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9. Mark Twain and His Broken Heart

After Olivia Clemens died, in June of 1904, her husband and daughters struggled-on without her. It was very hard, however, and Mark Twain, the famous author, made a decision.

He and his family needed a new home. He would have a new place built for himself and his daughters.

In 1908, a mansion in Redding, Connecticut—which he called “Stormfield”—was finished.

Although his declining health and sadness over losing his much-loved wife Olivia had slowed-down his previously hectic pace, Samuel Clemens undertook a major project soon after moving to Stormfield.

He helped to form Redding’s Mark Twain Library Association.

Donating around 3000 books to the new library, Twain created an organization which still exists. So do about 200 of the books which he originally gave the Association.

The New York Times has provided a way for those 200 books—referred to as “Twain’s Bookshelf”—to be explored online.

The walls of the Mark Twain Library contain some of his most-memorable quotes, like this:

*My works are like water,
the works of the great masters are like wine,
but everyone drinks water.*

Mark Twain’s Notebook, 1898

And this:

*To be good is noble, but to teach others
how to be good is nobler - and less trouble.*

Following the Equator, 1897

Twain was called, even in his lifetime, “the best-known American man of letters” (according to his obituary in the New York Times). Beyond his reputation as a famous humorist, he was also called the “Dean of American Literature” decades before Ernest Hemingway praised him for that.

Life at Stormfield moved forward. Then ... on Christmas Eve, in 1909 ... his daughter Jean unexpectedly died. After that, nothing was the same.

People who knew Sam Clemens well said that his end came not because of physical heart trouble—he had angina pectoris—but because of emotional heart trouble:

The people of Redding, Bethel, and Danbury listened when they were told that the doctors said Mark Twain was dying of angina pectoris. But they say among themselves that he died of a broken heart. And this is a verdict not of popular sentiment alone...

The man who has stood to the public for the greatest humorist this country has produced has in private life suffered overwhelming sorrows. The loss of an only son in infancy, a daughter in her teens and one in middle life, and finally of a wife who was a constant and sympathetic companion, has preyed upon his mind. The recent loss of his daughter Jean, who was closest to him in later years when her sister was abroad studying, was the final blow. On the heels of this came the first symptoms of the disease which was surely to be fatal and one of whose accompaniments is mental depression.

Mr. Paine [Twain’s biographer] says that all heart went out of him and his work when his daughter Jean died. He has practically written nothing since he summoned his energies to write a last chapter memorial of her for his autobiography. (See Twain’s New York Times’ obituary.)

Two years after moving into Stormfield, Sam Clemens—by then known to devoted readers everywhere as Mark Twain—died on April 21, 1910 (at the age of 74). Beyond his 28 books and numerous short stories, he left another legacy. The most unlikely prediction, which he made about his death ... came true.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Mark-Twain-and-His-Broken-Heart-Mark-Twain>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Mark-Twain-and-His-Broken-Heart-Mark-Twain>