



James Ross Clemens, a cousin of mine was seriously ill two or three weeks ago, in London, but is well now. The reports of my illness grew out of his illness, the report of my death was an exaggeration.

☞ Mark Twain, May 1897

You can assure my Virginia friends that I will make an exhaustive investigation of this report that I have been lost at sea. If there is any foundation for the report, I will at once apprise the anxious public. I sincerely hope that there is no foundation for the report, and I also hope that judgment will be suspended until I ascertain the true state of affairs.

☞ Mark Twain, May 5, 1907

MARK TWAIN is dead! In those four words America announces to a weeping world the loss of her foremost literary man. Assuredly of all our authors he was "first in the hearts of his countrymen."

☞ San Francisco Examiner, 22 April 1910

**From Samuel Clemens to
Mark Twain: A biography
from 1835-1869**

Steven H Silver

Florida, MO-A son was born to John and Jane Clemens on November 30, 1835. The boy, the couple's sixth child, has been named Samuel Langhorne Clemens. He has increased the population of the town from 100 to 101 residents.

The home was made in the wee village of Florida, in Monroe County, and I was born there in 1835. The village contained a hundred people and I increased the population by 1 per cent. It is more than many of the best men in history could have done for a town. It may not be modest in me to refer to this, but it is true. There is no record of a person doing as much—not even Shakespeare. But I did it for Florida, and it shows that I could have done it

for any place—even London, I suppose.¹

Hannibal, MO, 1840-The family of John Marshall Clemens has moved to Hannibal. Most recently, Clemens ran a dry good store in Florida, Missouri. Clemens intends to run a general store in Hannibal and hopes to practice law as well.

Hannibal, MO, 1847-Died in this City, on yesterday, the 24 inst., after a protracted and painful illness, John M. Clemens, Esq., in the 49th year of his age.

Judge Clemens has been for many years a citizen of North Eastern Missouri, and of Hannibal. He has been honored by several public stations which he filled with credit to himself and advantage to the community. He was noted for his good sense

¹ Twain, Mark and Charles Neider, editor. *The Autobiography of Mark Twain*. Harper & Row, 1959, p.1.

and a clear discriminating mind. These added to a high sense of justice and moral rectitude, made him a man of uncommon influence and usefulness. His public spirit was exercised zealously and with effect upon every proper occasion. His efforts to establish a Library and Institution of learning in our City were such as entitled him to all commendation, and his untimely death is felt on this account as well as many others as a loss to the whole community. He who devotes his energies to the diffusion of learning and intellectual enjoyments is not without his reward, even in death. There are many amongst us who, during life, will linger with no common delight on the memory of him, who contributed so much to their purest pleasures. As a good and useful citizen, a lover of his king, and an honest man,

John M. Clemens will hold a place in the recollection of all who knew him. But he has been cut down in an untimely hour—with death the harvest is always ready, and he reaches forth his sickle, regardless of him who may feel its edges.²

Following his father's death, young Samuel, became a printer's apprentice at the *Hannibal Courier*, under Joseph A. Anent. According to Twain, "Surreptitiously and uninvited, I helped to edit the paper when no one was watching; therefore I was a journalist."³

Clemens's oldest sibling was Orion Clemens, who was born ten years before Sam. By the time John Clemens had died, Orion was making it on his own in St. Louis, but following his father's death he moved to Hannibal and

² "Obituary," *Hannibal Courier*, March 26, 1847

³ Twain, Mark "To The Editor of the *Courier-Post*," December 3, 1907.

purchased the *Hannibal Journal*, which he renamed the *Hannibal Western Union*.

With Orion in competition with the *Courier*, Sam moved to his brother's paper in 1850, where he worked as a reporter and printer and, during Orion's numerous business trips, ran the newspaper.

As a 15 year old boy running a newspaper with little oversight, Sam was able to indulge in his own jokes and began inserting his own work into the paper using a variety of pseudonyms. His first published sketch appeared on January 16, 1851. The piece described the activities of Jim Wolfe, an apprentice who worked at the *Western Union* and the events of a fire in the grocery next door on the night of January 9. According to Clemens, the piece was lost to the mists of time, however since his death, copies of that issue of the *Western Union* have been found.

At the fire, on Thursday morning, we were apprehensive of our own safety, (being only one door from the building on fire) and commenced arranging our material in order to remove them in case of necessity. Our gallant *devil*, seeing us somewhat excited, concluded he would perform a noble deed, and immediately gathered the broom, an old mallet, the wash-pan and a dirty towel, and in a fit of patriotic excitement, rushed out of the office and deposited his precious burden some ten squares off, out of danger. Being of a *snailish* disposition, even in his quickest moments, the fire had been extinguished during his absence. He returned in the course of an hour, nearly out of breath, and thinking he had immortalized himself, threw his giant frame in a tragic attitude, and exclaimed, with an eloquent expression: "If that that

fire hadn't bin put out, thar'd a'bin the greatest *confirmation* of the age!"⁴

Throughout the year, Clemens's writing not only appeared in Orion's newspaper, but in other papers, including the *Saturday Evening Post*.⁵ He continued to work for Orion and his writing began to appear in additional newspapers, mostly around the Midwest, frequently under various pseudonyms.

He left Hannibal in 1848 and traveled to Cincinnati, St. Louis, and New York. In each town, he gained more experience as a printer and spent his off-time in local libraries, finishing off the education which he had abandoned when his father died. His travels ended when he was summoned to Iowa, where Orion had set up shop in Keokuk at the Ben Franklin Book and Job Office.

Both Keokuk and Hannibal are on the western bank of the Mississippi River, and the river played a major role in Clemens's life, whether as a limiting factor, a mode of transportation, or as a symbol of possibilities. He often wrote of seeing the riverboats plying the river and in 1857 he left the life of a printer behind to become a cub pilot on a Mississippi Riverboat.

Therefore it followed that I must contrive a new career. The 'Paul Jones' was now bound for St. Louis. I planned a siege against my pilot, and at the end of three hard days he surrendered. He agreed to teach me the Mississippi River from New Orleans to St. Louis for five hundred dollars, payable out of the first wages I should receive after graduating. I entered upon the small enterprise of 'learning' twelve or thirteen hundred miles of the great Mississippi River with the easy

⁴ Twain, Mark. "A Gallant Fireman," *Hannibal Western Union*, January 16, 1851.

⁵ This was a newspaper published in Philadelphia, the forerunner of the famous magazine.

confidence of my time of life. If I had really known what I was about to require of my faculties, I should not have had the courage to begin. I supposed that all a pilot had to do was to keep his boat in the river, and I did not consider that that could be much of a trick, since it was so wide.⁶

Clemens worked his way up to pilot, and the life seemed to suit him. Just as Orion had helped him, Sam helped his younger brother, Henry and arranged a job for him. The two brothers worked on the *Pennsylvania* until Sam had an altercation with another pilot, named Brown. Sam was put ashore at New Orleans and transferred to the *A.T. Lacey*, but Henry opted to remain on the *Pennsylvania*.

The *Lacey* left New Orleans two days after the *Pennsylvania*, and when it reached Greenville, Mississippi, they got word that the *Pennsylvania* had blown up, killing 150 people. Initially, rumor reached Clemens that his brother was uninjured, but later he heard that Henry had been hurt beyond help. Eventually, Clemens arrived at Memphis and arrived shortly before Henry died.

We witnessed one of the most affecting scenes at the Exchange yesterday that has ever been seen. The brother of Mr. Henry Clemens, second clerk of the *Pennsylvania*, who now lies dangerously ill from the injuries received by the explosion of that boat, arrived in the city yesterday afternoon, on the steamer *A. T. LACY*. He hurried to the Exchange to see his brother, and on approaching the bedside of the wounded man, his feelings so much overcame him, at the scalded and emaciated form before him, that he sunk to the floor overpowered. There was scarcely a dry eye in the house; the poor sufferers shed tears at the sight. This

⁶ Twain, Mark. *Life on the Mississippi*, James R. Osgood Co. 1883. Chapter 6.

brother had been pilot on the *Pennsylvania*, but fortunately for him, had remained in New Orleans when the boat started up.⁷

Clemens remained on the Mississippi and eventually earned his steamboat pilot license in 1859, a year after Henry's death. He worked on several ships, making the run from St. Louis down to New Orleans and back and quite possibly would have continued indefinitely if the US Civil War hadn't broken out. Eventually, he would write about his experiences in *Life on the Mississippi*.

In 1861, the Confederates opened fire on Fort Sumter, sparking the Civil War. The war resulted in the cessation of commercial traffic on the Mississippi, putting Clemens out of a job. In response to the Federal troops "invading" Missouri, Clemens joined a cadre of his fellow Missourians to form the "Marion Raiders." His time spent with the Marion Raiders lasted a few weeks and consisted of marching around making nuisances of themselves. Eventually, Clemens would write about the episode in "The Private History of a Campaign That Failed," published in 1885.

When Sam was growing up, the Clemens family did own a slave, a girl named Jennie. In addition, they hired a slave owned by another family, a young boy about Sam's age named Sandy. In his autobiography, Sam commented that he was annoyed by Sandy's constant singing, but Sam's mother, Jane, saw his singing as a sign that he had forgotten everything he lost. She informed Sam that when Sandy wasn't singing, it was because he was thinking of the mother he was taken away from. Although the Clemens family did own Jennie, John Clemens made it clear to Sam that slavery was wrong and that she would have been freed except for the financial hardship that would have entailed for the family.

⁷ *Memphis Eagle and Enquirer*, June 16, 1858.

Orion Clemens was a staunch Republican, or at least as staunch as one could be to a party whose existence could be measured on two hands. He had supported Illinois state congressman Abraham Lincoln's campaign for the presidency in 1860 and was rewarded with the position of Secretary of the Nevada Territory, the only person to have held that title. Orion noticed younger brother was at liberty and invited Sam to join him as his personal secretary.

The two men traveled West by stage coach and eventually arrived in Nevada, where Sam appears to have promptly forgotten about his job with Orion and set out to prospect for silver. Twain, and his partner, Calvin Higbee, did manage to find a vein of silver, but failed to adequately protect their interest and lost the mine. Twain wound up in Virginia City, Nevada where he returned to his journalistic roots and became a writer for the *Territorial Enterprise* in September of 1862.

By the time he took the job at the *Enterprise*, Clemens had already sent them letters for publication, using the pseudonym "Josh." It was these small items, for which Clemens was not paid, that led to the editor, Joe Goodman, offering Clemens a job. The *Enterprise* was almost like a college-run newspaper, mixing local news with gossip and hoaxes. One of the first pieces by Clemens that was published after he was hired was a piece about a petrified man found in the Virginia City area. Although Clemens gave up using the "Josh" pseudonym when he was hired, many of the reporters did use pseudonyms, in part to distinguish real news items from hoaxes.

Unfortunately, many, perhaps most, of Clemens's pieces from the *Enterprise* have been lost, some unintentionally, others destroyed by Clemens's own hand. Although "Josh" was

abandoned by Clemens in September 1862, by February 3, 1863, he has acquired another pseudonym...Mark Twain.⁸

Clemens/Twain began to build his name during this period, moving around the Tahoe/Sacramento area, getting to San Francisco in 1863 and working as a reporter for both the *San Francisco Morning Call* and the *Sacramento Union*. The *Sacramento Union* offered to send him to the Sandwich Islands in 1866, a trip which would form the basis for chapters 63-78 of *Roughing It*.

I was created San Francisco correspondent of the *Enterprise*, and at the end of five months I was out of debt, but my interest in my work was gone; for my correspondence being a daily one, without rest or respite, I got unspeakably tired of it. I wanted another change. The vagabond instinct was strong upon me. Fortune favored and I got a new berth and a delightful one. It was to go down to the Sandwich Islands and write some letters for the *Sacramento Union*, an excellent journal and liberal with employees.⁹

I was in the islands to write letters for the weekly edition of the Sacramento 'Union,' a rich and influential daily journal which hadn't any use for them, but could afford to spend twenty dollars a week for nothing. The proprietors were lovable and well-beloved men: long ago dead, no doubt, but in me there is at least one person who still holds them in grateful remembrance; for I dearly wanted to see the islands, and they listened to me and gave me the opportunity

⁸ Rather than including this lengthy piece in line, you can find it elsewhere in this issue. —Ed.

⁹ Twain, Mark. *Roughing It*, American Publishing Co. 1872. Chapter 63.

when there was but slender likelihood that it could profit them in any way.¹⁰

Although Clemens's life forms a major part of his travel and autobiographical works such as *Innocents Abroad*, *Roughing It*, *A Tramp Abroad*, *Life on the Mississippi*, and *Following the Equator* it is important to remember that Clemens was not particularly concerned with accuracy in any of those works. Entertainment was by far more important. It was almost as if, having lived many of those events as Clemens, he was creating a false biography of Mark Twain which mirrored, and expanded upon, Clemens's experiences. Hyperbole was the rule of his writing. The knitting of hyperbole and reality in a nearly seamless and entertaining manner is what made Samuel Clemens Mark Twain.

Not only would Clemens eventually get a large part of *Roughing It* out of his letters to the *Sacramento Union*, he would also use the experience for his initial speaking engagements in San Francisco in 1866. The talk was so well received that he began booking himself into houses wherever he went to give it and later commented that he had given that lecture hundreds of times.

“Take the largest house in town, and charge a dollar a ticket.” The audacity of the proposition was charming; it seemed fraught with practical worldly wisdom, however. The proprietor of the several theatres endorsed the advice, and said I might have his handsome new opera-house at half price--fifty dollars. In sheer desperation I took it--on credit, for sufficient reasons. In three days I did a hundred and fifty dollars' worth of printing and advertising, and was the most distressed and frightened creature on the Pacific coast. I could not sleep--who could, under such circumstances?

¹⁰ Twain, Mark. “My Début as a Literary Person.” 1899.

For other people there was facetiousness in the last line of my posters, but to me it was plaintive with a pang when I wrote it:

Doors open at 7 1/2. The trouble will begin at 8.¹¹

Seeing his letters from the Sandwich Islands published in the *Union*, Clemens realized that he could draw more than just a salary from his job as a reporter. The following year, an excursion was put together, an event billed as the first European pleasure cruise from America. The journey about the steamship *Quaker City* was put together by Charles Duncan. Duncan began selling passages, but after his pastor, Henry Ward Beecher, decided not to go, interest tapered off. Duncan had hoped to sell at least 110 places on the ship, but only sold about 70. Clemens's fare was paid for by the *San Francisco Alta California*, to whom Clemens owed at least 50 letters about the voyage. Eventually, 50 letters appeared in the newspaper with an additional eight appearing in other locations.

Before the trip could take place, however, Duncan needed to sell the spots, and he had difficulty doing so. Clemens founds himself with some liberty in New York and, with the help of Frank Fuller set up to give his Hawaii talk, his first lecture in New York. Unfortunately, several other events were scheduled for the night of Clemens's lecture and he fretted about its success.

The lecture was to begin at 8. I was nervous, and I went a little early. It was just as well that I did. Masses in the street were all the school teachers in America, apparently, and more coming. The streets were blocked, all traffic was at a standstill. It took me a while to get in. At 8 every seat was occupied. Even the huge stage

¹¹ Twain, Mark. *Roughing It*. , American Publishing Co. 1872. Chapter 78.

was packed, and I never had a better time in my life. Fuller had kept his word: there were more brains there than were ever under a roof before—and without counting me.

And also, in the box-office, in cold cash, there was \$35.¹²

The success of this first lecture at Cooper Union led to additional lectures while he waited for the sailing of the *Quaker City*. It also led to less lofty experiences for Clemens, although he viewed them as fodder for his reportage.

I was on my way home with a friend a week ago - it was about midnight - when we came upon two men who were fighting. We interfered like a couple of idiots, and tried to separate them, and a brace of policemen came up and took us all off to the Station House. We offered the officers two or three prices to let us go, (policemen generally charge \$5 in assault and battery cases, and \$25 for murder in the first degree, I believe,) but there were too many witnesses present, and they actually refused.

They put us in separate cells, and I enjoyed the thing considerably for an hour or so, looking through the bars at the dilapidated old hags, and battered and ragged bummers, sorrowing and swearing in the stone-paved halls, but it got rather tiresome after a while. I fell asleep on my stone bench at 3 o'clock, and was called at dawn and marched to the Police Court with a vile policeman at each elbow, just as if I had been robbing a church, or saying a complimentary word about the

¹² Twain, Mark. "Frank Fuller and My First New York Lecture." *Who Is Mark Twain?* HarperStudio, 2009, p.16.

police, or doing some other supernaturally mean thing.¹³

Clemens was released with time served and eventually the *Quaker City* left New York on June 8, 1867. The ship returned to New York on November 19 of that year. In some ways, the trip on board the *Quaker City* may have been the most important thing Clemens undertook. In 1869, he published *Innocents Abroad*, a travel book based on the letters to the *Alta California*. It was Clemens's first book publication and the book's success led him to his world wide fame.

More importantly, while on board the *Quaker City*, he met Charles Jervis Langdon, a seventeen-year-old sent on the excursion by his parents. Langdon appears to have pestered Clemens in the early days of the excursion, but his attention was due to his being awestruck by the successful author. While the ship was docked off the coast of Smyrna, in Turkey, Langdon happened to show Clemens a miniature he carried of his older sister. Clemens later claimed he was instantly smitten.

A month after the *Quaker City* returned to New York, the passengers had a reunion and Charles brought his sister. Clemens met Olivia Langdon and Charles invited Clemens to stay with the family in Elmira. Their relationship would flourish and in 1868 Clemens proposed marriage. Livy rejected him. However, an injury kept Clemens at the Langdon home in Elmira and two months later, he proposed again. Livy accepted and her parents approved, but her father, Jervis, told Clemens they didn't want to announce the engagement until they had checked his references.

And the references came in from Clemens's friends in the West: "I would rather bury a daughter of mine that have her marry such a fellow." "Clemens is a humbug—shallow &

¹³ Twain, Mark. "In the Station House," *San Francisco Alta California*, June 23, 1867.

superficial...a man whose life promised little & has accomplished less..." Clemens was "wild, & godless, idle, lecherous & a discontented & unsettled rover & they could not recommend any girl of high character & social position..." Clemens noted that these did not harm his cause as he "had already said all that about [him]self beforehand."

Jervis Langdon's response upon reading these recommendations was "Haven't you a friend in the world? I'll be your friend myself. Take the girl. I know you better than they do." The couple married in 1870 and remained married until Livy's death on June 5, 1904. Their first child, Langdon Clemens, was born nine months and 5 days after their wedding and lived for just eighteen months. They also had three daughters, Susy, Clara, and Jean. Only Clara survived her father, dying in 1962.

In 1869, Clemens, known publicly as Mark Twain, published his first book, *The Innocents Abroad, or The New Pilgrims' Progress*. Already established as a journalist and lecturer, Clemens used those reputations to build sales of his book and entered into a new phase of his career, which would see the release of several semi-autobiographical travel books, short stories, essays, and novels.

"All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*. If you read it you must stop where the Nigger Jim is stolen from the boys. That is the real end. The rest is just cheating. But it's the best book we've had. All American writing comes from that. There was nothing before. There has been nothing as good since."

Ernest Hemingway¹⁴

¹⁴ Hemingway, Ernest. *Green Hills of Africa*, 1935, p.22.

Twain's Advice

Johnny Carruthers

Mark Twain supposedly once gave a young man the following advice: "The first thing in the morning, swallow a live frog. That way, nothing worse will happen to either of you the rest of the day." I'm not certain how true this is, but the quote is attributed to him.

Well, if Mr. Twain were to give me a frogalyzer test right now, he would probably take a look at the test results, then look at me, and finally ask, "Son, just how many live frogs *did* you swallow today?" I would then have to admit that with the day I have had, I have probably been slamming down one live frog shot after another.

I know that at my job, depending on what shift I work, there are times when things get just a little crazy. Today, however, was one of those days when crazy was the norm, and there were times when it got *really* crazy. I know tonight is a full moon, but this this was during daylight. I was beginning to think that every other customer had decided to leave their common sense at home today.

I don't think there are enough live frogs on the planet to cover days like today.

There Is Only One River

Alma Alexander

The first time I read *Tom Sawyer*, of course, was in translation. I was only seven, possibly eight—at any rate, still several years away from reading fluently in English.

You have to remember one thing—when I was growing up, it in a place that was separated from the continent of North

America by the breadth of a world. There was, depending on which way you turned to look, either the whole of Europe and the Atlantic between me and Mark Twain's world, or else (worse) the entire expanse of Asia, including Siberia and China, and on top of that the massive and empty Pacific Ocean.

Even if you discarded the physical geography of it all, there was the great Grand Canyon of the cultural divide. The United States of America was, to me, quite literally another world. There were so many things that I could simply not even begin to understand. I had no idea what a picket fence was or why it was being whitewashed; I was born a city girl, and my own childhood experiences were paved roads and stone walls and fences—if fences there were—that were made of brick, and stone, and sometimes wrought iron. The wooden-board fences that I saw when I left the city for the occasional visits to the village where my grandparents owned a house were not remotely Sawyerish. Many of them were decrepit, with boards that were only just on this side of rotting leaning a little drunkenly on one another; others, in better repair, were rarely painted. I knew what whitewash was—there were occasions where it was used to paint the lower part of a tree trunk, in an attempt to prevent infestation of pests, but I don't particularly remember it being flung on fences. And yet... and yet... that iconic Tom Sawyer image, the barefoot boy in the straw hat vigorously painting the fence and giving an impression that he found this job, which he hated, *so* fascinating that he wound up having people pay him to take his place... I could appreciate that. It was a piece of cunning that transcended geography and culture. It was pure *kid*. And I was kid enough to appreciate it.

Other things from *Tom Sawyer* resonated, but in ways that Twain would have found baffling (if, perhaps, fascinating). I remember vividly the scene where Tom, presumed dead, turns up at his own funeral, and finds himself rather moved by the nice things that are said about him—until, that is, someone realizes that the “corpse” is standing in the back of the church

enjoying things a little too much and events turn against him. Again, part of it was that the thing was pure *kid*, the kind of thing that a kid would do without thinking it through. But the church which I envisioned this scene in was something that Tom Sawyer would have found quite foreign—because I was raised in the icon-and-gilded-splendour of the Eastern Orthodox churches, and to me the word “pew” was meaningless (we didn't have them) and our services were all sung, and our altars hidden behind the painted screen of the iconostasis and never seen by profane eyes. It was a house of God, but not as Tom Sawyer would have known it. I sometimes wonder, now, as a grown-up, what that barefoot kid in dungarees would have made of our halls of worship.. .and what they would have made of him.

And then, the other characters.

Becky Thatcher, the quintessential girl. In theory I was supposed to identify with her, I suppose, being a girl myself—but I kind of liked the idea of being Tom, actually. I was feminine enough when growing up—I liked and wanted long hair, for instance—but as for the trappings of it, all the careful curls and the hair ribbons and the white socks and the pretty frocks and patent-leather Mary Janes, that I could do without. I was, I suppose, a nascent young feminist, rebelling at the idea that a girl was there to look pretty and be rescued while the boys had the adventures.

Huck Finn, hero of his own saga, but coming to my own mind-space without the baggage which he shouldered in the American context—we, the children Europe's heart, knew of the slavery of the American south only through story, and through iffy representations of early American movies (if they showed it at all). Our literary contacts with the concept were limited to literary classics like Twain's books, or *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, or, later on, the Hollywood extravaganza that the movies made of *Gone with the Wind*. It was a Bad Thing, but

it was a once-removed Bad Thing; we had no direct experience of struggling with the aftermath of the legacy of the thing in a contemporary society, as they do in America to this day. Where I come from, slavery was not unknown—we, my own people, were slaves for half a millennium, we know all about it from the inside, thank you very much—but it was a different kind of slavery. It was the enslavement of a conquered people by a stronger conqueror; it was a time of suppression of culture and alphabet and history, of heavy tithes and taxes, of the age of Janissary troops (young boys levied from the families of the enslaved peoples, to be taken to a foreign land and taught a foreign language and a foreign faith and often to be sent back to the land of their birth long after they had forgotten that it had borne them as the crack troops of the hated invader...) Oh yes, slavery left deep roots, as it always does—but our experience of it ran to being subjugated and ground into submission, not to being bought and sold on the meat market or to being hounded to work in the cotton fields unto death. So while my American friends, and my American husband, tell me now that *Huckleberry Finn* was the *important* book and *Tom Sawyer* was more or less filler fluff... that was not my experience at all. I read *Huckleberry Finn* too—originally in translation—and to some extent that is a book that is aimed, at least with the subtext within it, at a higher-age-group audience to some extent... and one that was more grounded in the context and the contemporary times of the story. *Huck Finn* had a message. Perhaps *Tom Sawyer* did too, but with that book it might have been more deeply buried—because it was possible to read it without feeling that one was being preached at in any way, read it for the pure fun and the fantasy and the pleasure of it all—for the quintessential *kid* within it.

One of the most fundamental things in this part of Mark Twain's oeuvre was, of course, the Mighty Mississippi. Not unexpected from a writer whose pen-name is in fact a technical term in riparian navigation, the river was far more than setting and backdrop to Tom Sawyer's world. It was a character in its

own right. And long before I would even set foot on the continent which held the great river or Twain's world and his vast, muddy, riverboat-plied imagination, I knew, of course, what that river must have looked like.

I knew because I was born on its banks.

Or, to be more precise, I was born on the banks of the Danube—when it is already an old river, muddy, treacherous, full of shifting sandbanks and sucking mud and terrifying whirlpools. This was the river that held my own imagination. I was told stories about it when I was barely a toddler, of the years when the winters were so diamond-hard that the ice on the river was thick enough to bear sleighs and horses and they had sleigh races, complete with thundering hooves of iron-shod horses, up and down the frozen river. The river which ate life during the war, when the invaders took the local residents out onto the ice and pushed them under, sometimes still alive, for the crime of being who and what they were. The river which threw out bright glints when the summer sun hit the water lapping at the muddy banks, or the deep green depths where sometimes the clear water lingered; the river whose bottom was trawled by great bewhiskered catfish whose smaller representatives you could see moving sluggishly in a large tank at the marketplace and you could walk up to it, point to the fish you wanted, and it would be expertly extracted and brained and decapitated and wrapped up for you while you waited—but I, even as a child, knew that there had to be bigger and wiser catfish in the river who had lived there for a century or more and were far too canny to get trapped into that death-tank...

I was told that when my grandfather was a child the river was still clean enough to drink from. When my mother was a child it was still clean enough to swim in (and you probably wouldn't catch anything too bad if you swallowed a mouthful or two). By the time my time came, you'd probably catch seven different kinds of dysentery from the thing, and it

smelled of diesel, closer to the main quay where tow boats tied up, and, further down the embankment, of soft squelching ripe river mud, the kind that would suck the shoes off your feet if you wandered too deep into it. The mud hid things that were known as *bikovi*, a kind of seed pod which was distinguished by sharp spikes—three of whom at any given time served as a steady tripod on which the thing rested and the fourth pointed straight up, sharp and solid and sturdy enough to drive through the sole of a shoe. One didn't walk barefoot on the shore—at least not where there wasn't open sand—without paying close attention to where one stepped.

I loved my river with a great love. The Danube which was not blue, not here, and never was. It does not matter. I worshipped the great brown water flowing swiftly by. I loved the ramshackle fishing boats pulled up on the sandbanks out where the river was not constrained by concrete or great levees. I loved the forests of cats' tails and other water reeds that crowded its shallows, wading out into the stream. I even loved the sharp seedpods which I took such care to avoid. I loved the way it looked, the way it smelled, the way it flowed through my own veins, like blood and memory.

I was, still am, in a sort of superstitious awe of the thing. When I returned to the city of my birth in the aftermath of the NATO bombing campaign in 1999, the one that had taken out ALL the bridges that bound together the parts of the city on the river's two banks, the only way across was by crowded ferries which often had standing room only and were stuffed with as much humanity as they could carry... or by cockleshell boats piled by private enterprise, which would take you across for coin, like the ferryman across the Styx. We did that, my mother and my aunt and I, one time, and sat in the little wooden boat as it was flung across the river by the good offices of a tiny outboard motor. I remember sitting on the wooden seat in the boat, next to the edge, with the boat low enough in the water that I could, if I wanted to, reach out a hand and trail it in the water as we crossed the river.

And I tried.

I put out a hand and spread out fingers that trembled... and I could not make myself touch that holy water. Holy, to me, for so long. I had been warned against its whirlpools as a child and now there they were, swirling brown and oddly innocuous right next to my boat... and I could not touch them. Because the legends I carried in my heart and in my spirit told me that there really *was* a river god living here, and that he was drowsing, and that my touch might wake him, and I would pay the price.

The great river. The old river. The river of dreams, and of power, and of eternity, flowing like time.

Oh yes, I knew what Twain was talking about. *That* was my Mississippi.

His gift, to me, was to realize eventually that there was a way to make something into an archetype that transcended the mere quotidian. My Danube would have been a stranger to a Twain riverboat, or a black slave running away to freedom; the Mississippi would have equally been a stranger to sleigh races on ice, or to the specific kind of water reeds that grew on its banks. But I like to think that the catfish of both rivers would have found a common tongue between them as they slipped past the archetypal waters of all rivers and of all time. And I like to think that some day, if I find myself with my toes curled into the mud of the banks of the old downstream Mississippi of the Twain stories, I will instinctively be watching out for sharp seed pods which could not possibly be there.

Your river, Mr. Twain. My river. The waters mix and flow together. I like to think you would know mine, the way I think I would recognize yours.

Because of your words, and your dreams, and your stories.

Thank you for that.

I am not the editor of a newspaper and shall always try to do right and be good so that God will not make me one.

☞ *Galaxy* magazine, December 1870

Davy and Huck Finn

An example of how speculative fiction can reflect tell a timeless story in a timeless way

David E Romm

Mark Twain's *Huck Finn* is sometimes considered the first American novel. The themes and characters are unique to this country, and are presented in a vivid portrait of two friends on a raft. The defining moment of American literature is when the white Huck decides to save the escaped slave Jim, even though it is against the law and against the wishes of his family and society, "because he's my friend."

The problem with *Huck Finn* is that it's dated. What was common language back in Twain's time is now offensive to many. And rightly so. The book is defended because it is one of the reasons American society changed. And rightly so. *Huck Finn* brings to light American pre-Civil War culture in a way that merely stating the facts could not. Criticizing *Huck Finn* for being racist is as wrong headed as criticizing the original *Star Trek* for being sexist: They both took prevailing attitudes and gave them a good swift kick in the pants, while telling an entertaining story that was popular at the time. And they both helped change the culture in which they were originally presented.

Davy, by Edgar Pangborn, deals with similar issues. But the story is post-holocaust pastoral, set roughly 250 years in the

future, after an atomic war has destroyed most of society and left the rest of the people on a technological level about that of *Huck Finn*. Instead of a raft tying the friendship together, the human and outcast mutant are tied together by love of music.

How the friendship develops is quite different in *Davy* than in *Huck Finn*, but the elements of the friendship are similar: Society can't tear them apart when they have a mutual bond. Unlike Twain's novel, Pangborn's is still eminently readable, and hasn't caused any attempts at censorship. That's because *Davy*, set outside of any real society, cannot be held to the precepts of any society. Of course, it is a reflection of the 50s and early 60s; pre-Kennedy Assassination, pre-Great Society. It's not directly about slavery or McCarthyism, but reflects on both.

Another aspect that ties both novels together is that they were both written in two segments. Twain wrote the second half of *Huck Finn* much after the first, and the novel suffers for it. Twain introduces Tom Sawyer, who plays foolish games with Jim's attempt at freedom. This poor addendum to the important story severely diminishes the impact of the novel. Using a popular character probably helped sell the book at the time, but it's one of the few bad writing choices Twain made. *Davy*, meanwhile, was a novelette before it was expanded to a novel. The latter part of Pangborn's novel continues Davy's journey into manhood, and tells a gripping, human story of love and death. Pangborn wrote many stories set in this future, but *Davy* is the most successful.

Huck Finn will be continue to be read for its insight into humanity and for its description of America in the early 1800s. *Davy* will continue to be read because its an engaging tale with insight into humanity that cannot be placed in any one era. Twain's story is powerful because its set in a specific time; *Davy* is powerful because it isn't.

It is my belief that nearly any invented quotation, played with confidence, stands a good chance to deceive.

☞ *Following the Equator*

American Idol

Valerie Fausone

Readers, and writers must have a literary hero or two, to guide, impress and inspire us to keep reading. An epic hero to whom you would genuflect, and stop at nothing to have dinner with: the master, the ideal, the wordsmith deluxe. A good hero influences personal philosophy, turns of phrase, story telling attitude and, if you're lucky to choose Mark Twain, offers sage advice, too. I'd sell my soul to Satan twice to have a martini with Samuel Clemens, but he lived and died marked by Halley's Comet, many years before I was born.

What crap luck that is.

Twain's words rolled off the assembly line in his brain with precision not seen before or since. Mark Twain wrote thousands of glorious letters and stories for the *New York Times*, *Virginia Territorial Enterprise*, *The San Francisco Dramatic Chronicle*, and *the Sacramento Daily Union* and many others. Never stumped by a subject, Twain wrote intently about subjects such as vivisection and woman's voting rights, and yet took revenge by pen aimed directly at the fiend who stole his hat. It read:

Territorial Enterprise, January 8, 1863

LOCAL COLUMN

UNFORTUNATE THIEF

We have been suffering from the seven years' itch for many months. It is probably the most aggravating disease in the world. It is contagious. That man has commenced a career of suffering which is frightful to contemplate; there is no cure for the distemper - it must run its course; there is no respite for its victim, and but little alleviation of its torments to be hoped for; the unfortunate's only resource is to bathe in sulphur and molasses and let his finger nails grow. Further advice is unnecessary - instinct will prompt him to scratch.¹⁵

Though he's most famous for Tom and Huck, the rest of his genius shines in *The Innocents Abroad*, which is the funniest travel diary ever invented. I can only sigh like a love struck fool when I allow myself to fantasize about what it must have been like to travel on that ocean liner with the irascible Twain. How I wish it was me! We'd drink scotch and I'd stare at him and pray for an aneurism to strike me dead because to have more time alive would be cruel since the best day of my life already happened.

Mark Twain influenced my writing style and continues to influence my thinking as a writer. He once wrote that the only persons qualified to judge a piece of writing are the readers. This notion is comforting to writers like me who receive editorial rejection with the same happiness one gathers from swallowing a box of roofing nails. Mark Twain was always mindful of his audience. He wrote:

High and fine literature is wine, and mine is only water; but everybody likes water.

☞ Letter to William Dean Howells, 15 February 1887

¹⁵ *The Works of Mark Twain; Early Tales & Sketches, Vol. 1 1851-1864*, (Univ. of California Press, 1979), p. 182.

When I am elected Queen of the World, my first act will be to order all persons over the age of 15 to read every word written by Mark Twain. It's a shame today's young people sit around playing *World of Warcraft*, texting drivel to other little morons they know - when they could be reading Twain. I fight the good fight however, with my own teens and my nephews and encourage them to discover America's author. For example, I wrote my nephew Vinny a Christmas/birthday letter and felt a civic duty to bring Twain into it. Vinny is an aspiring writer, thus I can't help but meddle. I sprayed my letter with enough Twain quotes to dazzle the boy and prayed Vinny would someday hear Twain's voice as sweetly as I do. I wrote:

Dear Vinny,
December 22, 2009

I am writing you a long and tedious Christmas letter because you are my favorite nephew (besides your brother Jack), and about to turn 18. Thus, I must write this letter whilst I still have your address. Additionally, I am old, which qualifies me to write such things and guilt you into reading it on account I went to all this trouble.

When you get old, you can write meandering and helpful letters to teenagers. It's the cycle of life.

Anyway, let's begin by delving into your future writing career which I expect to be vast and significant. Every once in a while your dear mother reads me one of your doozies...and I delight in the emerging voice I hear.

I cannot tell you when, or how you will find your own voice, but when you do, you will know it. You will know it like you know it's daytime. Now, if someone doesn't like your voice, that doesn't mean there is anything wrong with it. It means they don't like your voice. Note to self: Never care about this. You don't write for critics, you write for readers. The reader is

the only one qualified to decide whether to invest time in any more of your paragraphs. Mark Twain taught me this.

Mark Twain is my writing hero. It's a good thing he is dead. If he were alive, your Mrs. Aunt Valerie would be in the slammer for stalking and other embarrassing fan girl crimes. I got you a book of his stories because the man is the ultimate writing bad ass (Chuck Norris with a pen), and has a command of English, timing and detail, who has no equal. I've read everything he wrote twice, and I'm considering reading it all over again. It's like watching the grand master of words make phrases dance like he's shooting bullets out of an AK-47. If you read Twain from a technical perspective, observing how he makes his stories, your writing will reflect his influence. If I could use the word "the" half as well as he did, I shall claim success beyond my wildest dreams.

The difference between the almost right word & the right word is really a large matter—it's the difference between the lightning bug and the lightning.

☞ Letter to George Bainton, 10/15/1888, Mark Twain

Study the writers you love. In literature, we must hang around people we wish to be like. This is likewise true in choosing friends. Hang around people you want to be like. Beware of persons only you understand.

Speaking of studying, I hope you plan to take college studies seriously as there will be 127 daily distractions and parties enough to kill a herd of Hooter's girls. Knowing this ahead of time will assist you in lifestyle planning...as you recall the words of your beloved Aunt Valerie, "The world is littered with stupid idiots with potential."

"I was seldom able to see an opportunity until it had ceased to be one.

☞ *Mark Twain's Autobiography*

I have every confidence you will embark on your future studies/writing with the zeal of an Olympic athlete and not waste a minute on distractions and absurdities that will sink the ships of several of your university friends. Not that I have personal experience with college distractions and absurdities because everyone who knew me then will testify that I was an angel. With a halo. And, a harp.¹⁶

If all the fools in this world should die, lordly God how lonely I should be.

☞ Letter to Olivia Clemens, 1/23/1885/Mark Twain

I want you to use language beautifully no matter what you decide to do. In other words, if you choose not to be a writer when you grow up, I won't kill myself or anything. I think you are a talented, wonderful writer and I want to make every effort to encourage you to work that skill. Going with a personal gift (writing, in your case) is like floating along with the current, refusing to fight nature, but instead going forth in harmony with your abilities. Imagine the calamity if I ever had my heart set on being a mountaineer? Boggles the mind. I don't think I'd make a very good astronaut either because everyone knows there's only rocks on the moon and to go all that way to observe a bunch of crap rocks would be appallingly dull and really piss me off.

When you were a small boy, you were full of wild adventure and you walked your own way all the time. This irritated and unnerved certain citizens and a few teachers of course, who had no brain for original people and no constitution for children who dare ask "Why?" I'm proud of this in you.

"The man with a new idea is a Crank until the idea succeeds.

☞ *Following the Equator*/Mark Twain

¹⁶ I did not have a harp. I made that up.

Writing is an awful profession with many ups and downs and frustrations. It's not reliable like accounts payable jobs, nor is it without it's boring tasks and duties. When you go over a piece for the 8th time with Editor Snodgrass, you will know what I mean. However, writing is not something you do. It is something you are. It is exclusively for persons with something to say. When you have something to say, and write it down...it could be two pages and have several authors...it might change the world. The Declaration of Independence, for example, was a seismic and universal shift on paper. Just ask England.

Behold the fool saith, "Put not all thine eggs in the one basket"—which is but a manner of saying, "Scatter your money and your attention;" but the wise man saith, "Put all your eggs in the one basket and—WATCH THAT BASKET."

☞ *Pudd'nHead Wilson*/Mark Twain

As you inch towards adulthood, use your resources and call upon the elderly (that's me) should you be stuck anywhere. Wynona Judd wrote a horrifying song, and I can't recall the title (I cast it out of my brain along with disco tunes and anything by Adam Lambert)- but in it, she sang, "A dead end is just a place to turn around."

This doesn't guarantee you will not fail and I hope you do fail once in awhile. Much is learned by failure. The trick is, not to sit in it or wear it like a badge, but instead to take your lesson and use it to your advantage. I have been enriched by failure, chiseled by it, which is how one turns a flop into a benefit.

Nobody deserves to be helped who don't try to help himself, and "faith without works" is a risky doctrine.

☞ "Important Correspondence," *The Californian*, May 6, 1865/Mark Twain

Write on, and know you are loved.

Valerie

I have been an author for 20 years and an ass for 55.

☞ fragment of a letter, 1891, to unknown person/Mark Twain

I think Apple should invent an iPhone app wherein a customer could holler “Time Machine” into the gadget then disappear in a cloud of rainbow smoke and arrive in Hartford, Connecticut, 1873, in Mark Twain’s living room. Presuming he was home, I’d ask him to solve our modern day problems with that big old brain of his, tell him how much I love him, take a few quick cell phone pictures of us and “poof” my way back to California. He wrote profusely, powerfully and with everything he had, so I will have to be satisfied with the six billion pages he left me to keep forever. Luckily, Mark Twain’s advice is timeless.

OCTOBER: This is one of the peculiarly dangerous months to speculate in stocks in. The other are July, January, September, April, November, May, March, June, December, August, and February.

☞ *Pudd'nhead Wilson's Calendar*

Some things never change.



The Adoptions of Mark Twain

Johnny Carruthers

Samuel Langhorne Clemens (perhaps better known to us by his nom du plume of Mark Twain) was what we would call today an early adopter. Of course, in the 1870s, the new technology that he so eagerly embraced was the typewriter. Clemens was the first author to submit a typewritten manuscript for one of his books, although there is some argument as to whether the book in question was *Tom Sawyer* or *Life On The Mississippi*.

I read that bit of information in a column of Robert Silverberg's last year. I reread the column recently, and it started me thinking: How would Samuel Clemens react if you could bring him forward in time a century or so? What would he think of the personal computer, and the Internet?

Personally, I suspect that Clemens would adopt the computer as quickly as he did the typewriter, especially once he saw a word processing program in use. One of his first attempts at using a typewriter was a letter to his brother, and he said that he didn't think it would take too long for him to master its use. He also mentioned several virtues of the typewriter, one of which was that it didn't scatter ink blots all over the page. In a similar fashion, I think Clemens would trumpet the virtues of the computer. You can make corrections without having to waste paper. You don't have that messy problem of changing the typewriter ribbon (changing an ink or toner cartridge is far less of a mess). Most importantly, if an editor wants changes, you don't have to retype the entire thing. (Come to think of it, I'm sure that's what a lot of writers were saying in the 1980s as they were beginning to make the switch from the typewriter to the computer.)

I'd even be willing to bet that Clemens would be using voice-recognition software in conjunction with his word processor. More than anything else, Clemens was a storyteller, and I suspect that he would love the idea of telling a story and

having a first draft as the result. There is the possibility that his writing style would lose some of its idiosyncracies, particularly in spelling, but I think Clemens would rectify that problem when he edited the story, if that was his desire.

And the Internet? I know that Clemens would have something to say about the Internet. I know that he would have a LOT to say about the Internet. I think that he would be a regular visitor to news sites and search engines. I think he would be amused by some of the more offbeat sites, and would probably write about some of them. I think he would be appalled by some parts of the Internet. And like most of us, I am certain that Samuel Clemens would be utterly outraged at the concept of spam. I can only imagine what he would have to say about that modern pestilence.

Mark Twain the Heretic

Gary McGath

Twain didn't shy away from the controversies of religion. He presents scenes in Heaven, correspondence from Heaven, correspondence from the Devil, memoirs of Biblical characters, ineffectual intervention by one angel, cold-blooded meddling with human lives by another. His skepticism and his scorn for conventional views come through clearly. What he actually believed is harder to pin down.

Some of his strongest pieces on religion were ones which he didn't try to publish in his lifetime. One which he did publish, near the end of his life, was "Extract from Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven." In spite of its title, it's a complete story, not an unfinished fragment. It presents something close to the Christian view of the afterlife, though with many twists. It has science-fictional elements: Stormfield, flying through space toward Heaven after his death, veers off course and arrives at the wrong entrance to Heaven, and the administrators have to

look up his obscure little planet by examining a map "as big as Rhode Island" with a microscope. This picture of Heaven isn't much like the traditional pictures of blessed souls interminably praising God. People get harps if they want them, but they don't hang on to them very long. Really, though, there's little to offend thinking Christians.

In a number of his stories, Twain attacks hypocritical religious practice, not religion as such. Probably the best-known example is "The War Prayer," in which an angel spells out the gruesome implications of praying for victory in war, only to be ignored. "Letter from the Recording Angel" is a study of hypocrisy. In "Was It Heaven? Or Hell?" he raises the question of whether a lie to comfort the dying is a sin and leaves it unanswered, for the reader to decide.

"The Mysterious Stranger" is quite another matter. Albert Bigelow Paine worked after Twain's death from three incomplete manuscripts ("The Chronicle of Young Satan," "Schoolhouse Hill," and "No. 44, the Mysterious Stranger") to create the best-known version of the story. One is set in 1490 Austria, one in 1702 Austria, and one in nineteenth-century America; this results in some inconsistencies of feeling in the combined product. The "mysterious stranger" in question is Satan, an angel who is the nephew of the Satan. He isn't fallen but is dangerously capricious, switching between kindness and cruelty, and most cruel when he insists he's being kind. "No. 44" ends in outright solipsism, and Paine used this ending in his combination work. It contains one of Twain's bitterest passages:

...a God who could make good children as easily as bad, yet preferred to make bad ones; who could have made every one of them happy, yet never made a single happy one; who made them prize their bitter life, yet stingily cut it short; who gave his angels eternal happiness unearned, yet required his other children to

earn it; who gave his angels painless lives, yet cursed his other children with biting miseries and maladies of mind and body; who mouths justice, and invented hell—mouths Golden Rules and forgiveness multiplied by seventy times seven, and invented hell...

“Letters from the Earth,” which didn’t reach the public till long after Twain’s death, goes still further. The premise of this work is that Satan (this time *the* Satan) has been briefly exiled to Earth for a his sarcasm, and he writes privately to a couple of archangels about what he sees on his visit. The main subject of the letters is the absurdity of the human conception of God. (It appears Satan visited only Christian countries.) His mockery isn’t just for the violence of the Old Testament God, but for Jesus as well:

Now here is a curious thing. It is believed by everybody that while he [God] was in heaven he was stern, hard, resentful, jealous, and cruel; but that when he came down to earth and assumed the name Jesus Christ, he became the opposite of what he was before: that is to say, he became sweet, and gentle, merciful, forgiving, and all harshness disappeared from his nature and a deep and yearning love for his poor human children took its place. Whereas it was as Jesus Christ that he devised hell and proclaimed it!

Twain’s heirs kept “Letters from the Earth” from being published until the 1960s. As a result, it’s still in copyright, though the text can be found on the Web.

“Reflections on Religion,” first published in 1963, and available in a book (*The Outrageous Mark Twain*) only in 1987, is in a similar vein but is more direct, since there’s no fictional narrator. It denounces Christianity without compromise; in the opening paragraph he calls the Biblical God “a personage whom no one, perhaps, would desire to

associate with now that Nero and Caligula are dead.” But what did he think God was really like, if he thought there was one? Part Four discusses “the real God, the genuine God, the great God, the sublime and supreme God.” There’s clearly a lot of irony in that description, but if he means any of it, his conclusion is one of the grimmest any human has reached:

In His destitution of one and all of the qualities which could grace a God and invite respect for Him and reverence and worship, the real God, the Maker of the mighty universe is just like all the other gods in the list. He proves every day that He takes no interest in man, nor in the other animals, further than to torture them, slay them and get out of this pastime such entertainment as it may afford—and do what He can not to get weary of the eternal and changeless monotony of it.

Twain’s writing, once you get past his lightest and most popular works, is full of bitterness. Did he really consider a cruel God more believable than a hands-off creator or no God at all? Based on the evidence, it seems he did. Yet he may have put his views in those terms because he was a satirist through and through. In his writings on politics, e.g., “To the Person Sitting in Darkness,” he seldom makes a direct denunciation, preferring irony and cynicism. The same is true of his writings on religion. Yet he did write plainly, in “Reflections on Religion,” that “There is no evidence that there is to be a Heaven hereafter.” Another statement there not only is plain, but refers to his decision not to publish the words in his lifetime: “We all know perfectly well—though we all conceal it, just as I am doing, until I shall be dead and out of reach of public opinion—we all know, I say, that God, and God alone, is responsible for every act and word of a human being’s life between cradle and grave.”

According to Albert Bigelow Paine's biography, Twain wrote: "I believe in God the Almighty. I do not believe He has ever sent a message to man by anybody, or delivered one to him by word of mouth, or made Himself visible to mortal eyes at any time in any place." The most reasonable conclusion is that Twain was a highly cynical, bitter deist.

However you take it, it's best to remember that Twain wanted to provoke rather than preach in his writings. His writings on religion offer bold criticism, and it's necessary to read them with an active mind.



Mark Twain's First Published Work

Mark Twain

EDS. enterprise: I feel very much as if I had just awakened out of a long sleep. I attribute it to the fact that I have slept the greater part of the time for the last two days and nights. On Wednesday, I sat up all night, in Virginia, in order to be up early enough to take the five o'clock stage on Thursday morning. I was on time. It was a great success. I had a cheerful trip down to Carson, in company with that incessant talker, Joseph T. Goodman. I never saw him flooded with such a flow of spirits before. He restrained his conversation, though, until we had traveled three or four miles, and were just crossing the divide between Silver City and Spring Valley, when he thrust his head out of the dark stage, and allowed a pallid light from the coach lamp to illuminate his features for a moment, after which he returned to darkness again, and sighed and said, "Damn it!" with some asperity. I asked him who he meant it for, and he said, "The weather out there." As we approached Carson, at about half past seven o'clock, he thrust his head out again, and gazed earnestly in the direction of that city—after which he took it in again, with his nose very much frosted. He propped the end of that organ upon the end of his finger, and looked down pensively upon it—which had the effect of making him appear cross-eyed—and remarked, "O, damn it!" with great bitterness. I asked him what he was up to this time, and he said, "The cold, damp fog—it is worse than the weather." This was his last. He never spoke again in my hearing. He went on over the mountains, with a lady fellow-passenger from here. That will stop his clatter, you know, for he seldom speaks in the presence of ladies. In the evening I felt a mighty inclination to go to a party somewhere. There was to be one at Governor J. Neely Johnson's, and I went there and asked permission to stand around awhile. This was granted in the most hospitable manner, and visions of plain quadrilles soothed my weary soul. I felt particularly comfortable, for if

there is one thing more grateful to my feelings than another, it is a new house—a large house, with its ceilings embellished with snowy mouldings; its floors glowing with warm-tinted carpets: with cushioned chairs and sofas to sit on, and a piano to listen to; with fires so arranged that you can see them, and know that there is no humbug about it; with walls garnished with pictures, and above all, mirrors, wherein you may gaze, and always find something to admire, you know. I have a great regard for a good house, and a girlish passion for mirrors. Horace Smith, Esq., is also very fond of mirrors. He came and looked in the glass for an hour, with me. Finally, it cracked—the night was pretty cold—and Horace Smith’s reflection was split right down the centre. But where his face had been, the damage was greatest—a hundred cracks converged from his reflected nose, like spokes from the hub of a wagon wheel. It was the strangest freak the weather has done this Winter. And yet the parlor seemed very warm and comfortable, too.

About nine o’clock the Unreliable came and asked Gov. Johnson to let him stand on the porch. That creature has got more impudence than any person I ever saw in my life. Well, he stood and flattened his nose against the parlor window, and looked hungry and vicious—he always looks that way—until Col. Musser arrived with some ladies, when he actually fell in their wake and came swaggering in, looking as if he thought he had been anxiously expected. He had on my fine kid boots, and my plug hat and my white kid gloves (with slices of his prodigious hands grinning through the bursted seams), and my heavy gold repeater, which I had been offered thousands and thousands of dollars for, many and many a time. He took these articles out of my trunk, at Washoe City, about a month ago, when we went out there to report the proceedings of the Convention. The Unreliable intruded himself upon me in his cordial way and said, “How are you, Mark, old boy? when d’you come down? It’s brilliant, ain’t it? Appear to enjoy themselves, don’t they? Lend a fellow two bits, can’t you?” He

always winds up his remarks that way. He appears to have an insatiable craving for two bits.

The music struck up just then, and saved me. The next moment I was far, far at sea in a plain quadrille. We carried it through with distinguished success; that is, we got as far as “balance around,” and “halt-a-man-left,” when I smelled hot whisky punch, or something of that nature. I tracked the scent through several rooms, and finally discovered the large bowl from whence it emanated. I found the omnipresent Unreliable there, also. He set down an empty goblet, and remarked that he was diligently seeking the gentlemen’s dressing room. I would have shown him where it was, but it occurred to him that the supper table and the punch-bowl ought not to be left unprotected; wherefore, we staid there and watched them until the punch entirely evaporated. A servant came in then to replenish the bowl, and we left the refreshments in his charge. We probably did wrong, but we were anxious to join the hazy dance. The dance was hazier than usual, after that. Sixteen couples on the floor at once, with a few dozen spectators scattered around, is calculated to have that effect in a brilliantly lighted parlor, I believe. Everything seemed to buzz, at any rate. After all the modern dances had been danced several times, the people adjourned to the supper-room. I found my wardrobe out there, as usual, with the Unreliable in it. His old distemper was upon him: he was desperately hungry. I never saw a man eat as much as he did in my life. I have the various items of his supper here in my note-book. First, he ate a plate of sandwiches; then he ate a handsomely iced poundcake; then he gobbled a dish of chicken salad; after which he ate a roast pig; after that, a quantity of blancmange; then he threw in several glasses of punch to fortify his appetite, and finished his monstrous repast with a roast turkey. Dishes of brandy-grapes, and jellies, and such things, and pyramids of fruits, melted away before him as shadows fly at the sun’s approach. I am of the opinion that none of his ancestors were present when the five thousand were miraculously fed in the old Scriptural times. I base my opinion

upon the twelve baskets of scraps and the little fishes that remained over after that feast. If the Unreliable himself had been there, the provisions would just about have held out, I think.

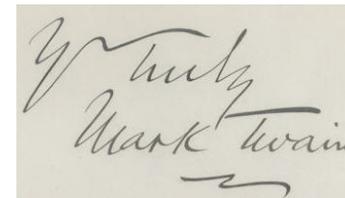
After supper, the dancing was resumed, and after a while, the guests indulged in music to a considerable extent. Mrs. J. sang a beautiful Spanish song; Miss R., Miss T., Miss P., and Miss S., sang a lovely duet; Horace Smith, Esq., sang "I'm sitting on the stile, Mary," with a sweetness and tenderness of expression which I have never heard surpassed; Col. Musser sang "From Greenland's Icy Mountains" so fervently that every heart in that assemblage was purified and made better by it; Mrs. T. and Miss C., and Mrs. T. and Mrs. G. sang "Meet me by moonlight alone" charmingly; Judge Dixson sang "O, Charming May" with great vivacity and artistic effect; Joe Winters and Hal Clayton sang the Marseilles Hymn in French, and did it well; Mr. Wasson sang "Call me pet names" with his usual excellence (Wasson has a cultivated voice, and a refined musical taste, but like Judge Brumfield, he throws so much operatic affectation into his singing that the beauty of his performance is sometimes marred by it—I could not help noticing this fault when Judge Brumfield sang "Rock me to sleep, mother"); Wm. M. Gillespie sang "Thou hast wounded the spirit that loved thee," gracefully and beautifully, and wept at the recollection of the circumstance which he was singing about. Up to this time I had carefully kept the Unreliable in the background, fearful that, under the circumstances, his insanity would take a musical turn; and my prophetic soul was right; he eluded me and planted himself at the piano; when he opened his cavernous mouth and displayed his slanting and scattered teeth, the effect upon that convivial audience was as if the gates of a graveyard, with its crumbling tombstones, had been thrown open in their midst; then he shouted something about he "would not live away"—and if I ever heard anything absurd in my life, that was it. He must have made up that song as he went along. Why, there was no more sense in it, and no more

music, than there is in his ordinary conversation. The only thing in the whole wretched performance that redeemed it for a moment, was something about "the few lucid moments that dawn on us here." That was all right; because the "lucid moments" that dawn on that Unreliable are almighty few, I can tell you. I wish one of them would strike him while I am here, and prompt him to return my valuables to me. I doubt if he ever gets lucid enough for that, though. After the Unreliable had finished squawking, I sat down to the piano and sang—however, what I sang is of no consequence to anybody. It was only a graceful little gem from the horse opera.

At about two o'clock in the morning the pleasant party broke up and the crowd of guests distributed themselves around town to their respective homes; and after thinking the fun all over again, I went to bed at four o'clock. So, having been awake forty-eight hours, I slept forty-eight, in order to get even again, which explains the proposition I began this letter with.

Yours, dreamily,

mark twain

A photograph of a handwritten signature in cursive ink on a light-colored piece of paper. The signature reads "Y truly Mark Twain" with a flourish at the end.

To ask a doctor or builder or sculptor for his autograph would be in no way rude. To ask one of those for a specimen of his work, however, is quite another thing, and the request might be justifiably refused. It would never be fair to ask a doctor for one of his corpses to remember him by.

☞ quoted in "Mark Twain on Autographs," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, March 24, 1902, p. 12.

I wanted to include an essay or story by Twain, which led to a difficulty of which to include. As I mentioned to Gary McGath, I love his stories “An Extract from Captain Stormfield’s Visit to Heaven” and “The Diaries of Adam and Eve,” but both are too long. Similarly, “Fennimore Cooper’s Literary Offenses” is a lengthy piece and his most famous works, the *Leatherstocking Tales*, are not widely read these days (my hunch is that *The Last of the Mohicans* is better known for providing the nickname of Hawkeye Pierce on *M*A*S*H* than for the actual book). Another of my favorite pieces appears below. I first discovered this piece in freshman year in high school when I began struggling with...

The Awful German Language

Mark Twain

A little learning makes the whole world kin.

-- Proverbs xxxii, 7.

I went often to look at the collection of curiosities in Heidelberg Castle, and one day I surprised the keeper of it with my German. I spoke entirely in that language. He was greatly interested; and after I had talked a while he said my German was very rare, possibly a “unique”; and wanted to add it to his museum.

If he had known what it had cost me to acquire my art, he would also have known that it would break any collector to buy it. Harris and I had been hard at work on our German during several weeks at that time, and although we had made good progress, it had been accomplished under great difficulty and annoyance, for three of our teachers had died in the mean time.

A person who has not studied German can form no idea of what a perplexing language it is.

Surely there is not another language that is so slipshod and systemless, and so slippery and elusive to the grasp. One is washed about in it, hither and thither, in the most helpless way; and when at last he thinks he has captured a rule which offers firm ground to take a rest on amid the general rage and turmoil of the ten parts of speech, he turns over the page and reads, “Let the pupil make careful note of the following exceptions.” He runs his eye down and finds that there are more exceptions to the rule than instances of it. So overboard he goes again, to hunt for another Ararat and find another quicksand. Such has been, and continues to be, my experience. Every time I think I have got one of these four confusing “cases” where I am master of it, a seemingly insignificant preposition intrudes itself into my sentence, clothed with an awful and unsuspected power, and crumbles the ground from under me. For instance, my book inquires after a certain bird—(it is always inquiring after things which are of no sort of consequence to anybody): “Where is the bird?” Now the answer to this question—according to the book—is that the bird is waiting in the blacksmith shop on account of the rain. Of course no bird would do that, but then you must stick to the book. Very well, I begin to cipher out the German for that answer. I begin at the wrong end, necessarily, for that is the German idea. I say to myself, “*Regen* (rain) is masculine—or maybe it is feminine—or possibly neuter—it is too much trouble to look now. Therefore, it is either *der* (the) *Regen*, or *die* (the) *Regen*, or *das* (the) *Regen*, according to which gender it may turn out to be when I look. In the interest of science, I will cipher it out on the hypothesis that it is masculine. Very well—then the rain is *der Regen*, if it is simply in the quiescent state of being mentioned, without enlargement or discussion—Nominative case; but if this rain is lying around, in a kind of a general way on the ground, it is then definitely located, it is doing something—that is, resting (which is one of the German

grammar's ideas of doing something), and this throws the rain into the Dative case, and makes it *dem Regen*. However, this rain is not resting, but is doing something actively,—it is falling—to interfere with the bird, likely—and this indicates movement, which has the effect of sliding it into the Accusative case and changing *dem Regen* into *den Regen*.” Having completed the grammatical horoscope of this matter, I answer up confidently and state in German that the bird is staying in the blacksmith shop “*wegen* (on account of) *den Regen*.” Then the teacher lets me softly down with the remark that whenever the word “*wegen*” drops into a sentence, it always throws that subject into the Genitive case, regardless of consequences—and that therefore this bird stayed in the blacksmith shop “*wegen des Regens*.”

N. B.—I was informed, later, by a higher authority, that there was an “exception” which permits one to say “*wegen den Regen*” in certain peculiar and complex circumstances, but that this exception is not extended to anything but rain.

There are ten parts of speech, and they are all troublesome. An average sentence, in a German newspaper, is a sublime and impressive curiosity; it occupies a quarter of a column; it contains all the ten parts of speech—not in regular order, but mixed; it is built mainly of compound words constructed by the writer on the spot, and not to be found in any dictionary—six or seven words compacted into one, without joint or seam—that is, without hyphens; it treats of fourteen or fifteen different subjects, each inclosed in a parenthesis of its own, with here and there extra parentheses which reinclose three or four of the minor parentheses, making pens within pens: finally, all the parentheses and reparentheses are massed together between a couple of king-parentheses, one of which is placed in the first line of the majestic sentence and the other in the middle of the last line of it—after which comes the VERB, and you find out for the first time what the man has been talking about; and after the verb—merely by way of ornament, as far as I can make

out—the writer shovels in “*haben sind gewesen gehabt haben geworden sein*,” or words to that effect, and the monument is finished. I suppose that this closing hurrah is in the nature of the flourish to a man's signature—not necessary, but pretty. German books are easy enough to read when you hold them before the looking-glass or stand on your head—so as to reverse the construction—but I think that to learn to read and understand a German newspaper is a thing which must always remain an impossibility to a foreigner.

Yet even the German books are not entirely free from attacks of the Parenthesis distemper—though they are usually so mild as to cover only a few lines, and therefore when you at last get down to the verb it carries some meaning to your mind because you are able to remember a good deal of what has gone before. Now here is a sentence from a popular and excellent German novel—which a slight parenthesis in it. I will make a perfectly literal translation, and throw in the parenthesis-marks and some hyphens for the assistance of the reader—though in the original there are no parenthesis-marks or hyphens, and the reader is left to flounder through to the remote verb the best way he can:

“But when he, upon the street, the (in-satin-and-silk-covered-now-very-unconstrained-after-the-newest-fashioned-dressed) government counselor's wife met,” etc., etc.¹⁷

That is from *The Old Mamselle's Secret*, by Mrs. Marlitt. And that sentence is constructed upon the most approved German model. You observe how far that verb is from the reader's base of operations; well, in a German newspaper they put their verb away over on the next page; and I have heard that sometimes after stringing along the exciting preliminaries and parentheses for a column or two, they get in a hurry and have to go to press

¹⁷ *Wenn er aber auf der Strasse der in Sammt und Seide gehüllten jetzt sehr ungenirt nach der neusten Mode gekleideten Regierungsräthin begegnet.*

without getting to the verb at all. Of course, then, the reader is left in a very exhausted and ignorant state.

We have the Parenthesis disease in our literature, too; and one may see cases of it every day in our books and newspapers: but with us it is the mark and sign of an unpracticed writer or a cloudy intellect, whereas with the Germans it is doubtless the mark and sign of a practiced pen and of the presence of that sort of luminous intellectual fog which stands for clearness among these people. For surely it is not clearness—it necessarily can't be clearness. Even a jury would have penetration enough to discover that. A writer's ideas must be a good deal confused, a good deal out of line and sequence, when he starts out to say that a man met a counselor's wife in the street, and then right in the midst of this so simple undertaking halts these approaching people and makes them stand still until he jots down an inventory of the woman's dress. That is manifestly absurd. It reminds a person of those dentists who secure your instant and breathless interest in a tooth by taking a grip on it with the forceps, and then stand there and drawl through a tedious anecdote before they give the dreaded jerk. Parentheses in literature and dentistry are in bad taste.

The Germans have another kind of parenthesis, which they make by splitting a verb in two and putting half of it at the beginning of an exciting chapter and the other half at the end of it. Can any one conceive of anything more confusing than that? These things are called "separable verbs." The German grammar is blistered all over with separable verbs; and the wider the two portions of one of them are spread apart, the better the author of the crime is pleased with his performance. A favorite one is *reiste ab*—which means departed. Here is an example which I culled from a novel and reduced to English:

"The trunks being now ready, he *de-* after kissing his mother and sisters, and once more pressing to his bosom his adored

Gretchen, who, dressed in simple white muslin, with a single tuberosity in the ample folds of her rich brown hair, had tottered feebly down the stairs, still pale from the terror and excitement of the past evening, but longing to lay her poor aching head yet once again upon the breast of him whom she loved more dearly than life itself, *parted*."

However, it is not well to dwell too much on the separable verbs. One is sure to lose his temper early; and if he sticks to the subject, and will not be warned, it will at last either soften his brain or petrify it. Personal pronouns and adjectives are a fruitful nuisance in this language, and should have been left out. For instance, the same sound, *sie*, means you, and it means she, and it means her, and it means it, and it means they, and it means them. Think of the ragged poverty of a language which has to make one word do the work of six—and a poor little weak thing of only three letters at that. But mainly, think of the exasperation of never knowing which of these meanings the speaker is trying to convey. This explains why, whenever a person says *sie* to me, I generally try to kill him, if a stranger.

Now observe the Adjective. Here was a case where simplicity would have been an advantage; therefore, for no other reason, the inventor of this language complicated it all he could. When we wish to speak of our "good friend or friends," in our enlightened tongue, we stick to the one form and have no trouble or hard feeling about it; but with the German tongue it is different. When a German gets his hands on an adjective, he declines it, and keeps on declining it until the common sense is all declined out of it. It is as bad as Latin. He says, for instance:

SINGULAR

Nominative—*Mein guter Freund*, my good friend.

Genitive—*Meines guten Freundes*, of my good friend.

Dative—*Meinem guten Freund*, to my good friend.

Accusative—*Meinen guten Freund*, my good friend.

PLURAL

N.—*Meine guten Freunde*, my good friends.
G.—*Meiner guten Freunde*, of my good friends.
D.—*Meinen guten Freunden*, to my good friends.
A.—*Meine guten Freunde*, my good friends.

Now let the candidate for the asylum try to memorize those variations, and see how soon he will be elected. One might better go without friends in Germany than take all this trouble about them. I have shown what a bother it is to decline a good (male) friend; well this is only a third of the work, for there is a variety of new distortions of the adjective to be learned when the object is feminine, and still another when the object is neuter. Now there are more adjectives in this language than there are black cats in Switzerland, and they must all be as elaborately declined as the examples above suggested. Difficult?—troublesome?—these words cannot describe it. I heard a Californian student in Heidelberg say, in one of his calmest moods, that he would rather decline two drinks than one German adjective.

The inventor of the language seems to have taken pleasure in complicating it in every way he could think of. For instance, if one is casually referring to a house, *Haus*, or a horse, *Pferd*, or a dog, *Hund*, he spells these words as I have indicated; but if he is referring to them in the Dative case, he sticks on a foolish and unnecessary *e* and spells them *Hause*, *Pferde*, *Hunde*. So, as an added *e* often signifies the plural, as the *s* does with us, the new student is likely to go on for a month making twins out of a Dative dog before he discovers his mistake; and on the other hand, many a new student who could ill afford loss, has bought and paid for two dogs and only got one of them, because he ignorantly bought that dog in the Dative singular when he really supposed he was talking plural—which left the law on the seller's side, of course, by the strict rules of grammar, and therefore a suit for recovery could not lie.

In German, all the Nouns begin with a capital letter. Now that is a good idea; and a good idea, in this language, is necessarily conspicuous from its lonesomeness. I consider this capitalizing of nouns a good idea, because by reason of it you are almost always able to tell a noun the minute you see it. You fall into error occasionally, because you mistake the name of a person for the name of a thing, and waste a good deal of time trying to dig a meaning out of it. German names almost always do mean something, and this helps to deceive the student. I translated a passage one day, which said that “the infuriated tigress broke loose and utterly ate up the unfortunate fir forest” (*Tannenwald*). When I was girding up my loins to doubt this, I found out that *Tannenwald* in this instance was a man's name.

Every noun has a gender, and there is no sense or system in the distribution; so the gender of each must be learned separately and by heart. There is no other way. To do this one has to have a memory like a memorandum-book. In German, a young lady has no sex, while a turnip has. Think what overwrought reverence that shows for the turnip, and what callous disrespect for the girl. See how it looks in print—I translate this from a conversation in one of the best of the German Sunday-school books:

“Gretchen: Wilhelm, where is the turnip?

Wilhelm: She has gone to the kitchen.

Gretchen: Where is the accomplished and beautiful English maiden?

Wilhelm: It has gone to the opera.”

To continue with the German genders: a tree is male, its buds are female, its leaves are neuter; horses are sexless, dogs are male, cats are female—tomcats included, of course; a person's mouth, neck, bosom, elbows, fingers, nails, feet, and body are of the male sex, and his head is male or neuter according to the word selected to signify it, and not according to the sex of the individual who wears it—for in Germany all the women either

have male heads or sexless ones; a person's nose, lips, shoulders, breast, hands, and toes are of the female sex; and his hair, ears, eyes, chin, legs, knees, heart, and conscience haven't any sex at all. The inventor of the language probably got what he knew about a conscience from hearsay.

Now, by the above dissection, the reader will see that in Germany a man may think he is a man, but when he comes to look into the matter closely, he is bound to have his doubts; he finds that in sober truth he is a most ridiculous mixture; and if he ends by trying to comfort himself with the thought that he can at least depend on a third of this mess as being manly and masculine, the humiliating second thought will quickly remind him that in this respect he is no better off than any woman or cow in the land.

In the German language it is true that by some oversight of the inventor of the language, a Woman is a female; but a Wife (*Weib*) is not—which is unfortunate. A Wife, here, has no sex; she is neuter; so, according to the grammar, a fish is he, his scales are she, but a fishwife is neither. To describe a wife as sexless may be called under-description; that is bad enough, but over-description is surely worse. A German speaks of an Englishman as the *Engländer*; to change the sex, he adds *inn*, and that stands for Englishwoman—*Engländerinn*. That seems descriptive enough, but still it is not exact enough for a German; so he precedes the word with that article which indicates that the creature to follow is feminine, and writes it down thus: “*die Engländerinn*,”—which means “the she-Englishwoman.” I consider that that person is over-described.

Well, after the student has learned the sex of a great number of nouns, he is still in a difficulty, because he finds it impossible to persuade his tongue to refer to things as “he” and “she,” and “him” and “her,” which it has been always accustomed to refer to it as “it.” When he even frames a German sentence in his mind, with the hims and hers in the right places, and then

works up his courage to the utterance-point, it is no use—the moment he begins to speak his tongue flies the track and all those labored males and females come out as “its.” And even when he is reading German to himself, he always calls those things “it,” where as he ought to read in this way:

TALE OF THE FISHWIFE AND ITS SAD FATE¹⁸

It is a bleak Day. Hear the Rain, how he pours, and the Hail, how he rattles; and see the Snow, how he drifts along, and of the Mud, how deep he is! Ah the poor Fishwife, it is stuck fast in the Mire; it has dropped its Basket of Fishes; and its Hands have been cut by the Scales as it seized some of the falling Creatures; and one Scale has even got into its Eye, and it cannot get her out. It opens its Mouth to cry for Help; but if any Sound comes out of him, alas he is drowned by the raging of the Storm. And now a Tomcat has got one of the Fishes and she will surely escape with him. No, she bites off a Fin, she holds her in her Mouth—will she swallow her? No, the Fishwife's brave Mother-dog deserts his Puppies and rescues the Fin—which he eats, himself, as his Reward. O, horror, the Lightning has struck the Fish-basket; he sets him on Fire; see the Flame, how she licks the doomed Utensil with her red and angry Tongue; now she attacks the helpless Fishwife's Foot—she burns him up, all but the big Toe, and even she is partly consumed; and still she spreads, still she waves her fiery Tongues; she attacks the Fishwife's Leg and destroys it; she attacks its Hand and destroys her also; she attacks the Fishwife's Leg and destroys her also; she attacks its Body and consumes him; she wreathes herself about its Heart and it is consumed; next about its Breast, and in a Moment she is a Cinder; now she reaches its Neck—he goes; now its Chin—it goes; now its Nose—she goes. In another Moment, except Help come, the Fishwife will be no more. Time presses—is there none to succor and save? Yes! Joy, joy, with flying Feet

¹⁸ I capitalize the nouns, in the German (and ancient English) fashion.

the she-Englishwoman comes! But alas, the generous she-Female is too late: where now is the fated Fishwife? It has ceased from its Sufferings, it has gone to a better Land; all that is left of it for its loved Ones to lament over, is this poor smoldering Ash-heap. Ah, woeful, woeful Ash-heap! Let us take him up tenderly, reverently, upon the lowly Shovel, and bear him to his long Rest, with the Prayer that when he rises again it will be a Realm where he will have one good square responsible Sex, and have it all to himself, instead of having a mangy lot of assorted Sexes scattered all over him in Spots.



There, now, the reader can see for himself that this pronoun business is a very awkward thing for the unaccustomed tongue. I suppose that in all languages the similarities of look and sound between words which have no similarity in meaning are a fruitful source of perplexity to the foreigner. It is so in our tongue, and it is notably the case in the German. Now there is that troublesome word *vermählt*: to me it has so close a resemblance—either real or fancied—to three or four other words, that I never know whether it means despised, painted, suspected, or married; until I look in the dictionary, and then I find it means the latter. There are lots of such words and they are a great torment. To increase the difficulty there are words which seem to resemble each other, and yet do not; but they make just as much trouble as if they did. For instance, there is the word *vermiethen* (to let, to lease, to hire); and the word *verheirathen* (another way of saying to marry). I heard of an Englishman who knocked at a man's door in Heidelberg and proposed, in the best German he could command, to “*verheirathen*” that house. Then there are some words which mean one thing when you emphasize the first syllable, but mean something very different if you throw the emphasis on the last syllable. For instance, there is a word which means a runaway, or the act of glancing through a book, according to the placing of the emphasis; and another word which signifies to associate with a man, or to avoid him, according to where

you put the emphasis—and you can generally depend on putting it in the wrong place and getting into trouble.

There are some exceedingly useful words in this language. *Schlag*, for example; and *Zug*. There are three-quarters of a column of *Schlags* in the dictionary, and a column and a half of *Zugs*. The word *Schlag* means Blow, Stroke, Dash, Hit, Shock, Clap, Slap, Time, Bar, Coin, Stamp, Kind, Sort, Manner, Way, Apoplexy, Wood-cutting, Enclosure, Field, Forest-clearing. This is its simple and exact meaning—that is to say, its restricted, its fettered meaning; but there are ways by which you can set it free, so that it can soar away, as on the wings of the morning, and never be at rest. You can hang any word you please to its tail, and make it mean anything you want to. You can begin with *Schlag-ader*, which means artery, and you can hang on the whole dictionary, word by word, clear through the alphabet to *Schlag-wasser*, which means bilge-water—and including *Schlag-mutter*, which means mother-in-law.

Just the same with *Zug*. Strictly speaking, *Zug* means Pull, Tug, Draught, Procession, March, Progress, Flight, Direction, Expedition, Train, Caravan, Passage, Stroke, Touch, Line, Flourish, Trait of Character, Feature, Lineament, Chess-move, Organ-stop, Team, Whiff, Bias, Drawer, Propensity, Inhalation, Disposition: but that thing which it does not mean—when all its legitimate pennants have been hung on, has not been discovered yet.

One cannot overestimate the usefulness of *Schlag* and *Zug*. Armed just with these two, and the word *also*, what cannot the foreigner on German soil accomplish? The German word *also* is the equivalent of the English phrase “You know,” and does not mean anything at all—in talk, though it sometimes does in print. Every time a German opens his mouth an *also* falls out; and every time he shuts it he bites one in two that was trying to get out.

Now, the foreigner, equipped with these three noble words, is master of the situation. Let him talk right along, fearlessly; let him pour his indifferent German forth, and when he lacks for a word, let him heave a *Schlag* into the vacuum; all the chances are that it fits it like a plug, but if it doesn't let him promptly heave a *Zug* after it; the two together can hardly fail to bung the hole; but if, by a miracle, they should fail, let him simply say *also!* and this will give him a moment's chance to think of the needful word. In Germany, when you load your conversational gun it is always best to throw in a *Schlag* or two and a *Zug* or two, because it doesn't make any difference how much the rest of the charge may scatter, you are bound to bag something with them. Then you blandly say also, and load up again. Nothing gives such an air of grace and elegance and unconstraint to a German or an English conversation as to scatter it full of "Alsos" or "You knows."

In my note-book I find this entry:

July 1.—In the hospital yesterday, a word of thirteen syllables was successfully removed from a patient—a North German from near Hamburg; but as most unfortunately the surgeons had opened him in the wrong place, under the impression that he contained a panorama, he died. The sad event has cast a gloom over the whole community.

That paragraph furnishes a text for a few remarks about one of the most curious and notable features of my subject—the length of German words. Some German words are so long that they have a perspective. Observe these examples:

Freundschaftsbezeugungen.
Dilettantenaufdringlichkeiten.
Stadtverordnetenversammlungen.

These things are not words, they are alphabetical processions. And they are not rare; one can open a German newspaper at

any time and see them marching majestically across the page—and if he has any imagination he can see the banners and hear the music, too. They impart a martial thrill to the meekest subject. I take a great interest in these curiosities. Whenever I come across a good one, I stuff it and put it in my museum. In this way I have made quite a valuable collection. When I get duplicates, I exchange with other collectors, and thus increase the variety of my stock. Here are some specimens which I lately bought at an auction sale of the effects of a bankrupt bric-a-brac hunter:

Generalstaatsverordnetenversammlungen.
Alterthumswissenschaften.
Kinderbewahrungsanstalten.
Unabhaengigkeitserklaerungen.
Wiedererstellungbestrebungen.
Waffenstillstandsunterhandlungen.

Of course when one of these grand mountain ranges goes stretching across the printed page, it adorns and ennobles that literary landscape—but at the same time it is a great distress to the new student, for it blocks up his way; he cannot crawl under it, or climb over it, or tunnel through it. So he resorts to the dictionary for help, but there is no help there. The dictionary must draw the line somewhere—so it leaves this sort of words out. And it is right, because these long things are hardly legitimate words, but are rather combinations of words, and the inventor of them ought to have been killed. They are compound words with the hyphens left out. The various words used in building them are in the dictionary, but in a very scattered condition; so you can hunt the materials out, one by one, and get at the meaning at last, but it is a tedious and harassing business. I have tried this process upon some of the above examples. "*Freundschaftsbezeugungen*" seems to be "Friendship demonstrations," which is only a foolish and clumsy way of saying "demonstrations of friendship." "*Unabhaengigkeitserklaerungen*" seems to be

“Independencedeclarations,” which is no improvement upon “Declarations of Independence,” so far as I can see.

“*Generalstaatsverordnetenversammlungen*” seems to be “General-statesrepresentativesmeetings,” as nearly as I can get at it—a mere rhythmical, gushy euphuism for “meetings of the legislature,” I judge. We used to have a good deal of this sort of crime in our literature, but it has gone out now. We used to speak of a things as a “never-to-be-forgotten” circumstance, instead of cramping it into the simple and sufficient word “memorable” and then going calmly about our business as if nothing had happened. In those days we were not content to embalm the thing and bury it decently, we wanted to build a monument over it.

But in our newspapers the compounding-disease lingers a little to the present day, but with the hyphens left out, in the German fashion. This is the shape it takes: instead of saying “Mr. Simmons, clerk of the county and district courts, was in town yesterday,” the new form put it thus: “Clerk of the County and District Courts Simmons was in town yesterday.” This saves neither time nor ink, and has an awkward sound besides. One often sees a remark like this in our papers: “Mrs. Assistant District Attorney Johnson returned to her city residence yesterday for the season.” That is a case of really unjustifiable compounding; because it not only saves no time or trouble, but confers a title on Mrs. Johnson which she has no right to. But these little instances are trifles indeed, contrasted with the ponderous and dismal German system of piling jumbled compounds together. I wish to submit the following local item, from a Mannheim journal, by way of illustration:

“In the daybeforeyesterdayshortlyaftereleveno’clock Night, the inthistownstandingtavern called ‘The Wagoner’ was downburnt. When the fire to the onthedownburninghouseresting Stork’s Nest reached, flew the parent Storks away. But when the bytheraging, firesurrounded Nest itself caught Fire,

straightway plunged the quickreturning Mother-stork into the Flames and died, her Wings over her young ones outspread.” Even the cumbersome German construction is not able to take the pathos out of that picture—indeed, it somehow seems to strengthen it. This item is dated away back yonder months ago. I could have used it sooner, but I was waiting to hear from the Father-stork. I am still waiting.

“*Also!*” If I had not shown that the German is a difficult language, I have at least intended to do so. I have heard of an American student who was asked how he was getting along with his German, and who answered promptly: “I am not getting along at all. I have worked at it hard for three level months, and all I have got to show for it is one solitary German phrase—‘*Zwei Glas*’” (two glasses of beer). He paused for a moment, reflectively; then added with feeling: “But I’ve got that solid!”

And if I have not also shown that German is a harassing and infuriating study, my execution has been at fault, and not my intent. I heard lately of a worn and sorely tried American student who used to fly to a certain German word for relief when he could bear up under his aggravations no longer—the only word whose sound was sweet and precious to his ear and healing to his lacerated spirit. This was the word *Damit*. It was only the sound that helped him, not the meaning;¹⁹ and so, at last, when he learned that the emphasis was not on the first syllable, his only stay and support was gone, and he faded away and died.

I think that a description of any loud, stirring, tumultuous episode must be tamer in German than in English. Our descriptive words of this character have such a deep, strong, resonant sound, while their German equivalents do seem so thin and mild and energyless. Boom, burst, crash, roar, storm,

¹⁹ It merely means, in its general sense, “herewith.”

bellow, blow, thunder, explosion; howl, cry, shout, yell, groan; battle, hell. These are magnificent words; they have a force and magnitude of sound befitting the things which they describe. But their German equivalents would be ever so nice to sing the children to sleep with, or else my awe-inspiring ears were made for display and not for superior usefulness in analyzing sounds. Would any man want to die in a battle which was called by so tame a term as a *Schlacht*? Or would not a consumptive feel too much bundled up, who was about to go out, in a shirt-collar and a seal-ring, into a storm which the bird-song word *Gewitter* was employed to describe? And observe the strongest of the several German equivalents for explosion—*Ausbruch*. Our word *Toothbrush* is more powerful than that. It seems to me that the Germans could do worse than import it into their language to describe particularly tremendous explosions with. The German word for hell—*Hölle*—sounds more like helly than anything else; therefore, how necessary chipper, frivolous, and unimpressive it is. If a man were told in German to go there, could he really rise to the dignity of feeling insulted?

Having pointed out, in detail, the several vices of this language, I now come to the brief and pleasant task of pointing out its virtues. The capitalizing of the nouns I have already mentioned. But far before this virtue stands another—that of spelling a word according to the sound of it. After one short lesson in the alphabet, the student can tell how any German word is pronounced without having to ask; whereas in our language if a student should inquire of us, “What does B, O, W, spell?” we should be obliged to reply, “Nobody can tell what it spells when you set it off by itself; you can only tell by referring to the context and finding out what it signifies—whether it is a thing to shoot arrows with, or a nod of one’s head, or the forward end of a boat.”

There are some German words which are singularly and powerfully effective. For instance, those which describe lowly,

peaceful, and affectionate home life; those which deal with love, in any and all forms, from mere kindly feeling and honest good will toward the passing stranger, clear up to courtship; those which deal with outdoor Nature, in its softest and loveliest aspects—with meadows and forests, and birds and flowers, the fragrance and sunshine of summer, and the moonlight of peaceful winter nights; in a word, those which deal with any and all forms of rest, repose, and peace; those also which deal with the creatures and marvels of fairyland; and lastly and chiefly, in those words which express pathos, is the language surpassingly rich and affective. There are German songs which can make a stranger to the language cry. That shows that the sound of the words is correct—it interprets the meanings with truth and with exactness; and so the ear is informed, and through the ear, the heart.

The Germans do not seem to be afraid to repeat a word when it is the right one. they repeat it several times, if they choose. That is wise. But in English, when we have used a word a couple of times in a paragraph, we imagine we are growing tautological, and so we are weak enough to exchange it for some other word which only approximates exactness, to escape what we wrongly fancy is a greater blemish. Repetition may be bad, but surely inexactness is worse.



There are people in the world who will take a great deal of trouble to point out the faults in a religion or a language, and then go blandly about their business without suggesting any remedy. I am not that kind of person. I have shown that the German language needs reforming. Very well, I am ready to reform it. At least I am ready to make the proper suggestions. Such a course as this might be immodest in another; but I have devoted upward of nine full weeks, first and last, to a careful and critical study of this tongue, and thus have acquired a confidence in my ability to reform it which no mere superficial culture could have conferred upon me.

In the first place, I would leave out the Dative case. It confuses the plurals; and, besides, nobody ever knows when he is in the Dative case, except he discover it by accident—and then he does not know when or where it was that he got into it, or how long he has been in it, or how he is going to get out of it again. The Dative case is but an ornamental folly—it is better to discard it.

In the next place, I would move the Verb further up to the front. You may load up with ever so good a Verb, but I notice that you never really bring down a subject with it at the present German range—you only cripple it. So I insist that this important part of speech should be brought forward to a position where it may be easily seen with the naked eye.

Thirdly, I would import some strong words from the English tongue—to swear with, and also to use in describing all sorts of vigorous things in a vigorous ways.²⁰

Fourthly, I would reorganize the sexes, and distribute them accordingly to the will of the creator. This as a tribute of respect, if nothing else.

Fifthly, I would do away with those great long compounded words; or require the speaker to deliver them in sections, with intermissions for refreshments. To wholly do away with them would be best, for ideas are more easily received and digested

²⁰ “*Verdammt*” and its variations and enlargements, are words which have plenty of meaning, but the sounds are so mild and ineffectual that German ladies can use them without sin. German ladies who could not be induced to commit a sin by any persuasion or compulsion, promptly rip out one of these harmless little words when they tear their dresses or don’t like the soup. It sounds about as wicked as our “My gracious.” German ladies are constantly saying, “*Ach! Gott!*” “*Mein Gott!*” “*Gott in Himmel!*” “*Herr Gott!*” “*Der Herr Jesus!*” etc. They think our ladies have the same custom, perhaps; for I once heard a gentle and lovely old German lady say to a sweet young American girl: “The two languages are so alike—how pleasant that is; we say ‘*Ach! Gott!*’ you say ‘*Goddamn.*’”

when they come one at a time than when they come in bulk. Intellectual food is like any other; it is pleasanter and more beneficial to take it with a spoon than with a shovel.

Sixthly, I would require a speaker to stop when he is done, and not hang a string of those useless “*haben sind gewesen gehabt haben geworden seins*” to the end of his oration. This sort of gewgaws undignify a speech, instead of adding a grace. They are, therefore, an offense, and should be discarded.

Seventhly, I would discard the Parenthesis. Also the re-parenthesis, the re-re-parenthesis, and the re-re-re-re-re-re-parentheses, and likewise the final wide-reaching all-inclosing king-parenthesis. I would require every individual, be he high or low, to unfold a plain straightforward tale, or else coil it and sit on it and hold his peace. Infractions of this law should be punishable with death.

And eighthly, and last, I would retain *Zug* and *Schlag*, with their pendants, and discard the rest of the vocabulary. This would simplify the language.

I have now named what I regard as the most necessary and important changes. These are perhaps all I could be expected to name for nothing; but there are other suggestions which I can and will make in case my proposed application shall result in my being formally employed by the government in the work of reforming the language.

My philological studies have satisfied me that a gifted person ought to learn English (barring spelling and pronouncing) in thirty hours, French in thirty days, and German in thirty years. It seems manifest, then, that the latter tongue ought to be trimmed down and repaired. If it is to remain as it is, it ought to be gently and reverently set aside among the dead languages, for only the dead have time to learn it.

Is He Dead? Mark Twain as a Character

Peter J. Heck

When I got the idea of writing a series of mysteries with Mark Twain as detective, I was working at Ace Books. The idea grew out of a “blue sky” meeting where Leslie Gelbman, then editor in chief of Berkley, asked the editorial staff to “come up with ideas for mystery series we can find somebody to write.” I thought that sounded like more fun than reading submissions, so I went back to my office and gave it a try.

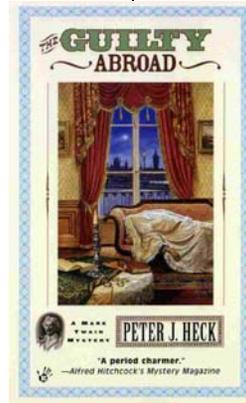
At that point, in the early 1990s, historical mysteries were just beginning to be very popular: Ellis Peters’ “Brother Cadfael” series, and Elizabeth Peters’ “Amelia Peabody” books. I looked at some of the popular ones and tried to figure out what made them work. The idea of Twain just jumped out at me. I knew it was a good one when I came up with six titles in fifteen minutes—all parodies of real Twain titles. *Death on the Mississippi* would obviously lead off the series. It was followed by *A Connecticut Yankee in Criminal Court*, *The Prince and the Prosecutor*, *The Guilty Abroad*, *The Mysterious Strangler*, and *Tom’s Lawyer*.

I already knew the hard part was going to be finding somebody who could do the idea justice. I looked at a couple of possibilities for authors who might do a good job with the concept. But I finally decided that the idea was too much fun to give anybody else. So I pondered the idea until I left Ace; then, with a little prodding from my wife, I decided to give it a shot. I had worked up rough outlines of the first three books, and I had a pretty good idea what kind of mystery I wanted to write.

Perhaps more importantly, I knew Twain’s work the way you can only know someone you’ve been reading practically your

whole life. I’d grown up in a home with a complete set of the 1910 edition of his works; it was my grandfather’s. I’d started reading it almost as soon as I’d figured out this was the same guy who’d written “The Celebrated Jumping Frog” and “A Genuine Mexican Plug,” which we read somewhere in elementary school. By the time I was 16 or so, I’d read it all—even things like *A Personal Narrative of Joan of Arc*, which I didn’t know was supposed to be a disappointment. I liked it—I liked everything I read by him.

I’d kept reading Twain, too. Especially *Huckleberry Finn*, which I still reread every few years. So when I came up with the idea of a series of mysteries with Twain as the detective, I had no problem coming up with ideas based on his life and works, including the titles and brief plot ideas for several books.



But I knew I couldn't tell a story through Twain’s eyes and in his voice; that that would be a tough job for a far more experienced writer than I was. The only way to deal with him would be to filter him through an observer, preferably one who saw him fresh. And so I invented my “Watson,” Wentworth Cabot, who comes straight out of Yale College to sign on as Mark Twain's travelling secretary. It’s a time-honored approach to have a sidekick or “Boswell” who narrates the doings of the brilliant detective. Holmes and Watson, Wolfe and Archie—there was plenty of precedent for Cabot. And I must admit, in some ways he’s a bit like me—at least, at his age.

Cabot is a lawyer's son, but he has dreams of becoming a writer and of travelling around the world. And he was on the football team at Yale—at the time, a national powerhouse—and so is in excellent physical condition. Like his employer, he has an ability to get along with all sorts of people, whatever their social origin. He was bright enough to get through Yale, which

indicates he had at least something between the ears; but in many ways he is a true innocent, at least as the series begins.

I had decided I wanted to write a “great detective” story, on the model of Sherlock Holmes or Nero Wolfe, who solve mysteries by intellect rather than beating people up until they get the answers. Twain had several characteristics that made him a good candidate for that kind of detective work. His background as a newspaper reporter gave him a good built-in lie detector, and the instinct to prod behind the surface of the accepted truths. He was a world traveler, and could associate with all kinds and conditions of people without any strain. And he was the last person to get into a physical confrontation—his idea of exercise was smoking a good cigar.

To use Twain as my protagonist was one thing; to portray him convincingly was another question entirely. It would be presumptuous to try to show him from the “inside;” I’m not so foolish to think I can write like the man who’s been called the greatest American novelist by better writers than I am. Even so, I did find a way to get the authentic Mark Twain flavor into my character, even as portrayed through the eyes of Cabot. If you want Twain, you go to the source. Steal from the best, they say. And there was no better Mark Twain than the man himself. For my first book, *Death on the Mississippi*, I decided to take some of his own stories and retell them in my own words—but with as good an approximation of his voice as I could manage.

Here’s one example: the starting point of my plot builds on a story he’d told in *Life on the Mississippi*. It was a story of

hidden treasure, murder, and revenge Twain claimed to have heard before taking the trip down the River that is the center of his book. He ends up turning the “treasure hunt” into an anticlimax—but I decided to pretend that he deliberately concealed the real ending. So very early in the novel, I have him retell that story—this time with the twist that it really is true, and that he is planning to recover the treasure he was prevented from finding in his own book. I use the same incidents, reusing authentic Twain material but converting it to my own purposes: creating the “McGuffin” for a mystery plot.



The reconstructed home of Tom Blankenship, the model for Huckleberry Finn.

I did similar adaptations in other books in the series. Twain is a perpetual source of good stories, and (as I’ve noticed from various real-life people with a reputation as wits) he had no compunction about reusing his best material—he certainly did so in his stage appearances. I’ll bet he did it over the dinner table, or to pass the time on a long train ride or sea voyage, as well. And in Cabot, he had a perfect audience—someone who didn’t know the old stories. So I have him play a trick he played on a minister, pretending to accuse him of plagiarism, on a fictional minister in

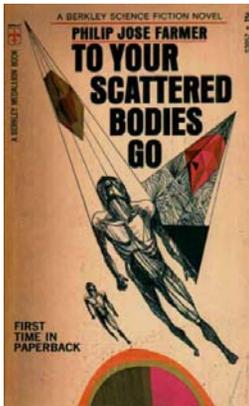
The Prince and the Prosecutor. The old jokes are still fun, even if the reader’s already heard them—and they’re genuine Twain.

I also made it a point to reread the book after which my current opus was named, in part to get material for plot—I always tried to work some aspect of the “original” into my book, such as a butler named Arthur in *A Connecticut Yankee in Criminal Court*. That gave me a refresher in Twain’s voice every time I was gearing up to portray him. It also gave my books a subtler resonance with Twain’s work—in some cases, probably too

subtle for anyone but a Twain scholar to spot, but perhaps subliminally there for a larger class of readers.

Ultimately, though I did have to fall back on my own ear—developed in part by my reading of Twain, and in part by growing up in a border state where I was exposed to a variety of different accents. My awareness of Missouri accents was pretty much confined to having had a college roommate from that state, and one visit to St. Louis and Hannibal while in grad school. But I did the best I could with that experience, and with my general sense of American speech patterns, and in a pinch, I could always have Cabot summarize the conversation in his somewhat less colorful prose.

To respond to a question I've occasionally been asked: I did consciously decide not to look again at some of the other fictional portrayals of Twain—notably Phil Farmer's in the "Riverworld" series. I liked them when I read them, but I wanted to do it my own way. It's probably impossible totally to wipe out an impression that strong, but to the extent I could avoid it, I tried to. One reviewer said I was trying too hard to sound like Twain in my first novel, but that I adopted a more "pedestrian" style for the second and that it worked better. I wasn't especially conscious of doing that; possibly I was just more comfortable writing fiction by then and relaxed a little bit.



There were eventually six Mark Twain mysteries, published by Berkley Prime Crime between 1995 and 2001. People tell me they like the books, and I very much enjoyed doing the series. I've got ideas for what happens next—I'd like to send Twain back to California and Hawaii, neither of which he got to revisit after he became a famous author back East. One of these days, I hope to sit down and give those stories a shot.

In religion and politics people's beliefs and convictions are in almost every case gotten at second-hand, and without examination, from authorities who have not themselves examined the questions at issue but have taken them at second-hand from other non-examiners, whose opinions about them were not worth a brass farthing.

Autobiography of Mark Twain

The Widow's Protest

Mark Twain

One of the saddest things that ever came under my notice (said the banker's clerk) was there in Corning during the war. Dan Murphy enlisted as a private, and fought very bravely. The boys all liked him, and when a wound by and by weakened him down till carrying a musket was too heavy work for him, they clubbed together and fixed him up as a sutler. He made money then, and sent it always to his wife to bank for him. She was a washer and ironer, and knew enough by hard experience to keep money when she got it. She didn't waste a penny.

On the contrary, she began to get miserly as her bank-account grew. She grieved to part with a cent, poor creature, for twice in her hard-working life she had known what it was to be hungry, cold, friendless, sick, and without a dollar in the world, and she had a haunting dread of suffering so again. Well, at last Dan died; and the boys, in testimony of their esteem and respect for him, telegraphed to Mrs. Murphy to know if she would like to have him embalmed and sent home; when you know the usual custom was to dump a poor devil like him into a shallow hole, and then inform his friends what had become of him. Mrs. Murphy jumped to the conclusion that it would only cost two or three dollars to embalm her dead husband, and so she telegraphed "Yes." It was at the "wake" that the bill for embalming arrived and was presented to the widow.

She uttered a wild, sad wail that pierced every heart, and said, "Sivinty-foive dollars for stooffin' Dan, blister their souls! Did thim divils suppose I was goin' to stairt a Museim, that I'd be dalin' in such expinsive curiassities !"

The banker's clerk said there was not a dry eye in the house.

A Day in Hannibal, MO²¹

Steven H Silver

The town of Hannibal suffers from a split personality. It knows that it is Hannibal, Missouri, with a population of 17,600 located on the western banks of the Mississippi, but at the same time, it is under the misconception that it is also the nineteenth-century village of St. Petersburg, Missouri, which only existed for a brief period in the imagination of Samuel Longhorne Clemens, who was occasionally under the misconception that he was Mark Twain, and in the books Clemens wrote about Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn.²²

I suppose that is isn't too difficult to understand this case of mistaken identity, for after listening to me read *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and spending a day in the village of Hannibal, my older daughter (11) also suffered from a difficulty in separating fact from fiction. As noted, the town plays to this. Located at the foot of Cardiff Hill, which is included in the novel *Tom Sawyer* as the site of the Widow Douglas's house, there is a sign, in the style of an historical marker, noting the "location" of the jail in which Muff Potter sat while awaiting trial in the novel. And while the house inhabited by the Clemens family is identified as "Mark Twain's boyhood home," the house across the street where Clemens's childhood sweetheart Laura Hawkins lived is identified as "Becky Thatcher's House" and the rebuilt home of Tom Blankenship is named the "Huckleberry Finn House."

And the town does this with very good reason. There is a thriving tourism business there based on the town's most

²¹ Originally published in *The Drink Tank*

²² Four published volumes in all, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), *Tom Sawyer Abroad* (1894), and *Tom Sawyer, Detective* (1896).

famous resident.²³ Had it not been for Mark Twain's residence in the village, and, perhaps, more importantly his immortalizing the village as the fictitious town of St. Petersburg, it is quite possible that in the century and a half since he lived there, Hannibal would have dried up and disappeared as so many other Mississippi river towns.

Twain's appearance wasn't always enough to save a town. Twain was born in the town of Florida, Missouri, of which he wrote in his autobiography

The home was made in the wee village of Florida, in Monroe County, and I was born there in 1835. The village contained a hundred people and I increased the population by 1 per cent. It is more than many of the best men in history could have done for a town. It may not be modest in me to refer to this, but it is true. There is no record of a person doing as much—not even Shakespeare. But I did it for Florida, and it shows that I could have done it for any place—even London, I suppose.²⁴

Granted that Florida was not a river town, but it was the birthplace of one of the foremost American men of letters. A man about whom Ernest Hemingway claimed that all American literature began with one of his books.²⁵ However, when planning our trip, I looked into the prospect of visiting Florida, for it is not too far from Hannibal, at least, not when one has the modern convenience of a car. What I learned was that while Twain may have increased the population by one percent at the time of his birth, were he to be born now in Florida, he

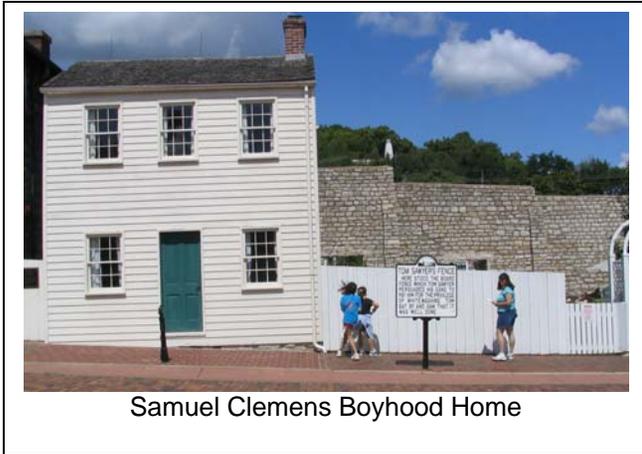
²³ Another famous person from Hannibal is Molly Brown, who survived the sinking of the R.S.S. Titanic, among other ship sinkings and became known as "The Unsinkable Molly Brown," but I imagine most people don't realize that she was from Hannibal.

²⁴ Twain, Mark and Charles Neider, editor. *The Autobiography of Mark Twain*. Harper & Row, 1959, p.1.

²⁵ Hemingway, Ernest. *The Green Hills of Africa*, Scribner's, 1935.

would increase its population by 12 ½ percent, for currently, Florida has a population of a mere eight individuals, ranging in age from 18 to 65.

The Clemens family moved to Hannibal in 1839, when the town was twenty years old. Founded with a population of thirty, by the time John Clemens relocated his family there, it had grown to a population of nearly 1,000 individuals. The Clemens family lived in several different houses in Hannibal, although the one in which they lived the longest was located at 206-208 Hill Street. The house, which was nearly demolished in 1911, has been thoroughly restored and set up as a museum to Clemens's boyhood. It is only one of several properties maintained on that street that allow the visitor to walk in his footsteps.



Samuel Clemens Boyhood Home

In preparation for the trip, I began reading *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* to my daughters (and wife), it being one of Twain's two novels which most fully depicts antebellum Hannibal.²⁶ When we pulled into a parking space on Broadway,

we were two short chapters from the end of the book. Nevertheless, we put the book down and walked along the nearly deserted early-Saturday morning streets of Hannibal.

²⁶ The other being *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, set in the fictitious town of Dawson's Landing. Hannibal tends to portray itself based more on the more famous *Tom Sawyer*, than *Pudd'nhead Wilson*.

Main Street in Hannibal runs parallel to the Mississippi River, about two blocks in from the river. The land between Main Street and the River is taken up by a single row of buildings, parking lots, a railroad track, and a small harbor. The stores that front Main Street tend to be of the touristy variety...gift shops, candy stores, restaurants, small live theatres, and the Mark Twain Museum, which is not the same as the Mark Twain Interpretive Center, although both are included in the same cost of admission.

Our plan was to head over to the interpretive center to begin the day, but after a ninety minute drive, my younger daughter (9) announced the need to find a bathroom. The only person on the street was a gentleman currying a horse rigged to pull a trolley. We asked for directions and he told us to hop onto the trolley. As he ferried us to the nearest public bathroom, he introduced himself as Glenn Yoder, and noted that his horse's name was Barney. My daughters sat in the front seat with him and he told them a little bit about Hannibal.

After using the facilities, he handed my daughters cobs of corn and allowed them to feed Barney before giving us a ride back over to the intersection of Main and Hill Streets. Hill Street is a walking street for about a block and a half, meaning that there is no traffic on the street that separates Samuel Clemens' Boyhood Home from the "Becky Thatcher House" and the building in which John Clemens served as Justice of the Peace. Before going to see them, though, we decided to walk to the end of Main Street, one block north, to the base of Cardiff Hill²⁷, where there is a statue of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn designed by Frederick Hibbard. In an interesting move, the statue is not easily accessible, which means that while it can be seen and pictures of it can be taken, posing with the statue is pretty much an impossibility.

²⁷ Featured in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. The Widow Douglas and the Welshman both lived on Cardiff Hill.

While Elaine took pictures of the statue, I noticed a small historical marker one block toward the river, in what looked like a vacant lot. It turns out that it marked the site that would have been the jail in which Muff Potter was kept following the murder of Doc Robinson. Reading the sign would give the tourist the impression that for all the world the jail, Muff Potter, and Doc Robinson had actually lived in the village rather than simply in the mind of one of its residents.

The Mark Twain Interpretive Center is located on a plot of land just north of the Clemens house. The center is comprised of essentially two rooms, the first, an “L”-shaped room, contains information about Twain’s life and family followed by a section on his writing career, including several first editions. Interestingly, although I own several first edition Twains, there was only one volume of overlap between my collection and what was on display. The second room contained several diorama and images from Twain’s writing.

Leaving the interpretive center, which was well done, although a little sparser than I would have liked, although probably the right amount of information for the girls, we walked to the cobbled walking street in front of the Clemens house. The girls wanted to see the Tom Sawyer and Becky Thatcher impersonators who were doing a living history spiel in front of Clemens’ house.

I left them to that and wandered passed the house that belonged to “Becky Thatcher,” actually Laura Hawkins. When I had last been to Hannibal with my parents when I was around my daughter’s age, this building was a bookstore specializing in all things Twain. It was currently in its third year of restoration with unreliable signs providing a date that the restoration was expected to be finished. Unreliable since the date was within a



few months and it was very clear that the work could not be done in the remaining time.

Just beyond the “Thatcher” house lay a small house with a “For Sale” sign in front of it. The signs on the house also claim that it was the model for the Haunted House on Hill Street where Tom and Huck first heard of Injun Joe’s plot to murder the Widow Douglas. Although the small museum that used to operate out of the house was closed, looking through the window you could still see a life size wax figure of Injun Joe, which surprised my daughters when they looked in.

We circled the block to see Tom Blankenship’s house. The original house had been torn down in the 1800s, but a new house was erected in the same spot. Woodson Blankenship, Tom’s father, like Huck Finn’s, was the town drunk and had eight children. The house was tiny, two small rooms above a cellar. Twain also used Tom’s oldest brother, Benson Blankenship in adding the personality trait that allowed Huck Finn to shelter the runaway Jim in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. The real Ben Blankenship also sheltered a runaway slave despite a fifty dollar reward for turning him in.

The Blankenship family left Hannibal around 1950, about three years before Twain left the town. Tom Blankenship returned to Hannibal in the later 50s and was arrested for theft in 1858 and 1861. According to Clifton Johnson, Tom Blankenship was sent away to the state penitentiary. By 1889, Twain had heard that Tom had died of cholera and in the 1890s, one of Blankenship’s sisters claimed that both Tom and Ben were dead. However, in 1902 when Clemens visited Hannibal, Elizabeth Blankenship, another sister, informed him that Tom was a justice of the peace in Montana.

The Clemenses lived in a two story clapboard house fronting Hill Street. After the Clemenses moved out of the house in the 1850s, it was rented to a series of tenants for brief periods of time and also was used as a restaurant. By 1911, it was threatened with demolition, however George A. Mahan, who was born in Hannibal in 1850, purchased the house and began work restoring it as much as possible to its original condition. When Clemens had visited Hannibal in 1902, he posed for a picture in front of the house and commented that each time he returned, his house seemed to grow smaller. A site study performed in 1984 when the house was closed for renovations discovered that this was not just a product of Clemens's imagination, but during the 1880s, part of the house had been torn down. Using old pictures, the house was restored to the size Clemens remembered it during the 1990s.

Restored to the size, but not the condition. Various holes have been cut into the walls of the house and the rooms inside to ease the flow of traffic through the building. The rooms had all been walled off with thick plexiglass and decorated in the style they would have been in the late 1840s when the Clemenses lived there, inaccessible to the viewing public, although a couple of weeks after we were there, Neal Moore, who was traveling down the Mississippi, was permitted to sleep in Clemens's bedroom.²⁸ Moore slept on a cornhusk mattress and left the museum a check for \$500. He is only the second person to sleep in the house since Mahan donated it to the city of Hannibal in 1912, the other being George Seybolt, who selected Hannibal as the site of a plant for General Mills in the 1960s.

The house is set up so you enter through the front door and walk through to the back of the house, exiting into a small fenced in back yard before going up a set of external stairs to

²⁸ Moore, Neal. "Twilight with Twain" <http://www.ireport.com/docs/DOC-332709>

the second floor and walking through to the front of the house before exiting through the building next door, which, of course houses a gift shop.

When Norman Rockwell was commissioned by Heritage Press to paint illustrations for *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in the 1930s, he visited the home after making his preliminary sketches and altered them in order to more accurately portray the home in which Clemens grew up. A fence was also added to the front of the house, not nearly as tall or as long as the one described in the second chapter of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. At one time, there were paintbrushes to allow visitors to take pictures pretending to paint the fence, but they had a tendency to be stolen and are no longer available. As part of a fundraising drive for the 100th anniversary of Clemens's death, beginning in September 2009, visitors were allowed to make a donation and sign or leave a handprint on the fence.



Samuel Clemens's father, John Marshall Clemens, was an interesting man. It would not be correct to call him a ne'er-do-well, and he certainly wasn't in the same category as Woodson Blankenship, however John always seemed to be eluded by success, at least measured financially. John's father died when he was 4 years old and his mother married Simon Hancock when he was 8. John was licensed to practice law at the age of 21 and immediately took what was left of his inheritance and reimbursed his stepfather for the cost incurred in raising him.

Marrying Jane Lampton, he settled first in Tennessee and later in Missouri, never quite managing to find the wealth he thought he would. While in Tennessee, John acquired 70,000 acres of land for less than \$500, which Sam Clemens would later call the "curse," saying it meant the poor family was prospectively rich and they wouldn't sell the land even when it became an albatross around their necks. In the 1860s, Orion Clemens, Sam's older brother, was offered \$200,000 for the land but declined the offer. Eventually, it was parceled out with the last bit sold in 1887. Mark Twain used the story of the Tennessee Land as background for his first novel, *The Gilded Age*.²⁹

Although John Clemens was never wealthy or successful, his law background proved useful and he often would serve as a justice of the peace. In 1846, he began a campaign for circuit court clerk and was considered a shoo-in, but while campaigning, he contracted pneumonia and died on March 24, 1847. One of his law offices is located directly across Hill Street from the home the family lived in.

We had planned to take a riverboat cruise, but decided against it. The cost was higher than we wanted to spend and would have eaten up a large chunk of time. Instead we found a small

²⁹ Twain, Mark & Charles Dudley Warner. *The Gilded Age*. American Publishing Co., 1873.

tea shop on Main Street, the Abby Rose Tea and Lunch Room, and ate there. The restaurant seemed to be one of the few places in downtown Hannibal which did not have a tie-in to Mark Twain, but it also had a distinct Victorian feel to it in architecture, décor, and menu.

Following lunch, we went to the Mark Twain Museum, located just down the street. While the Interpretive Center mostly featured Samuel Clemens's life, the Museum focused on his works. The first floor contained five sections, each one focusing on one of his books: *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, *Roughing It*, *Innocents Abroad*, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. These exhibits surrounded a display that contained several editions of Twain's books as well as one of his writing desks.

The dioramas were semi-interactive, mostly featuring stagnant displays, but usually with one thing that would invite viewers to interact, whether the stagecoach in the *Roughing It* section, the raft showing scenes from *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*,³⁰ or the mock cave to depict *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.



Up a half flight was a recreation of a wheelhouse for a Mississippi paddlewheel, similar to the kind Samuel Clemens piloted before he traveled out west with his brother. Facing the Mississippi River only a block away, standing in the wheelhouse gave one the feel of actually being on the river.

The most interesting part of the museum was on the third floor. This included several of the original paintings Norman

³⁰ The 1939 version, directed by Richard Thorpe and starring Mickey Rooney, Rex Ingram, Walter Connolly, and William Frawley.

Rockwell had painted, but even more interesting, the display included the preliminary sketches, which showed the changes he made after visiting Hannibal. This level of the museum also looked more deeply into Clemens's life, displaying the Oxford doctoral gowns he wore when he received an honorary degree³¹ and a look at his investments.

In his investments, Clemens proved to be John Marshall Clemens's son. Over the years, his various careers and writing as Mark Twain brought him significant money. In nearly every case he squandered it away or wasted it. The most famous investment was in the Paige Compositor, an automatic typesetting machine that never quite worked. Clemens poured money into its creation for fourteen years. By the time it was close to working, it had already been superceded by linotype. Paige had assembled two working models, one of which is housed at the Mark Twain Memorial in Hartford, Connecticut. The second was on display at Cornell University until it was donated to a scrap metal drive during World War II.

Small gift and curio shops line Main Street and all of them sell copies of Twain's books. And books about Twain. And magnets. And t-shirts. And just about anything else that can be made to say Mark Twain, Tom Sawyer, or Samuel Clemens. One interesting item that all have is huckleberry fudge. However, all of these store seem to expect the visitor to fork over the money for the fudge untasted, a prospect we declined.

³¹ Clemens was very proud of his honorary doctorate and would wear his robes to functions, or just around the house, for the rest of his life. Clemens had met the editor of the *London Times*, C. F. Moberly Bell, in 1906. Bell asked when Clemens next planned on visiting England. Already in his seventies, Clemens had already decided he was done traveling abroad and replied, "When Oxford bestows a degree upon me." In May of 1907, Clemens received word that Oxford was offering him an honorary degree, along with Clemens's friend Rudyard Kipling, sculptor Auguste Rodin, and composer Camille Saint-Saëns. Thomas Edison was also offered a degree, but he declined the offer.

However, we did find an ice cream parlor that had huckleberry ice cream and the proprietor was kind enough to give us a sample of the ice cream. It had a light purple color and a sweet taste not unlike blueberries, although more subtle.

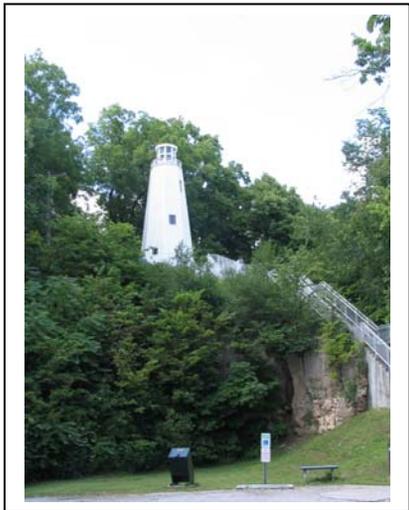
As mentioned earlier, Cardiff Hill is at the north end of Main Street, raising above a statue of Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn. Although the Widow Douglas's house (or the house that inspired it) no longer sits on its crest, the hill is home to the Mark Twain Memorial Lighthouse. While Tom and Huck had to pull a wagon up the hill, which doesn't sound too onerous in the book, the modern visitor can climb the stairs to the lighthouse.

Although Hannibal has renamed the hill in honor of the book, when Clemens lived in the town, it was called Holliday's Hill. It rises 300 feet about the Mississippi River. In *Innocents Abroad*, Twain remembers a boyhood prank that got out of hand that took place on Holliday's Hill. On visiting the Great Pyramid, Twain reminisced,

I remembered how, one Saturday afternoon, we gave three hours of honest effort to the task, and saw at last that our reward was at hand; I remembered how we sat down, then, and wiped the perspiration away, and waited to let a picnic party get out of the way in the road below—and then we started the boulder. It was splendid. It went crashing down the hillside, tearing up saplings, mowing bushes down like grass, ripping and crushing and smashing every thing in its path—eternally splintered and scattered a wood pile at the foot of the hill, and then sprang from the high bank clear over a dray in the road—the negro glanced up once and dodged—and the next second it made infinitesimal mince-meat of a frame cooper-shop, and the coopers swarmed out like bees. Then we said it was perfectly

magnificent, and left. Because the coopers were starting up the hill to inquire.³²

We took the 245 stairs slowly, having learned long ago just how hard a climb could be. The girls handled it quite well, pacing themselves and resting on a boulder about half-way up. The lighthouse, white wood built in an octagonal design, was dedicated in 1935 to honor the centennial of Clemens's birth. It was first lit when President Franklin Roosevelt touched a button in the White House which sent a telegraphic signal to Hannibal. The original lighthouse was knocked down in a windstorm in 1960 and a replacement was built and dedicated when John Kennedy recreated Roosevelt's action.



Near the bottom of Cardiff Hill are the remnants of the Mark Twain Memorial Bridge, which used to connect Missouri and Illinois on Highway 36. The bridge was built in 1936 to replace a 65 year old railway bridge. This time, President Roosevelt actually traveled to Hannibal for the dedication and it was Samuel Clemens's daughter, Clara, who pushed the telegraph button from her home in Los Angeles to light the bridge. The bridge was damaged in the 1993 Mississippi River flood and has since been torn down.

At the base of Cardiff Hill, across a sidewalk from the statue of Huck and Tom, there is a small store that gives away stickers to announce that a person has climbed and descended Cardiff Hill. Both of my daughters insisted on getting the stickers and

³² Twain, Mark. *Innocents Abroad*, chapter 58.

wore them as badges of honor for the remainder of the day, none of which was spent in Hannibal proper.

Just outside of Hannibal is a cave which has gone by various names throughout the last 150 years. Discovered in 1819, it was named Simms's Cave after its founder, Jack Simms. It then took on the name Saltpeter Cave after the guano deposits found in the cave were used to manufacture saltpeter. Eventually purchased by a St. Louis physician, Joseph Nash McDowell, it was called McDowell's Cave when the Clemens family lived in Hannibal. After Twain immortalized the cave as McDougal's Cave in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, it became known as either Tom Sawyer Cave or Mark Twain Cave.

While Elaine drove to the cave, I finished reading *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* to the girls, finishing as we pulled into the parking lot. We went in and purchased tickets to the cave tour, which was already sitting watching a short film about the cave, and we hurried through, missing the actual movie.

The cave passages for a strange matrix of cross passageways that are skewed at an angle. If you think of looking at a wine rack, it gives a good idea about the alleys the crisscross the cave. Because of how symmetrical the cave is, getting lost in the cave would be easy, but finding ones way out would just take patience. Of course, in a time without flashlights, the cave would be more formidable. Clemens claims that as a child he did get lost in the cave once with a female friend, although Laura Hawkins stated that she never got lost in the cave. It is quite likely that Clemens's remembrance of the event was done as publicity for his novel.

If Hannibal proper has difficulty separating Mark Twain from Samuel Clemens, the tour guides of the Mark Twain Cave find the separation impossible. Moving through the cave, they would point out where Tom and Becky got lost, where Injun Joe hid, and where other events from the novel took place.

However, they also pointed out the cave's actual history. It was used as a hideout by the Jesse James Gang. It was turned into a show cave, giving tours, as early as 1886. For a while, in what was stranger than any fiction Clemens wrote, Dr. McDowell used the cave in an attempt to petrify the corpse of his daughter, an action Clemens described in *Life on the Mississippi*.

In my time the person who then owned it turned it into a mausoleum for his daughter, aged fourteen. The body of this poor child was put into a copper cylinder filled with alcohol, and this was suspended in one of the dismal avenues of the cave. The top of the cylinder was removable; and it was said to be a common thing for the baser order of tourists to drag the dead face into view and examine it and comment upon it.³³

I amused myself during the tour by wandering up alleys that were neither lit or closed off. Frequently, I would point my camera blindly and take a picture, only knowing what was further up the alley when my eyes cleared enough from the flash to look at the display on the camera. At one point, I did this and by the time I returned to the main corridor had fallen behind the rest of the tour. As I exited into the corridor, a couple of stragglers came through. The woman let out a surprised shriek at seeing me emerge from an unexpected place. Her boyfriend let out an even higher pitched shriek and took off running for the rest of the group. I circled around using side passages and caught up to the guide at the front of the group who had just finished commenting to my wife how difficult it must be to live with me.

When we left the cave, our visit to Mark Twain's Hannibal was over. All that was left for the day as a long drive back to

³³ Twain, Mark. *Life on the Mississippi*, chapter 55.

Springfield, Illinois for dinner and to celebrate my wife's birthday, for she had agreed to spend that day indulging my whim to show Hannibal to our kids. I'm glad of the trip and hope that it gives my kids an appreciation for Mark Twain and his writing.

Colophon

©2010 *Argentus*, Inc. This issue of the *St. Petersburg Gazette and Dawson's Landing Herald* is being published on April 21, 2010, the centennial of the death of Samuel Langhorne Clemens. The masthead and image of Mark Twain on page 19 are the creations of MO Starkey. All photos of Hannibal, MO and its environs were taken by members of the Silver family on August 22, 2009. You can reach the *St. Petersburg Gazette and Dawson's Landing Herald* at 707 Sapling Lane, Deerfield, IL 60015-3969, or by e-mail at shsilver@sfsite.com. The editor's Livejournal is located at shsilver.livejournal.com and his website is at www.sfsite.com/~silverag. He is also on Facebook.

St. Petersburg was the fictionalized version of Hannibal, Missouri which was featured in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Tom Sawyer Abroad*, and *Tom Sawyer Detective*. Dawson's Landing was the fictionalized version of Hannibal, Missouri which was featured in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* and *Those Extraordinary Twins*.





Frontispiece to *Following the Equator*

I was gratified to be able to answer promptly and I did. I said I didn't know.

Life on the Mississippi

THERE IS A TIME TO LAUGH AND
THERE IS A TIME TO WEEP



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³⁴ Thorndike, *Baltimore American*, April 23, 1910.