosed, demonstrate how, in the course of his 1868–69 tour of the East and Midwest with his "American Vandal Abroad" lecture and his 1869–70 tour of New England with "Our Fellow Savages of the Sandwich Islands," he emerged as the standard by which other humorous lecturers were judged.

Clemens's letters during the first tour and before the beginning of the second show him seeking an alternative to the "lingering eternity" of lecture engagements (p. 62) in attempts, ultimately fruitless, to acquire an interest in the *Cleveland Herald* or the *Hartford Courant*. Meanwhile he was suffering even greater frustration in regard to the publication of *The Innocents Abroad*. Having submitted the manuscript to the American Publishing Company of Hartford in August 1868, he had initially expected publication that fall and then had agreed to a postponement until the following March. But production was delayed and in March 1869 Clemens was just beginning the process of revising and proofreading,

drudgery when he was working at his publisher's offices in Hartford, but a delight when he had Olivia's assistance in Elmira. As the proofreading ended and spring turned to summer, his impatience with what seemed to be an ever-receding publication date grew and finally exploded in an accusing letter of 22 July to Elisha Bliss, the shrewd secretary of the American Publishing Company, with whom he was to have a checkered relationship for more than a decade. The two men made their peace, however, and *The Innocents Abroad* issued at the end of July, quickly ringing up large sales and winning nearly universal praise. When in mid-August, with the counsel and financial backing of Olivia's father, Clemens became the managing editor and one-third owner of the *Buffalo Express*, he did so knowing that his expanding reputation as an author would enhance the appeal and influence of the paper.

By the last quarter of 1869, then, Clemens could feel comfortably certain that his rootlessness, his "foolish life *made up* of apprenticeships" (p. 298), was at last behind him. As the year drew to a close, only his marriage to Olivia remained to be accomplished and that was imminent. In a Christmas Day letter, toward the end of the lecture tour he hoped would be his last, he reminded her jubilantly that soon "we shall close our long correspondence, & *tell* each other what our minds suggest, by word of mouth. Speed the day!" (p. 435).

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