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Gary Scharnhorst

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In early July 1879, during a grand tour of Europe with his family, Samuel Clemens hired Joseph N. Verey for two dollars a day to serve as their courier. Verey “spoke eight languages, and seemed to be equally at home in all of them,” he reminisced in *A Tramp Abroad* (1880), and “he was shrewd, prompt, posted, and punctual; he was fertile in resources, and singularly gifted in the matter of overcoming difficulties; he not only knew how to do everything in his line, but he knew the best ways and the quickest; he was handy with children and invalids; all his employer needed to do was to take life easy.”¹ Olivia Clemens shared her husband’s opinion. Verey “proved to be perfect,” she wrote her mother. “We had no care whatever” because “he managed everything so splendidly,” adding, “we have wished during all these days that we had him last Fall [as] we should have had so much more pleasure in our Switzerland and Italian trip.”² On 23 August 1879, the same day the family sailed from Liverpool for the U.S. aboard the *Gallia*, Sam Clemens wrote Verey a letter of recommendation that has hitherto been lost to scholarship:³

Mark Twain to those whom it may concern—greeting.

Joseph N. Verey has acted as courier to me and my party of six persons during a period of three months, and I am free to say he is much the best courier I have ever had anything to do with.

Perfect is a strong term, and one ought to be very careful about using it; but I use it in his case without fear, and say that in his business Verey is perfect. He is prompt, punctual, efficient, energetic, watchful, and thorough. He is fertile in expedient and resource; difficulties and obstacles do not embarrass him; maybe impossibilities might overcome him, but I have my doubts.

I have had a good deal to do with couriers, but never gave one a recommendation before. I never saw one before whom I could safely recommend. I do not recommend unless I am sure; and because I am sure I recommend the reader to take Verey as his courier. He is thorough, and that is saying it mighty strong.

Hartford, Conn.

S. L. Clemens.

Would but the story of Verey's work for the Clemens family ended here.

Over twelve years later, Sam Clemens again hired Verey to serve as a courier when the family arrived in Europe. But Verey did not join them until nearly three months after they landed. "It was in Switzerland that Joseph, the lost guide, turned up at last," according to the family maid, Katy Leary.⁴ Verey appeared in time to accompany Clemens on a boat trip down the Rhône, embarking from the Castle of Chatillon on Lake Bourget in Switzerland on September 20 and reaching Arles, France, near the coast of the Mediterranean, ten days later. But before the trip was completed, Sam fired Verey, who returned to Ouchy. As Livy notified her husband from the Hotel Beau Rivage there on September 29, "Your would-be courier is in a constant state of inebriation and is the center of all eyes in the dining room. He is now put at a little bit of a round table all by himself. Poor thing. It is hideous and repulsive."⁵ Verey was rehired and remained in Clemens' employ until the following spring, but he apparently failed to discharge all his duties satisfactorily. As Clemens carped in his diary for 6 June 1892, the family left Frankfurt, Germany, via a local train for Bad Nauheim after missing an express "through Joseph's misinformation."⁶ Verey was soon dismissed for good. A decade later, Clemens' secretary Isabel Lyon quoted her boss to the effect that Verey, the "one-time excellent Courier who had served S.L.C. well" in 1879, had "picked up all the bad qualities acquirable on Earth and imported others from Hell" by 1891. "S.L.C. had to discharge him 3 times before he could get rid of him."⁷

Vevey surfaced in New York in November 1895, while Sam, Livy, and Clara Clemens were in New Zealand, with plans to marry a rich Cincinnati widow, or so he claimed. He had crossed the Atlantic in steerage, though he protested to a reporter that he had booked cheap passage "because I felt it was more in keeping with my humble mode of life and have been so comfortable that I am glad now I did not come first-class." By all appearances a vulgar fortune-hunter, he bragged that his "courier days are over, my fortune is made." He had met the widow while guiding her party on a tour of the continent, and "before her steamer put off" to return to the U.S. "we were betrothed." The two of them were "so 'simpatica,'" he insisted, "that life with us will be one golden dream." In the interview, Verey expressed pity for "poor Twain," whose fortunes had suffered in the wake of the Panic

of 1893. "He was better at writing than sightseeing, and no matter what he saw or did not see, I never knew what he would write about it."⁸

Verey's "golden dream" turned to ashes, however. By September 1902 he had returned to London where, according to the *Daily Mail*, he "had been resident . . . for some time."⁹ He had "fallen on evil days," though he averred he was "not so desperate as to demand public charity."¹⁰ Still, the British travel writer Robert Allbut solicited money for Verey and appealed to Sam Clemens, then summering in York Harbor, Maine, to donate. Clemens forwarded the plea on behalf of his disgraced courier to his friend Joseph Twichell with no comment save a muted question: "Remember Joseph, Joe?"¹¹

—*University of New Mexico*

Notes

1. *A Tramp Abroad* (Hartford: American Publishing Co., 1880), p. 354.
2. Olivia Langdon Clemens to Olivia Lewis Langdon, 20 July 1879 (UCCL 01677, Mark Twain Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California-Berkeley).
3. "Mark Twain's Courier in London," *Westminster Gazette*, 24 September 1902, 8.
4. Mary Lawton, *A Lifetime with Mark Twain: The Memories of Katy Leary* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1925), p. 122.
5. Olivia Clemens to Samuel Clemens, 29 September 1891 (UCCL 04229, MTP).
6. Notebook MS 31 (August 1891–July 1892), 49 (MTP).
7. Isabel Lyon diary, 5 January 1903 (MTP).
8. "Mark Twain's Courier," *Washington Star*, 23 November 1895, 24.
9. "Mark Twain's Guide," London *Daily Mail*, 25 September 1902, 3.
10. "Talks of Mark Twain," New Orleans *Times-Democrat*, 24 September 1902, 11.
11. *The Letters of Mark Twain and Joseph Hopkins Twichell*, ed. Harold K. Bush, Steve Courtney, and Peter Messent (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press, 2017), p. 308.