

June 21, 2011

Dear Friends,

The first day of summer has arrived. For many of us it is a time to read some great books.

Mark Twain was a famous American author. As a young man, Mark Twain saw a picture of his future wife while traveling off Turkey in 1867. Her brother, Charles, had a cameo photograph of his twenty-two year old sister, Olivia Langdon. Mark Twain would say that he fell in love with her the first time he saw her picture.

Mark Twain proposed to her three times. Olivia turned him down three times. Not to be deterred, he wrote her 184 love letters, which Olivia called, "the loveliest love letters that ever were written." One of them had a special request, "Give me a little room in that great heart of yours."

Mark Twain and Olivia eventually married. They made their home in Nook Farm, Connecticut and raised a family of their own. It was here that he composed his famous works, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *The Prince and the Pauper* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Olivia always was the first to read what he wrote, helping her husband with his manuscripts.

The family moved to Europe in 1891 and while living in Florence he finished *Extracts from Adam's Diary* (1892). It was a book that was never published, although to Mark Twain, "it was a little gem." This work was revised and included in a collection of essays known as *The Niagara Book*. Here he modeled the first man, Adam, after himself endowing him with the attribute of laziness.

In 1901, Mark Twain began his "autobiography" of Eve, the first woman. After numerous false starts, he put the book aside unable to finish it. Then, in 1903, his world began to change. His wife, Olivia, fell ill. For reasons known only to her doctors, Mark Twain was asked to keep his distance. Except for the occasional five minute visit, Mark and Olivia would not be able to see or hear each other's voice for the better part of the next two years.

On June 5, 1904, Olivia died at the Villa di Quarto in the Italian countryside. She was only fifty-eight years old. When Mark Twain returned to the United States, he was a different man. He had suffered bankruptcy and the loss of both his wife and eldest child. In seclusion he picked up Eve's story and began to work on it. Here Eve was modeled on Olivia. It was finished as *Eve's Diary* (1905) and published in *Harper's*. It was a companion piece to *Adam's Diary* and served as a eulogy to his beloved wife. It was published in book form in 1906 with a few changes. Here Adam is allowed to have the last word and it is spoken at Eve's grave. "Wherever she was; there was Eden."

Eve: "It is my prayer, it is my longing that we pass from this life together. But if one of us must go first, it is my prayer that it shall be I. For he is strong. I am weak. Life without him would not be life" (*The Diaries of Adam and Eve*, page 106).