

[Tuesday, February 20, 1906

*About Rear-Admiral Wilkes.—And meeting Mr. Anson Burlingame in Honolulu.*

MRS. MARY WILKES DEAD.

FLORENCE, ITALY, Feb. 19.—Mrs. Mary Wilkes, widow of Rear-Admiral Wilkes, U. S. N., is dead, aged eighty-five.

IT is death notices like this that enable me to realize in some sort how long I have lived. They drive away the haze from my life's road and give me glimpses of the beginning of it—glimpses of things which seem incredibly remote.

When I was a boy of ten, in that village on the Mississippi River which at that time was so incalculably far from any place and is now so near to all places, the name of Wilkes, the explorer, was in everybody's mouth, just as Roosevelt's is to-day. What a noise it made, and how wonderful the glory! How far away and how silent it is now! And the glory has faded to tradition. Wilkes had discovered a new world and was another Columbus. That world afterward turned mainly to ice and snow. But it was not *all* ice and snow—and in our late day we are rediscovering it, and the world's interest in it has revived. Wilkes was a marvel in another way, for he had gone wandering about the globe in his ships and had looked with his own eyes upon its furthest corners, its dream-

lands—names and places which existed rather as shadows and rumors than as realities. But everybody visits those places now, in outings and summer excursions, and no fame is to be gotten out of it.

One of the last visits I made in Florence—this was two years ago—was to Mrs. Wilkes. She had sent and asked me to come, and it seemed a chapter out of the romantic and the impossible that I should be looking upon the gentle face of the sharer in that long-forgotten glory. We talked of the common things of the day, but my mind was not present. It was wandering among the snowstorms and the ice floes and the fogs and mysteries of the antarctic with this patriarchal lady's young husband. Nothing remarkable was said; nothing remarkable happened. Yet a visit has seldom impressed me so much as did this one.

Here is a pleasant and welcome letter, which plunges me back into the antiquities again:

KNOLLWOOD,  
WESTFIELD, NEW JERSEY.  
February 17, 1906.

MY DEAR MR. CLEMENS:

I should like to tell you how much I thank you for an article which you wrote once, long ago, (1870 or '71) about my grandfather, Anson Burlingame.

In looking over the interesting family papers and letters, which have come into my possession this winter, nothing has impressed me more deeply than your tribute. I have read it again and again. I found it pasted into a scrap-

book and apparently it was cut from a newspaper. It is signed with your name.

It seems to bring before one more clearly, than anything I have been told or read, my grandfather's personality and achievements.

Family traditions grow less and less in the telling. Young children are so impatient of anecdotes, and when they grow old enough to understand their value, frequent repetitions, as well as newer interests and associations, seem to have dulled, not the memory, but the spontaneity and joy of telling about the old days—so unless there is something written and preserved, how much is lost to children of the good deeds of their fathers.

Perhaps it will give you a little pleasure to know that after all these years, the words you wrote about "a good man, and a very, very great man" have fallen into the heart of one to whom his fame is very near and precious.

You say "Mr. Burlingame's short history—for he was only forty-seven—reads like a fairy-tale. Its successes, its surprises, its happy situations occur all along, and each new episode is always an improvement upon the one which went before it." That seems to have been very true and it is interesting to hear, although it has the sad ring of Destiny. But how shall I ever thank you for words like these? "He was a true man, a just man, a generous man, in all his ways and by all his instincts a noble man—a man of great brain, a broad, and deep and mighty thinker. He was a great man, a very, very great man. He was imperially endowed by nature, he was faithfully befriended by circumstances, and he wrought gallantly always in whatever station he found himself." How indeed shall I thank you for these words or tell you how deeply they have touched me, and how truly I shall endeavor to teach them to my children.

That your fame may be as sacred as this, is my earnest, grateful wish, not wholly the inevitable, imperishable fame that is laid down for you, but the sweet and precious fame, to your family and friends forever, of the fair attributes you ascribe to my grandfather, which could never have been discerned by one who was not like him in spirit.

With the hope some time of knowing you,

Yours sincerely,

JEAN BURLINGAME BEATTY.  
(Mrs. Robert Chetwood Beatty.)

This carries me back forty years, to my first meeting with that wise and just and humane and charming man and great citizen and diplomat, Anson Burlingame. It was in Honolulu. He had arrived in his ship, on his way out on his great mission to China, and I had the honor and profit of his society daily and constantly during many days. He was a handsome and stately and courtly and graceful creature, in the prime of his perfect manhood, and it was a contenting pleasure to look at him. His outlook upon the world and its affairs was as wide as the horizon, and his speech was of a dignity and eloquence proper to it. It dealt in no commonplaces, for he had no commonplace thoughts. He was a kindly man, and most lovable. He was not a petty politician, but a great and magnanimous statesman. He did not serve his country alone, but China as well. He held the balances even. He wrought for justice and humanity. All his ways were clean; all his motives were high and fine.

He had beautiful eyes; deep eyes; speaking eyes;

eyes that were dreamy, in repose; eyes that could beam and persuade like a lover's; eyes that could blast when his temper was up, I judge. Preston S. Brooks, the congressional bully, found this out in his day, no doubt. Brooks had bullied everybody, insulted everybody, challenged everybody, cowed everybody, and was cock of the walk in Washington. But when he challenged the new young Congressman from the West he found a prompt and ardent man at last. Burlingame chose rifles at short range, and Brooks apologized and retired from his bullyship with the laughter of the nation ringing in his ears.

When Mr. Burlingame arrived at Honolulu I had been confined to my room a couple of weeks—by night to my bed, by day to a splint-bottom chair, deep-sunk like a basket. There was another chair, but I preferred this one, because my malady was saddle boils.

When the boatload of skeletons arrived after forty-three days in an open boat on ten days' provisions—survivors of the clipper *Hornet*, which had perished by fire several thousand miles away—it was necessary for me to interview them for the *Sacramento Union*, a journal which I had been commissioned to represent in the Sandwich Islands for a matter of five or six months. Mr. Burlingame put me on a cot and had me carried to the hospital, and during several hours he questioned the skeletons and I set down the answers in my note-book. It took me all night to write out my narrative of the *Hornet* disaster, and—but I will go no further with

the subject now. I have already told the rest in some book of mine.

Mr. Burlingame gave me some advice, one day, which I have never forgotten, and which I have lived by for forty years. He said, in substance:

“Avoid inferiors. Seek your comradeships among your superiors in intellect and character; always *climb*.”

Mr. Burlingame's son—now editor of *Scribner's Magazine* these many years and soon to reach the foothills that lie near the frontiers of age—was with him there in Honolulu; a handsome boy of nineteen, and overflowing with animation, activity, energy, and the pure joy of being alive. He attended balls and fandangos and *hula hulas* every night—anybody's, brown, half white, white—and he could dance all night and be as fresh as ever the next afternoon. One day he delighted me with a joke which I afterward used in a lecture in San Francisco, and from there it traveled all around in the newspapers. He said, “If a man compel thee to go with him a mile, go *with* him Twain.”

When it was new, it seemed exceedingly happy and bright, but it has been emptied upon me upward of several million times since—never by a witty and engaging lad like Burlingame, but always by chuckleheads of base degree, who did it with offensive eagerness and with the conviction that they were the first in the field. And so it has finally lost its sparkle and bravery, and is become to me a seedy and repulsive tramp whose proper place is in the

hospital for the decayed, the friendless, and the forlorn.

[*New York, Wednesday, February 21, 1906*

*Mr. Langdon just escapes being a railway magnate.*

BUT I am wandering far from Susy's Biography. I remember that I was about to explain a remark which I had been making about Susy's grandfather Langdon having just barely escaped once the good luck—or the bad luck—of becoming a great railway magnate. The incident has interest for me for more than one reason. Its details came to my knowledge in a chance way in a conversation which I had with my father-in-law when I was arranging a contract with my publisher for *Roughing It*, my second book. I told him the publisher had arrived from Hartford, and would come to the house in the afternoon to discuss the contract and complete it with the signatures. I said I was going to require half the profits over the essential costs of manufacture. He asked if that arrangement would be perfectly fair to both parties, and said it was neither good business nor good morals to make contracts which gave to one side the advantage. I said that the terms which I was proposing were fair to both parties. Then Mr. Langdon after a musing silence said, with something like a reminiscent sorrow in his tone, "When you and the publisher shall have gotten the contract framed to suit you both and no doubts about it are left in your

minds, *sign* it—sign it to-day, don't wait till to-morrow."

It transpired that he had acquired this wisdom, which he was giving me gratis, at considerable expense. He had acquired it twenty years earlier, or thereabouts, at the Astor House in New York, where he and a dozen other rising and able business men were gathered together to secure a certain railroad which promised to be a good property by and by, if properly developed and wisely managed. This was the Lehigh Valley Railroad. There were a number of conflicting interests to be reconciled before the deal could be consummated. The men labored over these things the whole afternoon, in a private parlor of that hotel. They dined, then reassembled and continued their labors until after two in the morning. Then they shook hands all around in great joy and enthusiasm, for they had achieved success and had drawn a contract in the rough which was ready for the signatures. The signing was about to begin; one of the men sat at the table with his pen poised over the fateful document, when somebody said: "Oh, we are tired to death. There is no use in continuing this torture any longer. Everything's satisfactory. Let's sign in the morning." All assented, and that pen was laid aside.

Mr. Langdon said: "We got five or ten minutes' additional sleep that night by that postponement, but it cost us several millions apiece, and it was a fancy price to pay. If we had paid out of our existing means, and the price had been a single