When Mark Twain and Bret Harte sought to bolster their inadequate incomes by entering the public lecture field, the acknowledged "queen of the lyceum" was a young lady named Anna Elizabeth Dickinson. Twain and Harte represented the new school of lecturers, for whom the platform was a side line and whose mission was to entertain. Miss Dickinson was, in Twain's phrase, one of the "old stagers," like Wendell Phillips, Oliver Wendell Holmes, and John B. Gough, who certainly aimed at entertaining an audience, but only as they enlightened it.

Both old and new schools could join in condemning the arduous nature of life on the lyceum circuit, especially in the Midwest, with its inhuman speaking schedules arranged by the lecture bureaus, ill-timed and uncomfortable trains, bad hotels and worse food, and the prying curiosity of the natives. But most of the "old stagers" approached their lecturing with a missionary zeal that helped them tolerate physical discomforts. Twain "could not observe that they ever expected or hoped to get out of the business." He himself had no sense of mission in this respect: "I most cordially hate the lecture field. . . . I don't want to get wedded to it as they are." Harte likewise despised lecturing.

Anna Dickinson certainly possessed a sense of mission, and she was indeed wedded to the rostrum, at least so long as it supported her. A Quaker girl born in Philadelphia in 1842, she had discovered

1 Research for this article was made possible in part through a grant-in-aid allocated by the research committee of Emory University from funds made available jointly by the Carnegie Foundation and Emory University.


3 Ibid. Twain's expression of hatred for the rostrum may have been exaggerated, as was his avowed detestation of the theater. See Rodman Gilder, "Mark Twain Detested the Theatre," Theatre Arts, XXVIII (February, 1944), 109-116.

her oratorical talent in her teens at abolition and Quaker meetings in and near her native city. William Lloyd Garrison heard her speak and invited her to New England in 1862, when she was not yet twenty, to reiterate before antislavery audiences their conviction that emancipation should be the primary war aim. Radical Republicans heard her and transferred her to the political stump to unleash her fury at Confederate and Northern Democrat.

Heralded as a Joan of Arc, in 1864 Anna was rewarded by the grateful Republicans with an opportunity to speak in the Hall of the House of Representatives in Washington before senators, cabinet members, Supreme Court justices, representatives, diplomats, war celebrities, and President and Mrs. Lincoln. Her reputation brought her lecture invitations from cities throughout the North, and she crusaded for a vindictive reconstruction policy and for justice to the freed slave.⁵

After the war Anna Dickinson maintained her position as “queen of the lyceum.” Avoiding official connection with the warring factions of the woman suffrage movement, she increasingly stressed in her lyceum addresses the rights of women. Whether blaming men for prostitution or apotheosizing Joan of Arc as an incentive to women, she won fame and fortune crusading from the rostrum through the early 1870’s.

Elmira, New York, was on the lyceum circuit, and Anna Dickinson visited with the Langdon family there both before and after Samuel L. Clemens appeared on the scene to woo Olivia.⁶ Anna had met Twain before his marriage, perhaps in Elmira or at some midwestern crossroads where their lecture routes had crossed, and the two had talked shop.⁷ After Twain and Olivia had settled in Hartford, Anna visited in their home.⁸

For the Langdon family, Anna had the most wholehearted approval: they were “full of simplicity, large heartedness [sic], gen-

⁵ James Harvey Young, “Anna Elizabeth Dickinson and the Civil War: For and Against Lincoln,” The Mississippi Valley Historical Review, XXXI (June, 1944), 59–80.
⁷ Mark Twain to Mrs. Jane Clemens, June 4, [1869], in Paine, Mark Twain’s Letters, I, 158–159.
⁸ Wecter, Love Letters of Mark Twain, 352.
erosity. . . ." For Twain Anna possessed an initial antipathy that time further embittered. Like her sister Susan, she could not “admire his personal appearance, tone, or manner.”

Like many of the Langdons' neighbors, she considered the match between the fair Olivia and the unpedigreed jack-of-all-trades intolerable. “Each time I see them,” Anna wrote after a visit in the Langdon home in 1873, “I have a fresh wonder how the flower of their house, Olivia, as frail in body as she is clear of mind & lovely of soul ever married the vulgar boor to whom she gave herself.—I hear of him all about the country at wine suppers, & late orgies,—dirty, smoking, drinking— with brains no doubt, but—”

Even when Anna was in Twain's home, the social amenities could not completely disguise this feeling. Olivia's cousin, Hattie Lewis, recalled that Twain and Anna "did not get along well together. They seemed to be always trying to test each other’s right to be famous."

Anna's background had not fitted her to appreciate such diamonds in the rough. She yearned for the creature comforts of gentility which her girlhood had not provided. Fine manners, fine clothes, and fine jewels were marks of refinement, and she abandoned Quaker costume when she could afford it. Anna missed at the time the point which Van Wyck Brooks, according to Max Eastman, missed in retrospect, that Mark Twain may have been somewhat unrefined, but he was not uncivilized.

Although Anna Dickinson found Twain too crude for her taste—and poked fun at his "bird-of-prey-beak"—she made bold to seek his assistance. In the mid-seventies, when she was contemplating a lecture trip to England, Anna asked Twain to write letters introducing her to some of his English friends. He complied graciously—though he objected to using such letters himself—and reported to Anna that he had sent letters to Frank D. Finlay, editor of the Belfast Northern Whig; to George MacDonald, a liberal clergyman, poet, and novelist of London; to Sir Thomas and Lady Hardy (not

9 Anna Dickinson to Mrs. Mary E. Dickinson, Mar. 14, 1873, Anna E. Dickinson Papers.
10 Susan Dickinson to Anna Dickinson, Oct. 25, 1871, ibid.
11 Anna Dickinson to Mrs. Mary E. Dickinson, Mar. 14, 1873, ibid.
12 Wecter, Love Letters of Mark Twain, 352.
14 Anna Dickinson to Susan Dickinson, Nov. 16, 1876, Anna E. Dickinson Papers.
15 Mark Twain to Olivia, Oct. 31, [1869], in Wecter, Love Letters of Mark Twain, 115.
the novelist) of London; and to Dr. John Brown of Edinburgh, physician and author of *Rab and His Friends*, a popular tale of a dog's devotion. Olivia had read the letters, Twain noted, adding playfully that there were "No lummuxes" among the recipients.

Anna's plans for the journey went awry for the moment, but were resumed some months later. Again she wrote Twain requesting him to dispatch a second round of letters to his English friends. Twain sent a cordial but firm refusal. "Your engraved card will make your name unmistakable & show whence you come. I was an *entire* day—from breakfast until evening—writing the 30 or 40 pages I put into those few introductory letters. And now you suggest that those people will have forgotten about you! . . . No indeed—if they have forgotten, on their heads be it!" With mock exasperation, Twain exploded: "*Good God!*" This oath he then struck through with his pen, explaining "[which expression Livy will mark out, so I may as well do it myself]—" This letter might have served those authorities who have blamed Olivia for dry-cleaning her husband's vocabulary. It must be noted, however, that the "*Good God!*," although excised, is still pointedly legible.

In Hartford Twain and Olivia became neighbors and intimates of the essayist Charles Dudley Warner and his wife Susan, who also were admirers of Anna Dickinson. As editor of the *Hartford Courant*, Warner had watched Anna's rise to fame since her onslaught on Connecticut Copperheads in 1863, and in frequent letters had provided the girl orator with commendation and counsel.

The friendship between Warner and Twain ripened into literary collaboration in *The Gilded Age*. In this novel each author created a heroine. Ruth Bolton, the product of Warner's imagination, represented the emancipated woman of her day. In sketching her temperament and in providing her with opinions on woman's new role, Warner may well have profited from his acquaintance with Anna's career and his awareness of her attitudes.

---

16 Mark Twain to Anna Dickinson, June 28, [187-], Anna E. Dickinson Papers. Permission of the Mark Twain Estate and of Harper & Brothers to cite from this letter, and from its undated sequel, has been granted by Mr. William Harlowe Briggs.

17 Brackets are Twain's.

Ruth, like Anna, was a Quaker girl from Philadelphia. Both were serious, strong-willed, and determined. But Ruth, away from the “stiffness and levelness” of Quaker society, found it pleasant to give freer reign to her own “gayety of temperament,” just as Anna doffed Quaker costume and, in mood as well, became more of the “world.” Both chafed under the restrictions which custom placed on the education of women and on their self-expression through careers. Anna would have subscribed to Ruth’s view of marriage: “I think I wouldn’t say ‘always’ to any one until I have a profession and am as independent as he is. Then my love would be a free act, and not in any way a necessity.” Ruth did postpone her “always” until her medical training was completed, and Anna never married, rejecting several suitors—one a member of Congress—to pursue her oratorical career.

Undoubtedly it is pure coincidence, but if Anna Dickinson resembled Ruth Bolton in background and attitudes, she also possessed some of the pride, courage, fire, scorn, and “the power of fascination” of Laura Hawkins, the heroine Twain created. It is interesting to note that in the summer of 1873, after *The Gilded Age* was written, but before it was published, Warner inquired of Anna: “How would you like to be Laura in our dramatized version of the Gilded Age?” The question may have been penned in a spirit of raillery, although Warner was aware of Anna’s yearnings in the direction of the stage. Warner, in fact, had no significant share in turning *The Gilded Age* into a play, and Anna did not succumb to her theatrical ambitions until 1876. Then in Boston she made a double debut, as playwright and actress, presenting her conception of Anne Boleyn. One of the first-nighters, occupying a box with his friends Howells and Aldrich,
was Mark Twain.\textsuperscript{27} Olivia wasn’t present, Twain told a reporter, because one of the children was sick, “on account of which, she would not leave home to assist in ushering [in] the millenium.”\textsuperscript{28} Twain’s verdict of Anna as dramatist and actress was dismal and concurred with that of most critics: “Talent is useless without training, thank God—as Anna Dickinson may yet discover before she gets done trying to skip to the top-round of tragedy at a bound.”\textsuperscript{29}

In manners and dress, Bret Harte was a more polished diamond than was Mark Twain, and understandably Anna Dickinson liked Harte better. She had met him briefly in San Francisco in 1869 when she ventured over the newly completed transcontinental railroad to view the wonders of California. Less than two years later she met him again in Chicago. Harte at the full tide of his fame was in the midst of his much-heralded progress to the East to establish a literary connection befitting his reputation. He had stopped at Chicago to consult with men anxious to promote a midwestern journal for him to edit.\textsuperscript{30} Discovering that Anna was to sup one evening at the home of the liberal Unitarian minister, Robert Collyer, Harte paid a call. Anna was flattered by this mark of respect. Her enthusiasm is evident in the vivid description she wrote to her mother:

He is satisfying:—that is the word for him.—One thinks all sorts of things about men & women who have accomplished wonders of some kind, & then are disappointed at sight. Not so here. You say, this is the person to have written those stories & sketches, full of pathos & power,—this & none other.

I was delighted with the little I saw of him in California, & more than delighted here.—He is not very tall, & quite slight, with slender, shapely hands & feet, but with a look of fervor & force, a tense emphasis, so to speak, all through him.—Nose too big for beauty, but full of character,—a mass of soft waving hair,—pock-marked, but with eyes, so large, & luminous, a lovely brown, that they would redeem any blemish.

He is very quiet, & unassuming,—so say people.—In fact as you watch him you see he knows, as genius always knows, in a steady, unpretentious way, its own power. He says good things in a clear rich voice, & he laughs a

\textsuperscript{27} Boston Daily Globe, May 9, 1876, clipping, Anna E. Dickinson Papers.  
\textsuperscript{28} Unidentified clipping, \textit{ibid.}  
\textsuperscript{29} Mark Twain to Mrs. Mary Mason Fairbanks, Sept. 23, 1879, in Dixon Wecter, ed., \textit{Mark Twain to Mrs. Fairbanks} (San Marino, Calif., 1949), 234.  
\textsuperscript{30} Stewart, 184–191; Chicago Tribune, Feb. 9, 1871.
mellow sort of laugh that is yet not gay. The man has looked at life &
knows it, & has carried a good many of its burthens; that is plain to be seen.

. . . He has abandoned California for good,—"burned his ships" he says,
& they are trying to demonstrate to him at Chicago, & New York, & Boston,
that there is the place for him. I think he leans towards dear, old Boston, &
I hope it will win.31

Harte, at any rate, did not lean toward Chicago. Before he left the
city there occurred the celebrated incident of the dinner party at
which the guest of honor and editor-elect did not appear.32

In one of their conversations, Anna told Harte a ghost story. The
tale had been related to her as solemn truth by a railroad engineer
who claimed to have seen vivid previsions of an actual disaster.
Harte later used the story as the basis of a minor and undistinguished
dialect poem, "The Ghost That Jim Saw."33 Anna herself provided a
prose version of the tale in her small book of reminiscences, A
Ragged Register (of People, Places and Opinions).34

In 1876 both Harte and Anna had suffered reverses of fortune.
The two met in New York, and Anna thought Harte looked "not
well."35 "Poor fellow," she commiserated with perception, "he ought
to have lived in the day when rich men were the patrons of genius.—
If he could be put into a great library & be fed & clothed, & have all
his worldly wants supplied, & be allowed to write & work unre-
stricted & unhampered he would do what is in him to do but will
never now come out of him."

Despite her feeling that circumstances had cast a shadow over
Harte's genius, Anna Dickinson maintained her loyalty to him. As
vigorously she retained her antagonism to Twain. In 1876 one of
Harte's books received what Anna termed a "brutal" review in a
New York newspaper.36 Jealousy was the motive of its "markedly

31 Anna Dickinson to Mrs. Mary E. Dickinson, Feb. 22, 1871, Anna E. Dickinson Papers.
32 Stewart, 189-191.
33 Bret Harte, The Poetical Works Including the Drama of "The Two Men of Sandy Bar"
(Boston, 1887), 173-175. The source of the original publication of this poem is not listed in the
mimeographed bibliography, Joseph Gaer, ed., Bret Harte, Bibliography and Biographical
Data (The California Literary Research, SERA Projects, 2-F2-132 (3-F2-197), Monograph
Papers, asserts that Harte had heard the tale from Anna.
35 Anna Dickinson to Mrs. Mary E. Dickinson, Mar. 26, 1876, Anna E. Dickinson Papers.
36 Anna Dickinson to Susan Dickinson, Sept. 4, 1876, ibid.
personal" tone, she was sure. There were two possible perpetrators of this outrage, she was convinced, and one of them was Mark Twain.\footnote{The other possible culprit Anna did not name.}

The historian continually seeks to discover fresh contemporary impressions of personalities whose fame and importance have outlasted their own generation. The impressions of Twain and Harte which Anna Dickinson reveals add a touch of color rather than new substance to what we know of them as personalities. And, as we would expect, her comments reveal as much about herself as they do about the two authors. However unconventional were some of her ideas and however "emancipated" was her role as a feminist, she was still not completely outside the bonds of the genteel tradition. In her judgment of personality and behavior, she employed the yardstick of gentility and refinement.