

greeting they exchanged made all the men wish that they also were the authors of funny books."

The title of most popular actress went to Pauline Frederick, who won by 15,000 votes.

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In Annapolis to deliver a benefit lecture, probably a series of anecdotes, Mark Twain spent part of his leisure time rambling around the Naval Academy and getting caught smoking in a sector where, as sailors put it, the smoking lamp was out. Then he was fêted at dinner by the governor, assorted politicians and other important people at the official residence. Called upon to speak, naturally, the guest of honor responded in good form.

Dinner Speech

Government House, Annapolis, Maryland, May 10, 1907

Yes, I have been arrested. I was arrested twice, so that there could be no doubt about it. I have lived many years in the sight of my country an apparently uncaught and blameless life, a model for the young, an inspiring example for the hoary-headed. But at last the law has laid its hand upon me.

Mine was no ordinary offense. When I affront the law I choose to do so in no obscure, insignificant, trivial manner. Mine was a crime against nothing less than the federal government. The officers who arrested me were no common, or garden, policemen; they were clothed with the authority of the federal Constitution. I was charged with smoking a cigar within a government reservation. In fact, I was caught red-handed. I came near setting a stone pile on fire.

It is true that the arrest was not made effective. One of the party whispered to the marines what Governor Warfield was going to say, and did say, in introducing me to the audience at my lecture—that I was one of the greatest men in the world. I don't know who proposed to tell that to the marines, but it worked like a charm. The minions of

the law faltered, hesitated, quailed, and today I am a free man. Twice they laid hands upon me; twice were overcome by my deserved reputation.

Perhaps I ought not to say myself that it is deserved. But who am I, to contradict the governor of Maryland? Worm that I am, by what right should I reverse the declared opinion of that man of wisdom and judgment, whom I have learned to admire and trust?

I never admired him more than I did when he told my audience that they had with them the greatest man in the world. I believe that was his expression. I don't wish to undertake his sentiments, but I will go no further than that—at present. Why, it fairly warmed my heart. It almost made me glad to be there myself. I like good company.

Speaking of greatness, it is curious how many grounds there are for great reputations—how many different phases, that is to say, greatness may take on. There was Bishop Potter. He was arrested a few months ago for a crime similar to mine, though he lacked the imagination to select United States government property as the scene of his guilty deed. Now, Bishop Potter is a great man. I am sure he is, because a streetcar motorman told me so. A motorman is not a governor of Maryland, but then Bishop Potter is not a humorist. He could hardly expect a certificate like mine.

I rode with the motorman one day on the front seat of his car. There was a blockade before we got very far, and the motorman, having nothing to do, became talkative. "Oh, yes," he said, "I have a good many distinguished men on this trip. Bishop Potter often rides with me. He likes the front seat. Now there's a great man for you—Bishop Potter."

"It is true," I responded. "Dr. Potter is indeed a mighty man of God, an erudite theologian, a wise administrator of his diocese, an exegete of—"

"Yes," broke in the motorman, his face beaming with pleasure as he recognized the justice of my tribute and hastened to add one of his own. "Yes, and he's the only man who rides with me who can spit in the slot every time."

That's a good story, isn't it? I like a good story well told. That is the reason I am sometimes forced to tell them myself. Here is one, of which I was reminded yesterday as I was investigating the Naval Academy. I was much impressed with the Naval Academy. I was all over it, and now it is all over me. I am full of the navy. I wanted to march with them on parole, but they didn't think to ask me: curious inattention on their part, and I just ashore after a celebrated cruise.

While I was observing the navy on land, I thought of the navy at sea and of this story, so pathetic, so sweet, so really touching. This is one of

my pet stories. Something in its delicacy, refinement, and the elusiveness of its humor fits my own quiet tastes.

The time is two A.M. after a lively night at the club. The scene is in front of his house. The house is swaying and lurching to and fro. He has succeeded in navigating from the club, but how is he going to get aboard this rolling, tossing thing? He watches the steps go back and forth, up and down. Then he makes a desperate resolve, braces himself, and as the steps come around he jumps, clutches the handrail, gets aboard, and pulls himself safely up on the piazza. With a like maneuver he gets through the door. Watching his chance, he gains the lowest step of the inside staircase, and painfully makes his way up the swaying and uncertain structure. He has almost reached the top when in a sudden lurch he catches his toe and falls back, rolling to the bottom. At this moment his wife, rushing out into the upper hall, hears coming up from the darkness below, from the discomfited figure sprawled on the floor with his arms around the newel post, this fervent, appropriate, and pious ejaculation, "God help the poor sailors out at sea."

I trust this matter of my arrest will not cause my friends to turn from me. It is true that, no matter what may be said of American public morals, the private morals of Americans as a whole are exceptionally good. I do not mean to say that in their private lives all Americans are faultless. I hardly like to go that far, being a man of carefully weighed words and under a peculiarly vivid sense of the necessity of moderation in statement. I should like to say that we are a faultless people, but I am restrained by recollection. I know several persons who have erred and transgressed—to put it plainly, they have done wrong. I have heard of still others—of a number of persons, in fact, who are not perfect. I am not perfect myself. I confess it. I would have confessed it before the lamentable event of yesterday. For that was not the first time I ever did wrong. No; I have done several things which fill my soul now with regret and contrition.

I remember, I remember it so well. I remember it as if it were yesterday, the first time I ever stole a watermelon. Yes, the first time. At least I think it was the first time, or along about there. It was, it was, must have been, about 1848, when I was thirteen or fourteen years old. I remember that watermelon well. I can almost taste it now.

Yes, I stole it. Yet why use so harsh a word? It was the biggest of the load on a farmer's wagon standing in the gutter in the old town of Hannibal, Missouri. While the farmer was busy with another—another—customer, I withdrew this melon. Yes, "I stole" is too strong. I extracted it. I retired it from circulation. And I myself retired with it.

The place to which the watermelon and I retired was a lumber yard. I knew a nice, quiet alley between the sweet-smelling planks and to that sequestered spot I carried the melon. Indulging a few moments' contemplation of its freckled rind, I broke it open with a stone, a rock, a dornick, in boy's language.

It was green—impossibly, hopelessly green. I do not know why this circumstance should have affected me, but it did. It affected me deeply. It altered for me the moral values of the universe. It wrought in me a moral revolution. I began to reflect. Now, reflection is the beginning of reform. There can be no reform without reflection.

I asked myself what course of conduct I should pursue. What would conscience dictate? What should a high-minded young man do after retiring a green watermelon? What would George Washington do? Now was the time for all the lessons inculcated at Sunday school to act.

And they did act. The word that came to me was "restitution." Obviously, there lay the path of duty. I reasoned with myself. I labored. At last I was fully resolved. "I'll do it," said I. "I'll take him back his old melon." Not many boys would have been heroic, would so clearly have seen the right and so sternly have resolved to do it. The moment I reached that resolution I felt a strange uplift. One always feels an uplift when he turns from wrong to righteousness. I arose, spiritually strengthened, renewed and refreshed, and in the strength of that refreshment carried back the watermelon—that is, I carried back what was left of it—and made him give me a ripe one.

But I had a duty toward that farmer, as well as to myself. I was as severe on him as the circumstances deserved. I did not spare him. I told him he ought to be ashamed of himself giving his—his customers green melons. And he was ashamed. He said he was. He said he felt as badly about it as I did. In this he was mistaken. He hadn't eaten any of the melon. I told him that the one instance was bad enough, but asked him to consider what would become of him if this should become a habit with him. I pictured his future. And I saved him. He thanked me and promised to do better.

We should always labor thus with those who have taken the wrong road. Very likely this was the farmer's first false step. He had not gone far, but he had put his foot on the downward incline. Happily, at this moment a friend appeared—a friend who stretched out a helping hand and held him back. Others might have hesitated, have shrunk from speaking to him of his error. I did not hesitate nor shrink. And it is one of the gratifications of my life that I can look back on what I did for that man in his hour of need.

The blessing came. He went home with a bright face to his rejoicing

wife and I—I got a ripe melon. I trust it was with him as it was with me. Reform with me was no transient emotion, no passing episode, no Philadelphia uprising. It was permanent. Since that day I have never stolen a water—never stolen a green watermelon.

Text / "Mighty Mark Twain Overawes Marines," *Times*, May 12, 1907.

Warfield / Edwin Warfield (1848–1920). American politician. He was president of the Maryland Senate (1886), surveyor of the Port of Baltimore (1886–90), and governor of Maryland (1904–08).

slot / On a cable car the slot was a continuous opening at the top of a conduit through which the shank of the grip passed and along which it moved. On an electric trolley car there was evidently a comparable opening to test the passenger's accuracy.

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Early in May 1907, Mark Twain was informed that Oxford had conferred upon him an honorary Litt.D. He was delighted. In a dictation of May 23, 1907, he says that he was as happy with a new degree as an Indian with a fresh scalp. But he was also human enough to grumble privately about American universities that, year after year, had overlooked him when bestowing honors upon hundreds of men, many of them nonentities, few of them internationally known. He had a point. We may wonder at the academic obtuseness that failed to recognize the most famous American of his time. To receive the Oxford degree in person, he embarked for England aboard the S.S. Minneapolis on June 8, chatting with reporters before sailing.

Interview

Aboard S.S. Minneapolis, New York, June 8, 1907

I may never go to London again until I come back to this sphere after I am dead, and then I would like to live in London. I spent seven years there, and I am going back to see the boys.

Work? I retired from work on my seventieth birthday. Since then I

have been putting in merely twenty-six hours a day dictating my autobiography, which, as John Phoenix said in regard to his autograph, may be relied upon as authentic, as it is written exclusively by me, but I don't want it published until after I am dead. And I want to be thoroughly dead when it is published. No rumors, but really dead. I have made it as caustic, fiendish, and as devilish as I possibly can. I might be what you call a sensation, for I have spared no one. It will fill many volumes, and I will go right on writing until I am called to the angels and receive a harp.

The story of my life will make certain people sit up and take notice, but I will use my influence not to have it published until the persons mentioned in it and their children and grandchildren are dead. I tell you it will be something awful. It will be what you might call good reading.

[He was asked what notable people had come down to see him off.] I don't know. I am so shy. My shyness takes a peculiar phase. I never look a person in the face. The reason is that I am afraid they may know me and that I may not know them, which makes it very embarrassing for both of us. I always wait for the other person to speak. I know lots of people, but I don't know who they are. It is all a matter of ability to observe things. I never observe anything now. I gave up the habit years ago. You should keep a habit up if you want to become proficient in it. For instance, I was a pilot once, but I gave it up, and I do not believe the captain of the *Minneapolis* would let me navigate his ship to London. Still, if I think that he is not on the job I may go up on the bridge and offer him a few suggestions.

Text / Composite, based upon: "Mark Twain Sails for Oxford Honors," *Times*, June 9, 1907; a fragment erroneously included in "Dress Reform and Copyright," *MTS*(10):88–89.

John Phoenix / Pen name of George Horatio Derby (1823–61), also known as "Squibob." American soldier and humorist. A West Point graduate and Mexican War veteran, he was in the United States Topographical Bureau (1847–48), explored Minnesota Territory (1848–49), then conducted explorations in California (1849–56), where he turned to humor as a relief from the exactions of engineering. Examples are *Phoenixiana* (1855), and *The Squibob Papers* (1859).