

Heroic Ambition: The early life of Dr. Elisha Kent Kane

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Though forgotten today, arguably the most celebrated hero of “Romantic” antebellum America was the sickly physician turned explorer, Dr. Elisha Kent Kane. At the time of his early death in 1857, Kane was one of the most celebrated men in America. During his short thirty-seven years of life, this surgeon from an aristocratic Philadelphia family accomplished more than most adventurers who lived to twice his age. Between 1843 and 1855 he traveled through China, East Asia, South America, India, Europe and Africa. He fought in the Mexican American war, made two highly-celebrated journeys to the Arctic, carried on a love affair with spirit-rapper Margaret Fox, and wrote one of the most successful books of the antebellum period. Most impressively, he became such a popular figure that when he died, the nation mourned his death for nearly a month as his casket wound from Havana to Philadelphia via steamboat and rail in a funeral procession that, to date, is still matched only by Abraham Lincoln’s.

Because he participated in so many activities in such a short period of time, Elisha Kent Kane’s life provides a unique insight into antebellum America. His explorations exemplify the Romantic spirit that inspired the young nation at this time; his writing and publication efforts illuminate elements of mid-century authorship and book production; his relationship with Margaret Fox exposes aspects of antebellum religion and class relations; and the many performances, books, images, and pieces of ephemera celebrating his life provide a way to examine America’s emerging culture of consumption.

In past years, Kane's Arctic adventures have been explored in scholarly works and fictionalized by many novelists, ranging from Jules Verne's *The Adventures of Dr. Hatteras* (1870) to Andrea Barrett's recent novel, *The Voyage of the Narwhal* (1998).¹ Little has been done, however, on Kane's pre-Arctic life. Kane was an ambitious but sickly youth who worked desperately to achieve the fame and prestige of his later life. This article examines these earlier years and shows how Kane worked tirelessly to create himself as a respected man of science and a hero for a troubled nation.²

Born into a politically powerful and socially aspiring Philadelphia family, Elisha Kent Kane grew up learning the ways of power and prestige from the models of success demonstrated by the previous three generations of the Kane family. Kane's great-grandfather, John Kane, emigrated from Ireland to America in 1752. Though an ex-Catholic turned Anglican, he married Sybil Kent, daughter of evangelical Presbyterian minister, Elisha Kent, and soon became a prominent and wealthy merchant of Dutchess county, New York. Because he was a loyal Tory, the Continental Congress confiscated Kane's property in the 1779 Act of Attainder. Kane moved his family behind British lines, first to Long Island and later to Nova Scotia, while he went to England to plead for the return of his assets. Though he did not dare return to the United States for some years, seven of his sons returned soon after the war and reestablished their father's trading company, expanding it with a string of posts beginning in Albany and running to Buffalo, far into the interior of New York's unsettled territory. Elisha Kane, Elisha Kent Kane's grandfather and namesake, was the pioneer brother. He established a trading post among the Oneidas and transported goods to and from Cooperstown.³ "Kane & Brothers" became a sizeable business that moved goods between the hinterlands and New

¹ George Corner's *Dr. Kane of the Arctic Seas* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1972) is the most comprehensive monograph on Kane. It is a reliable biography and provides a starting point for all subsequent Kane scholarship by skillfully reconstructing his Second Grinnell Expedition and comparing his published narrative to the actual events of the voyage.

² This article is excerpted from my recent dissertation *Raising Kane: The Creation of Fame in Antebellum America, or, The Thrilling and Tragic Narrative of Elisha Kent Kane and his Transformation into Dr. Kane, the Hero of the Romantic Age* (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas, Austin, 2001).

³ Residents of Cooperstown saw the Kane family as shrewd and successful but somewhat suspect. In 1792, Moss Kent, Elisha's cousin who lived in Cooperstown, thought about marrying Elisha's sister, Sally. Moss saw this as advantageous as the Kanes were wealthy merchants and he expected the union would "add to my Happiness & advance my Prosperity to many *Thousand*." He decided not to marry her, however, as his brother warned that he had "little respect for most of her connections." See Alan Taylor, *William Cooper's*

York City and then on to Europe. By 1793, Elisha had settled in Albany to run the company's primary storehouse. There, his wife, Alida Van Rensselaer, bore him two sons and a daughter before passing away. In 1801 Elisha moved his family to Philadelphia to open a new branch of the family business. Before his death in 1834, he gained some prominence in the Philadelphia business community, becoming the charter director of the Philadelphia Bank.⁴

As a member of a wealthy but socially unestablished family, Elisha Kane's eldest son, John Kintzing Kane, ambitiously sought to enter the higher social spheres of the city.⁵ After graduating from Yale in 1814 he gained admittance to the Philadelphia Bar in 1817 and married Jane Duval Leiper, a celebrated beauty from a prominent Philadelphia family.⁶ [figure 1.1] Jane's father, Thomas Leiper, was a Revolutionary war hero and a close friend of Thomas Jefferson, who often stayed in their house while in Philadelphia. Leiper was a successful businessman who constructed the city's first primitive railroad in 1809. He was also involved in local and national financial institutions, serving as a director of the Bank of Pennsylvania and the Bank of the United States.⁷

John K. Kane quickly established himself as an able lawyer, speaker, and writer. In 1828 he began to gain political power under the wing of Andrew Jackson, whom he served as a speech writer and advisor. He gained notoriety for a pamphlet entitled "A Candid View of the Presidential Question" published in August of 1828. Signing himself as "A Pennsylvanian ... pledged to the dogmas of no partisan leader" and with "nothing to

Town (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 306.

⁴ Early Kane family history is covered in: John K. Kane, *Autobiography: Myself from 1795 to 1849*, ed. Sybil Kane, (Philadelphia: privately printed, 1949); George Corner, *Dr. Kane of the Arctic Seas* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1972), 6-17; and Elizabeth Dennistoun Kane, *Story of John Kane of Dutchess County, New York* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1921). John K. Kane's autobiography was written in 1848 and published with additional information and a family tree in 1949. Though informative, both of these books are not entirely reliable as they are based largely on John Kane's recollections and family stories told many years after the events described.

⁵ John Kane did not have a middle name at birth, but as a young man he adopted his stepmother's maiden name, "Kintzing" as his middle name.

⁶ Charles K. Shields, "The Arctic Monument named for Tennyson by Dr. Kane," *Century Magazine* 34 (Aug. 1898): 482-92. In 1824, Jane, then a 28 year-old mother of two boys, was selected by the city to join the Marquis de Lafayette in opening a dress ball in his honor. Her beauty and grace at this event was recorded by Thomas Sully, the leading portrait painter of the day, who painted her portrait in her ball costume as Mary, Queen of Scots.

⁷ Edgar Richardson, "The Athens of America," in *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History*, ed. Russell F. Weigley, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1982), 237-38; Corner, 6-17; Henry Simpson, ed. *The Lives of Eminent Philadelphians* (Philadelphia, 1859), 648-50; *Dictionary of American Biography*, "Thomas Leiper."

hope from either candidate,” Kane offered his “dispassionately formed” opinion of Jackson and his political opponent, John Quincy Adams. The pamphlet portrayed Jackson as a self-made man with heroic attributes—a man “quick to resent an injury, and as quick to forgive one.” It noted, however, that Adams grew up in the lap of luxury with all the “respected traits ... and not a few of the less respected traits of the Yankee character,” and concluded that Adams, like the “head of the house of Stuart, ... has never forgotten an enemy, or remembered a friend.”⁸

Jackson grew to trust Kane’s abilities and appointed him to the commission delegated to negotiate claims with France as well as aid him in his attack on the Bank of the United States. Though these efforts, as well as his involvement with Free-Masonry, hurt his reputation in the eyes of many of Philadelphia’s elite, Kane ultimately gained political power in the emerging Democratic Party. In 1838, he led the Democrats in the “Buckshot War,” a Pennsylvania election dispute that grew so heated that the militia was called in to protect the legislators from the mobs that swarmed the state capital in Harrisburg.⁹

By 1845 Kane was appointed Attorney General of Pennsylvania, and then in 1846, President Polk appointed him U.S. District Court Judge of Eastern Pennsylvania—a position he held for the rest of his life. Kane made the most of this post. As a United States Judge, he could not easily be removed from power and so used his court as a bully pulpit from which to address the most controversial issues of the day, spinning them to benefit his political goals. The best examples of this are his controversial rulings in the *Christiana* case of 1851 and the *Passmore Williamson* case of 1855. In these cases Kane upheld the Fugitive Slave Act to its fullest extent, prosecuting abolitionists for treason and putting them at risk of their lives. As a staunch Democrat concerned about the elections of 1852 and 1856, Kane knew that he had to keep the South solidly behind the Democratic party while also maintaining enough Northern support to swing the election in their favor. The Fugitive Slave Act was the dividing issue of the era and with the *Christiana* and *Williamson* cases—both direct challenges to the Act—Kane recognized an opportunity. He made himself a villain among many Northerners as he charged

⁸ [John K. Kane], “A Candid View of the Presidential Question,” (Philadelphia, 1828). A copy of this rare pamphlet is housed at the American Philosophical Society.

⁹ John Kane, *Autobiography*, 36-42; Corner, 9-11.

abolitionists with treason in the *Christiana* case, and held Passmore Williamson, secretary of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society, in custody for contempt of court. Both of these cases polarized the North and South and sent newspapers into fits of scathing attacks and counter attacks. The Kane family added theatrics to this battle as their second son, Thomas Leiper Kane (who served as his father's legal clerk), worked against his father. Tom sent Thanksgiving food to the "traitors" his father had jailed in the *Christiana* case, and according to family legend, Judge Kane later threw Tom in jail for contempt of court because of his vigorous support of abolitionist causes.¹⁰ Through such rulings and theatrics, Kane allowed Democratic candidates to claim a moderate stance by opposing his extreme strictness, thus appeasing Northern voters, while delivering a hard-line defense of slavery to their Southern constituency.¹¹

Kane used his political savvy and skills of influence in other arenas as well. In business he insured the completion of his pet project, the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal; and in philanthropic efforts he helped found Philadelphia's Girard College, Second Presbyterian Church, Academy of Fine Arts, and Musical Fund Society. Kane was also a prominent Mason and the president of the American Philosophical Society.¹² By his death in 1858, he was one of the most powerful Democrats in the nation. As a biographical sketch then noted, "Judge Kane did not aspire to be conspicuous as a politician" but instead viewed himself primarily as "a writer of other men's speeches—a prompter of the stock performers on the stage, who could find his sufficient reward and enjoyment in seeing the drama enacted of which he might have claimed to be the author."¹³ Judge Kane was politically powerful because he knew how to influence, inspire, and use public opinion. This was a skill he passed along to his sons.

¹⁰ *Pennsylvania Freeman* (Dec. 4, 1851), 3; Corner, 279n8.

¹¹ Thomas Slaughter, *Bloody Dawn: The Christiana Riot and Racial Violence in the Antebellum North* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); W.U. Hensel, *The Christiana Riot and the Treason Trials of 1851* (Lancaster, PA: New Era Printing Co., 1911); and Randall Hudson & James Duram, "The *New York Daily Tribune* and Passmore Williamson's Case: A Study in the Use of Northern States' Rights," *Wichita State University Bulletin* (November, 1974). For the Kane family's take on Williamson's case see EKK to JKK (Oct. 30, 1855), letter in the possession of Eliza Cope Harrison. A good view of how Philadelphia's elite society viewed Judge Kane's ruling in the Williamson case is available in Sidney George Fisher, *The Diary of Sidney George Fisher, 1834-1871*, ed. N.B. Wainwright (Philadelphia: Historical Society of Pennsylvania, 1967), 249-51.

¹² John Kane, *Autobiography*; Corner, 9-11; and Simpson, 613-18.

¹³ Simpson, 615. It seems likely that this biographical sketch was written by John Kane's son, Tom Leiper Kane, who appears as a contributor to this work and who was himself a skilled manipulator of public opinion.

On February 3, 1820, Elisha Kent Kane was born the first child of John Kane, then a young lawyer, and his wife, Jane Duval Leiper Kane. During Elisha's early years, the family lived in the heart of Philadelphia, on Walnut street between 7th and 8th, and then at 100 South 4th—each location also housing John Kane's law office.¹⁴ During these years Elisha's constant companion was his brother, Tom, who was just two years his junior. Elisha and Tom were bright, energetic boys full of adventurous spirit. Elisha's childhood drawings depicted exciting scenes of battle and heroism—soldiers fighting with drawn swords and exotic turban-clad warriors galloping on horseback.¹⁵ Despite his slight build (34 pounds at age eight) Elisha was drawn more to outdoor adventure than books—developing and executing a plan to scale their three-story house took far higher priority than learning Greek or Latin. Judging from accounts told later in his life, he was anything but a disciplined student in his younger years.¹⁶ William Elder, Kane's first biographer and a friend of the family, noted, "Elisha earned the character of bad boy, while he was in fact exercising and cultivating the sprit of a brave one. Goody-good people, very naturally, did not understand him then."¹⁷ But by the time he was a young teen, Elisha worked diligently at his studies; he wrote his father that that he "would rather be a smart boy and clumsy play fellow" than the other way around.¹⁸

By the age of seventeen, Elisha was a gifted scientific observer and hoped to pursue a career as an engineer or natural philosopher. His father pushed him to attend Yale, but Elisha was denied admittance, presumably for his lack of Classical languages. Instead, he opted for the University of Virginia, where he was not required to meet Greek and Latin requirements and could concentrate on his scientific interests. Robert Patterson, Elisha's cousin, had begun at UVA the year before and this was another major draw because Robert provided Elisha with a ready roommate and friend. Kane matriculated in 1838 and soon proved to be an excellent student. He studied primarily

¹⁴ Corner, 11.

¹⁵ folder, "Notebook (Childhood)," APS EKK papers.

¹⁶ EKK to JKK (June 10, 1828), APS EKK papers. For Elisha's roof-climbing story see William Elder, *Biography of Elisha Kent Kane* (Philadelphia: Childs & Peterson, 1857), 22-25.

¹⁷ Elder, 21.

¹⁸ EKK to JKK (Sept. 16, [1831?]), APS EKK papers.

with William Barton Rogers who taught physics, geology, mineralogy, and civil engineering. At that time, Rogers (who later became MIT's first president) was in the midst of mapping the geological formations of the Blue Ridge Mountains. He invited Kane to join him on several of his excursions. Kane enjoyed these rugged outings and hoped to pursue a career in geology or engineering, but these hopes ended when he suffered a severe attack of rheumatic fever in the fall of 1838.¹⁹

After a time of recovery at home, Elisha returned to UVA thanks to the university granting Patterson and him special permission to live in a vacant room in the library; this afforded Elisha a less stressful and better heated environment than the dormitory. Elisha again excelled in his work and by June of 1839 Patterson wrote his mother that Elisha “stands among the best in all his classes” and “is with Mr. Rogers in his laboratory every evening.”²⁰ Within a few months, however, Kane again suffered a major illness and returned home to recover. At this time, Kane's physician warned him that he should not pursue any active occupation for, given his heart condition, such strain could cause him to die “as suddenly as from a musket shot.” Taking this to heart, Kane languished in bed for several weeks. Judge Kane could not bear the sight of his son in such a weak and miserable condition and, feeling it was for his son's best interest, ordered Elisha to get up and get back to work saying, “If you must die—die in the harness.”²¹

Despite such a rousing command by his father, the family decided it would be best for Elisha to chose a less strenuous career. In the fall of 1839 he apprenticed himself to Dr. William Harris of Philadelphia and began studying medicine at the University of Pennsylvania. Kane was a diligent student, a hard-working resident at Blockley (now Philadelphia General Hospital), and an impressive researcher. By the time of his graduation in March of 1842, Kane had considerable hospital experience and had published an article on Kiesteine (a substance found in urine that can indicate pregnancy) in the *American Journal of the Medical Sciences*.²²

¹⁹ James Park McCallie, “Elisha Kent Kane,” *Alumni Bulletin, University of Virginia* 6 (1889), 103-6; Corner, 22-24. It seems Kane may have began taking classes at UVA in 1837 though he did not matriculate until 1838.

²⁰ Robert Patterson to Mrs. Patterson (June 6, 1839), Dow Papers, Stefansson Arctic Collection, Dartmouth College Library.

²¹ Elder, 37.

²² EKK to U.S. Naval Board of Examiners (June 2, 1842), APS EKK papers. This letter outlines Kane's work over the previous few years. For his experiments with Kiesteine see Elisha Kent Kane, “Experiments on Kiesteine with Remarks on its Application to Pregnancy,” *American Journal of Medical Sciences* 4

These years of medical training were not easy for Kane. He was sick much of the time and often agonized about his own worth—what good was a sickly doctor? At times these thoughts depressed Elisha almost to the point of despair. He felt his parents were unsympathetic to his feelings; he wrote them, “no one who has not experienced the suffocating state of low spirits induced by heart disease would do other than you would do and have done — laugh at my explanation.”²³ But at other times the illness drove Kane to succeed. William Marcellus McPheeters, Kane’s immediate superior at Blockley, noted that while Kane was always aware of “the gravity of his disease” it did not seem to “affect the buoyancy of his spirits, or to abate the ardour with which he pursued the objects of his ambition.” McPheeters even suggested that “the uncertain state of his health had a good deal to do with his subsequent course of life, and the almost reckless exposure of himself to danger.”²⁴

Upon graduation from medical school, Kane’s life took a sudden change. Instead of renting office space and settling down to the secure life of a Philadelphia physician, Elisha joined the Navy. Both William Elder and George Corner, Kane’s contemporary and modern biographers, have attributed this sudden career change to Kane’s father. Elder noted that Elisha planned to open a private practice but his father, without Elisha’s knowledge, wrote Secretary of the Navy Abel Upshur and signed him up as a naval physician. Corner repeats this statement without documentation other than a letter from Upshur to Elisha, asking him to report for testing. Corner speculates that Judge Kane intruded into his son’s life because he felt the Medical Corps of the Navy, with its opportunity for travel and research, would better suit Elisha’s frail health than would a private practice in crowded Philadelphia.²⁵

This assumption is not unreasonable as such a plan is congruent with the times. The common “recipe” for marine travel books during the 1840s and 1850s was to, “Take a weak-eyed Harvard boy and have him ship as a common seaman on a voyage round the Horn, thereby toughening his body, sharpening his sight, and bringing out all the basic

(1842), 13-37.

²³ EKK to JKK & JDLK (May 23, [1842]), APS EKK papers.

²⁴ Elder, 41. Quoted from a letter McPheeters wrote to Elder about EKK while Elder was working on Kane’s biography in 1857.

²⁵ Elder, 52; Corner, 32-33, 280n1. Elder’s goal for the biography was to show Elisha as a selfless hero, one who did not seek out fame and fortune. This would explain why he would have attributed Elisha’s sudden change of career to his father, not Elisha.

strength of his character.”²⁶ Judge Kane may have been wanting to toughen up his young, academically-minded son. He himself had began his work career as a fireman with the Philadelphia Hose Company, a career that ended only after he had a bad fall from the steeple of the flaming State House.²⁷

Despite this, sources suggest that it was Elisha as much as his father that instigated this radical change in his life. After graduation, Elisha was not working to establish himself as a physician; he was at home busily conducting further experiments. Judge Kane noted in a letter to his daughter, that Elisha had captured a couple of “dear little rats” for his work, but they had run away and he thus had only his brother’s guinea pigs “to comfort him in his study.”²⁸ Full of ambition but trapped in a sickly body, in the months after his graduation, Elisha went against his family’s wishes and adopted a strenuous lifestyle, hoping that it would lead to his recovery. He left his family’s home for Lapedia (his uncle George Gray Leiper’s country estate outside of Philadelphia) and began a daily routine of exercise and activity. Elisha wrote his parents that he left their house because, while there, “there were few moments when I did not feel as if death had his grip upon my larynx.” He noted that his medical mentor, William Harris, recommended this plan and explained, “Should Harris be correct, it would cure me, if wrong it would kill. The first was my hope and the latter my anticipation and thus I left you.” He concluded:

I hope to come back to you a new man — hope of life is for the first time urging me on and the very hope is worth a host. For the first time I begin to see that a life of usefulness may be before me, and for the next six months I intend to devote soul and body to this one great possibility. Eating, drinking, sleeping, riding, sweating and better than all forgetting — Living the life of the body that I may hereafter live that of the mind.²⁹

After an active summer in the company of his attractive and attentive cousin, Mary Leiper, Elisha’s health was much improved. He then spent the winter of 1842-43 attending lectures at Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia.³⁰ Though no documents survive from this period, it is clear that during this time Elisha became convinced that he

²⁶ Carl Bode, *The Anatomy of American Popular Culture, 1840-1861*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960), 221.

²⁷ Simpson, 614.

²⁸ JKK to Elizabeth Kane (April 1, 1842), Kane family papers, Clements Library, University of Michigan.

²⁹ EKK to JKK & JDLK (May 23, [1842]), APS EKK papers.

³⁰ Corner, 33; Mary Leiper to EKK (May 23, 1843), APS EKK papers. Sixteen letters from Mary to Kane housed in the APS show that over the next decade the two stayed close as Mary’s infatuation with her older

did not want to be a physician. His experiences of the past year supported this decision because he had remained healthy throughout his active summer but again became ill when he resumed a physicians sedentary lifestyle. Elisha also still had fond memories of the vigorous mental and physical exercise of his explorations with William Barton Rogers during his early college years. Though he did not articulate it clearly at that time, by early 1843, Elisha Kent Kane no longer saw himself as a physician but as a man of science and adventure.³¹

This impulse could easily have caused Elisha to urge his father to use his influence to gain him a position in the Navy. It would also explain why he readily went through with the subsequent application and testing process.³² But Elisha did not embrace the Navy whole-heartedly. He wanted to travel and explore the world as a free-thinking man of science, not as a duty-bound, subservient naval officer. As an independent, strong-willed young man, the idea of military discipline horrified him. He knew what he did and did not want to do and could not tolerate the idea of “the routine life of a subordinate” that Naval rank would impose on him.³³

Elisha passed the Naval exams and was accepted into the Navy in 1842, but as no positions were then available, he was not commissioned. In January of 1843, anxious for adventure and to regain his health, he requested leave from the Navy so he could set off aboard a merchant vessel. But before this plan came to fruition, Elisha learned of a far more appealing opportunity that would fulfill his longing for adventure and scientific exploration while not subjugating him to military discipline—Caleb Cushing’s diplomatic mission to China.³⁴

Following the Opium War of 1837-1842 between China and England, China was forced to surrender Hong Kong and open several “treaty ports” to British commerce. Not wanting to miss out on this new trade opportunity, the United States quickly organized a diplomatic mission to China, hoping to negotiate commercial treaties and even to gain a

cousin slowly turned into a warm friendship.

³¹ This change is apparent in the letters between Elisha and his family over the next several months and years. See especially EKK to TLK (undated, c. August, 1844), folder “Robert Patterson Kane, n.d.,” APS TLK papers. A rough draft of this letter in the APS EKK papers shows that this letter was written from Whampoa, China.

³² EKK to U.S. Naval Board of Examiners (June 2, 1842), APS EKK papers.

³³ Elder, 100.

³⁴ Corner, 33.

hold in China's forbidden capital, Peking. When Daniel Webster resigned his cabinet post early in 1843, Massachusetts statesman Caleb Cushing was appointed as head of this delegation. Upon hearing of this mission, Judge Kane used his political connections to assure that Elisha would have a position on this mission—a popular idea apparently as Webster also insured that his son Fletcher would be on board. Kane's position was "honorary," or more accurately stated, unsalaried. He was thus viewed as a passenger with no official Navy rank.³⁵ This freed Elisha from the naval regulations he so despised and allowed him the freedom he wanted. Thus, with arrangements made to delay his official Naval duties until after the mission, Elisha shipped out of Norfolk, Virginia aboard the *Brandywine* on the 24th of May, 1843. His travels from this time until his return on August 6, 1845 were full of adventure and provide the first signs of the daring and romantic enthusiasm that became the hallmark of his popular persona in the years that followed. This journey also provides the first glimpse into Kane's mind as his prolonged absence from home resulted in a substantial correspondence between himself and his family. Through this and the remains of his fragmented journal, it is easy to see the growing ambition of this young man.³⁶

With Kane happily aboard, the *Brandywine* left Norfolk and crossed the Atlantic to the African island port of Madeira, only to cross back to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; a common route that took advantage of prevailing winds. During this trip, Kane discovered another reason to hate Navy life—sea sickness, a condition that plagued him the rest of his sea-faring life. One thing that helped him keep his mind off this discomfort was a young boy, William Henry Weaver. Weaver was orphaned at a young age and placed in the care of William Robinson who arranged for him to ship aboard Cushing's expedition as a Midshipman. Kane took Weaver under his wing, serving as both an instructor and mentor. He had Weaver keep an unofficial logbook of the journey and instructed him in basic medical skills.³⁷

³⁵ Elisha wrote Cushing, volunteering for the mission as an "honorary" member and Cushing accepted. See Cushing to EKK (May 20, 1843), Library of Congress, Manuscripts Division, Caleb Cushing papers.

³⁶ Corner, 32-48. Corner did an amazing job of piecing together Kane's route during this two year escapade, meticulously verifying and correcting Elder's exaggerated account. My telling of this journey relies heavily on Corner's work as well as his research notes now housed with the Elisha Kent Kane papers at the American Philosophical Society. One date discrepancy appears in his book; he cites Kane as returning to Philadelphia on April 6, 1845, undoubtedly a typographical error of the correct date, August 6, 1845.

³⁷ Weaver's logbook, housed in the APS EKK papers, is now the only complete account of this part of the

While in Rio, Kane observed the celebration of Emperor Dom Pedro II's marriage to Princess Theresa Christina of Bourbon and attended the massive reception that followed. He also spent a few days climbing in the Organ Mountains that surround Rio. From Rio the *Brandywine* sailed for Bombay by way of the Cape of Good Hope, arriving on October 25. Cushing had not accompanied the mission to this point, choosing instead to meet them in Bombay. He was delayed, however, and this gave Kane a month in India with little to do but explore and study. He pored over books on mathematics, navigation, and European languages when on board, but spent a good deal of time roaming the area, visiting the sculpted caves at Elephanta and Karli and crossing to Ceylon with several British officers to join in an elephant hunt near Kandy.³⁸

Cushing's ship met up with the *Brandywine* in late November and, with the delegation complete, they set sail for the Bay of Canton on December 9 and arrived on February 27, 1844. During this long trip, Kane became fast friends with Fletcher Webster, who served as secretary to the legation. Webster was both amused and impressed with his new friend's almost obsessive quest for knowledge and experience. He noted that though Kane was an accomplished physician, "he seemed to think very lightly of his acquirements" and that he was "continually looking forward to something beyond ... evidently annoyed when not engaged in something, and always restless unless busy,—for hours in the stateroom buried in mathematics, and then next seen at the masthead or over the ship's side."³⁹ Upon arrival, it was quickly apparent that the negotiations would take a very long time as the Chinese made every effort to delay the Americans; they did not even let the delegates set foot on Chinese soil; they had to conduct all negotiations at a temple in the Portuguese colony of Macao. Peter Parker, a doctor and missionary who had worked in that region for years, served as the delegation's primary interpreter. Because he was an experienced physician, Kane, as assistant surgeon to the expedition, was not needed. This allowed him to leave the delegation and travel with the *Brandywine* to the Philippine Islands, where it was to inspect supplies left

journey as this section of the ship's official log is now missing. For Kane's work with Weaver see William Robinson to EKK (Oct. 10, 1845) APS EKK papers.

³⁸ Corner, 35-36; Elder, 55-56. Kane's journals from this time were lost and so this information comes from the remembrances of the Kane family as told to Elder in 1857. The events do match with the logbook of William Weaver noted above.

³⁹ Elder, 75-76. When writing his biography of Kane, Elder wrote many of Kane's friends for their remembrances of him; this quote comes from Webster's response.

in Manila by the U.S. East India Squadron. Kane again had no official duties and could thus explore the islands on his own. Before leaving the United States, he had prepared for just such an opportunity and had obtained letters of introduction from both Catholic and Protestant mission boards. These gained him ready acceptance on Luzon, the main island of the Philippines.⁴⁰

It was just forty miles outside of Manila that Kane conducted one of his most dramatic and dangerous feats of scientific daring. Accompanied by Baron Loë, a young German he met in Manila, Kane set off for Taal Lake, famous for its active volcano that rises 1,000 feet out of its waters. A local clergyman provided the two explorers with native guides to lead them to the volcano, a task the natives were hesitant to perform because they regarded the active volcano as sacred. The volcano's mouth was two-miles in circumference and dropped over one hundred feet to a beach of volcanic ash that led to a steaming lake that bubbled around several sulfur-covered cones protruding from its surface. Loë was surprised, and the natives horrified, when Kane decided to descend into the crater, cross the beach, and collect a specimen of the bubbling water to see if it was sulfuric acid. Loë consented to help him only after Elisha hastily penciled a note that absolved him of any blame in what Loë felt was likely to be Kane's death.⁴¹

Kane fashioned a rope out of bamboo and instructed his guides to dig eight holes that they could brace themselves in as they lowered him to the beach below. With much effort, Kane descended into the crater. Loë was to follow him down, but the makeshift rope could not support his heavy frame. At this point, the native guides began to leave their stations, leaving Kane stranded below. Quickly grabbing Kane's pistol (which didn't actually work), Loë waved it in their faces "and after an interesting jumble of Tagalog & Spanish succeeded in conveying the conviction that any man who spoke, or laughed, or changed his betel nut, or quit his hole, was to be instantly shot through the head."⁴² He then forced one of the guides, Isidro, to follow Kane down the rope. This act saved Kane's life as he was overcome by fumes when Isidro reached him, and had to

⁴⁰ Corner, 36-37.

⁴¹ This note still exists in the APS EKK papers. It reads, "Being about to descend into the Crater for the first time since its great alteration, I would exempt my friends from all participation in my attempt and I beg that this may be forwarded to my friends at home should I not return. E.K. Kane April 14th Manila Time, Crater of Taal Forward to J.K. Kane Esq. Philada."

⁴² Folder, "Travel Notes," APS EKK papers

be tied to the rope so Loë and the others could pull him out of the crater. After Elisha revived, the group began their trek back to Manila, but before long the guides abandoned Elisha and Loë and joined local natives in aggressively protesting their profanation of the volcano. The two explorers sought shelter in a thicket and fired their pistols until local friars came to their rescue.⁴³ Safely back in Manila, Elisha recorded this story in prose full of romantic and youthful flare. It is impossible to know whether the discrepancies in his story (first his pistol does not work, then he is firing it to scare off natives) come from information left out in the haste of writing, or from artistic embellishment for heightened effect. But either way, the deed and its vivid telling demonstrated Kane's ability to execute and record a thrilling adventure. His journal from his time in the Philippines includes this and other exciting tales, each clearly written with the idea of publication in mind.⁴⁴

In Manila, Kane received letters from home for the first time on his journey. His family had gratefully received his first packet of letters, but his father was disturbed by Elisha's desire to leave the delegation permanently and to keep exploring the world on his own. In a letter back to his son, Judge Kane praised Elisha's spirit and assured him that funds were available for his full support during Cushing's mission (up to \$1,000), but demanded that once the delegation ended, he was to "come home." He stressed, "No outer Island, no South American project, but home, home to us, and to such welcome as no man has a right to think coldly of."⁴⁵ Judge Kane's words are followed by several paragraphs from Elisha's brother Tom, scolding him for trying to travel frugally and thus missing out on other exciting escapades. Sure that Elisha's adventures could be made into a great book, and not wanting him to pass up any opportunities for adventure, Tom closed, "Damn your 'resisting temptation' — damn and double damn your having lived so cheaply."⁴⁶

Whether Elisha took Tom's advice or had simply overstated his frugality in his letters home, he did not live a monastic life in Manila. In a letter written soon after

⁴³ This story appears in *ibid.*; and Elder, 59-65 (Elder's account comes from Kane's travel notes and family stories).

⁴⁴ folder, "Manila Rough Notes," APS EKK papers. Marks in the journal show that they were edited for potential publication and letters between Elisha and Tom allude to these journals as the foundation of a book.

⁴⁵ JKK & TLK to EKK (undated, c. Spring, 1844), APS EKK papers.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

Elisha left the Philippines, Loë noted that “Since you left me ... I go on in drinking gin and water from morning till evening and smoking again from twilight till dawning.” He reminisced about the time he and Elisha were briefly imprisoned in Balimac and bemoaned the fact that a recent escapade without Elisha—that involved a fine “collection of Tuchan and Mestizo women”—had not been “equal to what we have seen on our trips.”⁴⁷ Though Kane was a skilled and disciplined doctor and scientist, it is clear that he was also a young and exuberant 24 year old traveling about the world, free for the first time from the confines of his very proper home.

Sometime in mid-May, 1844, Kane returned to Macao and took up his station with the American legation. He enjoyed all the pomp and ceremony of the final days of the negotiations and described the events fully to his family. He was especially impressed with the drinking game, “Chin-chin,” that had the Americans and their Chinese hosts gulping down larger and larger quantities of wine-flavored rice liquor. He noted that the dinner ended when they finally, “toasted the Emperor of China, hip-hipped him, hurraed him, hiccupped him, and withdrew.”⁴⁸ In the same letter, however, despite (or perhaps because of) his Father’s wishes, he announced that he had decided not to return home with the delegation. He enthusiastically reported that he had resigned his post, participated in one final official dinner, and then “two hours after, I was in a chartered boat, armed to the teeth, and threading the ladrone dangers of the Canton River. I was a freed man.”⁴⁹

Kane declaring himself a “freed man” was a declaration of double meanings. He was happy to be free of the delegation and again able to explore on his own, and this was certainly the meaning he meant for his parents to understand. But more importantly, by refusing to return home, he was directly defying the wishes of his powerful and domineering father—a rebellion that Elisha was also certainly celebrating. This rebellion was not missed by Tom, who, struggling to make his mark in Philadelphia society and constantly worried about the family’s social standing, stated enviously and bluntly, “I can see damned plain now that you have been freed from our cramping [and] are rebelling.”⁵⁰

⁴⁷ Baron Loë to EKK (May 23, 1844), APS EKK papers.

⁴⁸ Elder, 70.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 73.

⁵⁰ JKK & TLK to EKK (Dec. 9, 1844) APS EKK papers.

Whether motivated by rebellion or not, Kane's departure from the Cushing delegation came as no surprise to his friends aboard the *Brandywine*. They all knew him as a young man who thrived on risk and adventure. Fletcher Webster noted that even while in Macao with the delegation, Kane often set off alone on "excursions always attended with a good deal of personal danger," and that he had "explored the whole town itself before we, of slower motions, had commenced."⁵¹ The ship's chaplain, Rev. George Jones, further noted that Kane had "a great enthusiasm in manner, which also mixed itself with his conversation. He seemed to be all hope, all ardor, and his eye appeared already to take in the whole world as his own."⁵²

When Kane set off from the delegation, his plan was to travel down the Canton River to the busy harbor of Whampoa (present day Huang-Pu), where he hoped to set up a temporary medical practice to gain funds for further travel. In Whampoa he teamed up with Michael O'Sullivan, a young English Surgeon, and the two of them managed a hospital boat that serviced foreign ships coming into port. Though he eventually fell ill and had to sell his portion of the business, Kane worked for about six months and earned nearly three thousand dollars.⁵³ During this time he also helped medical missionary Peter Parker in an amazing surgery in which they removed a basketball-size tumor from a man's head—the man survived and remained at Parker's Ophthalmic Hospital as living proof of the power of Western medicine.⁵⁴

While in Whampoa, Kane gained a new sense of independence and power. He began to see himself not as the son of Judge John Kane of Philadelphia (though his father still loomed large in his thoughts) but as an independent man of science. He was a Romantic explorer, skilled in many areas, determined to experience and understand new lands and new peoples, and capable of turning these discoveries into significant contributions to the scientific community. Hoping that his brother would join him in such quests, Elisha wrote Tom, proposing that they set off together on an extended adventure. Tom, who envied Elisha's spirit but felt too tied to home issues to leave,

⁵¹ Elder, 76.

⁵² Ibid., 77.

⁵³ *The Friend of China and Hongkong Gazette*, an English-language newspaper published in Hong Kong, contained several ads placed by Kane and O'Sullivan, informing foreign captains of their services. A clipping can be found in the APS EKK papers and is reprinted in Corner, 41.

⁵⁴ Corner, 41-42.

declined, saying that Elisha's life was too "Romantic" for him. Writing from Whampoa, Elisha replied, "As for you calling it Romantic, I am too well satisfied, Tommy, to dispute—besides which, ... it is the merest question of words. You may call it what you d—n please.... Religion—Romance—Ridiculous Moonshine—are words for 'the same thing in Dutch'—degrees of the speech or rather of the speakers."⁵⁵

Both Elisha and Tom wanted to see and experience the world and to gain the recognition and respect they felt they deserved. However, they also each felt a deep sense of responsibility toward their family—a responsibility that necessitated them settling down as respectable citizens with stable careers. At this time, Tom envied Elisha's freedom and felt oppressed by the social responsibilities of their family and its reputation. He thus longed for Elisha to return so he could be free of family and social responsibilities.

If you were here, what in the devil do you suppose I would care for them? Why we'd make light of them all, and rub through the world, right finely till both were able to make the Declaration of Independence. If you want my place, as lighting rod to carry off the electric shocks of the progenitors, formerly yours, then I'll put into execution my idea of going to practice at New Orleans, leaving you the onus — the duty, which alone keeps me here, of taking care that Bess & Pat & John get in good society — of which without something done there is at present no chance.⁵⁶

This early correspondence between Tom and Elisha shows the beginning of the partnership that developed between them in later years. Elisha would travel the world, performing amazing deeds and winning glory. Tom would stay at home, keep family matters in order, and work to promote Elisha's achievements to the public. Working together in this way, Elisha and Tom operated together to fulfill their greatest desire—to earn fame and glory for themselves and their family. Though their different roles at times caused jealousy and conflict, they remained committed to one another and worked as one. But in 1844, their efforts that would one day create the heroic "Dr. Kane" were not yet ready to begin.

By the time Tom's letter reached Whampoa, things had dramatically changed—Elisha was violently ill. Just as an attack of rheumatic fever had ended his goals of

⁵⁵EKK to TLK (undated, c. August, 1844), folder "Robert Patterson Kane, n.d.," APS TLK papers. A draft of this letter shows that it was written from Whampoa, China.

⁵⁶TLK to EKK (Dec. 6, 1844), APS EKK papers. Bess (Elizabeth), Pat (Robert Patterson) and John (John Jr.) were Elisha and Tom's younger siblings.

adventure eight years earlier, in December of 1844 “rice fever” (probably cholera) again threatened to end his dreams of exploration by rendering him completely incapacitated for several weeks. Discouraged with his life and disgusted with his frail constitution, he decided to sail for home. A surviving journal written the day before his departure shows the anger he felt as his pride of self-sufficiency was replaced by feelings of sickly inadequacy.

China had been my first field of action and responsibility. It was here that casting off the dependence of a child I assumed the self-sustaining duties of a man.... I felt myself improving in my profession and advancing in experience. My present success redeemed all my previous failures—it exceeded all my expectations. My debts had been paid, my position established and, in a little heaven of self satisfaction, I was looking forward with almost childlike delight to what? To day dreams....

This then was China.... I at last felt that I could gladden those I loved by an account of my success, and a hurried letter gave vent to my hopes. Three days after its completion and one before its departure, I was delirious—for three weeks my life was despaired of, and when at last I awoke from the stupefaction of a frightful fever it was to feel, not that disease had crushed my energies, nor sickness broken down the pride of manhood, but that both were useless—Nature’s frail instrument the carcass had broken down.⁵⁷

On January 25, 1845, Kane left Macao and headed for home. What happened on this trip is not entirely clear because few records from it survive. What is clear, however, is that Elisha’s health quickly improved and his spirit of adventure returned. What was to be a quick trip home turned into a journey spanning much of Asia, Africa, and Europe and lasting over half a year.⁵⁸ Elisha’s few surviving letters show that he was in good spirits and pursuing adventure with renewed energy. In March of 1845, his seven year old brother, Willie, wrote that he had “laughed very much” at Elisha’s previous letters, but was now refusing to write “quite so much as I have done till you write to me how you escaped from the indians and the shark.”⁵⁹

From Singapore, Kane traveled to Borneo and Sumatra, stopping briefly at both islands before he headed for Galle, Ceylon, which he reached on the 19th of February. Soon thereafter he crossed over to India and explored its eastern coast, perhaps as far north as Calcutta. While in India, Elisha met wealthy nobleman, Dwarkanath Tagore (grandfather of poet Rabindranath Tagore), who was planning a trip to England to visit Queen Victoria’s court. He invited Kane to travel with him. In his biography of Kane,

⁵⁷ folder, “Whampoa Medical Affairs,” APS EKK papers.

⁵⁸ Judging from the letters he quotes, William Elder had many letters that have not survived to the present. However, Elder’s biography was purposefully hagiographic (commissioned by Kane’s publisher to promote further book sales) and is thus exaggerated the scope of Kane’s travels.

Elder claimed that before Kane left with Tagore, he spent “some months ... in a tour of exploration through the interior of India, including the ascent of the Himalaya Mountains.”⁶⁰ His facts are then contradictory: he said Kane traveled with Tagore by sea to Suez, which would have meant a sailing route through the Red Sea; but then noted that he visited Persia and Syria, which suggests that Kane sailed up the Persian Gulf and traveled overland to Suez. Whichever route he took, it is clear that some of Elder’s story is fabricated because Kane arrived in Suez by April 3, giving him only a month and a half to have made it there from Ceylon, leaving little time for exploration or overland travel.⁶¹

By mid-April, Kane was in Cairo and, thanks to a letter of introduction from Tagore, he obtained safe-conduct for travel in Egypt. Another letter from Tagore gained him membership in the Egyptian Society of Cairo.⁶² On April 15 he hired a boat and pilot and headed up the Nile, bound for the pyramids. In Dendera, disaster struck. Kane wanted to inspect the site’s famous ruins and went ashore for the night. When he returned the next morning, his boat along with all the trunks containing his collections and papers were gone. He discovered the boat downstream, lodged on a sandbar and emptied of its contents. Fortunately he had taken his money with him and was thus able to continue his travels. A few days later he recovered his pocket watch, which he saw in the possession of his interpreter, who escaped during the ensuing scuffle, no doubt with other possessions from Kane’s boat.⁶³

Though sick over the loss of his artifacts and journals from the past two years, Kane continued his trek, making it to Thebes sometime before May. Awed by the monuments there, he wrote home, “there is something so vast in the dimensions of these colossal ruins that I cannot embrace details; and, indeed, I almost fear that I shall leave Thebes without a definite impression of anything but magnitude.” He spent hours exploring these monuments and enthusiastically adopted the local lifestyle, wearing “native dress, with a beard so long that I have to tuck it in.”⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Willie Kane to EKK (March 19, 1845), APS EKK papers.

⁶⁰ Elder, 80.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*; Corner, 44, 281-82n20. Corner speculates on each of these possible routes and shows that a sea route is much more likely.

⁶² Corner, 44. Kane also gained membership in the Egyptian Literary Association. See Henry Abbott to EKK (Dec. 2, 1845), APS EKK papers.

⁶³ folder, “Notebook #7,” and EKK to JKK (Aug. 3, 1845), APS EKK papers.

⁶⁴ Elder, 81, 84. This comes from a long letter excerpted by Elder. The original is not present among Kane’s surviving papers.

While in Thebes, Kane learned that German Egyptologist Richard Lepsius was just across the river, working at the great temple in Karnak. Lepsius had recently become a foreign member of the American Philosophical Society (an honor he learned of via a letter from the society's secretary, John K. Kane) and thus Elisha's name alone gained him welcome with Lepsius. They spent several days together, Kane enthralled with Lepsius's work and Lepsius glad to have a learned companion. Over the next weeks, traveling by camel, boat, and on foot, Kane visited the ruins at Luxor, Karnak, Abydos, Saqqara, Serapeum, and Masara, as well as the Valley of the Kings and the two statues of Amenophis III.⁶⁵ While at the monument known as "Vocal Memnon," Kane again performed a reckless feat in the name of discovery. Kane believed that Egyptian hieroglyphics were "nothing more nor less than a great library of monumental history, where all that is wanted is the patient labor of a reader." It is thus not surprising that, when he reached Vocal Memnon—a massive seated Pharaoh reading a tablet—he wanted to know what the Pharaoh was reading. Others before him had easily read the tablet by climbing to the Pharaoh's head via an easy route up the back, but this was not good enough for Elisha. He was certain there were hieroglyphics on the underside of the tablet as well. This presented a challenge because the ten inch thick tablet rested on the Pharaoh's knees about thirty-five feet above the ground. The only way Kane could see its underside was to climb up the statue's massive legs and suspend himself beneath the tablet. Despite the objections of his guides, Kane stripped down to his pantaloons and began this difficult task. Within minutes he was stranded, unable to move either up or down. Fortunately, his boat man found a guide who climbed out onto the tablet and pulled Kane up to safety with his sash.⁶⁶

Sometime during his Egyptian travels, Kane received an injury to his leg. Whether it was inflicted by "thieving Bedouins" as Elder stated, or by some less dramatic means, Kane returned to Cairo and then passed on to Alexandria to seek medical attention. While there he developed a high fever that incapacitated him for several weeks. When he was traveling among the monuments he had sent several boats to Alexandria full of artifacts he planned to send home. The anguish of his illness was

⁶⁵Ibid., 81-90; Corner, 45.

⁶⁶Elder, 90-95.

thus heightened when he learned that none of these boats made it to Alexandria with their cargoes still intact.⁶⁷

Still ill but wanting to press on with his travels, Kane left Alexandria and arrived in Athens on the tenth of June. He spent the next few weeks visiting the ancient cities of the area, including Thebes, Livadia, Mount Helicon, and the Pythos oracle at Castri. He then traveled up the Adriatic and through northern Italy and Switzerland to Paris, which he reached by July 13.⁶⁸ By this time Kane's spirits and health were again recovered. He wrote his father and asked him to have Washington Irving, then the U.S. Minister to Spain, grant him permission to practice medicine in the Philippines. His plan was to return to Manila and open a short-term practice that would finance a further tour of the world.⁶⁹ But this plan never came to fruition. After a brief tour of France, Elisha went to England and booked passage for home. He arrived in Philadelphia late in the summer of 1845.

Conservatively estimated, Kane traveled nearly 40,000 miles during his two and a half year trip. He crossed the Atlantic four times; cruised the waters of the Indian and Pacific Oceans as well as the Mediterranean, Red and Adriatic Seas; and set foot on five continents. This extensive journey made him one of the most-traveled Americans of his day. Had he not lost his journals and collections, Elisha could easily have turned his adventures into a successful book because the U.S. reading public was then clamoring for travel narratives from exotic lands.⁷⁰ He certainly had the skills for such a project—his letters home show a lively, energetic writing style that would have made for an exciting read, and his surviving sketches show that he was capable of drafting rich illustrations to accompany his text. Even though he did not have all his notes, Elisha began this literary project upon his return home, writing up a narrative of his time in the Philippines.⁷¹ But

⁶⁷ Corner, 45-46; folder, "Notebook #7," APS EKK papers.

⁶⁸ Elder, 96-97. Elder notes that Kane visited "the Delphic oracle at Castri" but the Delphic oracle is in Delphi, not Castri. When Elisha was in Delphos (then known as Castri) he probably visited the oracle of Pythos, dedicated to the god Apollo.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 97. Though this letter is no longer among the EKK papers, I do not doubt its authenticity because Elisha proposed a similar plan a few months earlier. See Washington Irving to EKK (Feb. 8. 1845), APS EKK papers.

⁷⁰ Note the success of Richard Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast* (1840), and Herman Melville's *Typee* (1846) and *Omoo* (1847).

⁷¹ TLK to EKK (undated, c. May, 1846), APS EKK papers. This letter discusses a chapter Elisha sent Tom for review.

this project never had time to mature. Within months of his return, Kane was occupied with more pressing matters and again preparing for another long journey.

While Elisha had been away on his world-wide wanderings, his family had been busy at home. His brother Robert Patterson (who went by Pat) had grown from an energetic sixteen year old to a dedicated nineteen year old law student. Tom, though often sick, had spent a year studying in France with positivist philosopher Auguste Comté. After his return to Philadelphia, he passed the bar and opened his own law practice. He was struggling, however, because he began “with locked wheels” since the merchants of Philadelphia disliked prominent Democrat John K. Kane, and, as Tom sadly noted, “his son with him.” To help remedy this, he had decided to “work gratis for the name of the thing if I can’t get work for money.... Thus, it is my hopeful delusion to have in two or three years a circle of acquaintances in which to move....”⁷² Most importantly though, Kane family fortunes changed thanks to the 1844 presidential election in which Jacksonian Democrat James Polk defeated Whig candidate Henry Clay. Political spoils soon came John Kane’s way. There was talk of a position on Polk’s Cabinet, and though this did not materialize, Kane was appointed Attorney General of Pennsylvania.⁷³ The Kane family to which Elisha returned was thus one of far greater political power and social position than the one he had left.

After a few weeks at home, neither Elisha nor his parents wanted him to remain in the Navy. Elisha was perpetually sea sick during rough weather and his aversion to military discipline had only grown stronger. His parents, though proud of his accomplishments while abroad, were now anxious for their eldest son to settle in Philadelphia—“Our hearts would call you home at any price.”⁷⁴ Withdrawal from the Navy was not a problem because the Navy had not called him into service. This left him free to return to civilian life and set up a medical practice in Philadelphia. Though he still longed to continue his globe-trotting travels, Elisha decided this was the best option because it would give him a chance to earn some money and publish a narrative of his

⁷² TLK to EKK (Dec. 6 & Dec. 9, 1844), APS EKK papers. For more on Tom Kane, see Albert L. Zobell Jr., *Sentinel in the East: A Biography of Thomas L. Kane* (Salt Lake City: Nicholas G. Morgan, 1965).

⁷³ JKK to EKK (Dec. 14, 1844), APS EKK papers; Corner, 10.

⁷⁴ TLK to EKK (Dec. 9, 1844), APS EKK papers.

adventures. He rented an office on Walnut Street and began reestablish himself within the medical community by keeping a “full round of engagements,—chemical, anatomical, quiz, and soirée.”⁷⁵ He worked on his book and also began to translate French medical works for publication. He wrote Henry Selden, a friend returning from Paris, asking him to bring with him, “any medical work suitable for a translations — short and marketable, [that] meets you eye.”⁷⁶

During this time, Elisha also rekindled old romantic relationships and began some new ones as well. He maintained a close relationship with his cousin Mary Leiper and also began seeing another cousin, Helen Patterson, the sister of his college roommate, Robert.⁷⁷ How intimate these relationships became is impossible to tell, but it does seem that Elisha was sexually active at this time. He asked his friend Selden to bring back more than just medical texts from Paris: “Do not forget my gossamer envelopes for the pistolet d’amour—for already I need their protecting influence.”⁷⁸ It is unlikely that his relationship with his cousins ever became physical; such carnal relations were taken up instead with another young lady, Julia Reed.⁷⁹ This relationship soon haunted Elisha because Julia became pregnant.

Just nine months after returning home, Elisha shipped out again, this time as a fully commissioned assistant surgeon in the U.S. Navy. Both Kane’s contemporary and modern biographers explain this sudden turn of events as the result of the “exciting new chance of adventure” offered by the impending war with Mexico.⁸⁰ While it is certainly true that Kane did aggressively pursue the chance to participate in this war, his sudden decision to abandon his new medical practice and rejoin the Navy was driven as much by the desire to avoid scandal as to gain adventure. In the few months before his departure, Kane scrambled to win a military position and to hide his sexual indiscretion that was growing more and more obvious with each passing day.

⁷⁵ Elder, 100.

⁷⁶ EKK to Henry Selden (Sept. 1, 1845), APS EKK papers.

⁷⁷ folder, “Mary Leiper to EKK,” and EKK to Helen Patterson (May 7, 1845), APS EKK papers.

⁷⁸ EKK to Henry Selden (Sept. 1, 1845), APS EKK papers.

⁷⁹ Not surprisingly, Kane worked hard to keep Reed’s identity hidden. I have been unable to learn who she was or the nature of their relationship. The condescending tone in his letters, and the fact that he had no concerns about her family, suggest that he saw her as a lower-class citizen. She is not listed in the 1845 Philadelphia directory.

⁸⁰ Corner, 49; Elder, 100-01

Though little is known of Elisha's relationship with Julia—little correspondence between them survives—it is clear that they must have begun seeing each other in the fall of 1845, soon after Kane's return. The first record of their relationship is a letter from John Taylor Jr., dated January 4, 1846 and written in reply to a letter Elisha must have sent in late December. Taylor was Elisha's cousin by marriage, who lived in Hazelwood, Virginia. Elisha asked him for help in finding a place to hide Julia during her pregnancy. Taylor's light-hearted response shows that he knew Elisha well and could sympathize with his request.

Hazelwood, Wednesday, Febry 4th 1846 Private

My Dear Doctor,

... I think there can be no doubt that our young Lady may find a pleasant place of temporary abode in Harrisonburg, Port Royal, or in the country, a point intermediate between these two.... Next week I shall be in your City & will describe accurately the place I allude to—the prospects they hold out for comfort &c, & the charge for board &c; Harrisonburg would be the most accessible place, & I doubt not there are worthy families in the Town who would for \$10 or 12 per month, take good care of our loving woman. How awful 'tis that these women will now & then get themselves with child.

Would it not be a good plan for the Lady to pass herself off as the widow of some one who has died by train, small pox, or salt water, on his way to the south where her husband had relations? — Her situation would render such a tale plausible & proper to stop for a while in Hburg....

Woman are the bane of men—I got along morally enough in Richmond for the first ten days, when I stumbled upon the smartest piece of youthful flesh, young 18. I soon got word that she was the paramour of a member of the Legislature, & staid with him every night—I passed the day of Sunday with her & my God! added to her beauty she is intellectual, a shade under the nubian size, with coal black hair, & the sweetest & whitest bosom in the world. Ye Gods! what a form. She has written to me to come again to see her, & I will....

What an ardent lover must you be Elisha. I have heard you generally leave a mark on anything which you touch. I am more fortunate....

Sincerely yours, J.T.J.⁸¹

Clearly, an indiscretion such as Elisha's was far from exceptional for men of his social class. However, such affairs were still an embarrassment if detected, and so Elisha needed a way to hide Julia, at least until she gave birth. Kane did not follow Taylor's suggestion but instead kept her in Philadelphia under the care of fellow physician C.C. VanWyck. How this was executed is spelled out in a surviving draft of a letter from Elisha to VanWyck.

Commencing with July 1st my 2nd brother Robert Patterson Kane under the signature of P.T. Hensker Esq. will enclose as directed by you the intended allowance receiving in return the receipt. Julia had better change again her last name, and she will be ignorant of any other than a business connection between Old Mr. Hensker and myself. By this arrangement I spare you any

⁸¹ J[ohn] T[aylor] J[r.] to EKK (Feb. 4, 1846), folder "Letters to Dr. Kane," APS EKK papers.

further mediations feeling only too grateful for that which you have already given, while at the same time my brother is not brought into contact with her—a thing desirable for all parties....

Let her suppose that it (her remittance) is uncertain in its continuance and dependent absolutely upon her caution with regard to my name—Mr. Hensenker “my agent” having orders to immediately stop all funds should any mention be made or written. Make her feel this.⁸²

Kane hoped that this young woman would be willing to give up the baby once it was born, but she refused. He asked VanWyck to keep pushing her on this point, and just to be sure he was covered, he wrote several notes which VanWyck was to deliver to her depending on her ultimate decision.⁸³ VanWyck found this plan acceptable and wrote Kane a reassuring note saying, “do not annoy or distress yourself about final results. You have done as much as & more than could be asked of any individual in a like fix—you rest therefore under no moral or other obligation towards this girl ... in my opinion you ought to rest quietly by night in view of what you have agreed to perform.”⁸⁴

Among Kane’s papers is a contract for indenture, stating that Margaret Jones Smith is giving her 6 week old girl, Eleanora, to John Smith Jones. The contract is in ink but the names (obviously pseudonyms) are filled in with pencil, and though it is officially stamped, it does not appear to have ever been enacted.⁸⁵ It is thus unlikely that Julia gave up her child. One of the last records of this affair comes in a coded but sharply written letter from Patterson to Elisha. Along with a bill for \$76.29 for medical expenses and prolonged care, Patterson told Elisha “that poor Paul Hensenken ... became a Papa.” He explained that things got complicated and that he had “been obliged to lend him some of your money; but I am certain you would have done so yourself, had you been here. He begged me to tell you his story.” Hensenken’s “fair one” suffered greatly during labor. “Her physician told me that owing to injuries she had received at a former period in her life, her delivery gave rise to sever ulcerations of one of her legs.”⁸⁶ Elisha paid these final bills but never again had contact with Julia.

While Elisha was arranging for Julia to be hidden from public view, he was also working to get himself out of town. The impending war with Mexico was the perfect

⁸² folder, “Miscellany #1,” APS EKK papers.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ C.C. VanWyck to EKK (May 27, 1946), APS EKK papers.

⁸⁵ folders, “Miscellany #1,” and “Miscellany #5,” APS EKK papers.

⁸⁶ RPK to EKK (Nov. 12, 1846), APS EKK papers. Other surviving letters show that Patterson know about this whole affair and is here using false names only to protect Elisha. It is evident that “Hensenker” is a pseudonym because they alternate spelling it “Hensenker” and “Hensenken.” See folder “Elisha Kent

solution. Diplomatic relations between Mexico and the United States had been strained since Texas declared its independence in 1836, and by December of 1845, war was imminent. John Kane, being intimately connected with the Polk administration, had the most recent intelligence from the disputed territory. It is thus not surprising that in March, two months before Congress declared war, he was already writing to Secretary of the Navy, George Bancroft, hoping to get Elisha a promotion and thus an advantageous position in the Navy.⁸⁷ The Navy did not grant Elisha's promotion but did commission him aboard the frigate *United States*, the flagship of a squadron set to patrol the slave trade off the West African coast. Though this assignment made Elisha "bitterly bitter," he accepted it. He reported for duty in Charlestown, Massachusetts on May 5 and shipped out at the end of the month.⁸⁸

During the time Elisha was in Charlestown waiting to sail, the Kane family was kept busy by Tom's new obsession—the Mormon's evacuation of Nauvoo, Illinois. Like his older brother, Tom suffered because of his spirit for adventure and body built for bed-rest. He tried to get a position in the military but the Army turned him down because he was too frail. His parents wanted him to go on a trip through upper New York to visit family members and recover his health, but on May 13, 1846 (the same day Congress declared War on Mexico) Tom discovered a third option. He attended a rally held by Jesse Little, an Elder of the Mormon Church, and there learned of their forced exodus from Nauvoo to the trans-Rocky Mountain West. As both a philanthropist often involved in social causes and a young man looking for adventure, this seemed perfect. Within a few days he accompanied Little to Washington D.C. to help him gain governmental support. Though Polk and his cabinet were not supportive of Brigham Young and his followers, they recognized that the Mormons could fill a much needed gap in the United States' war with Mexico. California was sure to be a key battle site of the war and Polk needed to find a way to get troops there quickly. The Mormons were already over halfway there — several hundred of them were camped along the Missouri River near

Kane," APS RPK papers.

⁸⁷ Corner, 50. That John Kane had prior knowledge of the events in Mexico is suggested in the journal of Philadelphia merchant Thomas Cope who, on Dec. 13, 1845, noted that he sought advice from John Kane on the situation and Kane had "affected ignorance on the subject." *Philadelphia Merchant: The Diary of Thomas P. Cope, 1800-1851* ed. Eliza Cope Harrison, (South Bend, IN: Gateway Editions, 1978).

⁸⁸ Corner, 50; Elder, 101.

present day Omaha, Nebraska. If a battalion of men could be pulled from their numbers, this force could march to California quickly and inexpensively. Though this plan necessitated what is to this day the longest military march in U.S. history, Little saw it as a wonderful opportunity; the military salaries of the 500 Mormon troops could finance the group's migration across the West. The Mormon battalion also sounded wonderful to Tom because it would provide him with a chance for adventure and prestige. He would travel with Little to Fort Leavenworth and deliver the order to organize the Mormon battalion. He would then go on to the Mormon camps to help organize and train the 500 "volunteers" for military service. Tom's exuberant optimism prompted him to speculate that he could serve as the battalion's commander, and that after leading them in victorious battle against the Mexican troops in California, his family's political connection would make him a good candidate for the first governor of the newly formed California Territory.⁸⁹

Tom and Elisha wrote letter after letter during the month of May, discussing their upcoming adventures and the best ways to turn them into successful books. Though the tales of his earlier adventures were still incomplete, Elisha was consoled by the fact that his trip to Africa would provide him with time to complete this project and the opportunity to gather more tales of exciting exploits. He was also sure he could write medical articles of a caliber far beyond those being published in the United States at that time. Tom agreed and strongly encouraged him. "Write your book materials and your medical case notes, and if I live, you shall only fall behind Irving & Stephens in reputation. You shall certainly be the lead writer of your profession and, ere two years after your return, shall be one of its head lecturers."⁹⁰

While he supported Elisha's writing, Tom also had literary ambitions of his own. He was sure he could produce a popular account of his trip; his book would describe new Western lands as well as an inside account of the Mormon migration and the "queer life, yankee and fanatic" of Brigham Young and his Saints.⁹¹ Tom contacted publisher Carey & Hart of Philadelphia. They were interested in the project and promised "famous

⁸⁹ Mark Metzler Sawin, "A Sentinel for the Saints: Tom Leiper Kane and the Mormon Migration," *Nauvoo Journal* 10 (Spring, 1998).

⁹⁰ TLK to EKK (May 27, 1846), APS EKK papers.

⁹¹ TLK to EKK (undated, c. May, 1846), APS EKK papers.

success” for the book, but they refused to give him the advance he needed to help subsidize the trip.⁹² Though this discouraged Tom, he was convinced that, given the current conflict with Mexico, it was best for him and Elisha to delay their publishing projects anyway. On the last day of May he wrote Elisha, “Moore the publishing bookseller told me ... that since our foreign difficulties ‘the trade’ was at a stand still and that if you had contrived to edit your book before your departure he would have advised its being held back for a time at least. So you see you have not lost much time after all.”⁹³

After nearly a month of waiting, the *United States* finally sailed for its first African port, Praia, Cape Verde Islands. During the nine months Elisha spent on board, the *United States* made two cruises from Praia to Principe Island in the Gulf of Guinea, calling at the major ports of Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Ghana along the way. These trips were largely uneventful, leaving Elisha time to write long descriptions of all that he saw. In a letter to his mother he dedicated seven pages to verbally painting a picture of Praia, noting that “every ripple of its dark bay becomes a crescent spangle and its shoreline is haloed with the white glories of the surf.”⁹⁴ But such florid descriptions could only entertain an adventurous young man for so long. As the medical officer he had some interesting cases, but this did not break the monotony. He wrote Philadelphia physician Robley Dunglison, “of all the miserable blanks in one’s existence the most miserable is an African cruise.”⁹⁵

Things were better when the ship was docked. While in Brazil with the Cushing legation, Kane had met Francisco Felix de Sousa, a famous Brazilian slave trader based out of Dahomey. When the *United States* docked at Ouidah, Kane spent two days with de Sousa’s sons, who gave him a tour of their slave factory. Careful not to offend his hosts with any judgmental questions, Kane gained their confidence and learned all about their methods to elude British and American naval vessels (such as the *United States*

⁹² TLK to EKK (May 27, 1846), APS EKK papers.

⁹³ JKK to EKK (May 31, 1846), APS EKK papers. Tom included a note on the back of this letter. The “Moore” referred to is almost certainly William H. Moore of the Cincinnati publishing house Moore, Anderson, Wiltach & Keys who specialized in travel literature and medical books. See John Tebbel, *A History of Book Publishing in the United States* vol. 1 (New York: R.R. Bowker, 1972), 483.

⁹⁴ Corner, 52-53; EKK to JDLK (July 13, 1846), APS EKK papers.

⁹⁵ Corner, 53, 283n8.

itself) stationed along their coasts to prevent the exportation of slaves. Further, Kane was allowed to join the de Sousa sons on a caravan to meet “King Gezo,” an African leader who supplied many slaves for trade. Kane was amazed by Gezo, who wielded absolute power over his subjects. He executed men for sport and kept dozens of women as his wives. As did many Western travelers to this region, Kane wrote of the King’s exploits with a sense of horror and awe, recording all the gory and salacious details.⁹⁶ Though Kane was appalled by the slave traders’ cruel treatment of their human chattel, after meeting Gezo, Kane felt that slavery was the better of the two terrible options for the people of that area.⁹⁷

An interesting side-note to Kane’s visit to King Gezo is that Elisha helped him with a rather intimate problem. Tom Dillard, the fleet-surgeon aboard Kane’s mission, wrote Kane some months later, “Your friend ... inquired after you, and wishes you to send him some drops, more powerfully restorative and invigorating, than those you administered to him! His numerous wives, they say, complain that you did not benefit and strengthen their liege Lord and sovereign as much as they desired and expected.”⁹⁸

As the *United States’* mission dragged on, boredom caused tensions to rise aboard the ship, especially between Kane and line officer Lieutenant George A. Prentiss. The two quarreled often and twice their spats resulted in Kane challenging Prentiss to a duel. Each time Prentiss wrote back a firm refusal, pointing out what Kane already knew, that “while our official relations remain as they are ... the consequences would be disastrous to me whatever the event, while you would go unscathed.”⁹⁹ The last of these confrontations in January of 1847 grew very tense but never resulted in violence because Kane became extremely ill. After three weeks of high fevers, Dillard, fearing for Kane’s life, sent him home by a merchant ship. By early March, Kane was back in Philadelphia, recovering at home.

⁹⁶ Note for example Richard Francis Burton, *A Mission to Gelele, King of Dahome* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1864).

⁹⁷ Elder, 104.

⁹⁸ T[homas] Dillard to EKK (May 12, 1847), APS EKK papers. Dillard addresses Kane’s friend as “King Freeman” but this is almost certainly the same “king” as Westerners often referred to African rulers by a number of different names and this was the only king Kane met while in Africa.

⁹⁹ George A. Prentiss to EKK (Jan. 5, 1847), APS EKK papers. Bickering between the two began in the fall of 1846; Kane complained about Prentiss several times to his commanding officer, J.R. Smoot. See folder, EKK to J.R. Smoot, APS EKK papers.

Once again, during Elisha's absence, the Kane family had undergone a major change. Just over a year after becoming Attorney General of Pennsylvania, John Kane resigned to accept a new position — Judge of the U.S. District Court for Eastern Pennsylvania. Judge Kane loved his new position because it provided life tenure in a job with a hefty salary and the power to appoint a clerk with a \$1,500 per year salary—a position he offered to Tom. In a letter to Elisha, Judge Kane noted that he was “on the whole so placed that I would not change for any office in the nation.”¹⁰⁰

Tom's life had also changed in the fall of 1846. Upon return from his Western trip in October, he committed himself to helping the Mormons in their continuing evacuation of thousands of their members from Illinois to the Great Salt Lake Basin. Mormon Elder Orson Spencer joined Tom in Philadelphia and was amazed at his energy for their cause. He reported to Brigham Young, “Col. Kane ... is nothing daunted, but thinks the best method of operating upon [Polk's] Cabinet is through the press and the conversion of public opinion.”¹⁰¹ During November and December, Tom flooded Eastern newspapers with heart-wrenching accounts of the travesties committed against Mormons and the dire nature of their situation, having to face a harsh winter on the high plains. He published these articles anonymously and followed them with editorials, praising his article and calling for further support of the Mormons. In early December he wrote Brigham Young, “it was found next to impossible to do much for you before public opinion was corrected ... [and so] it became incumbent on me to manufacture public opinion as soon as possible.” Tom happily reported that his efforts “had been successful beyond my hopes” and explained that “my first feeler, of the bold kind, was put forth in the *Pennsylvanian* and its reception proved that I had fully prepared the public to receive the truth. This week I have begun the hard knocks.... Tomorrow morning myself and scribe start for New York, and if I can have there, any portion of the same success which I have had in my own city, I will consider the brunt of the battle over if indeed victory be not at hand.”¹⁰²

Tom's efforts to promote the Mormons demonstrates his ability to use the popular press to shape public opinion. He learned these skills from his father who was very

¹⁰⁰ JKK to EKK (Nov. 11, 1846), APS EKK papers.

¹⁰¹ Orson Spencer to Brigham Young (Nov. 26, 1846), in Zobell, 28.

¹⁰² TLK to Brigham Young (Dec. 2, 1846), in Zobell, 29-30.

skilled at manipulating public opinion and governmental policy.¹⁰³ Both of these men soon turned their skills to the promotion of a new cause, the publicity of “Dr. Kane.”

In November of 1846, Tom accepted the position as his father’s clerk. Though he was anxious to get on with his life, he did not want to make any plans without first consulting Elisha. From the many letters he wrote to his older brother in the fall of 1846, it is clear that Tom (and to a lesser degree, Elisha) saw their lives as necessarily intertwined. In a high-spirited letter, Tom demanded that Elisha come home, get married, restart his medical practice, and settle down so the two of them could begin their plans for financial and social success. He generously offered Elisha \$1000 per year from his \$1,700 salary. He told Elisha, “you can have a first rate office for \$100. \$200 will pay the livery of a horse and vehicle. \$300 will give you a good wardrobe, and your pocket money certainly cannot stand you in \$100 more. Your total expenses of living will then be \$700 the year.”¹⁰⁴ He noted that this money would free Elisha from having to worry about his medical practice making a profit during its first years.

After explaining the financial portion of his plan, Tom moved on to its social elements: “You must marry. — Take any of the girls in town (which Judge Kane’s son can) but marry you must.” This, he explained, was a necessary part of proper society and that it was high time for Elisha “to begin the domestic duties, set on your own eggs and leave off promiscuous cock pigeoning.” He warned Elisha to do this soon, before too many years of sea-life made his face “look like unhealthy jerked beef.” Turning humorously to slang language, Tom exclaimed, “Now the damnition brides is waiting for you in their nuptshil chambers. I see three of em.... They was a piece put in the mornin’ papers of one of them there chamin’ creatures which, mentionin’ all the facts desired relatin’ to altars and baby clothes and such like, bust into the frantic ejackylation — Where be my Lijah?” He further noted that if Elisha would agree to marry it would help their younger brother Patterson because he was currently cultivating “the acquaintance of three sweet damsels who will be glad to furnish forth the staff of life as well as its old hat, but he cannot in our well regulated political family take quince & peach both, and fears

¹⁰³ Simpson, 615.

¹⁰⁴ TLK to EKK (Nov. 12, 1846), APS EKK papers.

through distraction to go without either.... He invites you to his aide to divide, and conquer.”¹⁰⁵

The same package that brought Tom’s letter to Elisha also carried one from his father. Judge Kane praised his adventurous son but suggested that it was time for him to come home and take up the responsibilities of a settled, adult life. “All I have to say pointedly and finally is this: Judge for yourself what is honourable, politic, best.” If Elisha did this, Judge Kane promised that he and the whole family, would do “all we can do to further your purposes to the utmost, means, action, influence, — all we have is yours.”¹⁰⁶

Alone and depressed on his African cruise, these letters hit Elisha hard. In a confessional letter to Tom, he discussed all that had been troubling him for the past several months. He alluded to his affair with Julia Reed and the circumstances of his rapid departure from Philadelphia. “When I left you it was in such a state that I would have run to hell to escape a Paradise. The hereditary failing of our Kane race had beset me and circumstances were such that a short absence was essential. I was then advised upon a two year cruise.” He apologized that his departure came at a time when Tom was ill and their father’s affairs were “nearly at a crises,”¹⁰⁷ and confessed that his selfishness had been so great as to be sinful—“while I may be a very tolerable Elisha Kane the assistant Surgeon, I am a very poor Ilish Kane brother and son.”¹⁰⁸ He then made an honest assessment of his life:

I am now 26 years old. In two years I will be twenty eight. Am I to be in the Navy as a career or am I to make it subservient to a more solid [life] at home?... But at the same time even in spite of home longings, excited (oh how much) by the dreary social waste around me—I am bound dispassionately to say that should domestic affairs remain unaltered I would much hesitate about resigning. It is difficult to give up a fine & increasing income—difficult to change a certainly to an uncertainty.... It is hard to commence a race in which I should have had already a long start of some years.... All these things have weighed upon me....¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ JKK to EKK (Nov. 11, 1846), APS EKK papers.

¹⁰⁷ It is difficult to ascertain just what this crisis was. It may have been monetary; several of the family letters of the time discuss finances. More likely, it refers to Judge Kane’s work and political life—at this time he was serving as Attorney General for the State and was prosecuting many of the men arrested in the anti-Catholic riots of 1844, a process that put him in the middle of harsh political crossfire.

¹⁰⁸ folder, “E.K. Notebook—Egypt, etc.,” APS EKK papers. The above is the draft of a letter to his brother Tom that appears in this notebook marked “confidential” and dated Dec. 1, 1846. Given its confessional nature it is likely Elisha never sent it—no corresponding letter appears in Tom’s surviving papers.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

After this internal debate, Kane proclaimed, “I have at last stopped oscillating & made up my mind. I am going to try my tug at home—if possible to retain the Navy as a potential reserve in case of failure but if I cannot do this ... I am prepared to burn my bridge and resign.” He compared his love and devotion for Tom to that of King David and Jonathan of the Bible, and then proclaimed, “Father and Mother need me, need us. Not me as I was nor you as you were, but both of us as we might be.... We will put each other right and ... travel together! Together!!” Having come to this resolution, he concluded, “I cannot be wrong Tom in all this Joy. Apart from argument, I am urged by so many quiet warning voices which chattering within my inner soul have at last struck chords and spoken harmony—that it would be a Holy Ghost Sin to resist this influence.”¹¹⁰

At this same time Tom was also torn about their future. He had grand plans about settling down and establishing themselves among Philadelphia’s elite society, but his longing for adventure still pulled strongly at his heart. This was especially true in late 1846, when Mexican War hysteria was at its height and thousands of young American men flooded Army recruitment stations. The question across the nation was not who would have to go, but who would have to stay—in Tennessee, for example, 30,000 men volunteered for 3,000 positions. The war was a chance for young men to win glory in an exciting and exotic land, to live the fantasies of chivalry and daring they had read about in the popular novels of Sir Walter Scott.¹¹¹

Despite his plans for an established, respectable life, his moral stance against violence, and the promise of a lucrative job as his father’s clerk, Tom could not resist the romantic fervor of the time. He again pushed for a position in the Army. In a bemused letter, his father wrote Elisha, “Could you ever believe it! Your philanthropish-philosopher, anti-war, anti capital punishment brother ... is rabid for a chance of shooting Mexicans, and would march, if I did not forbid it, as third lieut. of a company of rowdy volunteers.”¹¹² Judge Kane, convinced that military service would “kill him with ennue and camp duty,” used his political pull to have Tom considered for Pay Master or some

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ This sensation is well documented in Robert Johannsen, *To the Halls of the Montezumas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 29.

¹¹² JKK to EKK (Dec. 24, 1846), APS EKK papers.

other high-ranking, non-combatant position. Tom himself went to the White House to press his case in person. But despite these efforts, no position became available and he had to resign himself to staying at home.

On Christmas day, 1846, Tom wrote Elisha. He explained his disappointment regarding a military position, but he also celebrated his forced alternative. He would be his father's court clerk, and with the money and time this would allow him, he would be able to assemble Elisha's adventures into a narrative that was sure to be a popular success. During the next several months he advised Elisha on what to write, how to write it, and what to do with it once it was written. He sent Elisha several clippings of articles recently written on Africa and insisted, "You must make the most of your time irremediably spent abroad, collecting materials; so as to be the writing Doctor of Philadelphia." He instructed him to assemble any statistics he could on gold dust or the slave trade for a mercantile article; to put together a narrative article about some interesting incident for the *Democratic Review*; and to write an essay on some strange pathology for a medical journal. He confidently noted that, "This done, ... you would stand the superior of the M.D.'s every one—indeed for the matter of that; I do not know the man of them who has risen to the heights of a readable magazine contribution." He then closed by stressing the importance of his narrative, for it would establish his reputation most broadly. He suggested a story "of slave ships, combats, cocoa nuts, Quashees, Mud Huts, Boarding parties, Fevers, Ivory, Palm Oil, Nigger Kings, &c. &c. cemented together by proper quantities of Blue Sea, Fire, Blood, and Tropical Sunshine as [James Gordon] Bennett would write."¹¹³

In the months before he became ill and was sent home, Elisha took Tom's suggestions and sent several essays back to him. Tom critiqued these with great care; his biggest fear was that Elisha's prose were too labored and ornate. "Remember, that your aim must be to prepare simple solid food as you have always a profusion of confectionery on hand." He felt that Elisha was at his best when he provided "a mixture of the touching and humorous," a style that came forth most readily in Elisha's "unguarded moments" of writing.¹¹⁴ He suggested that Elisha write almost spontaneously: "Don't slant your paper.

¹¹³ TLK to EKK (Dec. 25, 1846), APS EKK papers. Bennett was the flamboyant editor of the *New York Herald*, famous for its sensational stories.

¹¹⁴ TLK to EKK (Feb. 12, 1847), APS EKK papers.

Fill note books of every kind with thoughts, hints, impressions, notes, facts, suppositions, whatever has at any time been in your brain.”¹¹⁵

Despite these problems, Tom was convinced that Elisha truly had a gift and that his essays could easily be formed into a popular travel narrative. He calculated eighty to one hundred pages on India; fifty each on China, Ceylon, Africa, and Europe; and another hundred on the Philippines, bringing the total to three to four hundred pages. Tom believed this was the most marketable length for a book. He also instructed Elisha to “make a few more water colours if possible” as well as “small portraits of objects for wood cuts”; he was certain that a well-illustrated volume would sell best, especially if it included a few color prints. Tom closed his letter encouragingly: “know your time is not thrown away so long as you can write. Your style is improving rapidly — and I can see that you want nothing but practice. You have more imagination & fancy than any of the family and have only to break your faculties into harness.”¹¹⁶

Unfortunately, by the time Elisha received these comments, he was already extremely ill and on his way home from Africa to recover. Back in Philadelphia, in March of 1847, he was too sick to write for several weeks. By the time he recovered enough to continue his narrative, his priorities had shifted once again. Though he leased an office and applied for a faculty position at the newly opening Girard College, wanderlust pulled hard at his feet.¹¹⁷ In April, and again in October, against his doctor’s recommendation and his family’s wishes, Elisha went to Washington to plead with president Polk for some opportunity to serve in the final days of the war with Mexico.¹¹⁸ Unlike Tom, Elisha was successful in this effort. General Winfield Scott captured Mexico City on the thirteenth of September, and though happy for the victory, President Polk justifiably feared that Scott and Nicholas V. Trist of the State Department were negotiating with Mexico on their own and disregarding his administration’s wishes. He urgently needed to send a message to Mexico City and Elisha showed up at the right time. Elisha received special orders from H.L. Heiskill, Acting Surgeon-General, to

¹¹⁵ TLK to EKK (Jan. 24, 1847), APS EKK papers.

¹¹⁶ TLK to EKK (Feb. 12, 1847), APS EKK papers.

¹¹⁷ C.C. VanWyck to EKK (Aug. 27, 1847), APS EKK papers. Kane and VanWyck both applied for the position of medical professor; VanWyck felt certain Kane would get it if the board of trustees decided to appoint a non-Quaker.

¹¹⁸ Corner, 57. Kane also wrote president Polk, requesting a position. See EKK to James Polk (June 19, 1847), APS EKK papers.

gather statistics about U.S. field hospitals in Mexico; this served as cover for Kane's real assignment, to hand deliver a dispatch to Mexico City ordering Trist home and Scott to forward duplicates of all his dispatches back to Washington.¹¹⁹ Thus, on November 6, 1847, Kane was off on another adventure, this time to Mexico.

The news of Elisha's success in gaining a position, angered Tom. He wrote Elisha, "I am trying very hard to realize [this] is true." But despite his disappointment, he again supported his brother's adventurous ambitions, promising to "keep the office in trim until the orders to close it may come from you; so, you shall come home if you like to just what you started away from, with a little more love of quiet maybe; and a little more renown."¹²⁰

A daguerreotype of Elisha from this time shows him strong and determined, dressed in military garb and clutching a sword—truly a man of adventure. [figure 1.2] As he traveled from Louisville to New Orleans, he wrote a letter back to his father, justifying his sudden departure. Knowing that his family felt he was full of "fickleness and instability," he explained that "in sober truth" his actions were "urged by more direct and impulsive instigations of propriety." Sure that his father would not see this as a sufficient explanation, Elisha reminded him that, "Be all this as it may, now that the deed is done we must make the best of it." He then suggested that his service in the war could be good for the family's image and wondered if his father could make his service conducive "to the Kane family advancement." Obviously, Elisha had the family's promotion of his adventure in mind all along. He was obliged to send dispatches back to Polk's administration, but he had decided to send these back via his family so they could be edited to best suit the family's purposes. He wrote, "Whatever reaches you, purify it by the family filter and send it in its clear state to its instructed destination." He explained, "The arrangements which I have made with the Bureau allow me to keep back any or all of my communications — publishing them, after my own revision under the

¹¹⁹ H.L. Heiskill to Officers of the Medical Department serving in Mexico (Nov. 5, 1847), reprinted in Elder, 111. Kane was to verbally deliver the message and so a copy does not survive. The message is quite certain, however, because the date of Kane's assignment matches with an entry in Polk's diary noting the commissioning of a "special messenger" for this purpose. See Corner, 58.

¹²⁰ TLK to EKK (undated, c. Nov., 1847), APS EKK papers.

auspices of the Department.” Elisha asked his father and Tom to “make extracts from my letters, work them up, ... and then journalise;—in a word puff me when you can.”¹²¹

In a second section of this letter marked “private,” Elisha wrote frankly about Tom. He recognized that his letter was “very selfish” because it promoted his own success at a time when Tom was struggling with his health. Before he left, Elisha encouraged Tom to be more active because he was sure this would improve his health, but Tom was not compliant. More importantly though, Elisha recognized the sacrifices Tom was making for their success but felt they were often unnecessary and based more on self-pitying martyrdom than any practical purpose. “Tom has made great sacrifices for me but where has been their result? They have been sacrifices for they have wrought their full share of pain with him—poor fellow!—but what the devil else have they done[?]” Elisha insisted that his father force Tom to relax, look after his health, and advance his own career. If Tom did this, Elisha was very willing to come back home and work with him. “Tell Tom that this is my dream, that it all depends upon him....” But if Tom did not comply, Elisha felt they could no longer work together. He closed, “who dear Father, would advise me to give up a competency in order to follow to the grave the only human being who could chose the dull path of an every day working time awaiting profession[?]... Tell this to Tom, but do not show him my remarks. They would give him pain.”¹²²

Tom and Elisha had an intense, loving, but often strained relationship. Elisha was a doer. His impulse was to leap into every opportunity for adventure that came his way, be that an expedition to China, an affair with a young woman, or an evening at a less-than-respectable club. Tom was a thinker. He was always concerned about the moral, political, and social ramifications of his actions. He was deeply involved with issues of religious freedom, free-soil and free-labor concerns, and abolition efforts. He also fretted over the family’s social and financial well being, even fearing that their association with his mother’s family, the Leipers, would hurt their reputation—he compared their social influence to a degenerative disease he cleverly termed “Leiprasy.”¹²³ Though he often

¹²¹ EKK to JKK (Nov. 12, 1847), APS EKK papers.

¹²² Ibid..

¹²³ TLK to EKK (Dec. 6, 1844), APS EKK papers.

talked of great adventures, he was hesitant to actually do them.¹²⁴ Like his father, Tom was more comfortable at home, working quietly behind the scenes to influence others through politics and the press. Though a strong person, Tom relied on Elisha for much of his own identity. Judge Kane wrote Elisha, “Indeed, Tom has no exclusive identity when you are in the case, and I believe at this moment he is content with his approaching lot, principally because it will connect him with you still more closely.”¹²⁵ These different characteristics made Elisha and Tom a good team, but it also assured that they would occasionally disagree about which course of action was most appropriate.

Following Elisha’s letter, Tom did begin to change his ways. He wrote, “I find that I am learning to look forward with pleasure instead of the contrary, to my moments of holiday inaction; and so become every day more and more disposed to make them for myself.”¹²⁶ He began to cultivate his love of music again, visiting Drigo’s, Elisha’s favorite singing tavern, as well as the more proper events of the Musical Fund Society. He even began singing himself and was anxious for Elisha to come back so they could do duets: “Just imagine two such hells of noises as we would make in Sasboard Watch, raised two and a half notes above concert pitch!”¹²⁷

As Tom steadily worked at recovering his health and spirits, Elisha was having a grand adventure. Though still connected with the Navy, during his mission to Mexico he had no superior officer and was free to make his own decisions. He traveled to Pittsburgh via rail, canal and stage coach, and from there to New Orleans by way of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers. He added spice to this routine trip by riding on the cow catcher of the train. He wrote a friend, “Never had I such a twenty miles... I tore the heel from my boot, and smashed my thumb on the drag chain;—but I held on; and after it was all over, sneaked on to the cars, much relieved—a wiser and a better man.”¹²⁸

Elisha reached New Orleans on the twenty-first of November and two days later sailed for Veracruz aboard the U.S. steamer *Fashion*, which carried a full load of civilian

¹²⁴ Though he was more hesitant than his brother, Tom was adventurous. He went West with the Mormons and in the years following Elisha’s death he founded his own community, Kane, in rural western Pennsylvania. He also became a brigadier general during the Civil War and his men described him as “a little coal of hell-fire.” See Robert D. Hoffsommer, “The Bucktails,” *Civil War Times* (1966), 16-21.

¹²⁵ JKK to EKK (Feb. 3, 1847), APS EKK papers.

¹²⁶ TLK to EKK (Nov. 19, 1847), APS EKK papers.

¹²⁷ TLK to EKK (Feb. 20, 1848), APS EKK papers.

¹²⁸ Corner, 59. A copy of this letter is in the Dow papers, Stefansson Arctic Collection, Dartmouth College Library.

and military passengers as well as a cargo of military supplies and a deck-load of cavalry horses. They hit a severe storm that blew the ship far off course, choked her pumps, and forced all aboard to desperately bail water to keep afloat. Amazingly, after more than a month at sea, the *Fashion* was blown between the reefs that protect Veracruz harbor and landed safely around the first of January, 1848, with no lives lost.¹²⁹

The next day Kane traveled with a party of officers to Perote and there joined a group of contra-guerillas—“all Mexican skimmers, bandits, and traitors”—that was travelling to Puebla. This group was headed by Manuel Dominguez, a “celebrated captain of robbers,” whom the U.S. Army hired in June of 1847 to patrol the road from Puebla to Veracruz. He and his men stopped all Mexican parties while allowing U.S. troops and supplies to pass, collecting only a small fee instead of robbing them as they had been doing.¹³⁰ On January sixth, Dominguez and his group encountered a company of about fifty Mexican troops near Nopaluca. A brief but bloody battle ensued in which Kane, Dominguez, and about 125 mounted lancers attacked the small Mexican company, killing four privates, wounding several officers, and taking the whole company captive, including Brigadier Generals Anastasio Torrejón and Antonio Gaona. What Elisha did during and after the battle epitomizes the high romance that surrounded his image in later years. The following account appeared in the March 24, 1848 edition of *The Pennsylvanian*.

It is not clear to us how the doctor ranked in the party ... but it appears that it was at his instance, if not at his order, that they engaged the enemy.... At one period of the charge, when Dr. Kane was some distance ahead of the rest of his company, his fine horse carried him in between a spirited young major and his orderly, who fell upon him at the same moment. The lance of the latter failed at the thrust, except so far as to inflict a slight flesh-wound upon the doctor, who, being able to parry the major's sabre-cut, ran that officer through the bowels. The fight over, Dr. Kane was attending to his own hurts, when the poor wounded youth seized him by his arm, crying, “Father! my father! save my father!” The renegade Mexicans, having determined to slaughter their prisoners, had commenced operations by attacking their chief man [Gen. Gaona], an aged person, who had surrendered to Dr. Kane. He was at the moment defending himself, bare-headed and unarmed, against his assailants. Dr. Kane saved him and numerous others; but it appears that he did so with great efforts, and at considerable personal risk.... He parried four sabre cuts that were made at him, and did not succeed in enforcing obedience to his order until he had drawn his six shooter, (which all Mexicans hold in mortal dread,) and fired at Col. Dominguez, the commander of the squadron....

As soon as the old general was rescued, he sat down by the side of the major, his son, to comfort his last painful moments. When the doctor observed that that individual was bleeding to

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 59-60; Elder, 112-13.

¹³⁰ Statement made by Dr. George E. Cooper of Philadelphia (Dec. 1, 1848), quoted in Elder, 113-14. See also, A. Brooke Caruso, *The Mexican Spy Company: United States Covert Operation in Mexico, 1845-48* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland Co. Inc., 1991), 152-55.

death from an artery in the groin, he made an effort in his behalf. With the bent prong of a table-fork he took up the artery and tied it with a ravel of packthread, and the crude surgical operation was perfectly successful.¹³¹

The events described above—which were written up by Kane and his family—were confirmed by General and Major Gaona, who wrote the only other surviving accounts of the battle. Whether this story is exaggerated or actually what happened is difficult to determine because the Gaona family and Elisha soon became close friends.

In the skirmish with Dominguez's men that followed the battle, Kane received a lance wound in the lower abdomen and his horse was mortally wounded. Once some semblance of order was restored, the company began the twenty-five mile trip to Puebla, Kane riding on the back of another horse. After a few miles, Kane collapsed and so rode in a cart with the other injured men. Upon reaching Puebla, the men took Kane to the army quarters while General Gaona and his son were held in the Governor's Palace that served as the U.S. headquarters for the area. The commanding officer, U.S. Governor, Colonel Tom Childs, ruled that the Gaonas were Dominguez's, not Kane's, prisoners, a decision that infuriated both Kane and General Gaona. Gaona declared to a U.S. officer, "I respect the Americans. They are a brave and magnanimous people, but I have been captured by that man, who is a thief and a robber. My honor is gone."¹³² This blow was lessened when Childs allowed the Gaonas to return to their luxurious mansion in Puebla under a very loose arrangement of house arrest. Gaona accepted this arrangement but insisted on making a public declaration that he and his son owed their lives to Kane. To express their gratitude, they offered him the pick of their stables to replace his fallen mount. The Gaona family also began to prepare a fiesta in his honor, but before it could be arranged, Kane fell deathly ill of "congestive typhus fever." The Gaonas took him to their mansion and there the General's attractive daughters served as his nurses for the next several weeks as he regained his strength.¹³³

News of Kane's heroic deeds soon found its way back to Philadelphia. The story appeared in several articles in *The Pennsylvanian* and the *Pennsylvania Inquirer* during

¹³¹ *The Pennsylvanian* (March 24, 1848), 2.

¹³² W.W.H. Davis, "Three Pennsylvanians, Biographical Sketches of General Robert Patterson, James Madison Porter, and Elisha Kent Kane." An undated, incomplete manuscript housed in the Bucks County Historical Society, Doylestown, Pennsylvania. Davis was in Puebla at the time and visited both Kane and the Gaona family.

¹³³ *Ibid.*; *The Pennsylvanian* (March 24, 1848), 2; EKK to JKK (Jan. 16, 1848), APS EKK papers.

February and March under headlines such as “Gallant Conduct of Dr. Elisha K. Kane of the U.S. Navy,” and “Romantic Incident of the War.” Philadelphia was soon buzzing with news of their hometown hero. This is not surprising. Elisha had performed a heroic deed, and equally importantly, he quickly reported it to his family with romantic flair. While recovering at the Gaona’s house, he sent a letter home, telling his story in detail. He enumerated point by point the parts he wanted played up, what effect he wanted them to have, and where he wanted them published. For his section on Dominguez and his men he wrote, “Work up these facts and publish in the N.Y. Herald, the others in the N[orth] American. I want for readers, which the subjoined will explain, a sort of an excitement got up concerning this disgraceful corps.”¹³⁴

Having received this letter, as well as an accompanying letter from Colonel Childs verifying Elisha’s story, Tom and Judge Kane got to work. Their method of distributing the story was to place it in *The Pennsylvanian* (a paper sympathetic to the Democratic party and thus friendly to the Kanes’ wishes) and to then work at having it picked up by other papers. This was the same method Tom used to spread his pro-Mormon articles, and he continued to use this method for years to come—he commented to Elisha a few years later, “I have the press here.”¹³⁵

When the first news of Elisha’s battle arrived in Philadelphia, Tom wrote up what he could for the press, and on receipt of Elisha’s letter he provided all the details for the March 24, 1848 *Pennsylvanian* article cited above. Apparently a letter from Elisha arrived just a few days later again pushing Tom to get his story into the papers. This annoyed Tom, who wrote back, “It is right that I should say to you seriously that I do not consider your interests to have been neglected by me during your absence. I send you by this mail two newspapers issued before our receipt of your letters I allude to, which report progress, and show that there has not been an absolute inactivity on my part.” He bitterly explained that while Elisha has “been all this time casting ornaments for your whole life like those of a monumental column,” he had been busy with the mundane activities of normal life and simply did not have time to get all of Elisha’s deeds promptly into the

¹³⁴ EKK to JKK (Jan. 16, 1848), APS EKK papers.

¹³⁵ TLK to EKK (undated, c. March 1850), APS EKK papers.

papers: "I know it must be hard for you to believe ... [but this] is nevertheless the fact, and you must content yourself with it."¹³⁶

Tom then brightened and asked Elisha to send more information on his exploits because the story was still sketchy and he was having difficulty pushing it further without more documentation. "It is now three weeks since our very first letter came giving authentic news of you, from Colonel Childs. It was the first thing capable of being made the basis of a newspaperism. We have had no official notice, no extract from one, no dispatch, no newspaper American or Spanish, nothing of the kind." He explained that he was willing to do anything but reminded Elisha that he had to deal with newspaper men who "had their regular business habits, and their regular habits of thought," and that he would need some documentation because he could not simply "take their opinions by storm."¹³⁷

Because of his illness, Elisha did not leave for Puebla until February 18. By the time he arrived in Mexico City, another messenger had already reached the city with an order officially dismissing Scott from his command, which made Kane's message moot. While in the city, Elisha wrote an official statement regarding the battle at Nopaluca and submitted it to the acting commander-in-chief, General William O. Butler. In this statement he demanded punishment for Dominguez and official recognition of General Gaona's kindness and aid.¹³⁸ Soon thereafter the army surgeons declared Kane unfit for duty and ordered him to be sent home for proper treatment of his wounds. In early April he traveled to Veracruz in a four-horse ambulance cart escorted by a company of dragoons, and after a few weeks delay, he sailed for home, arriving sometime in the early summer of 1848. Discouraged by his broken health he wrote his family en route, "I again return, a broken-down man. My hair would be gray, but that I have no hair. My hopes would be particularly small, but that I have no hopes...."¹³⁹

As he had done five years earlier, Kane spent much of the summer of 1848 at his uncle George G. Leiper's Chester County estate. During this time he recovered from his wounds and worked on several projects related to his experiences in Mexico. He again

¹³⁶ TLK to EKK (April 7, 1848), in folder, "E.K. Kane letters to Dr. Kane," APS EKK papers. This unsigned letter is marked "post dated April 7, 1848" and was written by TLK.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ EKK to William O. Butler, reprinted in Elder, 121-22.

¹³⁹ EKK to Kane family (undated), quoted in Elder, 137.

wrote an account of his adventures for publication and outlined a forty-chapter book that would be a general history of the war accompanied by additional cultural, scientific, and personal information.¹⁴⁰ He also agreed to illustrate a book for fellow physician Richard McSherry, whom he met while in Mexico. This book, *El Puchero: A Mixed dish from Mexico*, came out in 1850 and included several engravings of battles and Mexican scenery.¹⁴¹

Elisha sent multiple petitions to the government for remuneration for his horse that was killed by Dominguez and his men. Though it took many months, they did eventually repay his losses.¹⁴² But his most ambitious project of the summer was to gain official recognition for his efforts in the war. After a bit of pushing by Kane himself, seventy citizens of Philadelphia formed a committee and contributed to the purchase of a gold-sheathed ceremonial sword to be presented to Elisha for his “courage, conduct, and humanity,” during the battle of Nopaluca.¹⁴³

When the fall approached, Kane applied for a post at the Philadelphia Navy Yard, but he was turned down because he was only ranked as an assistant surgeon and a full surgeon was required. He then pushed for a place aboard an expedition to the California and Oregon coast, but this too fell through. Finally, he agreed to take a routine assignment aboard the store ship *Supply*.¹⁴⁴ Why he signed on to this routine expedition is a bit mysterious. Sometime in the summer of 1848, Elisha and Tom signed an agreement in which Elisha solemnly promised “to resign my commission in the U.S. Navy ... and to plant myself as a practicing physician in Philada,” dependent only on the condition that Tom “regulate his daily habit as to present such an indication of health.”¹⁴⁵ What this

¹⁴⁰ folder, “re: Mexico,” APS EKK papers.

¹⁴¹ folder, “R[ichard] McSherry to EKK,” APS EKK papers; and, Richard McSherry, *El Puchero* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo & Co., 1850). The documentation suggests that these illustrations were done by Elisha, but his name appears nowhere in the volume. The engravings themselves are in different styles and signed by two different makers—“Gilbert & Gihon,” and “Butler Sc.” It is likely that those done by Gilbert & Gihon were done for the work because they match the text well. Those by Butler Sc appear to be recycled from another general work on Mexico. The book was copyrighted through “the Clerk’s Office of the District Court for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania” which was then manned by Tom Kane.

¹⁴² Elder, 135. In his application for remuneration, Kane was required to outline what had happened to his horse, thus providing a written record of the events at Nopaluca.

¹⁴³ Statement dated “Philadelphia, February 8, 1849,” reprinted in Elder, 132-33. That Elisha lobbied for this award is evidenced in a letter in which Tom tells him how others have gone about getting such an award, a process that Tom felt would necessitate connection with a “Hose Company or other crony gang.” See TLK to EKK (April 7, 1848), folder, “letters to Dr. Kane,” APS EKK papers. This sword is now on display at Kane Manor Inn, Kane, Pennsylvania.

¹⁴⁴ Corner, 66.

¹⁴⁵ folder, “Miscellany #3,” APS EKK papers.

habit was is difficult to say, but Tom must have been unable to break it because Elisha was soon again at sea. Whatever the reason for his sailing, Elisha was not happy with this assignment. He was called into duty in February, but the ship was delayed for a month. During this time he wrote to himself, “My loneliness is so oppressive and my heart growing so void and selfish with the saddened recollection of other days—that I am actually scared when I feel how much I changed.” He hoped that the short trip would allow him “to recover that manly state of mind so essential to my future success, and to rouse myself from the selfish revery into which I have now six months been indulging.”¹⁴⁶

The *Supply* finally left the Norfolk Naval Yard on March 5, 1849 and it reached Gibraltar by April 3. It stopped at several Mediterranean ports and then sailed for Rio de Janeiro, arriving on July first. As always, Kane began the trip violently sea-sick. He felt so ill that he believed he had tetanus and so bled himself several times, making conditions worse. Otherwise, the trip was only notable for its violent disciplinary actions—during the seven month cruise all eighteen of the ship’s seamen and three of her six petty officers were punished with the cat o’ nine tails. As surgeon, Elisha had to attend each of these beatings, events that only increased his dislike of military discipline.¹⁴⁷

The *Supply* arrived back in Norfolk in early September, 1849, and almost immediately, Elisha set out again on another routine cruise, this time a surveying expedition of the Gulf states aboard the steamer, *Walker*. As he waited in Norfolk, he was aggravated that he was not given permission to return home for a brief visit. He wrote his parents, “my very blood boils at the brutality of the Old commodore fool commanding here.... We cannot possibly leave for a fortnight—and brother surgeons have volunteered to act until I return, yet ‘no’ is the only answer vouch safed.” His family wanted him to leave the Navy, but he stoically refused. “As to my application for a detachment, as I am a gentleman, I shall never make nor allow it to be made. While the hard collar of Naval Serfdom hangs around my neck I must and will do the duty of a bondsman.” But though he refused to leave, he also hated to stay; he closed his letter, “Damn such a life.”¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ folder, “Miscellany #2,” APS EKK papers. Undated, but almost certainly from Feb., 1849.

¹⁴⁷ Corner, 66-67.

¹⁴⁸ EKK to JDLK (Sept. 6, 1849), APS EKK papers.

While waiting at Norfolk, Kane finished up the illustrations for McSherry's book on the Mexican War and helped him find a publisher. He also worked at securing himself a servant for his next voyage.¹⁴⁹ Elisha almost always had a servant with him, be it an official assistant assigned to him as surgeon, or a personal servant under his own employ. William Weaver, the young boy Kane met on his trip to China, stayed with Kane for several years, serving him as a personal servant while Elisha trained him as a physician, a career he eventually achieved.¹⁵⁰ When he tried to secure a new servant, his mother helped him find one but chastised him saying, "you require more waiting on than any member of the family—a bad habit I have always thought taught by your profession."¹⁵¹ In later years, William Morton would serve as Kane's servant, confidant, and friend, twice following him to the Arctic and attending to his wishes even in Elisha's final days.

As Elisha waited for the *Walker* to leave port, he had mixed feelings about what his future would hold. He wrote to his brothers Patterson and Tom that, after months of stewing about his Navy position, he had finally resolved himself to this being his final voyage. He would just relax and enjoy it and then return home to Philadelphia "in an admirable condition for the elderly ladies, and for family practice."¹⁵² Elisha took this plan seriously enough to have Patterson rent him an office and living quarters on the first floor of 21 Sansom Street in preparation for his return.¹⁵³ But, Elisha still felt restless and longed for further adventure and fame. Before he left, he made inquiries into serving as surgeon aboard a U.S. expedition to the Arctic, if one was launched—this was a subject of heated political debate at the time.¹⁵⁴ The *Walker* left port soon after Christmas and by mid-January it reached Charleston, South Carolina. While ashore for a few days, Kane undoubtedly read that on January 4, President Zachary Taylor had officially advocated an Arctic expedition and passed his wishes along to Congress for debate. This news fueled Elisha's restlessness for adventure. He wrote home to his mother:

Never before have little things formed so equilibrium disturbing an aggregate, never have trifles so taxed a man used to the graver vicissitudes of life.

¹⁴⁹ folder, "R[ichard] McSherry to EKK," and EKK to Mr. Bier (Oct. 15, 1849), APS EKK papers.

¹⁵⁰ folder, "EKK to William Weaver," APS EKK papers.

¹⁵¹ JDLK to EKK (Jan. 28, 1849), APS EKK papers.

¹⁵² EKK to RPK (Oct. 27, 1849), APS EKK papers.

¹⁵³ folder, "Kane, R.P. agreement with Mrs. Mary Martin (Nov. 8, 1849)," APS EKK papers.

¹⁵⁴ Lynch, W.F. to EKK (Dec. 6, 1849), APS EKK papers.

Could the Charleston Hotel burst out into a comforting conflagration and I descend from the fifth story with sixteen small children bundled into an entry carpet, or could even the Cape Fear Steamboat boiler have burst opposite the light house so as to have enabled me pleasantly to float ashore on a tea box — with fat Mrs. Colonel Huger tied to my neck cloth in a state of strangulation — there would have been something to relieve the littleness and undo the miserable tedium of small adventures under which most hopelessly and without comfort I do now groan....¹⁵⁵

Clearly, Elisha still thirsted for adventure. He was far from happy about the idea of settling down to the life of an established Philadelphia physician and resigning himself to “the miserable tedium of small adventures.” He wanted more, and an Arctic expedition would provide just such an adventure. He thus struggled about what to do next. In mid-February he wrote Patterson that he saw his present trip as a type of atonement for his previous reckless life and suggested that he soon expected to make a change. “Every pendulum has its downward undulation & should I live to see the young summer I will begin to go up again.” His last line cryptically addressed this change: “Worms-multicaulis-catterpillar-Butterfly.”¹⁵⁶ Five days later Kane sent a letter to the Secretary of the Navy officially requesting a position aboard the Arctic expedition.

By the spring of 1850, Elisha had finally and definitively decided that he was a man of science and exploration, not a physician. Two days after applying for a post on the Arctic expedition, he wrote his mother a letter comparing his two lives. “Ah, my dear Mother! It is hard to give up the ghost among foul sheets and dirty napkins — Better die in the bloody struggle ... better be lance struck or fever smitten than expire in a white washed chamber whose four walls are spotted with the expectorated muculi of your departed predecessors.”¹⁵⁷ On May 12, 1850, Elisha received a telegram officially detaching him from his assignment aboard the *Walker* and ordering him to report immediately for duty aboard the United States’ first expedition to the Arctic—the U.S. Grinnell Expedition in Search of Sir John Franklin. He made the trip from Mobile Bay, Alabama to New York in seven and a half days, an amazing feat for the time, involving stagecoach, train, and ferry.¹⁵⁸ Forty hours after his arrival, Kane was aboard the U.S. Grinnell Expedition and on his way to the Arctic. As his ship, the *Advance*, left its New York harbor, Elisha Kent Kane the Philadelphia physician faded into the distance and Dr. Kane the Arctic hero slowly began to come into public view.

¹⁵⁵ EKK to JDLK (Jan. 16, 1850), APS EKK papers.

¹⁵⁶ EKK to RPK (Feb. 15, 1850), APS EKK papers.

¹⁵⁷ EKK to JDLK (Feb. 22, 1850), APS EKK papers.

¹⁵⁸ Corner, 70, 80-81.

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