Notes: Autobiography - McClures Magazine (3 pages)

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Autobiography: McClures Magazine

Yesterday, April 3rd, I called on Dunham's
200 West 86th Street to see an illustrated life of Lincoln -
very good. Mrs. D. was interested in knowing how I got my
inspiration for Life and I said quite truly I did not
start out with an inspiration, I started out to do a job -
quite a different thing. I decided
uninfluenced by the way I, and I owe it to myself, too garrulously
as always, to become an authority on the French Revolution. I
did not tell them that back of that lay my search to find out
what the women would be worth in public life and I settled on
Madam Roland as a beginning at least of research. But this
led me to a desire to know all about the French Revolution, to
become as I say an authority. I came back to America with that
notion and then that queer thing happened that I must tell about
of knowing that I belonged here.

What happened when I stepped off and got that
impression. I did not touch on this, however, to the D's.

They spoke of Napoleon and here is something that
should come in. The satisfaction I had in studying the man who
had brought France back to order, the mental and spiritual
distress that I felt in Madam Roland dead by the guillotine -
all her friends and fine ideas torn to tatters - headless,
disorderly, hopeless country. The necessity of a strong hand.
There was an intellectual and spiritual satisfaction to me in
seeing them jaded up so that while they may call it a pot
boiler, and it was I suppose a pot boiler, it was done with a
degree of satisfaction, that only those who have had similar
experiences can realize.

I was not even upset by Napoleon's death; he brought it on himself I felt, of course Madam Roland did, and he left behind him certain achievements of great value which are ordinarily overlooked to which a man in their contribution to the larger must be taken into consideration.

That is, I did have a part in Napoleon. It was not merely a pot boiler; it was logical enough, psychologically and intellectually that I should seize the opportunity—\textit{fait accompli} in fact—over there in Paris.

And then I told them about Lincoln - the project to gather articles. And here I should put in what I over-looked at that time how easily I might really have gotten a great thing. But how that passion for detail and for starting at the beginning of things, finding out what had been done ruled me. If I had gone away and carefully read anything and then tabulated the material - the men whose reports were not in make lists - and had persuaded them as John Rice had to give up records I might have gotten many things that have come out since. That is, I might have done a fine useful piece of editorial work, but I began with scraps, intent on getting things that were not in any published source or illustrated, also getting my own impressions—some of which were to come back to tease me, like the God-forsaken Southwestern Indiana.

Then these had to be put together. Here I should put in some paragraphs on McCann Davis and his work. And then, my feeling that if Mr. McClure by this time had not become so impressed with Lincoln as a magazine serial I think I should have gone on and written that life, that is I by this time had become interested in Lincoln, himself, quite apart from its relation to
McClure's magazine. I never would have been satisfied not to have finished the story, any more than I would not have written the next chapter after the event in the French Revolution. It was the usual way of a tool of course for what little training I had. Certain things I knew how to do. I had gotten a certain method of collecting, classifying.