AMERICAN PERIODICAL CRITICISM OF MARK TWAIN, 1869-1917

by

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this investigation is to study the literary reputation of Mark Twain from his first major publication through his last -- but to study his reputation primarily as it was established in the American periodicals of his day. A full-fledged reputation study would, of course, involve a consideration of all critical material relating to Mark Twain wherever it might be found -- in books, letters and newspapers as well as in magazines, and in foreign countries as well as in the United States. Such a study would be a gigantic undertaking and might easily extend over a period of decades. Indeed, the prospect of merely trying to locate and catalogue all the critical judgments passed on Mark Twain (or on any major author, for that matter) is one which staggers the scholarly imagination. Needless to say, this does not purport to be a full-fledged reputation study. It is offered, rather, as a segment of what one day might be, if it is ever undertaken and accomplished, the over-all, comprehensive picture of what Mark Twain meant to the vast audience for whom he wrote and to the perhaps less vast but in many ways more select audience who still read a good portion of his works.

The segment which is here offered is limited largely (though not exclusively) in two ways -- temporally, to the years 1869-1917 and spatially, to the magazines of this period. A few excursions into materials other than periodicals (i. e., books, newspapers and letters) and into years before and beyond the dates listed above have been permitted for purposes of contrast and amplification. Periodicals have been selected as the major area of investigation because they were felt to be if not an

infallible index at least a fairly reliable guide to the intellectual and social tastes and tendencies of the age. My intention, in dealing with these periodicals, was to be as inclusive as possible. No restrictions were placed upon the type of magazine consulted. Neither the audience to which it was directed nor the location of its place of publication was a factor in determining its usefulness. The only criterion was whether or not it published literary criticism. Hence it is that semi-learned essays from, say, the Yale Review and the Catholic World rub shoulders with popular notes from Godey's Lady's Book and Hearth and Home.

Obviously, under such an eclectic plan, omissions and oversights must necessarily occur. I do not, however, think that they are either numerous or serious. I have examined the files of nearly two hundred magazines, although I found only a fraction of this number wholly or partially pertinent to an investigation of this type, and only a score or more consistently useful. All of the material, naturally, is not equally valuable as criticism. Some, indeed, is rather shockingly inferior. But all that I found (except for the most perfunctory notices of publication) I have used, at least in part. Little attempt, as a rule, has been made to evaluate the material, since bad criticism tells us almost as much about the temper of an age as does good criticism -- indeed, sometimes even more, especially if the age happens to be the one whose prevailing tradition was "genteel."

The most striking fact to emerge from a perusal of the magazines of the period under investigation is that, relatively speaking, there is to be found only a small body of criticism of the works of Mark Twain. That he was widely read we have ample statistics to prove. But that he was widely reviewed was not, unfortunately, the case. The works of such writers as Bret Harte, Henry James, William Dean Howells, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, George

Washington Cable and even Lew Wallace, Mrs. Southworth and F. Marion Crawford were consistently noticed in the journals of the day. But one turns pages with a growing sense of frustration and futility in a vain search for reviews of even Mark Twain's most important works. For example, I have been able to uncover only two major reviews of Roughing It, one of Tom Sawyer, five of Life on the Mississippi, and two of Huckleberry Finn, one of which (the better, incidentally) was an "open letter" to the editor and not a solicited or regularly scheduled article. The opportunities for critical immortality which the reviewers of the period lost -- if we except Howells and four or five others -- by failing to recognize the importance of Mark Twain make the reader of today shake his head sadly over the curious ways of the world -- until, of course, he realizes the advantages of hindsight over foresight.

What were the reasons for this apparent critical neglect of the writer whom Howells called "the Lincoln of our literature"? A number of suggestions come to mind. The best way to examine them is to locate Mark Twain in the main stream of nineteenth-century culture. Such a location will disclose the reasons behind the curious attitude of his contemporaries toward him. The matter seems sufficiently large and complex to warrant special treatment and has therefore been made the subject of the first chapter of this study.

CHAPTER ONE

The Background of the Age

To describe the social and cultural history of the American people in the post-Civil-War decades is quite obviously outside the scope of this discussion. But the problem of Mark Twain's relationship to the culture of his day is so important that a fairly extensive treatment seems advisable. Only by attempting to clarify that relationship through an examination of the major trends and tendencies of the time can the criticism of Twain's works be made intelligible.

In the first place, then, the East was still the center of culture although its supremacy was beginning to be challenged by the West. Boston was giving way to New York as the literary hub. In 1871 the editorship of the Atlantic Monthly, the cultural mouthpiece of the old guard in New England, fell to a Westerner, William Dean Howells. The significant rise in the number of newspapers and magazines published in the United States after the war indicates the existence of an increasingly large middle-class reading public. Culture was on the march, and a literature exclusively the polite pastime of scholarly gentlemen and genteel ladies was a thing of the nostalgic past. Vocal stirrings were heard in the West as the barbaric yawp which Whitman had sent thundering across the chimney pots of New York came echoing back to trouble the late afternoon quiet of New England's Indian summer. The times were indeed changing, and the change was not greeted with either favor or optimism. The democratization of letters was looked upon clearly as their vulgarization. Culture may have been spreading, but in the process it was becoming tarnished and soiled and unworthy of the

name.

The new literary regime was slow getting started. Within a year after the end of the war, the editor of the Round Table, a New York magazine, had "A Plain Talk With American Writers," in the course of which he lamented the fact that native authors were doing next to nothing to bring credit to their country.

> All the bright promise of the new era of literary brilliancy, which was so heartily welcomed at the close of the war, . . . seems to have passed away. . . .
>
> What are American writers doing to-day? Bryant, Longfellow, Whittier, Lowell, Holmes, . . . -- who has produced or is producing any distinctive work? Barring Mr. Longfellow's translations of Dante, we know of nothing that is likely to bring any credit to our literature. . . .

Continuing, he deplored the "host of trash" that passed for literature. "There is no life, no strength, no power in it all. Literature seems dead. Scribbling has taken its place." He found the outlook grim indeed.

> We are sick and tired of this never-ending stream of insipidity, weakness, and puerility. Either genius has left us or is too indolent to make itself known. Who will awaken us from this sleep? Who will first show us the signs of a genuine literary reviving?[1]

Within three years after this question was asked, there took place what Professor Pattee calls the second discovery of America. The new era was ushered in with the publication in 1869 of The Innocents Abroad, "the first book from which there breathed the new spirit of revolt."[2]

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[1] 3 (May 12, 1866), 296-7.

[2] Fred Lewis Pattee, A History of American Literature Since 1870, New York, 1915, p. 20. Mr. Pattee lists as indicative of the new spirit the works of Bret Harte, John Burroughs, Edward Eggleston, John Hay, Howells, and Joachim Miller; T. B. Aldrich's Marjorie Daw, Leland's Hans Breitman Ballads, Lanier's Poems, Cable's Old Creole Days, and others. He states further: "All the elements of the new era had appeared before 1880." Ibid., p. 21. It need hardly be pointed out that this list includes the names of several writers customarily associated with the rise of realism in American literature. The problem of realism vs. romanticism in the

As is customarily the case when a new age begins, this new age was not recognized as such during its early years. In 1870, for example, the editor of Putnam's Magazine complained:

> Our writers want independence, boldness, incisiveness, individuality. They seem to be afraid of something or somebody,.. . . they want an authority for what they are doing; they pattern after some conscious or unconscious model. This is the more strange, because we here boast of our liberty so much, and say we are not like others.[3]

Two years later the book reviewer of the Galaxy bemoaned the fact that the reading public demanded nothing but entertainment. The aims of literature, he felt, were being lowered by the increased tempo of modern life. Readers cared not for "the mellow vintage of ripe thought" but craved rather "the fire-water of sensation, or the elegant effervescences of trifles. The "old wells of English undefiled" they found "insipid . . . compared with the coarse gust of newspaper pungencies, . . ."[4]

Later in the same year a genteel critic in the Southern Magazine (Baltimore) discussed "The Turning Point in American Literature." Deploring the current degeneracy of taste, Mortimer F. Taylor observed:

> . . . the rule will hold good that the tastes of the people and the great body of the literature are the same. . . . What the people clamor for will in the main be given them; and until the impulse of the masses be turned in a new direction, no decided change will be made for the better in the literature of a country.

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post-Civil-War period is far too complex to outline here. Nor would it be necessary to do so, in view of the numerous studies of the subject in existence. For an especially good recent treatment see Grant C. Knight, The Critical Period in American Literature, Chapel Hill, 1951. Parrington's The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America (Volume III of Main Currents in American Thought) and "Realism Defined: William Dean Howells" in Volume II of The Literary History of the United States should not be overlooked.

[3]"American Writing," n. s. 5 (April, 1870), 500.

[4]13 (March, 1872), 427. Review of William Dean Howells's Their Wedding Journey.

Such a change, he continued, has been made. In a burst of prophecy which, in light of subsequent developments, seems for its erroneousness almost laughable, he claimed that the school of Bret Harte (into which he lumped Mark Twain and Josh Billings) marked "the place where vitiated tastes culminated." Things were bound to improve, he went on, despite the "mass of vicious publications" which were currently flooding the market.

> Nast makes a fortune; . . . Mark Twain and Josh Billings and their publishers luxuriate in public patronage, and have representatives in almost every library; while Poe died on highly seasoned charity, and you will not find a dozen copies of Bryant and Hawthorne in a day's journey. . . . For the last ten years the whole country has been flooded with cheap sensational works, and the public taste has been such that the real genius has been chilled and frozen into silence by the neglect of the reading world.

He became more impassioned as he surveyed the degenerate public taste the country over. The classics, he asserted, were no longer known; references to them were greeted with blank expressions. But

> Tell the story of the Mummy's questionable death, or how Bemis ran from the buffalo, or Scotty wanted his friend's funeral preached, and a face lighted with interest greets you. Describe how Josh Billings' signs of the zodiac were on the rampage, or how "Sut Luvengood's daddy played hoss," and see if you do not touch a familiar chord. Nilsson sang one of her finest operas and the audience listened passively. She came out and sang "Arkansaw Traveller," and the house thundered with applause. Verily, for the last ten years the American people did not want you to write for them unless you spelled miserably or made them hold their sides for laughter. . . .

The cause of this sorry state of affairs he found in the period of moral relaxation which followed the Civil War. But the pendulum was swinging in the other direction: ". . . the brain and heart of the nation are turning their attention to the cultivation of a purer standard and loftier taste." This happy change, he averred, was coming about as a result of public revulsion from the excesses of the previous five years'

orgy of wallowing in scandal, sensationalism and vulgar humor. The revulsion was hastened by the knowledge, gained in late 1870 and early 1871, that Twain had realized upwards of $150,000 on the sales of The Innocents Abroad, and that Harte had made almost that amount on his books. Reported Taylor:

> It was then the public began to make inquiries, and to find out that Bill Arp was offered twenty thousand dollars for the copyright of his book, that Nast was paid a salary of ten thousand dollars, and that Josh Billings was getting a larger return from the sale of his books. They were awakened to the consciousness of the consequence of such a state of affairs, and throughout the literary circles of the land a general alarm was sounded, and the call for a better class of reading-matter is rapidly gaining ground.[5]

Such comments were obviously mere wishful thinking and had no real basis in actuality. Bill Arp may have been a flash in the pan and so may Josh Billings. But Harte and Mark Twain were just beginning careers that were to extend into the next century and to place them upon the very pinnacle of fame.

Much the same type of criticism as that described above was made by the old guard in New England. Edmund Clarence Stedman, a critic of no mean repute, wrote to Bayard Taylor on September 16, 1873, to compliment him on his new pastoral poem Lars. The poem, said Stedman, was one that would "last, though not in the wretched, immediate fashion of this demoralized period." He then launched into a rather shrill attack

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[5] 11, n. s. 4 (Sept., 1872), 324-7. The reference to the mummy is from The Innocents Abroad, to Bemis and Scotty from Roughing It. Nilsson was a famous European operatic performer of the period. John Esten Cooke, in the next month's issue of the same magazine, bemoaned the loss in literature of "Repose, simplicity, and that charming unreserve which characterises the well-bred author as it characterises the well-bred gentleman in society, . . ." He regretted that writers had "abandoned the old tone of writing -- the amenity, the suavity, the easy grace of the literature preceding that of our day -- . . ." In "The West, Twenty Years Ago," 11, n. s. 4 (Oct., 1872), 469.

upon the humorists of the day and, in passing, deplored the low state of contemporary letters.

> Cultured as are Hay and Harte, they are almost equally responsible with "Josh Billings" and the "Danbury News" man for the present horrible degeneracy of the public taste — . . . The whole country . . . is flooded, deluged, swamped, beneath a muddy tide of slang, vulgarity, inartistic bathers, impertinence and buffoonery that is not wit.[6]

Charles Eliot Norton, writing to Carlyle two months later, said:

> Longfellow was complaining the other day of the decline in the interest in literature and in the taste for it. Nor was he mistaken, — this generation is given over to the making and spending of money, and is losing the capacity of thought. It wants to be amused, and the magazines amuse it.[7]

On November 24, he wrote to Lowell: "Even Longfellow, optimistic as he is, complains of the decline in taste for literary culture, and of interest in literary pursuits. We stop at the high-school level."[8] And, again, to Lowell, on February 23, 1874: "There must be a revival of letters in America, if literature as an art is not to become extinct."[9]

By the end of the decade, the editor of Scribner's Monthly had trimmed his sails to the prevailing wind. In an article on "Vulgarity in Fiction and on the Stage," he recognized that things were not what

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[6]Laura Stedman and George M. Gould, Life and Letters of Edmund Clarence Stedman, New York, 1910, I, 477. One wonders why Stedman neglected to mention Mark Twain in his condemnation. The fact that the two were friends and that Stedman admired Twain's works — at least such of his novels as Huckleberry Finn and A Connecticut Yankee (both, of course, published after this comment) — perhaps accounts for the omission. John Hay, best known as a statesman, had published Pike County Ballads, dialect poems of the Illinois frontier, in 1871. The Danbury News Man was James M. Bailey, a Civil War journalist who published humorous articles in his Danbury, Connecticut, newspaper.

[7]Sara Norton and M. A. DeWolfe Howe, edd., Letters of Charles Eliot Norton, Boston and New York, 1913, II, 18. (Letter dated Nov. 16, 1873)

[8]Ibid., p. 22.

[9]Ibid., p. 36.

they used to be. He spoke specifically about the theater, but his remarks had a wider application.

> The times have changed, and life has become so active and overburdened and so full that men go to the theater to laugh. The one thing that they need most is forgetfulness of care, in innocent pleasure. To the modern man and woman, life is a tragedy. The newspapers are full of tragedies. We swallow them every morning with our coffee. What we absolutely need is fun, jollity, mirth, forgetfulness; and the stage must adapt itself to this want or go to the wall.[10]

What are the implications of the above comments to a study of Mark Twain's reputation? For one thing, Twain made his literary debut in the person of a Westerner and a humorist. In the conflict of traditions that characterized the post-Civil-War decades he was clearly on the side of the opposition -- of the opposition to the old, the established, the venerated. The guise in which he presented himself to the world -- his guise by birth, temperament and training -- was one which was calculated to alarm and amaze the keepers of the cherished flame of eastern culture. His removal to their midst was no signal for rejoicing on the part of the New England literati. Although during his Hartford years he became a close friend of Howells, T. B. Aldrich, Charles Dudley Warner and Mrs. Stowe, among others, he was never really accepted by the old guard.[11] The fiasco of the Whittier Day Dinner of 1877 -- the episode which Howells called "the amazing mistake, the bewildering blunder, the cruel catastrophe" -- might well have had something to do with the aloofness

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[10] 18 (May, 1879), 133.

[11] He even published a few pieces in the Atlantic Monthly, notably the "Old Times on the Mississippi" in 1875. But by the time his first story was printed (November, 1874 -- "A True Story") he was a famous writer, and the publisher of the Atlantic was seeking him out. As Howells says: "It was the publisher, the late H. O. Houghton, who felt the incongruity of his absence from the leading periodical of the country, and was always urging me to get him to write." My Mark Twain, New York, 1910, p. 20.

of the Brahmins. But there was more to it than that. A humorist, a jester, a buffoon, was simply not of the same breed of men as the gentle Whittier, the scholarly Longfellow, the urbane Lowell, the cultured Emerson, the polished Holmes. Lowell, indeed, indirectly threw some light on the subject in an altogether different connection when (in a letter to Charles Eliot Norton of August 18, 1889) he sneered at the English tendency to lionize American entertainers. (Mark Twain, from the beginning, had been received with unparalleled enthusiasm by the English.) Another westerner, some years after Twain's success, was likewise accorded a rousing reception. Buffalo Bill, in London with his Wild West Show for the Queen's Jubilee of 1887, was taken up, remarked Lowell,

> by a certain layer of society, but not, I should say, by society in its better sense. . . . But I think the true key to this eagerness for lions -- even of the poodle sort -- is the dulness of the average English mind. . . . What it craves beyond everything is a sensation, anything that will serve as a Worcestershire sauce to its sluggish palate.[12]

The implications are obvious. Norton, writing some years later (November 5, 1901), to S. G. Ward, observed:

> It would have seemed incredible twenty-five years ago that Yale should give her highest degree of honour to a Catholic prelate and to a popular novelist, and that, on the chief day of commemoration of her founding, the warmest applause should be bestowed on the Archbishop, on a Japanese statesman, and on Mark Twain![13]

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[12] Charles Eliot Norton, ed., Letters of James Russell Lowell, New York, 1894, II, 377.

[13] Letters, II, 314. The occasion referred to was the awarding to Clemens of an honorary Master of Arts degree. The Catholic Prelate was Archbishop Ireland, the popular novelist was Thomas Nelson Page, and the Japanese statesman was Marquis Ito. The reference to an attitude of snobbishness on the part of Yale of twenty-five years before is not to be construed as representing Norton's own attitude toward Mark Twain. Howells reports that Norton greatly admired Twain when they met late in 1871 or early in 1872, but that Longfellow and Lowell remained aloof. See My Mark Twain, Ch. 12.

Even after Twain had become a figure of world renown the critical temper of the genteel tradition found it difficult to look with favor upon the type of writing of which he was an important practitioner. At the height of the period of gentility James Lane Allen, spokesman par excellence, was writing in the Bookman in 1896 on "The Gentleman in American Fiction." He gave grudging recognition to that bulk of American literature which dealt "with types that come lower than the highest." He used such adjectives in describing this material as "genuine," "characteristic," and "indispensable," but he admitted that "whatever its field and whatever its scope and whatever its merit, it has this common limitation that it is not the literature of our highest civilisation." He concluded:

> It is a ridiculous and mortifying admission that the only two names in all the range of our fiction that have attained anything like universality of acceptance even among ourselves, not, of course, as gentlemen, but as mere characters, are the two negroes, Uncle Tom and Uncle Remus.[14]

He might very well have changed the "two names" to "four" and added, "and the two boys, Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn."

The genteel tradition, as has been suggested above, found Mark Twain to be not consonant with the prevailing notions of gentility. It has been only within comparatively recent times that sufficient serious attention has been paid to a second tradition which existed from the beginning alongside the genteel -- the native or popular. The ideals of the former were refined, classical, imported; those of the latter (if it can be said to have had any) were crude, proletarian, indigenous. It is this latter tradition which many students of our national culture feel to be the true American one. It is this latter tradition also,

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[14] 4 (Oct., 1896), 119-20.

needless to say, with which Mark Twain has become associated.

The mainstay of the popular tradition in America was (and possibly still is) humor. A number of reasons have been suggested as to why this should have been so, the main one being that the United States is a young nation. A characteristic of youthful exuberance, according to an authority on the subject,[15] is humor — a fondness for burlesque, horseplay, exaggerated bravado, boisterous boastfulness, high spirits. Mark Twain made his bow to the American people as a purveyor of such humor and was at once classed in the public eye with other dealers in the same commodity — Josh Billings, Sut Lovingood, Orpheus C. Kerr, Artemus Ward, and their like. His connection with the West Coast, an area traditionally associated with the type of humor described above, was not overlooked. An anonymous writer for the Penn Monthly in 1870 called him "the head and front of the whole tribe of exaggerators, . . . the court jester of the sovereign people . . . completely Californian."[16] The story of how he took to the lecture platform in San Francisco is well known and need not be repeated here. Suffice it to say, he was a huge success. A year after his return from the Holy Land excursion he spent a season lecturing (1868-9). On November 17, 1868, he spoke on "The American Vandal Abroad" before the Cleveland Library Association. A reporter for the Morning Herald complimented him on "having conclusively proved that a man may be a humorist without being a clown. He has elevated the profession by his graceful

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[15] See Constance Rourke, American Humor, New York, 1931, for a full treatment of this subject. She credits Mark Twain, in his early work, with "the renewal of the American comic legend." (p. 209)

[16] 1 (Aug., 1870), 298. The "advertisement" of the Jumping Frog volume (1867) had billed him as the "Wild Humorist of the Pacific Slope." See Albert Bigelow Paine, Mark Twain, a Biography, (4 vols. in 2), New York, 1912, pp. 318-9.

delivery and by recognizing in his audience something higher than merely a desire to laugh."[17]

This was a fairly unusual comment to be made in Twain's early years as a public figure. Ordinarily, he was considered simply as a comic. For example, the editor of Hearth and Home, in describing the attractions of the approaching lecture season, announced: ". . . Billings and Twain will contribute the seasoning for the intellectual entertainments."[18] The wording of this notice is interesting, for it tells us a good deal about the early attitude toward Mark Twain. Other lecturers would furnish the intellectual fare (Emerson and Beecher were mentioned in the Hearth and Home editorial), while the humorists were to supply "seasoning," spice. By 1872 the situation had deteriorated to such an extent, there being, presumably, a surfeit of seasoners, that the editor of Scribner's Monthly was moved to comment:

> There was a time in the history of our popular "lecture system" when a lecture was a lecture. The men who appeared before the lyceums were men who had something to say. Grave discussions of important topics; social, political, and literary essays; instructive addresses and spirited appeals — these made up a winter's course of popular lectures. Now, a lecture may be any string of nonsense that any literary mountebank can find an opportunity to utter. Artemus Ward "lectured"; and he was right royally paid for acting the literary buffoon. He has had many imitators; and the damage that he and they have inflicted upon the institution of the lyceum is incalculable. The better class that once attended the lecture course have been driven away in disgust, and among the remainder such a greed for inferior entertainments has been excited that lecture managers have become afraid to offer a first-class, old-fashioned course of lectures to the public patronage.[19]

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[17] Quoted by David Mead, Yankee Eloquence in the Middle West, East Lansing, Mich., 1951, p. 232.

[18] 2 (Dec. 17, 1870), 819.

[19] "Triflers on the Platform," 3 (Feb., 1872), 489. A. L. Vogelback considers this and a subsequent article in the same vein a thinly-veiled attack upon Mark Twain and his school. To be sure, in 1872 Twain's reputation was such that he might very readily have been included in a

Such comments as these could not hurt Mark Twain's reputation as a lecturer. He remained one of the most phenomenally popular platform speakers America has produced, and his fame achieved world-wide proportions. His name continued to be bracketed with those of other purveyors of what was considered during the ascendancy of the genteel tradition an inferior art form. The religious periodicals, especially, if they did not ignore him altogether (as most of them did) had, in general, only harsh words to say. A writer in the Chicago Advance, for example, as late as 1875 made a plea for "a real live Christian editor . . . [to] find something . . . that may satisfy the natural craving which otherwise, in its greediness will swallow the indigestible diet of Josh Billings or Mark Twain."[20]

If the genteel readers and critics of the East were alienated by Mark Twain's guise of funny man from the uncouth West, they were inspired with an equally strenuous distaste for his method of marketing his books. On the title-page of The Innocents Abroad appeared the following notation: "Issued by Subscription Only, and Not for Sale in the Book-Stores. Residents of Any State Desiring a Copy Should Address the Publishers, and an Agent

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sweeping denunciation of this type. Since, however, he is not mentioned by name in either article, the answer to the question of whether or not he was the object of these attacks must remain suppositional. See A. L. Vogelback, The Literary Reputation of Mark Twain in America, 1869-1885, Ph. D. Dissertation (unpublished), University of Chicago, 1938.

[20]Rev. C. D. Helmer, "The Religious Newspaper as an Evangelizing Agency," Advance, 8 (June 3, 1875), 682. The religious periodicals of the day, full as they were of sermons, Christian endeavor, prayer meeting information and religious musings, would almost certainly not have deigned to review the works of so notoriously secular a writer as Mark Twain. Because his chosen field was comedy, Mark Twain had to pay what Brander Matthews has aptly termed "the penalty of humor." A consideration of his brilliant analysis of Twain's work, which is certainly one of the high water marks in pro-Clemens criticism during that writer's lifetime, will be reserved until a later time when its position in a chronological survey renders it appropriate for discussion.

Will Call Upon Them." With one or two minor exceptions, all of Mark Twain's books for the first thirty years of his writing career were sold by subscription — at first by the American Publishing Company of Hartford, one of the important subscription book publishers of the period, later by Osgood of Boston, and finally by his own firm of Charles L. Webster and Company. Not until the firm of Harper and Brothers became his publisher in 1896 did he abandon this not altogether happy method of marketing his books, and even after that date he lapsed into the former method upon occasion — in 1897 with Following the Equator and in 1900 and 1903 with two less important books.

Merle Johnson, in his extremely valuable A Bibliography of the Works of Mark Twain, appends "A Note on Subscription Books" in which he throws some light on this important matter.

> A subscription book . . . was one sold originally by publisher's agents direct to the reader and not over the bookshop counter. Agents went from customer to customer or door to door carrying a prospectus that displayed sample pages showing the style and size of the actual book. For the convenience of the agent several ruled blank pages were bound in to be used as a record of sales, space being allowed for name and address of buyer, type of binding, and all other facts necessary to the final sale. . . .
>
> In an effort to prevent the bookstores from securing copies of the book the publishers numbered each copy of the Connecticut Yankee by means of a label, . . . These stamps were numbered and the numbers recorded against the names of agents to whom shipped. The publishers had made a strict rule that none of the books were to be sold to the shops, and discovery of a copy in a store meant loss of agency for the defaulting agent.[21]

A curious disadvantage of the subscription system was that complimentary copies of books for review purposes were not generally circulated. Mark Twain always made sure that Howells received an advance copy of a

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[21](Revised edition), New York, 1935, pp. 153-4.

given volume for reviewing in the Atlantic, and he perhaps sent out other copies. But as a rule, no copies were available unless contracted for with agents. The fact that a reviewer could not even come by the latest Mark Twain book in the local bookstore (supposing that he had wanted to avail himself of it) made reviewing an unnecessarily difficult problem. This situation undoubtedly accounts for the paucity of critical notices of many Twain items. It is a wonder, under the conditions which prevailed, that as many reviews got written as we have examples of. Professor S. S. Haldeman, in a letter to the president of the American Book Trade Union, summed up the matter in 1874 as follows:

> The issuing of books by subscription alone is a nuisance which should be abated. The canvassers are often impudent trespassers; the books do not find their way into regions where there is a sparse population, but, on the contrary, they are often pushed to the disadvantage of the local dealer; they are not published, and, as a consequence, they cannot be quoted, nor can they be reviewed in respectable periodicals. It is fortunate that in most cases such books are mere compilations of little or no value.[22]

The editor of the Literary World (Boston) at this time was waging a war against subscription books. Although he conceded to the system a certain advantage,[23] he maintained:

> Subscription books are in bad odor, and cannot possibly circulate among the best classes of readers, owing to the general and not unfounded prejudice against them as a class.
>
> Consequently an author of established reputation, who resorts to the subscription plan for the sake of making more money, descends to a constituency of a lower grade and inevitably loses caste, . . . For this loss no money could compensate.
>
> But the injury resulting from the adoption of the subscription plan by our best writers would not be limited to themselves, but would affect seriously our whole literature.

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[22] Reprinted in "Literary News," Literary World, 5 (Sept., 1874), 63.

[23] ". . . a book is pushed into currency by the combined personal efforts of many experienced and dauntless men, while a book published in the regular way must depend mainly upon its own merits for its success." Literary World, 5 (Aug., 1874), 40.

> This plan operates directly against the principle that the sale of a book should be proportioned to its merits, and makes these quite subordinate to the arts of importunity and trickery, . . . of which almost every reader has had personal experience, as characteristic of the book-canvasser.[24]

The animus against the subscription method continued unabated. In 1885, a writer in the Book News suggested that as a rule it was a matter of utter indifference to the reading public whether or not subscription books got published, "for hardly one in ten is what people in general want."

> A little examination of them shows that they are clumsy and showy, made very cheaply and sold at a high price. Their market is found among people who would never think of going to a book-store, but on whose credulity and gullibility, the agent finds it possible to work. The high price pays not only for the book, but for the costly method of selling it. Thus for one sold at three dollars (the average price), the agent has paid one dollar and a quarter, the latter sum including, of course, the cost of production and a good profit.
>
> The ordinary subscription book is manifestly made to catch the eye of the ignorant, who can be forced to buy it by means of the volubility, chicanery, and persistence of an agent interested, not in books in general, but in one book. If Mark Twain did not find it expedient to adopt this peculiar method of selling his books, he would have a good opportunity for the exercise of his humor in picturing an agent's sales and attempts at sales. The absurdity of it all is sufficiently apparent, but a humorist's delineation would give relief to the pent-up feelings of many a victim.[25]

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[24] Ibid.

[25] 3 (May, 1885), 209. By 1910, the issue was a dead one, redolent of a sort of pleasant nostalgia. George Ade, reminiscing over the days of "the old time subscription book," observed:

"Mark Twain should be doubly blessed for saving the center table from utter dullness. Do you remember that center table of the seventies?. . . . The Bible had the place of honor and was flanked by subscription books. . . .

"The book-agents varied, but the book was always the same, — many pages, numerous steel engravings, curly-cue tail-pieces, platitudes, patriotism, poetry, sentimental mush. One of the most popular, still resting in many a dim sanctuary, was known as 'Mother, Home, and Heaven.'. . .

"Just when front-room literature seemed at its lowest ebb, so far as the American boy was concerned, along came Mark Twain. His books looked, at a distance, just like the other distended, diluted, and altogether tasteless volumes that had been used for several decades to balance the ends of the center table. . . .

"Can you see the boy, a Sunday morning prisoner, approach the new

These fairly lengthy preliminaries have been presented in an effort to make clear why Mark Twain was not considered by most of the serious readers and critics of his day as an important writer. To summarize briefly, the reasons were, first, the sub-literary position held by humor; second, the novelty and strangeness which much of his western writing held for eastern readers, especially critics; and third, his method of publication. These three reasons account in part for the reluctance of a certain limited group to consider Mark Twain seriously. The general public, however, is more adaptable than the literary critic or the cultured and conservative reader, and Mark Twain's works found immense favor with the masses. As Mr. Bernard DeVoto points out:

> Not the least amazing of many paradoxes that Mark Twain presents to us is this: that, although only in the very last years of the century now ending have critics been willing to discuss him as a literary artist, from the very first the people who read books and incorporate them into their lives have recognized the artist whom the critics only now begin to acknowledge. In the minds of the public, American and international, there has never been any doubt about the greatness of Mark Twain. It is only among the literary that the recognition now fulfilled in centennial exercises has delayed.[26]

Mr. DeVoto continues:

> There has never been any doubt of Mark Twain's greatness in that court of appeal whose jurisdiction over literature

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book with a dull sense of foreboding, expecting a dose of Tupper's 'Proverbial Philosophy'? Can you see him a few minutes later when he finds himself linked arm-in-arm with Mulberry Sellers or Buck Fanshaw. . . ? No wonder he curled up on the hair-cloth sofa and hugged the thing to his bosom and lost all interest in Sunday-school." -- George Ade, "Mark Twain and the Old Time Subscription Book," American Review of Reviews, 41 (June, 1910), 703-4.

[26]"Mark Twain: The Ink of History," An Address Delivered at Columbia, Missouri, Dec. 6, 1935, as part of the Concluding Exercises of Mark Twain Week at the University of Missouri. In Forays and Rebuttals, Boston, 1936, pp. 350-1.

is final, the reading public. The verdict of that court has been a universal and sustained acclaim never equaled by any other American, and equaled by only a few writers in the whole history of literature.[27]

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[27] Ibid., p. 354.

CHAPTER TWO

The First Decade

After the publication of the "villainous backwoods sketch" which the world knows as "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," Mark Twain awoke (as Byron had awakened) to find himself famous.[1] No less an authority than James Russell Lowell pronounced it "the finest piece of humorous writing yet produced in America."[2] The incorporation of the tale in a volume along with twenty-six other items marks an important date in American literature -- the date of Mark Twain's first book.[3] It was not widely reviewed. After all, the title story was the only really good thing in the volume. Some of the other pieces had merit of one kind or another, but even Twain realized the essential slightness of most of them and selected under a dozen for reprinting in his volume of Sketches brought out eight years later. A typical notice of the period was the one in the Book Buyer in November, 1867, which simply called attention to the book and quoted a comment from a London journal, as follows: "It is not often that we meet a genuine collection of harmless drollery

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[1]The comparison with Byron -- not, by the way, an inappropriate one -- was made by some of his contemporaries. The frog story appeared in the New York Saturday Press, Nov. 18, 1865, and (slightly changed) in the Californian, Dec. 16, 1865. See Edgar L. Branch, The Literary Apprenticeship of Mark Twain, Urbana, Ill., 1950, p. 293.

[2]Quoted in Paine, p. 321.

[3]Publication was May 1, 1867.

and mirth, unforced, natural, and exhilarating like 'The Jumping Frog.'"[4]

Here then was the consensus: a "collection of harmless drollery and mirth"; nothing that would cut much ice in the literary East; popular enough with those who enjoyed a good joke or two — and there were many, but they did not confuse good jokes with good literature; and not even very highly regarded by the author.[5]

The development exhibited between the first book and the second is startling.[6] The Innocents Abroad, although it has many defects, as its reviewers were quick to point out, nevertheless frequently shows a maturity and an artistry which were probably as unconscious to the author as they were unnoticed by the readers. The genesis of the work is interesting. It appeared in its earliest form as fifty-two or fifty-three letters to the San Francisco Alta and six to the New York Tribune, during the years 1867-68. These were later revised and edited for book publication.[7]

As early as July, 1868, or exactly a year before The Innocents Abroad appeared in book form, a writer (possibly Bret Harte) for the Overland

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[4]1 (Nov. 15, 1867), 3.

[5]Paine (p. 320) quotes a letter from Mark Twain to his family: "As for the Frog book, I don't believe it will ever pay anything worth a cent. I published it simply to advertise myself, and not with the hope of making anything out of it."

[6]Archibald Henderson hardly exaggerates when he says: "Mark Twain enjoys the unique distinction of exhibiting a progressive development, a deepening and broadening of forces, a ripening of intellectual and spiritual powers from the beginning to the end of his career. From the standpoint of the man of letters, the evolution of Mark Twain from a journeyman printer to a great author, from a merry-andrew to a world-humorist, from a river-pilot to a trustworthy navigator on the vast and uncharted seas of human experience, may be taken as symbolic of the romance of American life." — Mark Twain, New York, 1910, p. 15.

[7]See Merle Johnson, A Bibliography of Mark Twain, p. 11.

Monthly was describing the fresh and vigorous charm of Mark Twain's Holy Land letters. He made special mention of the iconoclastic traveller's "lawless humor and lyric fire," and he found generally salutary the results of Twain's having "used brickbats on stained glass windows with damaging effect."[8]

When The Innocents Abroad was published as a six-hundred-page subscription book in the summer of 1869, it achieved immediate success. In the words of a recent critic, it "marked his [Twain's] acceptance by a leading publisher, by the American public, and by no less an arbiter than William Dean Howells."[9] It has remained the most popular travel book ever printed in the United States (perhaps ever printed in English), has been frequently re-issued, and is today, almost a century after its initial appearance, a fairly steady seller.

But what of its contemporary reception? Only three periodicals published reviews, each, interestingly enough, representative of a specific region — the Nation of New York, the Atlantic Monthly of New England, and the Overland Monthly of the West Coast. The last two reviews, by Howells and Bret Harte, respectively, are, by virtue of the status of their authors, sufficiently important to warrant special consideration as critical essays

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[8]"Current Literature," [Review of Going to Jericho by John Franklin Swift], 1 (July, 1868), 101.

[9]Branch, op. cit., p. 186. Paine reports: "Newspapers chorused their enthusiasm; the public voiced universal approval; only a few of the more cultured critics seemed hesitant and doubtful." — p. 382. Within twenty years after its appearance, it was described as "one of the most widely read of all American books. . ." — Charles Hopkins Clark, "Samuel Langhorne Clemens," Literature, 1 (June 16, 1888), 46. Concerning Twain's acceptance by Howells, it is interesting to note what the humorist's attitude toward the critic was shortly to become. In 1875, Twain wrote to Howells: "Yours is the recognized critical Court of Last Resort in this country; from its decision there is no appeal; . . ." Letter dated Oct. 19, 1875. Letters, I, 263. This view, one might suppose, was pretty generally held at the time.

in their own right.

But first, the Nation. The review was on the whole favorable, though not enthusiastic. Of particular interest, aside from the critical comments, was the animadversion against subscription books with which the notice began.

> It might have been a thinner book, for there is some dead wood in it, as there has to be in all books which are sold by book-agents and are not to be bought in stores. The rural-district reader likes to see that he has got his money's worth even more than he likes wood-engravings. At least, such is the faith in Hartford; and no man ever saw a book-agent with a small volume in his hand.

The magazine further claimed that the book contained "some real value as well as much freshness," but agreed that the American humor was "the great thing." "All the prominent characteristics of our peculiar school of humorists -- their audacity, their extravagance and exaggeration -- Mr. Clemens displays in fulness. . ."[10]

The review by Howells is important on two counts — first, as a piece of criticism containing remarks of a more prophetic than acute nature, and second, as the instrument which brought about the lifelong friendship between Howells and Twain -- one of the most famous associations in American literary annals. Though Howells misspelled the author's name throughout his review,[11] he seems to have admired The Innocents Abroad sincerely.[12] He apparently was the first critic to point out the existence in Mark Twain of

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[10] 9 (Sept. 2, 1869), 194-5.

[11] He wrote it "Clements."

[12] A short time after the review appeared (i. e., late in 1869) Twain was in Boston lecturing. He had read Howells's review, and it had pleased him. To express his gratitude, he called at the offices of the Atlantic where Howells was assistant editor. His comment was in character. "When I read that review of yours, I felt like the woman who was so glad her baby had come white." — Paine, p. 390.

traits which were to be mentioned more and more frequently as the years passed as vital characteristics of his personality until they became practically trade-marks of his genius -- namely, his kindness and benevolence, his lack of rancor, his sympathy and innate nobility. Howells wrote:

> It is out of the bounty and abundance of his own nature that he is as amusing in the execution as in the conception of his work. And it is always good-humored humor, too, that he lavishes on his reader, and even in its impudence it is charming; we do not remember where it is indulged at the cost of the weak or helpless side, or where it is insolent, with all its sauciness and irreverence. . . .[13]

He praised Twain's ability at characterization, complimented him on the success of his style, which he said approached to "colloquial drolling," and admired the "excellent sense and good feeling" of his humor. He concluded on a prophetic note:

> . . . this book ought to secure him something better than the uncertain standing of a popular favorite. It is no business of ours to fix his rank among the humorists California has given us, but we think he is, in an entirely different way from all the others, quite worthy of the company of the best.[14]

Bret Harte and Mark Twain had been friends during their California days, and in 1868 a few chapters of The Innocents Abroad had been published in Harte's magazine, the Overland Monthly.[15] When the work saw final publication in book form, Harte reviewed it rather lengthily for the Overland early in 1870. On the whole, the review was favorable, though what

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[13] Atlantic Monthly, 24 (Dec., 1869), 765.

[14] Ibid., p. 766. Mr. Franklin Walker, in San Francisco's Literary Frontier, New York, 1939, p. 323, writes: "The Innocents Abroad has survived for two reasons: Mark Twain's frontier humor was more amusing than that of his fellows; and, of greater importance, he was more truly the spokesman of his generation and his civilization than were they."

[15] Johnson, op. cit., p. 11.

the critic considered shortcomings were indicated without hesitation. Twain would have had no cause to feel that his old friend had let him down. Harte began on a high note: "Six hundred and fifty pages of open and declared fun -- . . . an Indian spring in an alkaline literary desert." He commended the readability of the book. He mentioned "the lawlessness and audacity" of the author's treatment of his subject -- traits which would have appealed to a fellow-westerner. The "real power of the book" he found in Twain's "mock assumption of a righteous indignation." He praised the style, the "really admirable rhetoric, vigorous and picturesque," calling it "an agreeable relief to long passages of extravagant humor." So much for the credit side. On the debit side, he found Twain "As a conscientious, painstaking traveler, . . . not to be commended." He disapproved of the fidelity with which he followed guides and guide-books, a curious criticism in view of the fact that the Quaker City excursion was a trip with a carefully arranged itinerary. He betrayed his own weakness in charging that Twain lacked "that balance of pathos which we deem essential to complete humor." In this, Harte's contemporaries, who dubbed him "the American Dickens," would doubtless have concurred, although a change in taste has placed Twain higher in favor than Harte primarily because the former happily eschewed (as a rule) those maudlin excesses of pathos to which his generation was largely given over. Harte concluded:

> . . . after a perusal of this volume, we see no reason for withholding the opinion we entertained before taking it up, that Mr. Clemens deserves to rank foremost among Western humorists; and in California, above his only rival, "John Phoenix," whose fun, though more cultivated and spontaneous, lacked the sincere purpose and larger intent of "Mark Twain's."[16]

The enormous success of The Innocents Abroad established Mark Twain as a popular favorite. It is doubtful, however, that his immense following

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[16] 4 (Jan., 1870), 100-1.

found in his book the "larger intent" which Bret Harte mentioned in his review. For instance, a literary critic writing a quarter of a century after the Innocents was published endeavored to explain Mark Twain's "purpose," which he found to consist in pointing out "not how an American ought to feel on seeing the sights of the Old World, but how he actually does feel if he is honest with himself." This purpose, he claimed, was not apparent to the great mass of readers who enjoyed The Innocents Abroad and is even yet (1894) but imperfectly appreciated.[17] A few discerning critics saw more than the antics of a funny fellow, but on the whole Twain was enjoyed in this early period for his ability to make his audience laugh. His immediate plans were vague. Bliss, the publisher of the Innocents, was eager for a repeat performance, but, as Paine reports, at this time "Mark Twain still did not regard himself as a literary man."[18] Some journalistic activity he did engage in -- notably the Buffalo Express writing and the Galaxy column.[19] Both involved the production of humorous skits, whimsical observations, witty sayings, and the like -- largely hack work of little importance. But both enterprises tended to keep his name before the public. The periodicals of the day contain numerous references to Twain during this period of transition from journalist to man of letters.

The name Mark Twain had made for himself was that of humorist, pure and simple. The Nation said of one of his Galaxy columns that it was

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[17] Henry C. Vedder, American Writers of To-Day, New York, 1894, pp. 129-30.

[18] Paine, p. 385.

[19] He worked on the Express off and on after his purchase of a third interest from August, 1869, to April, 1870. He wrote for the Galaxy, of New York City, a column of "Memoranda" from May, 1870, to April, 1871. Meantime, he lectured (notably in New England), was married, and took up residence in Hartford, which was to be his home for the next twenty years.

"up to his ordinary mark, and . . . to our apprehension, very funny, and very well worth reading by anybody who likes to be amused, and is not above laughing when he feels like it."[20] The same periodical a few months later remarked editorially:

> . . . the United States possesses, what no other nation does, several professed jesters — that is, men who are not only humorists in the ordinary sense of the term, but make a business of cracking jokes, and are recognized as persons whose duty it is to take a jocose view of things. Artemus Ward, Josh Billings, and Mark Twain, and the Rev. P. V. Nasby, and one or two others of less note, are a kind of personages whom no other society has produced, and who certainly could in no other society attain equal celebrity.[21]

It was difficult during this period for Clemens to take a jocose view of things, for the crush of circumstance bore heavily upon him. Let him tell it himself in his "Valedictory" for the Galaxy.

> I have now written for The Galaxy a year. For the last eight months, with hardly an interval, I have had for my fellows and comrades, night and day, doctors and watchers of the sick! During these eight months death has taken two members of my home circle and malignantly threatened two others. All this I have experienced, yet all the time been under contract to furnish "humorous" matter once a month for this magazine. I am speaking the exact truth in the above details. Please to put yourself in my place and contemplate the grisly grotesqueness of the situation. I think that some of the "humor" I have written during this period could have been injected into a funeral sermon without disturbing the solemnity of the occasion.
>
> The Memoranda will cease permanently with this issue of the Magazine. . . . At last I am free of the doctors and watchers, and am so exalted in spirits that I will cut this final Memoranda very short and go off and enjoy the new state of things. I will put it to pleasant and diligent use in writing a book.[22]

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[20] 11 (July 7, 1870), 14.

[21] "The 'Comic Paper' Question," 11 (Dec. 29, 1870), 434.

[22] 11 (April, 1871), 615. The Nation, commenting editorially upon Twain's severance of his Galaxy connections, said: "Mr. 'Mark Twain' bids farewell to the readers of the Galaxy this month, and will be regretted by a good many of them, ourselves, we confess, among the number.

The book he mentions was to be Roughing It, but before we consider that work, we must take note of a trivial and wholly unworthy effort which he gave to the world in the spring of 1871. This bore the rather ponderous title of Mark Twain's (Burlesque) Autobiography and First Romance. It was on all counts a mistake. Paine said of it:

> The publication was not important, from any standpoint. Literary burlesque is rarely important, and it was far from Mark Twain's best form of expression. A year or two later he realized the mistake of this book, bought in the plates and destroyed them.[23]

The Romance was the "Awful, Terrible Mediaeval Romance," which had appeared in the Buffalo Express early in 1870. The burlesque autobiography had not seen previous publication. Together they made a singularly odd little volume rendered even more curious by a series of quite irrelevant, full-page engravings depicting members of the Erie Railroad Ring in attitudes which were presumably intended to illustrate the dishonest methods of the Erie group. What connection the illustrations had with the text was by no means clear. Perhaps the very vagueness of the whole volume was intended as part of the humor. The medieval romance, inferior as it is in all respects, might conceivably be of some interest to students of Mark Twain's thought as an early example of his treatment of a subject which interested him throughout his entire life and saw its finest fruition in A Connecticut

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For while, like all other professional 'American Humorists' — about as odd a profession, by the bye, as has ever been seen — he was sometimes rather vulgar and rather low, he has on several occasions told some extraordinarily good stories, and said some very good things, and given a deal of not very refined, perhaps, but on the whole harmless amusement to a large number of people." — 12 (April 6, 1871), 243.

[23]Paine, p. 433. Needless to say, this was not the follow-up of the Innocents for which Bliss was eagerly waiting. The Burlesque Autobiography was brought out by Charles Sheldon, publisher of the Galaxy, and presumably came about as a result of Twain's connection with that periodical.

Yankee and Joan of Arc. Otherwise, the item is altogether negligible. Only three reviews of the volume have been uncovered, two of them quite brief, and all of them distinctly unfavorable. The longest (much longer, incidentally, than the worth of the volume merited) appeared in the Literary World of Boston.[24] The writer began by announcing that the work was unclassifiable. "We can recall no precedent in literature for this biography. . . . Is it 'fish, flesh, fowl, or good red herring'?" He continued: "The name of the author justifies the suspicion that the work is one of humor; but the book itself affords not the feeblest fibre of corroboration, and the suspicion is dismissed as unwarrantable. Is it a religious tract? . . . Is it a rebus, a charade, an enigma?" He remained baffled. As for the autobiographical part, it "has neither head nor tail, neither sense nor wit, . . ." He concluded: "As to the literary merit of these effusions, they would have had a more appropriate place in some quack medicine almanac. We are sincerely sorry to see Mark Twain, who has done some admirable work, lending himself to a mere money-catching scheme like this."[25] A critic for the Eclectic, of Cincinnati, wrote:

> This making fun for so much a page, and grinding it out monthly to meet the demands of publishers, is not usually very laughable. Indeed, on the contrary, the material has frequently a funereal character that impresses one unpleasantly, as he wonders if the mental decrepitude does not presage early death.[26]

The reviewer for Godey's Lady's Book was more charitable, but equally firm in his contention that this would never do.

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[24]This "review" was, strictly speaking, a humorous sally on the part of some Boston critic. It is much wittier and more whimsical than anything in the Twain volume.

[25]1 (April 1, 1871), 165.

[26]3 (April, 1871), 256.

> This autobiography does not do justice to Mark Twain's reputation for humor. The necessity for making a book must have borne very heavily on him to compel him to send before the public such a collection of weak jokes and mild witticisms as this. We do not mean to say that it is not funny, and absurd, or that the reader will not laugh at every page, but it does not do full justice to the author.[27]

So much for Mark Twain's third work. His fourth, "the California book," as he called the volume which we know as Roughing It, was published early in 1872. It was in every way a worthy successor to The Innocents Abroad and holds indeed much more interest for an American reader, although, oddly enough, it has never been as popular as its predecessor. Albert Bigelow Paine, Twain's greatest biographer, considered it "a marvelous picture of frontier aspects" and claimed that it was "essentially a picaresque novel, a work of unperishing fiction, founded on fact."[28] The book marks a return to the earlier and more successful method of the Innocents, and as such it should have been widely heralded. But it was not. Indeed, it was largely ignored in the East. Howells reviewed it for the Atlantic, but none of the other journals paid it any attention whatever. To the East, presumably, the West was as yet no fit subject for serious literary exploitation -- at least not by a humorist. One other review has been discovered -- that in the Overland Monthly, a periodical dedicated largely to western matters. Both reviews are fairly brief.

Howells began his notice by praising the book for its picture of "the flush times in Nevada."

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[27] 82 (June, 1871), 575.

[28] Paine, pp. 454-5. Later criticism, especially that of Bernard DeVoto, has tended to substantiate this estimate (although it should be added parenthetically that such is not the case concerning all of Paine's judgments). Mr. DeVoto finds in Roughing It and in Twain's other works with a native background pictures of American life that are as valuable, factually and artistically, as anything our literature possesses. See Mark Twain's America, Cambridge, Mass., 1932, passim.

> The grotesque exaggeration and broad irony with which the life is described are conjecturably the truest colors that could have been used, for all existence there must have looked like an extravagant joke, the humor of which was only deepened by its nether-side of tragedy.[29]

He continued, calling attention to the grab-bag nature of the work; "and yet the complex is a sort of 'harmony of colors' which is not less than triumphant." His concluding remarks were generous and sensible.

> Probably an encyclopaedia could not be constructed from the book; the work of a human being, it is not unbrokenly nor infallibly funny; nor is it to be always praised for all the literary virtues; but it is singularly entertaining, and its humor is always amiable, manly, and generous.[30]

The reviewer for the Overland (probably not Bret Harte, who by this time had gone east), singled out the humor for special consideration, terming it "grotesque" and "extravagant" but nonetheless "genuine, and thoroughly enjoyable. . . ."

> On almost every page of the volume this vein of broad, robust humor crops out. It is not fine and pensive, like Irving's. It is not artificial, or based upon any literary model, . . . Its specific character is its spontaneity and naturalness, together with an underlying element of sturdy honesty and rugged sense, antagonistic to sentimentality and shams.

He mentioned the "keen insight and shrewd observation" of this Mark Twain humor, and conceded to its creator "precedence in the unclassical school" of

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[29]Note the similarity of Paine's much later comment: "A word here about this Western humor: It is a distinct product. It grew out of a distinct condition — the battle with the frontier. The fight was so desperate, to take it seriously was to surrender. Women laughed that they might not weep; men, when they could no longer swear. 'Western humor' was the result. It is the freshest, wildest humor in the world, but there is tragedy behind it." — p. 454.

[30]Atlantic Monthly, 29 (June, 1872), 754-5. The basis for attributing to Howells the critical notices which in the ensuing discussion are said to be his is the work by William M. Gibson and George Arms, A Bibliography of William Dean Howells, New York, 1948. See also the appendix to My Mark Twain, in which Howells reprinted twelve items about Clemens written between 1869 and 1905.

American humor.

> About him there is nothing classic, bookish, or conventional, any more than there is about a buffalo or a grizzly. His genius is characterized by the breadth, and ruggedness, and audacity of the West; and, wherever he was born, or wherever he may abide, the Great West claims him as her intellectual offspring.

The critic concluded by calling attention to two traits Mark Twain possessed: a gift for description and one for narration. The remarks are quite acute.

> It would be a great misapprehension, however, to conceive of Roughing It as merely a book of grotesque humor and rollicking fun. It abounds in fresh descriptions of natural scenery, some of which, especially in the overland stage-ride, are remarkable graphic and vigorous. The writer's talent for clear, impressive narrative, too, is illustrated in the chapters devoted to the terrible story of the desperado, Slade, which has as intense an interest as any thing in the wildest sensational novel of the day.[31]

In spite of these really rather flattering comments upon aspects of Clemens's writing other than the comic ones, it was primarily as a humorist that his contemporaries continued to view him in this early period. This is especially noticeable if we digress a moment to consider his academic reputation. One of the earliest appearances of Mark Twain's name in a scholarly history of literature occurred in N. K. Royse's A Manual of American Literature, published in 1872. Twain's name was merely listed in a footnote as one of a group of "writers of funny sketches, depending, perhaps, more upon a grotesqueness of style and orthography than upon any other element of the ludicrous."[32] The following year appeared a book by John S. Hart with the same title as the Royse volume. Twain was included in a chapter of humorists on the strength

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[31] 8 (June, 1872), 580-1.

[32] Page 32.

of his first two books. It was said of him simply that he "set the whole continent in a roar by his volume, The Innocents Abroad, . . ."[33] In the same year Frederic Hudson published a scholarly account of Journalism in the United States from 1690 to 1872 in which he made the following observation:

> While comic journalism, per se, does not thrive in the United States, we have plenty of comic writers and talkers, who have grown fat, made money, set the nation in a roar, and thrown Momus into ecstasies of delight over the fresh, free, funny, and broad humor of our numerous raconteurs, and wits, and punsters. . . .
>
> Artemus Ward, Mark Twain, John Phoenix, Doesticks, Josh Billings, Bret Harte, Petroleum V. Nasby, . . . have introduced a new order of comic literature, which, for quaintness, and richness, and freshness, is a feature of the times.[34]

Even after the publication of his masterpieces, the academicians of the eighties still drew the line just short of including him in the realm of "Literature," as we shall see when we digress again during our discussion of Twain's second decade as a literary figure.

Meantime, to return to a chronological account. In Hartford the Clemenses became a part of the Nook Farm circle, which included Harriet Beecher Stowe and Charles Dudley Warner.[35] One of the important results of the friendship with Warner was the joint authorship of The Gilded Age. It was undertaken as a sort of challenge growing out of a dinner-table discussion among the two authors and their wives concerning the popular novels of the day. The men agreed that they could write a better novel than those which the women were currently enjoying. They began almost

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[33]Page 437. Four pages of excerpts from the Innocents follow.

[34]Pages 688-9.

[35]For an account of the activities of this important group, see Kenneth R. Andrews, Nook Farm: Mark Twain's Hartford Circle, Cambridge, Mass., 1950.

immediately, writing alternate sections, and completed the task in about three months. "The result," as Paine says, "if not highly artistic, made astonishingly good reading."[36] The Gilded Age was more widely reviewed than any previous Twain volume or any of the subsequent six, a circumstance which may have been owing to the prominence of the co-author. Warner had gained a fame of sorts as a polite essayist in the tradition of Charles Lamb. He is remembered today (if at all) for one book -- My Summer in a Garden, a collection of pleasant and whimsical observations on the vicissitudes of planting flowers, vegetables and berries, together with certain moral reflections called up by his close association with nature.[37] His connection with The Gilded Age has been almost forgotten, so eclipsed were his conventional, plot-ridden episodes by Mark Twain's brilliant and masterful portrayal of Colonel Sellers. But in the seventies and eighties he was a force to be reckoned with. A reviewer of his Mummies and Moslems, for instance, which was published in 1876, comparing him with Mark Twain, had this to say: ". . . Mr. Warner is also funny, and possesses, besides, a vein of poetic feeling, which Mr. Clemens does not."[38] Some reviewers felt that Warner was prostituting his talent by

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[36]Paine, p. 478. See also pp. 476 ff. for an account of the composition of the book. Mark Twain's own impression of the collaboration is worth reporting. "[We worked] in the superstition that we were writing one coherent yarn, when I suppose, as a matter of fact, we were writing two incoherent ones." (This comment was made several years after the book was written.) Quoted by Paine, p. 477.

[37]It was published in 1871.

[38]Arcadian, 5 (May 6, 1876), 3. A decade or so later a critic wrote of him: "Charles Dudley Warner has been classed among our humorists and his philosophy is indeed permeated by a vein of delicious humor absolutely sui generis, which sparkles and corruscates, as it were, on the surface. . . ; but under this smiling surface it is never to be forgotten that there lie the deepest and most earnest feelings and convictions. Mr. Warner is a thinker and one whose thoughts are mainly occupied with subjects that make for the elevation and well being of his fellows." -- "Charles Dudley Warner," Book News, 8 (Sept., 1889), 3.

collaborating with a mere comic like Mark Twain. Others felt that the work was a pretty hopeless hodge-podge. The Gilded Age does not enjoy a very high reputation today, the best thing about it being its title. Its sins are manifold, and even the palliative attempt of Twain's good friend Stoddard can do little to redeem the novel. He wrote: "As to the plot of the story, it was never meant to have any; . . ."[39] Colonel Sellers lives as one of the truly great comic characters in the American portrait gallery. The Mississippi River scenes in the early part of the book are justly famous and are among the best things Twain ever did. And the satire of politics and society in Washington can still be read with undiminished pleasure. But the rest of the book — largely the work of Warner — is pretty dreary. Let it be said, however, in extenuation that Warner was simply working within the accepted literary confines of his period. That he lacked Mark Twain's genius for transcending the merely local and prescribed and achieving the universal and the timeless is less to his discredit than to his collaborator's glory.

Five reviews of The Gilded Age were published shortly after it appeared. Most of them were unfavorable. The one in the Boston Literary World was practically insulting.

> We have read enough of the book to convince us that it is not worth reading and to fill us with wonder as to how a man of Mr. Warner's literary reputation could lend his name to such cheap and feeble stuff. . . . The book has a strong savor of lucre; it was evidently written to sell, and in the hope of gaining a liberal heap of that money, whose worship it purports to ridicule. It is not witty, or in any respect interesting; the only feature of it that we can conscientiously praise is the illustrations.[40]

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[39] Charles W. Stoddard, Exits and Entrances, Boston, 1903, p. 71.

[40] 4 (Jan., 1874), 126.

The Independent singled out the realism of the book for special comment.

> . . . it is a book of real life with a vengeance, selecting from real life what is worst and most repulsive. It is not so much a well-wrought story, with a unity running through it, as a series of sketches strung together. . . . We should blush to see this book republished in Europe. . . . The book has excellent features, the best being the character of Eshkol Sellers, the extravagantly visionary bummer; but even he is disgusting. We confess to some little disappointment, and wish that the pleasanter features of American life might have had their proportionate treatment.[41]

The reviewer for Appleton's Journal was perhaps the least harsh at the same time as being the most cogent. He called attention to the penalty which the pursuit of humor inevitably involves — "the painful penalty . . . of not being able to ask for the mustard or greet a friend without provoking a laugh." In the case of Mark Twain, however, he continued, this pursuit of humor has probably not blinded careful readers "to the quaint and peculiar originality, acuteness, . . . /and/ genius" of the author's mind — "to its real power and subtilty, the keenness of its observation, and its perpetual and consistent hatred of feebleness and sham." The critic found in Twain's writings certain qualities which made him feel that it would be a real pleasure "to hear his talk or read his works when — if such time ever could come — he was not funny." Concerning the shortcomings of The Gilded Age, he wrote:

> But the book has the faults which will possibly cling to the results of most joint authorship to the end of time. It is good in episodes from which to make a novel — unsatisfactory as a combination of them. It is like a salad-dressing badly mixed, wherein one comes upon the mustard in lumps, the salt in masses, pools of vinegar, and collections of oil which might have softened the whole. The ingredients are capital, the use of them faulty, . . .

His remarks on characterization were pertinent. Believing that the authors

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[41] 26 (Jan. 1, 1874), 1642.

had "overcrowded their stage with people," he asserted further: "If they meant to give us a story, in the course of which the characters played a true and properly balanced part, they must certainly be said to have failed." Concerning the humorous paraphernalia, he wrote, in conclusion: "The preface, the chapter-headings, and the appendix of the book may possess humor of a high order; to us it seemed -- after the first smile, perhaps -- to be of rather a dreary sort."[42]

The reviewer for Hearth and Home stressed the unexpected nature of the work.

> We imagined it an extremely funny exaggeration of life with here and there a touch of Mr. Warner's dainty humor, and thought the whole would prove an inimitable burlesque of the modern novel peculiarly rich in the characteristics of both its authors. We find it instead as genuine a novel as any, full of humor, with now and then a laughable exaggeration of character and life, but on the whole, rather a pathetic than a humorous production.

"The realism of the book" he called "simply marvelous," and the satire "pungent." He praised the "accuracy of aim" with which it was delivered. He found the story "full of purpose," and the moral "an especially worthy one." He decided that the novel was a "practical preachment" against the current curse of avarice and concluded by suggesting that although it abounded in humor it was clearly "written not in fun but very much in earnest."[43]

The Galaxy devoted but little space to The Gilded Age. The reviewer quoted from the Preface a few lines (intended to be humorous) concerning the critics, whom the authors did "not expect . . . [to] read the book before writing a notice of it." Taking them literally, he asserted:

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[42] 11 (Jan. 10, 1874), 59.

[43] 6 (Jan. 17, 1874), 38-9.

"It would be a sheer waste of time to read every line of a production heralded to the world in this way, . . ." "Nevertheless," he continued,

> . . . we have looked into it, and can say that it is a work which no library should be without; for it is the production of two humorists whose names are well known throughout the United States, and who, if they seldom succeed in being funny, have at least the reputation of always being so — which comes to very much the same thing.[44]

Old and New published the longest review of The Gilded Age and the only signed one. F. B. Perkins, a connection of the Beecher family, a some-time Hartford resident and member of the Nook Farm circle, former editor of the Galaxy, and a generally well-known writer of the time, described the book as "curious," and found it to be "a story with a purpose as much as 'The Pilgrim's Progress.' It is written to expose speculators, lobbyists, and corrupt legislators." Concerning characterization, he remarked: "There is, indeed, throughout, a clearness of drawing, and an individuality about the characters, that will convince any expert, that they are, to a great extent, portraits; that is, genuine and faithful work." He praised the descriptive powers of the authors. "Many of the scenes in the book are described with great force, . . ." As to the merits of the collaboration, he had some doubts.

> The peculiar subtlety, and delicate, quiet, graceful humor, of Mr. Warner's best work, are of too cool a tone to mix well with the broader and more ridiculous and literal fun of Mr. Clemens. And yet, in a constant appeal to the instinct of secretiveness, the two men are much alike. They do not laugh nor smile: they produce their funny thoughts as coldly and gravely as if it wrote itself up on a cemetery fence. The result is, that you see it yourself; and that is what makes men laugh. . . .
>
> For such merely literary merits as elaborate construction and detailed finish, we need not look: they could no more exist in a book made as this was than a chicken could be hatched from a new-laid egg in fifteen minutes.

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[44] 17 (March, 1874), 428.

And yet his over-all opinion was favorable. He described the novel as a "remarkably well-executed work," a "book of real and high purpose, much graphic and portrait power, much knowledge of men and things, and uncommon swiftness and force of action."[45]

An interesting side light connected with The Gilded Age concerns the play which Mark Twain fashioned from the novel. It was a hasty job, undertaken in the summer of 1874, when he learned that the dramatist Gilbert S. Densmore was preparing an acting version for the popular theatrical performer John T. Raymond.[46] The play was made up almost wholly of Twain's chapters from the novel, and Warner thus declined to accept any returns either in the way of financial remuneration or critical praise or blame. Twain's opinion of his venture was not especially high. "It is simply a setting for the one character," he wrote, "Col. Sellers — as a play I guess it will not bear a critical assault in force."[47] His judgment was largely correct. The play was a popular success but a critical failure.[48]

Appleton's Journal published two notices. The first announced that the public was "keenly curious to know what one of the foremost humorists

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[45] 9 (March, 1874), 386-8.

[46] Paine, p. 517.

[47] Letter to W. D. Howells, Sept. 20, 1874. Letters, I, 227.

[48] "Colonel Mulberry Sellers, warm and genial, eloquent and sanguine, impecunious in purse but a millionaire in promises, rallies to the theatre thousands nightly to roar in laughter over the exaggeration of an extravagant feature in our American society. The genius of Mark Twain in facile caricature proves that there are not only 'millions' in a play, but that millions will laugh it into every man's conversation and approval." — S. S. Cox, "American Humor," Harper's Monthly, 50 (April, 1875), 698.

of the age could do as a dramatist." The critic asserted that, although the construction was amateurish, the play could be considered "in some respects, a decided success." These respects had to do with character and dialogue. Colonel Sellers, though he was described as having "no necessary connection with the story," was pronounced a triumph. And it was acknowledged that the dialogue was "so abundantly salted with pungent and vigorous satire, so full of effective shots at current shams in life and practice, that it would almost suffice of itself to carry the play." The critic concluded by alleging that the drama, on the whole, was what one might logically expect at the hands of "a pungent and gifted humorist" who was "entirely lacking in dramatic instinct and experience."[49]

Three months later the same periodical published an essay speculating upon the possible reasons for the decay of American comedy in the course of which it asserted that the Sellers play, in addition to being "weak and inadequate," was "entirely worthless as a literary performance."[50]

Howells, in his review for the Atlantic, set aside literary standards as criteria of judgment, claiming that the play was "as unlike good literature as many other excellent acting-plays."

> Yet any one who should judge it from the literary standpoint, and not with an artistic sense greater and more than literary, would misjudge it. The play is true, in its broad way, to American conditions, and is a fair and just satire upon our generally recognized social and political corruptions.

He commented upon its vigor and originality -- qualities which, he believed,

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[49] 12 (Oct. 3, 1874), 446.

[50] "Music and the Drama," Appleton's Journal, 13 (Jan., 1875), 23.

went far toward mitigating its defects.

> It is merely an episode, but it is strong and new to the stage, however stale to fact, and it appeals to the spectator's imagination so successfully throughout, that he does not mind how very sketchy an episode it is.[51]

Eventually the play took its place in the annals of the American theater. Brander Matthews, that indefatigable investigator into the history and development of world drama, wrote a few years after the production on the American as a theatrical type. Speaking of the Sellers characterization, he said:

> Now there was in this character something which exactly fell in with the times, . . . In the hands of Mr. John T. Raymond, the careless, reckless, airy brag and boundless anticipations of the character were rounded into a harmonious whole, and the character itself was shown to be simple and strong behind all its eccentricities. And there was something in it that all Americans, in those days when the gilding was first washed from the age most of us had taken for solid gold, -- there was something in it we all could recognize; . . .

These good qualities, however, did not blind him to the defects of the piece which, he claimed, "has nearly every fault a play can have and still stand the glare of the foot-lights." He concluded his discussion of the work by saying:

> It is difficult to speak of it seriously; its construction is infantine; its introduction of a steamboat explosion is puerile; its incidents, where they are not forced and improbable, are trivial and trite; it has no dramatic development of either action or character; even Colonel Sellers himself has no vital connection with the story and is exhibited to us merely in speech instead of being shown in action.[52]

The Gilded Age was Mark Twain's fifth book -- his fourth important book if we discount (as we must) the Burlesque Autobiography. At the

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[51] "Drama," Atlantic Monthly, 35 (June, 1875), 750.

[52] "The American on the Stage," Scribner's Monthly, 18 (July, 1879), 328-30.

time of its great popularity, during the spring and summer of 1874, he was thirty-eight years old, and his best work lay ahead of him. Nevertheless, he was considered to be a writer of some importance -- or perhaps we should say a humorist of some importance, for a distinction continued to be made during this period between humor and literature. It was at this time that probably the first full-length study of Clemens appeared in the literary journals -- a critical summary of his work in the aggregate, an attempt to evaluate his contribution not to American literature, but to American humor. The author was George T. Ferris, whose essay is a model of inferior criticism -- pretentious, cloudy, sentimental, digressive, overly biographical, and only occasionally really critical. He betrayed his bias (which was largely the bias of the age) by comparing Twain with Bret Harte, praising Harte for his pathos, and then saying:

> Mark Twain, on the other hand, rarely touches the latent springs of human sentiment, nor is his style more than narrative and descriptive. He strolls in the open, breezy sunshine, happy-go-lucky fashion, yet with a keenness of vision that allows nothing in his horizon to escape him.

Although Twain, he continued, lacked Bret Harte's subtlety and pathos, he possessed "more breadth, variety, and ease."

> His sketches of life are arabesque in their strange combinations. Bits of bright, serious description, both of landscape and society, carry us along till suddenly we stumble on some master-stroke of grotesque and irresistible form. He understands the value of repose in art. One tires of a page where every sentence sparkles with points, and the author is constantly attitudinizing for our amusement. We like to be betrayed into laughter as much in books as in real life. It is the unconscious, easy, careless gait of Mark Twain that makes his most potent charm. He seems always to be catering as much to his own enjoyment as to that of the public. He strolls along like a great rollicking school-boy, bent on having a good time, and determined that his readers shall enjoy it with him.

He suggested that many of Twain's faults were owing to his early journalistic training in connection with which he was forced into attitudes suggestive of the "professional funny man," not the worst of which was his tendency to season his work "with the hottest, strongest condiments." Traces of this method of writing persisted. However, the critic continued,

> In spite of this fault, our writer is so thoroughly genial, so charged with rich and unctuous humor, that we forget the lack of finesse and delicacy in its breadth and strength. Its tap-root takes no deep hold in the subsoil, and we may not always find a subtile and penetrating fragrance in its blooms. But these are so lavish, bright, and variegated, that we should be ungrateful indeed not to appreciate our author's striking gifts at their full worth.

He praised the photographic realism of Twain's characterization, and concluded on a note of prophecy: ". . . the author's powers are at their best working capacity, and . . . the world has a right to look for liberal fruits from them."[53]

In the summer of 1874 appeared Twain's Number One, a pamphlet published by the American News Company of New York. It contained thirteen stories and sketches, of which ten had been previously printed elsewhere.[54] It is an unimportant item and is not even mentioned in Paine's Biography. So far as can be determined, there were no reviews.

Clemens's next major publication was the Sketches New and Old, brought out by the American Publishing Company the following autumn. It

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[53]George T. Ferris, "Mark Twain," Appleton's Journal, 12 (July 4, 1874), 15-18. The essay is noteworthy for taking up each of Twain's major books in turn and criticizing them briefly. But the comments are not especially worth quoting. Of interest, however, though how reliable is uncertain, are the statistics on the sale of The Innocents Abroad. In five years the sales reportedly reached 241,000 copies, $950,000. This the critic called "almost unparalleled."

[54]Johnson, op. cit., p. 23.

had been contracted for five years earlier, but other books, lectures, and a trip to England had conspired to delay its appearance. Many of the items are of little worth and, as Twain soon realized, would better have remained uncollected.[55] The best things in the book are the reprinted frog story, together with a French translation and Twain's immensely funny literal translation back into English, and the Auntie Cord tale, which had first seen print in the Atlantic. Also worth mentioning is the humorous petition to Congress concerning copyright -- Twain's first utterance on a subject which was to interest him for many years afterwards. Only one review of the Sketches has been found -- that in the Atlantic by Howells. It was much longer and more laudatory than the volume merited.[56] Howells began by praising the work for the traits which were by then familiar -- its humor, its burlesque, its "extravagance of statement," its irony, its "right-mindedness," its "breadth," and so forth. "But," he continued,

> there is another quality in this book which we fancy we shall hereafter associate more and more with our familiar impressions of him, and that is a growing seriousness of meaning in the apparently unmoralized drolling, which must result from the humorist's second thought of political and social absurdities. . . .

He mentioned several items, characterizing them briefly, and singled out the Auntie Cord tale for specific praise.

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[55] Paine, p. 551.

[56] Paine reports that Clemens was "very anxious" that Howells should be the first critic to review the Sketches, for "He had a superstition that Howells's verdicts were echoed by the lesser reviewers, and that a book was made or damned accordingly; . . ." Such, however, was by no means the case, as a perusal of the criticism of the day discloses. In this particular instance, the complimentary review had little effect upon the sales of the book, which were fairly small. See Paine, p. 551. Nevertheless, Twain was highly pleased with the review, calling it "a perfectly superb notice," and adding that "nothing ever gratified me so much before." -- Letter to Howells, Oct. 19, 1875. Letters, I, 263.

> But by far the most perfect piece of work in the book is A True Story, . . . a study of character as true as life itself, strong, tender, and most movingly pathetic in its perfect fidelity to the tragic fact. . . . The rugged truth of the sketch leaves all other stories of slave life infinitely far behind, and reveals a gift in the author for the simple dramatic report of reality which we have seen equaled in no other American writer.[57]

This was high praise indeed, but Howells was always one of Mark Twain's most enthusiastic admirers. Praise from other quarters came to Clemens at this time, though whether he knew about it or not we have no way of determining. From three separate areas writers who were of almost equal stature with Howells spoke out warmly in approbation of various qualities of his work. From Philadelphia the Duyckinck brothers wrote in their Cyclopedia of American Literature that Mark Twain was "an American humorist of decided and peculiar originality, and the possessor of a descriptive style of great vigor and clearness, . . ."[58] From California William C. Bartlett, in an address delivered before the faculty, students, and visitors of the University of California, November 12, 1875, said of "the prince of grotesque humorists":

> With a keen sense of the symmetry and harmony of things, he had a keener perception of all the shams and ridiculous aspects of life. His pungent gospel of humor is as sanitary as a gentle trade-wind. . . . He has also a finer touch and flavor, not of the rankest soil, but of that which gives the aroma and delicate bouquet to the rarest mountain-side vintage.[59]

And from New England (by way of Harper's Monthly) the well-known Boston critic Edward P. Whipple called Mark Twain "a man of wide experience, keen intellect, and literary culture," and added the (for that time) rather

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[57] 36 (Dec., 1875), 749-51.

[58] 1875, II, 951.

[59] "Literature and Art in California," Overland Monthly, 15 (Dec., 1875), 539.

surprising comment: "The serious portions of his writings indicate that he could win a reputation in literature even if he had not been blessed with a humorous fancy inexhaustible in resource."[60]

Such was Mark Twain's reputation on the eve of the publication of the first of his acknowledged masterpieces, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer. The book was slow in getting written, having been started in the summer of 1874 when, as Paine tells us, the success of Roughing It "made him cast about for other autobiographical material, . . ."[61] He interrupted work on Tom Sawyer to do the "Old Times on the Mississippi" for the Atlantic late in 1874. In the summer of 1875, however, inspiration returned, and he completed the story in July. Eager for Howells's opinion, he carried the manuscript to Boston. When Howells had read it, he wrote: "It's altogether the best boy's story I ever read. It will be an immense success. But I think you ought to treat it explicitly as a boy's story. Grown-ups will enjoy it just as much if you do, . . ."[62] And Howells, as usual, was right. Except for a few dissenting notes,[63] opinion concerning Tom Sawyer has been uniformly favorable, and the work has achieved the status of an

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[60] "American Literature," Harper's Monthly, 52 (March, 1876), 526. See DAB, XX, 67-8, for an account of Whipple wherein he is called "one of the most brilliant writers in the country, as well as one of the most experienced reviewers."

[61] Paine, p. 507.

[62] Letter of Nov. 21, 1875. Mildred Howells, ed., Life in Letters of William Dean Howells, Garden City, New York, 1928, I, 212.

[63] Agnes Repplier, for example, writing twenty years later, said: "Tom Sawyer has much to be forgiven. His adventures are beyond credence, his courage and sagacity a trifle overdrawn, his love-making much too ardent and sophisticated, his misdeeds occasionally vulgar and inane." — "The Boy in Books," Book Buyer, 14 (March, 1897), 123.

American classic.[64] It appeared belatedly in December, 1876, although it had been announced as early as April of that year,[65] and Howells's review from advance sheets was printed in the Atlantic for May, 1876. Possibly because of its delayed appearance it was considered "old stuff" by reviewers. The Atlantic article was the only critical notice it received in the journals of its day. As might be expected, Howells was enthusiastic in his praise, singling out the realism of the book for special mention. The character of Tom, he reported, was presented "with a fidelity to circumstance which loses no charm by being realistic in the highest degree, and which gives incomparably the best picture of life in that region as yet known to fiction. . . ." He continued:

> The local material and the incidents with which his career is worked up are excellent, and throughout there is scrupulous regard for the boy's point of view in reference to his surroundings and himself, which shows how rapidly Mr. Clemens has grown as an artist. We do not remember anything in which this propriety is violated, and its preservation adds immensely to the grown-up reader's satisfaction in the amusing and exciting story. . . .
>
> The story is a wonderful study of the boy-mind, which inhabits a world quite distinct from that in which he is bodily present with his elders, and in this lies its great charm and its universality, for boy-nature, however human-nature varies, is the same everywhere.
>
> The tale is very dramatically wrought, and the subordinate characters are treated with the same graphic force that sets Tom alive before us. The worthless vagabond, Huck Finn, is entirely delightful throughout, . . .

He concluded with a description of the book as "full of entertaining character, and of the greatest artistic sincerity."[66] An interesting

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[64] Bernard DeVoto sums up critical judgment by terming it "the supreme American idyll." -- Mark Twain's America, p. 304.

[65] "The American Publishing Co. of Hartford have in press a new book by Mark Twain, entitled 'The Adventures of Tom Sawyer.'" Arcadian, 5 (April 8, 1876), 3.

[66] Atlantic Monthly, 37 (May, 1876), 621-2. Among newspapers Tom Sawyer was reviewed by the New York Times (Jan. 13, 1877), which singled

side light in connection with Tom Sawyer is the advertisement which was printed (for one place) in the Christian Union, 15 (March 7, 1877), 215. (It ran in the issues for March 14 and 21, also, and possibly longer.) In a column headed AGENTS WANTED, along with requests for salesmen to handle chromo cards, watches, glass chimneys, choice teas, magic lanterns and stereopticons, etc., appeared the following notice:

> 30,000 copies sold in two months. MARK TWAIN'S New Book, "Adventures of Tom Sawyer," is the book that outsells everything, and the one agents make money on. Don't fool away time on dull works, but get this live book. Send for circulars, terms, &c, to Am. Pub. Co., Hartford, Ct.; Chicago, Ill.; Cin., O.

Regardless of how the reader or student of today may view this rather crass method of salesmanship (and one can hardly picture, say, Henry James resorting to it), it paid off. According to Professor Mott, who has made an exhaustive study of these matters, Tom Sawyer "was destined to reach higher sales figures than any of Mark Twain's other books," eventually in later years exceeding the two million mark.[67]

Mark Twain completed his first decade as a famous writer by collaborating with Bret Harte on an unsuccessful play,[68] and by publishing two inconsequential works which were ignored by the critics of the day.[69]

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out the realism of the work for special comment. "Matters are not told as they are fancied to be, but as they actually are." Reprinted in "A Century of Books, 1851-1951," p. 13.

[67] Frank Luther Mott, Golden Multitudes, New York, 1947, pp. 156-7.

[68] Ah Sin had its premiere at the National Theater in Washington, D. C., on May 7, 1877. It ran for a while in New York, toured for a time, and was soon abandoned.

[69] A True Story, and the Recent Carnival of Crime (1877) and Punch, Brothers, Punch! and Other Sketches (1878). No reviews of either have been located.

On April 11, 1878, he sailed for Germany with his family, not to return to the United States for seventeen months. His fame was world-wide. His literary reputation, less secure than his standing with the public, rested upon four major works: The Innocents Abroad, Roughing It, The Gilded Age, and Tom Sawyer. A brief summary and recapitulation discloses some interesting points. First, it was primarily as a humorist that Clemens was considered (when he was considered at all). Second, it was as something of an innovator that he came before the reading public. The Nation, for example, praised the freshness of The Innocents Abroad, while Howells in the Atlantic praised its novelty.[70] Third, certain qualities of mind were detected that later became closely associated with Mark Twain both as a social critic and as a thinker — a strong sense of justice and a hatred of sham. Finally, attention was called to such aspects of his art and personality as his rhetoric, his realism, the spontaneity and naturalness of his humor, his keen insight, his descriptive and narrative powers, his characterization, the acuteness of his mind, his geniality, his satiric powers, his universality, and his artistic sincerity. In spite of these admirable traits, however, some critics claimed to find little or no literary worth in his writings, others felt that since he was a humorist it was useless to look for literary worth, and still others seemed puzzled as to exactly how they were intended to react when faced with one of his books. A few discerning critics (notably Harte and Howells, who were personal friends) were more far-seeing concerning Twain's merits, but to what extent theirs were cases of special pleading it would be hard to say. Equally

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[70] It should be pointed out that in California The Innocents Abroad was not regarded as especially novel or different. It was "but one of three /books/ that were all deservedly popular, and Clemens himself was placed in no higher position as a humorist than either of the authors of the two other books." These were John F. Swift, author of Going to Jericho and Ross Browne, author of Multifarious Voyages. — George Wharton James, "Mark Twain and the Pacific Coast," Pacific Monthly, 24 (Aug., 1910), 126.

difficult to determine would be the degree to which Clemens considered himself simply a funny man. There is ample evidence to support the opinion that he was seldom correctly able to evaluate his work, and his dependence upon the judgments of others (his wife and Howells, especially) shows a critical instability that was more than just superficial. The numerous clownish antics to which he was given throughout his life militated rather considerably against his being taken seriously, and it is hardly an exaggeration to suggest that he became a classic in spite of himself.[71]

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[71]An example of the way in which he persisted in playing the clown: According to a note in the Outlook, 58 (March 19, 1898), 733-4, he answered a question as follows: "The books which have most influenced my life? With pleasure. This is the list: 'The Innocents Abroad,' 'Roughing It,' 'Tramp Abroad,' 'Prince and Pauper,' 'Huckleberry Finn,' 'Tom Sawyer,' 'Yank at the Court of Prince Arthur,' 'Personal Reminiscences of Joan of Arc,' 'Pudd'nhead Wilson,' 'Following the Equator,' and the publications of the late firm of Charles L. Webster & Co."

CHAPTER THREE

The Second Decade

The second decade of Mark Twain's career as a man of letters opened in 1880 with the publication of A Tramp Abroad, the direct result of the European tour of the previous year and a half. He had high hopes for its success. "I want to make a book which people will read, -- . . ." he had written to Howells.[1] And to Rev. Joseph Twichell, his friend in Hartford, who had accompanied him on the tour: "I think I can make a book that will be no dead corpse of a thing and I mean to do my level best to accomplish that."[2] The book appeared in March, 1880, after a rather painful period during which it had been wrenched into shape and out again, rewritten in large part, set aside and taken up, added to and subtracted from, until it had become, in the words of Paine, "a veritable nightmare."[3] Despite its wide pre-publication publicity and an advance sale of twenty-five thousand copies,[4] it was ignored by the magazine reviewers. In addition to the reasons for the neglect of Twain's works set forth earlier in this study, the following suggestion is worth considering. Travel literature was supposed to be serious; here was a funny travel book. To be sure, The Innocents Abroad had been a funny travel book, and it had suffered critical

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[1] Letter dated Jan. 30, 1879. Quoted in Life in Letters of William Dean Howells, I, 264. The letter does not appear in Mark Twain's Letters.

[2] Letter dated Jan. 26, 1879. Letters, I, 350.

[3] Paine, p. 663.

[4] Paine, p. 665.

neglect accordingly. It was reviewed by only two eastern critics, one of whom, Howells, acclaimed the author for possessing traits which were quite apart from the humorous. It will be demonstrated in a moment that Howells praised A Tramp Abroad for manifesting the profoundly serious intent of its author, its humor being more or less incidental. Howells, I venture to suggest, took the trouble to read his good friend's new book (and it was a fat volume) and thereby discovered the serious core of meaning which he deemed it necessary for a travel book to possess if it were to be taken in earnest. Other critics apparently simply did not bother with the book on the grounds that it was the work of a humorist and hence was not to be taken seriously. If this is the way they reasoned, they were mistaken, and their neglect of the Clemens volume, based as it was upon an erroneous preconception, was unfair. All this, of course, is theory. But it is given support by a review published in the Atlantic for August, 1880, of S. S. Cox's Search For Winter Sunbeams in the Riviera, Corsica, Algiers, and Spain (second edition). Cox was a humorist and critic of some note, having written articles and at least one book (Why We Laugh) on American humor. Howells was probably the author of the anonymous critique, since it was his custom while editor of the Atlantic to review large numbers of books without, of course, signing the articles.[5] At any rate, here is what the critic of Cox's book had to say about travel literature which was merely or excessively humorous:

> The book is made depressing reading by the fact that the author seems to have labored continually under the feeling that it was incumbent upon him to be funny, and in obedience to this sense of duty he frequently indulges in jests by the side of which grinning through a horse-collar is a serious and dignified occupation. If he had been content to be

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[5]He remained editor until January, 1881.

> natural, his book would have been an interesting account of some still tolerably little-known regions, but he incessantly pokes us in the ribs, kicks at the tambourine, and reminds us by his forced merriment that he remembers his position as "end-man." When he is sensible he is readable, but when he is funny he is lamentable.[6]

How can we reconcile this severe condemnation of Cox (providing we assume Howells is the author of the above comments) with the high praise of Mark Twain published in the Atlantic three months earlier? Let us examine the Howells review of A Tramp Abroad. He began with some generalizations on American humor which, he claimed, was becoming inordinately popular and widespread. That is to say, second-rate practitioners were invading the field with disastrous results. "Thieves from over the wall" were stealing the seeds of humor and were growing only weeds. Their crop was "not racy of the original soil." Twain's humor, Howells maintained, was grounded firmly in common sense, in a love of justice, and in a scorn of what is "petty and mean." These qualities his so-called followers had not been able to achieve. Howells found these traits more conspicuously displayed in A Tramp Abroad than in any previous Clemens volume. Indeed, he contended, they gave to the book "its sole coherence." The "paradoxical charm" of Mark Twain's humor, observed the critic, stemmed from the fact that the author was always in earnest. The deep feeling and the anger which human stupidity and folly aroused in Clemens had its outlet in such wild extravagance as conceiving the idea of a tramp through Europe by means of any method except walking; and "it is because he has a real loathing, otherwise inexpressible, for Alp-climbing, that

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[6] "Some Amusing Books of Travel," Atlantic Monthly, 46 (Aug., 1880), 267. William M. Gibson and George Arms do not list this essay in their Bibliography of William Dean Howells, New York, 1948, but they admit that there are undoubtedly omissions in their check-list. They may have had a reason for not attributing it to Howells, but if they had, I do not know what it is.

he imagines an ascent of the Riffelberg, with 'half a mile of men and mules' tied together by rope. One sees that affectations do not first strike him as ludicrous, merely, but as detestable." Howells pointed out that abuses, bad manners, conceit, and cruelty inspired Clemens to laughter, but it was a mirth that had a corrective impulse at bottom. Frequently Twain gave evidence of possessing "the grimness of a reformer." He was concerned, Howells felt, not with abstractions or generalities, but with "matters that are out of joint, that are unfair or unnecessarily ignoble, and cry out to his love of justice for discipline. . . ." He contrasted A Tramp Abroad with The Innocents Abroad and pointed out wherein it differed from its illustrious predecessor. It was more mature, more seasoned, more disillusioned. Its author's opinions were no longer those of the American seeing European differences for the first time but were rather those of the American seeing for the second time things he has been able to reflect upon and study over, and which he still finds in serious need of reform. This Howells considered to be "the serious under-current" of A Tramp Abroad. He concluded:

> We have, indeed, so great an interest in Mr. Clemens's likes and dislikes, and so great respect for his preferences generally, that we are loath to let the book go to our readers without again wishing them to share these feelings. There is no danger that they will not laugh enough over it; that is an affair which will take care of itself; but there is a possibility that they may not think enough over it.[7]

Here indeed was a paradox: a humorist disguising his serious observations under a cloak of comicality and requiring an interpreter to rescue his laughing profundities from critical neglect and the possibility of popular oversight. Howells's review is unquestionably an important

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[7]"Mark Twain's New Book," Atlantic Monthly, 45 (May, 1880), 686-8.

one; the fact that it is the only periodical criticism of A Tramp Abroad makes it doubly significant. A. L. Vogelback calls the notice "one of the first extended appreciations of the philosophical implications in Clemens' writings."[8] Some idea of Howells's aim in this essay and of how important it seemed to him may be gained from a letter to Twain of March 22, 1880.

> I have been feebly trying to give the Atlantic readers some notion of the charm and the solid delightfulness of your book; and now I must tell you privately what a joy it has been to Mrs. Howells and me. Since I have read it I feel sorry, for I shall not be able to read it again for a week, and in what else shall I lose myself so wholly? Mrs. Howells declares it the wittiest book she ever read, and I say there is sense enough in it for ten books. That is the idea which my review will try to fracture the average numskull with. Well, you are a blessing. You ought to believe in God's goodness, since he has bestowed upon the world such a delightful genius as yours to lighten its troubles.[9]

Opinion today concerning A Tramp Abroad is not so enthusiastic as was Howells's in 1880 or even Brander Matthews's nineteen years later.[10] Mr. DeVoto, for example, while admitting that the work contains "some excellent passages," finds it on the whole "uneven and frequently dull,"[11] a judgment with which most readers of today would concur. There are some good things: the account of the French duel is certainly among the author's

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[8] The Literary Reputation of Mark Twain in America, 1869-1885, p. 118.

[9] Life in Letters of William Dean Howells, I, 282-3.

[10] In his Introduction to the collected edition of 1899, Matthews wrote: "'A Tramp Abroad' is a better book than the 'Innocents Abroad'; it is quite as laughter-provoking, and its manner is far more restrained. Mark Twain was then master of his method, sure of himself, secure of his popularity; and he could do his best and spare no pains to be certain that it was his best." — Reprinted in Inquiries and Opinions, New York, 1907, pp. 152-3.

[11] Mark Twain at Work, Cambridge, Mass., 1942, p. 56.

best burlesques; the satire on "The Awful German Language" is unsurpassed for its ingeniousness and its sheer fun; the character sketch of Nicodemus Dodge is Twain portraiture at its best, anticipating in some ways the greatest of all his portraits, Huck Finn. The list could be extended. But among the unfortunate things in the book are the tedious length to which he strings out some of the satire on mountain climbers, the over-labored burlesque of travel books, the rather tiresome German legends, and (greatest of all his sins) his appalling and annoying judgments on music and art.[12]

Writing A Tramp Abroad had been a distinct chore. To alleviate the difficulty of composition Twain spent many a happy hour when he should have been working on the travel book in writing a story which had fascinated him from the moment he conceived the idea after reading Charlotte M. Yonge's The Prince and the Page in the summer of 1877.[13] As preparation for writing the work which became The Prince and the Pauper he read widely in the history of sixteenth-century England. Also, he re-read Pepys's Diary.[14] A result of this activity was the Fireside Conversation in the Time of Queen Elizabeth, or 1601, as it is generally entitled. It has been called "the most famous piece of pornography in American literature."[15] Not, of course, one of Mark Twain's regularly published works,

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[12]Can anyone forgive his remarks on Titian's Venus, which he called "Titian's beast," "the foulest, the vilest, the obscenest picture the world possesses. . . ."?

[13]Paine, p. 597.

[14]DeLancey Ferguson, Mark Twain: Man and Legend, Indianapolis and New York, 1943, p. 185.

[15]Edward Wagenknecht, Mark Twain, The Man and His Work, New Haven, 1935, p. 122.

the skit belongs to this period, and, since it did achieve publication of sorts, might as well be described here. It was composed, according to Clemens, purely to amuse Twichell, the Hartford clergyman who was Mark Twain's best friend,[16] and to provide the humorist with an opportunity for trying his hand at Elizabethan dialogue. In its day it was extravagantly admired by the select group of friends who saw its Rabelaisian indecencies. John Hay called it a "most exquisite bit of old English morality"[17] and believed that it was written "in a serious effort to bring back our literature and philosophy to the sober and chaste Elizabethan standard,"[18] an opinion which Twain denied.[19] David Gray, the editor of the Buffalo Courier, saw the sketch and said: "Print it and put your name to it, Mark. You have never done a greater piece of work than that."[20] 1601 has achieved a good bit of notoriety in the years following its composition. It has been frequently printed and circulated surreptitiously. A frank piece of bawdry, it does little credit to its illustrious author, despite Franklin J. Meine's attempt to give it respectability by bringing it out in a scholarly limited edition privately printed for the Mark Twain Society of Chicago in 1939. Mr. Basil

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[16] See Bernard DeVoto, ed., Mark Twain in Eruption, New York, 1940, pp. 203-11 for an account of the composition of 1601.

[17] Quoted in Paine, p. 580.

[18] Letter dated June 24, 1880, to Alexander Gunn. Charles Orr, "An Unpublished Masterpiece," Putnam's Monthly and the Critic, 1 (Nov., 1906), 250.

[19] Letter to Charles Orr, July 30, 1906, in Mark Twain in Eruption, p. 205. Twain says that Hay was mistaken. ". . . the object was only a serious attempt to reveal to Rev. Joe Twichell the picturesqueness of parlor conversation in Elizabeth's time; . . ."

[20] Quoted in Paine, p. 580.

Davenport, reviewing this edition, called the work a "laborious muck-heap" and insisted that it lacked both wit and humor. Concerning the Meine edition, he continued: ". . . one is compelled to ask, why?" His conclusion: "But that . . . this hoary indecency should still command such interest, . . . is melancholy indeed."[21]

The Prince and the Pauper appeared in December, 1881. It was a decided departure from anything Clemens had done before, a better example of the novel form than either The Gilded Age or Tom Sawyer. In spite of his protestation to Howells (". . . — can't write a novel, for I lack the faculty; . . ."[22]), the work shows great technical skill. A recent critic has written: "So far as structure is concerned, this book is perhaps his finest achievement."[23] It is doubtless of some significance in illustrating the remarkable versatility of its author, although, as Mr. DeVoto says, it "has not kept the splendor that Mark and his family found in it."[24] It is upon occasion hopelessly sentimental at the same time that it presents scenes of unsparingly brutal realism. Howells, as

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[21] "1601 and All That," Saturday Review of Literature, 20 (July 1, 1939), 19. The composition of 1601 has been the focal point of much rash speculation concerning Mark Twain's so-called clash with the genteel respectability of his day. VanWyck Brooks, in the classic study of Clemens as a frustrated artist, sees in 1601 and in his "verbal obscenities" ". . . the expression of that vital sap which, not permitted to inform his work, had been driven inward and left there to ferment." — The Ordeal of Mark Twain (revised edition), New York, 1933, p. 227. Howells, without attempting to explain its existence, simply speaks of Twain's "Elizabethan breadth of parlance, which I suppose one ought not to call coarse without calling one's self prudish; . . ." He mentions "hiding away in discreet holes and corners the letters in which he had loosed his bold fancy to stoop on rank suggestion; I could not bear to burn them, and I could not, after the first reading, quite bear to look at them." — My Mark Twain, p. 4.

[22] Letter of Jan. 21, 1879. Letters, I, 346.

[23] Gladys Carmen Bellamy, Mark Twain as a Literary Artist, Norman, Okla., 1950, p. 309.

[24] Mark Twain at Work, p. 56.

usual, had said just about all there was to say in a letter to Twain of December 13, 1880.

> It begins well, and it ends well, but there are things in the middle that are not so good. . . . I think you might have let in a little more of your humor the whole way through, and satirized things more. This would not have hurt the story for the children, and would have helped it for the grownies. As it is, the book is marvellously good. It realizes most vividly the time. All the picaresque part -- the tramps, outlaws, etc. -- . . . are incomparable. The whole intention, the allegory, is splendid, and powerfully enforced. . . .
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> It is such a book as I would expect from you, knowing what a bottom of fury there is to your fun; but the public at large ought to be led to expect it, and must be.[25]

And Howells did try to lead the public along the way to a truer understanding of the profound aspects of Mark Twain's art. He chose for his medium this time a newspaper, the New York Tribune, whose editor, John Hay, had suggested that he criticize The Prince and the Pauper in its pages. On October 16, 1881, Howells wrote to the editor explaining his purpose in the review: ". . . I have written it solely in the interest of that unappreciated serious side of Clemens's curious genius. The book has a thousand blemishes and triumphs over them."[26] The article appeared in the Tribune for October 25, 1881. In it Howells commended the "realistic force" of the novel, but the crux of his comments is found in the following statement:

> The fascination of the narrative and the strength of the implied moral are felt at once and increase together to the end in a degree which will surprise those who have found nothing but drollery in Mark Twain's books, and have not perceived the artistic sense and the strain of deep earnestness underlying his humor. Those even who have read him with this perception will recognize an intensified purpose in the human sympathies that have hitherto expressed themselves in some ironical form. The book is in this way an interesting evidence of growth in a man who ought still to have his best work before him.

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[25] Life in Letters of William Dean Howells, I, 290-1.

[26] Ibid., p. 303.

He pointed out the shortcomings of the novel -- faulty handling of dialogue, conventional figures, crude characterization. He continued: "But the great and vital artistic virtues, the effects of a bold and strong imagination, and the calm of a profound ideal, are there, and make this a very remarkable book."[27]

Most of the critics recognized the novelty of The Prince and the Pauper and commented upon it, but the work seems to have been slow in catching the public fancy. A critic writing some fifteen years later reported that the book "was rejected by the great mass of non-thinking readers, when it appeared in 1881, because it was Mark Twain's, and was not 'funny.'"[28] Clemens himself, ordinarily so concerned with sales, allegedly told Howells "that if he never sold a copy his jubilant delight in writing it would suffer no diminution."[29]

Four periodicals published reviews of The Prince and the Pauper. Two are especially interesting -- one in the Atlantic, which stressed the "new departure" aspects of the work, and one in the Critic, which denied that there was a "new departure." The anonymous author of the Atlantic essay began by speculating upon the tendency of established writers "to forsake the field of assured success, and seek distinction in untried paths."

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[27]Page 6. Twain wrote to Howells on October 26, 1881, that he was "delighted" with the review. "What you have said, there, will convince anybody that reads it; . . ." -- Letters, I, 406.

[28]Laurence Hutton, "Literary Notes," Harper's Monthly, 93 (June, 1896), supplement, p. 2. As early as 1882, or the year following the appearance of The Prince and the Pauper, a Scotch critic said: "The successful writer of burlesque seldom succeeds in anything else. Mr. Clemens' most ardent admirers cannot read his Pauper and Prince." -- John Nichol, American Literature, An Historical Sketch, 1620-1880, Edinburgh, 1882, p. 430.

[29]Paine, p. 663.

The new Mark Twain book he held up as a good illustration.

> He has written a book which no reader, not even a critical expert, would think of attributing to him, if his name were withheld from the title-page. There is nothing in its purpose, its method, or its style of treatment that corresponds with any of the numerous works by the same hand.

The book, he continued,

> is indisputably by Clemens; it does not seem to be by Twain, — certainly not by the Twain we have known for a dozen or more years as the boisterous and rollicking humorist, whose chief function has been to diffuse hilarity throughout English-reading communities, and make himself synonymous with mirth in its most demonstrative forms. Humor, in quite sufficient proportion, this tale does assuredly contain; but it is a humor growing freely and spontaneously out of the situations represented, — a sympathetic element, which appeals sometimes shrewdly, sometimes sweetly, to the senses, and is never intrusive or unduly prominent; sometimes, indeed, a humor so tender and subdued as to surprise those who are under its spell with doubts whether smiles or tears shall be summoned to express the passing emotion.

He mentioned the "sincerity," the "delicacy," the "true feeling" with which Twain told his story; he praised the "atmosphere of perfect reality" and the "life-like verisimilitude" which suffused the tale. The authenticity of the setting and the veracity of detail were singled out for special commendation. He speculated concerning the probable reaction of public and critic.

> It will be interesting to watch for the popular estimate of this fascinating book. Of the judgment of qualified criticism there can be little question. That it will be accorded a rank far above any of the author's previous productions is a matter of course. It has qualities of excellence which he has so long held in reserve that their revelation now will naturally cause surprise.

He concluded on a note of mild dismay. The public, captivated by the "heterogeneous accumulations" of a decade of humorous writing, was now "called upon to welcome its old favorite in a new guise, — as the author of a tale ingenious in conception, pure and humane in purpose, artistic

in method, and, with barely a flaw, refined in execution."[30]

This high praise was echoed by the reviewer for the Critic, but exception was taken to the unexpected novelty which most readers claimed to find in The Prince and the Pauper.

> The public has seen fit to be surprised at Mark Twain's "new departure," and the critics have, . . . without exception taken it for granted both that it is a departure, and that it is new. We do not necessarily claim to be wiser than the rest, but we must insist that the author has in his recent books very gradually prepared the public for just such a volume. What has made Mark Twain's extravagant humor so effective has been (apart from its more glaring qualities) the skilfully painted background of more subdued and often delicate description. . . . We could cite many other passages to prove that the finer element in Mark Twain's nature, which has been more or less distinctly traceable in all his books, has been growing more predominant in his more recent writings, until at last, in "The Prince and the Pauper," it hides temporarily the humorous vein out of sight.

He mentioned "a gentle humor and a poetic quality" that could be found in the novel, and he complimented the author on the success of the local color and the historic accuracy of the work. He concluded by praising Twain's "poetic instinct," a faculty which had hitherto not been detected in the popular humorist.[31]

The reviewer for the Century stressed the novelty of the new Twain volume, observing that the author had pretty much "divested himself of his usual literary habit." He found the novel "effective as a story, though," he added, "it is spun-out almost to tediousness." He seemed,

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[30] "Mark Twain's New Departure," Atlantic Monthly, 48 (Dec., 1881), 843-5. [From an advance publication copy.]

[31] 1 (Dec. 31, 1881), 368. Less famous than its contemporaries, the Atlantic, Harper's, the Century and Scribner's, the Critic was an excellent literary journal. Frank Luther Mott writes: "It was usually bright, incisive, and impartial, with a tendency to be conservative in judgments and not very profound." — History of American Magazines, III, 549.

in addition, not entirely comfortable in its presence, claiming that it was "overweighted with purpose." If it was the author's intention, he continued,

> to prove that the humorous story-teller and ingenious homely philosopher, Mark Twain, can be a literary purist, a scholar, and an antiquary, we do not think his "new departure" is a conspicuous success. It was not necessary for the author to prop his literary reputation with archaic English and a somewhat conventional manner. His recent humorous writings abound in passages of great excellence as serious compositions, and his serious, nervous style is the natural expression of an acute mind, that in its most fanciful moods is seldom superficial in its view. Indeed, it is because Mark Twain is a satirist, and in a measure a true philosopher, that his broadly humorous books and speeches have met with wide and permanent popular favor.[32]

The reviewer for Harper's found the work "interspersed with sparkles of dry humor and covert satire yet observing a careful regard to the historical accessories, . . ." His conclusion: "The tale is full of romantic surprises, and besides being rich in historical facts and teachings, is charged with a generous and ennobling moral."[33]

In spite of an unusually large number of reviews (most of them favorable), The Prince and the Pauper did not achieve as great a sale as either author or publisher had anticipated. Elisha Bliss, Twain's first publisher, had died in the autumn of 1880, and The Prince volume, at Howells's instigation, was sent to James R. Osgood, of Boston, who was to publish the next three Clemens books. "Osgood," says Paine, "was doing no great things with The Prince and the Pauper, but Clemens gave him another book presently, a collection of sketches — The Stolen White Elephant."[34]

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[32] 23 (March, 1882), 764.

[33] 64 (March, 1882), 635.

[34] Paine, p. 734. The book was published in June, 1882.

It was an unimportant volume from a literary standpoint,[35] but from a publishing standpoint it represented something of a departure. It was the first major book of Mark Twain's to be issued through regular publishing channels without the assistance of the door-to-door salesman.[36] It was probably this fact, rather than any merit inherent in the volume, which caused it to be noticed more widely than any previous Twain work. The reviews ranged from unfavorable to lukewarm. The Critic, for example, called the book an "extraordinarily miscellaneous" collection of varying merit. The title story was described as "a wild extravaganza" which had "small excuse for being." Attention was called to the method of publication -- that is, regular and not subscription.[37] Our Continent, a Philadelphia journal, provided the least complimentary opinion, finding no good reason why the sketches should have been exhumed from the magazines in which they lay buried.

> Singly they are tolerably amusing; collectively they become inexpressibly dreary, but the author is in either case tolerably certain of an audience. The book is the first ever published by ordinary methods, his previous ones having been only obtainable by subscription.[38]

The Dial, of Chicago, devoted a few lines to an over-all look at Twain's work.

> He has not always played his role with equal wit, or been able to avoid conceits in bad taste. He has sometimes encouraged expectation and disappointed it; yet he is a benefactor of the

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[35]Ten of the eighteen items had seen prior publication in books, and a number of the remaining eight had seen prior publication in magazines. The title story is an exaggerated but mildly amusing satire on detectives and their methods.

[36]A technical problem arises here. Were the Burlesque Autobiography and Punch, Brothers, Punch! subscription books? The whole matter of Twain's publishing methods is a confusing one. Fortunately, we do not have to unravel the tangled skeins here. The Stolen White Elephant was generally said to be Twain's first regularly published book. Let it go at that.

[37]2 (June 17, 1882), 163.

[38]2 (July 19, 1882), 59.

> race, having increased its sources of merriment and ministered to its needed moments of diversion by the kindly, skilful exercise of his talent.

Of the sketches in the Elephant volume it said: "They exhibit varied grades of excellence, some falling little short of dulness, and others amply accomplishing their purpose of inspiring fun and gayety."[39] The Independent found some of the items "amusing." Others, however, were described as "a new illustration of the immense difficulty of sustaining the reputation of a professional humorist."[40] The Nation used The Stolen White Elephant as a point of departure for a brief analysis of Mark Twain's humor, which it found to be "of such a universal and comprehensive character that it is very difficult to say in what its peculiarity consists. . . ." Twain's humor, the article asserted, was "American enough," but his inventions were declared to be "of no nationality. There is a kind of monstrosity about them which we remember in no other writer -- a wild extravagance which is not simply that of exaggeration."[41] Harper's and the Atlantic gave passing mention only, the former calling the book "a collection of humorous satires, extravaganzas, and stories, in the characteristic vein of that popular writer; . . ."[42] and the latter simply saying that the sketches, most of which had "delighted the readers of The Atlantic," were worth a second reading.[43] Mr. Vogelback has uncovered several newspaper reviews of The Stolen White Elephant[44] which, together

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[39] 3 (Aug., 1882), 78.

[40] 34 (Aug. 3, 1882), 11.

[41] 35 (Aug. 10, 1882), 119.

[42] 65 (Sept., 1882), 641.

[43] 50 (Aug., 1882), 286. The Literary News reprinted a notice from the Chicago Tribune which called Mark Twain "a professional funny man." -- 3 (July, 1882), 207.

[44] Op. cit., p. 49.

with the periodical criticisms make the work, although a relatively trivial production, nevertheless the most widely noticed of Mark Twain's books to its date.

The year 1882 was important for Clemens's reputation in other ways. To counteract criticism which either took an actively hostile attitude toward Twain[45] or which was content merely to regard him as a humorist,[46] William Dean Howells came to the defense. Paine tells us that Howells "clearly resented" the general indifference of the New England literati to Twain's work and "determined to declare himself, in a large, free way, concerning his own personal estimate of Mark Twain."[47] He selected as

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[45]John Nichol, Ll. D., Professor of English Literature in the University of Glasgow, had said in his book on American literature (op. cit., p. 426) that Mark Twain had "done perhaps more than any other living writer to lower the literary tone of English speaking people." The work created much lively attention in the United States. For example, a critic in Our Continent, 4 (Nov. 21, 1883), 668-9, while agreeing substantially with the Scotsman's strictures on American humorous writing, yet took him to task presumably for being so lenient. "In nothing has he been so unhappy as in his treatment of 'humorists'; . . . What American would think of putting in the same category Mark Twain and Charles Lamb, Artemus Ward and Thackeray? . . . It seems incredible that he should not see that this class of American humor is comparable only to the dreary Joe Millerisms that have served their term for so many generations of Englishmen, and with the comic weeklies that die with commendable punctuality in English railway stalls; that if 'the master of this degenerate style,' as he terms Mark Twain, is the representative of American prose 'to the lower class of English Philistines,' it is because his work has gravitated to the level for which it was written."

[46]Will M. Clemens, perhaps a distant relative of Mark Twain's, called his illustrious namesake "the prince of funny men." -- Famous Funny Fellows, New York, 1882, p. 23. See also Samuel W. Duffield, "American Humor," Independent, 34 (May 4, 1882), 5, where Twain is called "the most eminent of our humorists." ". . . Mark Twain has gone from bad to worse and his latest exhibitions and contortions are more excruciatingly funny than ever."

[47]Paine, p. 731.

the vehicle for the dissemination of his manifesto the Century Magazine, at that time enjoying one of the widest circulations of any American periodical.[48] His appraisal of Mark Twain's career included a biographical sketch as well as an analysis of American humor. But he was most concerned with seeing that Twain was given proper acknowledgment as a serious artist. Howells contended that Clemens's humor was "as simple in form and as direct as the statesmanship of Lincoln or the generalship of Grant." But he was more than just a humorist. Indeed, insisted Howells, he transcended all other American humorists in "universal qualities." He eschewed pathos, although he knew how to handle it, as he had shown in the Auntie Cord tale. The critic discerned in Clemens's work a poetic element, "the touch of nature," an honest and open manliness, and a "deliciously shrewd" spirit. "Elsewhere," Howells went on to say,

> I have tried to persuade the reader that his humor is at its best the foamy break of the strong tide of earnestness in him. But it would be limiting him unjustly to describe him as a satirist; and it is hardly practicable to establish him in people's minds as a moralist; he has made them laugh too long; they will not believe him serious; they think some joke is always intended. . . . I shall not insist here upon Mark Twain as a moralist; though I warn the reader that if he leaves out of the account an indignant sense of right and wrong, a scorn of all affectation and pretense, an ardent hate of meanness and injustice, he will come indefinitely short of knowing Mark Twain.

He praised Clemens's "powers as a story-teller" and his ability to create character. "He portrays and interprets real types, not only with

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[48] Howells could not have chosen a better place for presenting his case. The Century, reorganized the year before, was beginning a spectacular career in American publishing annals. Its circulation within the next two and a half years was to pass the two hundred thousand mark with the impetus given it by such popular serials as The Rise of Silas Lapham and Battles and Leaders of the Civil War.

exquisite appreciation and sympathy, but with a force and truth of drawing that makes them permanent."[49]

The essay, complete with a full-page portrait of its subject as frontispiece, appeared in the Century for September, 1882, and certainly represented the ultimate to its date in serious, provocative, sensible and reasoned criticism which had for its object the establishment of Mark Twain as a man of letters. One wonders what the reaction was among the Boston Brahmins to this declaration of faith. Perhaps there was none, for darkness was closing in upon the New England scene. The literary lights were going out: Longfellow in March of 1882 and Emerson a few months later. Others were still shining, though, if but faintly -- Holmes and Lowell and Whittier. The time, however, had not yet come when Mark Twain could be whole-heartedly accepted by the proper Bostonians. Howells was doing spade work. It was to prove effective in the long run.

Meanwhile, Twain had new irons in the fire. In April, 1882, he and Osgood, his publisher, had set out for the Mississippi River and had cruised down the stream to revisit the scenes of the author's youth. Their object was quite frankly to gather material for a new book. The "Old Times on the Mississippi" had been lying dormant for some eight years in the pages of the Atlantic Monthly where it had appeared in the first half of 1875. Twain thought it would make a book -- not a very large one, to be sure, not a large enough one for the subscription trade. Hence this excursion to gather new material to add to the old. The trip was completed in the summer of 1882, and the writing went on through the fall and winter. In May, 1883, Life on the Mississippi was published. The work is divided into two parts. The first twenty

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[49] "Mark Twain," Century, 24 (Sept., 1882), 780-3.

chapters describe the life that Clemens had known as a river-boat pilot. Of these chapters fourteen (4 through 17) make up "Old Times on the Mississippi." Chapters 1-3 and 18-20 deal with the early period but were probably written later. The second section reports the trip the author made in 1882. The first part, an idyllic hymn to a vanished day, is generally regarded as one of the best things Mark Twain ever produced. Here, in his reminiscences of his childhood and young manhood along the great river, is the finest flowering of his genius. The second part is a realistic account of the changes he found upon revisiting the scenes of his youth — rather journalistic, somewhat disillusioned, discursive, and often tediously statistical. And yet it is by no means a total loss. It contains some excellent local color, some fine character sketches, and, in Ritter's narrative of the thumb print, one of the most luridly macabre Gothic tales this writer has ever read. Criticism today is pretty unanimous in agreeing that the Mississippi volume will survive along with whatever of Mark Twain's work posterity decides to preserve. It is one of the great pieces of Americana.

Reviews of the book in the periodicals of its day were generally favorable. Nearly all the critics pointed out that here was still another departure from what Mark Twain's readers had come to expect from him, for Life on the Mississippi was more than just a humorous compilation. This was the burden, for example, of the notice published in the Nation.

> Mark Twain labors under the disadvantages which attach to the position of a professional humorist. When he writes a serious book, the public receives it with a predisposition to laugh which interferes with its appreciation of what the author has to say. "Life on the Mississippi" is only secondarily the work of a funny man. Primarily it is a descriptive and historical work, by an ex-pilot of the old Mississippi sort, intended to bring before us the contrast between the river as it is, and as it was in the days

> before the war, and before the great steamboat trade had been interfered with by the building of rival railroads.[50]

The Atlantic printed a long review and summary of contents, paying special attention to the Huckleberry Finn section (which it called "a wonderful transcript from nature") and Ritter's Narrative (which it said bore "witness . . . to its author's startling power of weird imagination.") Concerning the great detail with which the river topography was described and the city statistics were presented, the reviewer commented: "The general reader stands in some peril of finding these observations wearisome; . . ." But the conclusion was, in general, complimentary.

> There is a good deal of grimness and soberness in the book, underlying the surface of fun and incident and panoramic diversity of scene. There is also a good deal of solid sense and of information. What the future investigation — if people of the twentieth century have any time left for investigating the past — will conclude concerning the life depicted in these pages we can conjecture only from our own impression; which is that the Mississippi has developed prosperity and misery in about even measure, . . .[51]

The Overland Monthly published perhaps the best review of Life on the Mississippi, sensible and judiciously critical. "It is, on the whole, a pleasure rather than otherwise to find that Mark Twain's latest book, while unquestionably an entertaining one, is not distinctly humorous." Concerning the wealth of extraneous material the critic said:

> There is unquestionably padding in the book; the idea of the publishers seems to have been that if five hundred pages from Mark Twain were good, six hundred were better; and in so assuming, they certainly had a public to count upon who will consider every page extra so much clear gain. The critical, however, would prefer to have Life on the Mississippi with the padding out, to the exclusion of some well-worn facts,

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[50] 37 (Aug. 30, 1883), 192.

[51] 52 (Sept., 1883), 406-8.

> some dull itinerary details, and some strained jests that seem to have been forced in among better ones to make the number up to what the public will naturally expect from Mark Twain.[52]

The critic for Harper's called attention to the substitution of information for humor.

> If the reader of . . . Life on the Mississippi shall miss from its pages the abounding strokes of whimsical humor that have tickled the fancy in other productions of this popular writer, he will find their comparative absence amply compensated for by the amusing and interesting medley of fact and fiction -- historical, topographical, autobiographical, and descriptive of aspects of life on and beside the Great River -- . . .

He concluded by asserting that the volume was "an invaluable souvenir of a phase of American life and manners that has passed away never to be revived."[53]

The Critic published a slight and rather trivial notice in which attention was called to the "good deal of solid reading and genuine information" contained in the book. The reviewer further asserted:

> We have found more to enjoy in this book than in any other of Mark Twain's, even in the branch of literature considered to be his forte; as incidental humor, in the midst of genuine description, is always more effective than a series of unrelieved jokes.[54]

Here, then, as his critics pointed out with approval if not enthusiasm, was a new dimension in Mark Twain's writing -- reliable factual information uncolored, for the most part, by burlesque or exaggeration or extravagant humor. The re-creation of the past was looked upon with

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[52] n. s. 2 (Sept., 1883), 333.

[53] 67 (Oct., 1883), 799.

[54] 3 (Nov. 17, 1883), 481.

interest. No one noticed a connection between Life on the Mississippi and Tom Sawyer, perhaps because one was purportedly factual while the other was fictitious. Yet both came from the same source -- a source which was soon to provide a third tributary to Mark Twain's main literary stream, his past recaptured.

The Mississippi volume gave impetus to Clemens's nostalgic musings. The time was perhaps ripe for him to resuscitate Tom Sawyer's vagabond comrade and put him into a book of his own. He had been toying with the idea over a period of years. In Life on the Mississippi (Chapter 3) he mentioned "a chapter from a book which I have been working at, by fits and starts, during the past five or six years, and may possibly finish in the course of five or six more. The book . . . details some passages in the life of an ignorant village boy, Huck Finn, . . ."[55] Interest in the village boy probably revived when he revisited the river scenes of his childhood. At any rate, in August, 1883, he began working on the manuscript in earnest, by January, 1884, it was in the hands of the publisher, and in the spring he was reading proof.[56] After alternately working over the book and pigeon-holing it for some ten years, Clemens had finally disciplined his erratic creative genius and had settled down to the production of his masterpiece.

Bernard DeVoto has made the rather challenging suggestion that Mark Twain in the eighties "With Howells and Henry James . . . was bringing

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[55] Writings, IX, 19. See Bernard DeVoto, Mark Twain at Work, pp. 51-3, for an ingenious theory concerning Twain's erratic method of composing Huckleberry Finn.

[56] Paine, pp. 754; 771.

the modern American novel into being."[57] Reference is to The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. A brief glance at the background of American fiction during this period will throw some interesting light upon the curious critical and popular reception of Twain's novel. The outstanding activity in the world of letters during the decades that followed the Civil War was the search for the Great American Novel.[58] Those whose business it was to scan the literary horizon for signs of something new in the way of shifting tastes had been aware of late that a change was in the air. They may not have recognized that a new age had begun, but there were signposts evident if only someone could interpret them correctly. One such signpost was John S. Hart's A Manual of American Literature (Philadelphia, 1873.) Hart was Professor of English in the College of New Jersey, and his book, if not the first history of American literature, was one of the earliest.[59] Its reception was cordial. Wrote one critic: "For ourselves, we greet the appearance of a text-book on American literature as a token both wholesome and hopeful."[60] Finally, it would seem, the old cry for a declaration of literary independence was beginning to have results. "There is something morbid and degrading in the passion with which we have worshipped exotic models in letters and have despised our own,"

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[57] Mark Twain at Work, p. 89. Ernest Hemingway has said that "All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called Huckleberry Finn." — Green Hills of Africa, New York, 1935, p. 22.

[58] The definitive treatment of this subject is that of Herbert R. Brown, "The Great American Novel," American Literature, 7 (March, 1935), 1-14. Quotations which are included in the following discussion represent my own more or less random findings. Examples could be multiplied a hundredfold.

[59] He was conscious of the novelty of such an undertaking. Of his book he wrote: "It is not only original in its conception, form, and structure, but it has, in its materials also, to a much greater extent than is usual in such works, the character of originality." — Preface, p. viii.

[60] Christian Union, 7 (March 5, 1873), 168.

wrote the same critic who welcomed the Hart volume.[61] Another reviewer of the Manual took occasion, while heralding its appearance, to expound upon the "new school" of American fiction.

> Doubtless, the "great American Novel" is yet to be written, and the critics sigh in vain for this long looked for epic of American social life, in which a virgin continent and a new people are to be reflected. But the pathway to this, or some other literature, quite new, and unborrowed, seems about to be "blazed" out. The rough sketches of Mr. Harte and other writers of the new school who cast behind them old subject and old methods, to scrawl their vivid outlines of what they have actually seen in the rude transitionary life of the extreme frontier, are at least new writing. They are not imitators of Scott, or of Dickens, or of Thackeray. They are unclassic in style perhaps, shock the refined reader in his drawing room: impress the old world of convention and "good society" with a sensation of being introduced to a social system succinctly summed and described as "half horse, half alligator;" but, in these pages, rough and unkempt as they are, filled with solecisms of language, faults of taste, and the results of democracy in its last analysis, there is evidence, we think, of unquestionable vigor and "realistic" strength, which will work their way to something new in literature, when the turbid liquid has had time to settle and become clear. Grate as these books may on the reader enamored of "convention," they will make their path in literature.

The western authors, he continued, "seem to herald a remarkable revolution in literature, of which revolution, those American writers who succeed the present generation will reap the results, and be the great exponents."[62]

These words of prophecy were re-echoed a decade later as the hue and cry continued.

> Not only do we read English and French stories written by French and English authors, but even Americans neglect their

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[61] Ibid.

[62] J. B. C., "American Authorship" [Review of A Manual of American Literature by John S. Hart], Presbyterian Quarterly and Princeton Review, n. s. 2 (July, 1873), 539-40.

> own vast and almost virgin country to go over the well-beaten path of old Europe for interesting subjects. Why, there are materials enough for fifty thousand romances in Sherman's march down to the sea; or, in Sheridan's fierce sweep through the Shenandoah Valley. Unfortunately there were no dukes with our armies, or very few, and it is heroic dukes and marquises all our story readers are anxious about. A novel whose hero is not a lord, who, even though an American, does not succeed to some title, is not worth much.[63]

A few years later, a critic commented upon the influence of the West on American letters.

> Its spirit is nothing if not American, and it would be enterprising if America were less bent upon smothering everybody under heaps of Russian and English and French, cheap, trashy, and often demoralizing rubbish stolen bodily and without a blush. After all, it may be that the provincial influence is soon to become the prevailing one in American letters. The free South is making a brave beginning in literary art with her Miss Murfrees, her Cables, her Chandler Harrises and her many newer aspirants, and the great West never looks back when once she sets out, as she has now set out to achieve a literature. It is not over statement to say that a smack of the prairies has got into the body of American art already. It has given its zest to fiction, poetry and criticism — . . . it bids fair to become the largest element.[64]

If anyone were in doubt as to how to go about writing the Great American Novel, suggestions on that score also were available. Listen to one of the shrewdest critics of the day.

> The great novel is yet unwritten. We hope that he who shall attempt to write it will see the simplicity, the singleness of the problem that lies before him. The surer he is of this, the better will be his work. The less conscious he is of trying to be American, the more truly will he succeed in being so. . . . Lay the scene on the limitless prairie or in limited Fifth Avenue, but let the story rise above its geographical boundaries; let the characters be treated as human

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[63] Citizen, 1 (Sept. 26, 1885), 643. It might be of interest to note that this periodical let go by a perfectly good chance to review Huckleberry Finn, which was published the very year the magazine was running.

[64] Maurice Thompson, "The Western Literary Outlook," Chautauquan, 7 (Feb., 1887), 279.

> beings, not simply as inhabitants of such or such a place, . . . They must dwell somewhere, but they must be something besides citizens. . . . The real novelist, he who is to write the "great American novel," must be a poet; he must look at life, not as the statistician, not as the census-taker, nor yet as the newspaper reporter, but with an eye that sees, through temporary disguises, the animating principles, good or bad, that direct human existence; these he must set before us, to be sure, under probable conditions, but yet without mistaking the conditions for the principles. He must idealize. The idealizing novelist will be the real novelist. All truth does not lie in fact.[65]

Most of the critics could not see the forest for the trees. Here is Will M. Clemens, eight months after the appearance of Huckleberry Finn.

> . . . the modern novel is in a state of rapid decay. Take the writings of the first ten novelists of the country. To read them is to loathe them. What is wanted is a new school of fiction. But the ideal school of a Bulwer Lytton is not wanted. Nor is the historical school of a Walter Scott. We don't want a second Dickens or a second Jules Verne, or a second Zola or Eugene Sue. We never want to see the modern novel again. Bury it, masters, decently, but oh so quickly, for it has the plague. We do want a new school of writing. There is fortune and fame for the rising master. The public already sicken of the modern novel. . . .[66]

In the light of contemporary literary theory as described above, Huckleberry Finn should have been hailed as the Great American Novel. Its setting was native, its flavor western, its language colloquial and racy of the soil, its treatment realistic, its characterization true, and its theme universal. We shall examine its critical reception in a moment. But first — what of its publication? According to contemporary accounts, Clemens was so eager to reap the greatest possible profit from the sale of his new book that he demanded sixty per cent of the proceeds.[67]

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[65] T. S. Perry, "American Novels," North American Review, 115 (Oct., 1872), 378.

[66] "The Modern Novel," Literary Life, 4 (Aug., 1885), 25.

[67] Will M. Clemens, "The Editor's Gossip," Literary Life, 2 (Jan., 1885), 178.

He was allegedly turned down by the American Publishing Company and eventually formed his own concern with his nephew, Charles L. Webster, as head. While the book was going through the press, three chapters appeared in the Century Magazine. In December, 1884, "An Adventure of Huckleberry Finn" was printed. This account of the Grangerford-Shepherdson feud drew at least two periodical comments. The Independent wrote:

> The delightful "adventures of Huckleberry Finn," by Mark Twain, with its bouquet of old Southern life, is worth the price of the magazine. Who can help smiling as he sees in his mind's eye that remarkable parlor in the old manor house hung round with the mortuary art-work of Miss Grangerford's fingers? — and the incident of the runaway and the battle between the rival families closes the sketch with dramatic vigor.[68]

And a writer in the Christian Union said: "In fiction there is a short story by Mark Twain, in which his usual drollery is subordinate for once to the requirements of the story-teller's art, . . ."[69] The Century for January, 1885, contained a brief excerpt from the novel entitled "Jim's Investments, and King Sollermun." This caused little comment, the Christian Union reviewer merely saying that it was among "The best of the fiction . . ." in that particular issue.[70] In the February Century there appeared "Royalty on the Mississippi," the famous section of the novel in which the Duke and the Dauphin first make their appearance. Criticism was mixed. The reviewer for the Critic said: "After the delicate and dainty humor, as rich as it is delicate, which has abounded

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[68] 36 (Dec. 4, 1884), 9.

[69] 30 (Dec. 5, 1884), 550. Edmund Clarence Stedman wrote of the excerpt: "To my mind it is not only the most finished and condensed thing you have done, but as dramatic and powerful an episode as I know in modern literature." Quoted in Paine, p. 793.

[70] 31 (Jan. 1, 1885), 18.

lately in the magazines, Mark Twain's 'Royalty on the Mississippi' seems rather broad farce; still, it is undeniably funny."[71] The reviewer for the Independent mentioned "the new vein of humor which Mark Twain has suddenly struck in the adventures of Huckleberry Finn, who, in the present installment, encounters 'Royalty on the Mississippi' of a singularly original and far from effete type."[72] The Christian Union was not so happy about the episode. "Twenty-four pages of the magazine are given up to a rather coarsely humorous installment from Mark Twain's new book."[73]

When The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn finally was published and distributed, it was spring of 1885. The newspapers and magazines had been full of references to the novel and excerpts from it. Twain had read selections on a lecture tour with Cable in the winter of 1884-85. It had been the subject of a widely publicised lawsuit between its author and the Boston publishing house of Estes and Lauriat, who had advertised the novel as available in their bookstores at a price reduced from $2.75 to $2.25.[74] Presumably because of the wide pre-publication publicity given

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[71] 6 (Jan. 31, 1885), 54.

[72] 37 (Feb. 5, 1885), 171.

[73] 31 (Jan. 29, 1885), 20.

[74] Clemens asked the court for an injunction prohibiting the sale at the lower price on the grounds that the regular subscription sales were being injured by the Boston bookseller's action. He lost the case, but it provided him with material for one of his most famous and amusing letters: ". . . a Massachusetts Judge has just decided in open court that a Boston publisher may sell not only his own property in a free and unfettered way, but may also as freely sell property which does not belong to him but to me — property which he has not bought and which I have not sold. Under this ruling I am now advertising that judge's homestead for sale; and if I make as good a sum out of it as I expect I shall go on and sell the rest of his property." — Letter of March, 1885, to Frank A. Nichols. In Bernard DeVoto, ed., The Portable Mark Twain, New York, 1946, pp. 762-3.

the book, it was almost entirely ignored by regular reviewers. Except for such minor comment as that quoted above, only two full-length reviews have been uncovered. The first appeared in the comic magazine Life and was written in an ironic vein which underscored the critic's severe disapproval of the work. It apparently was typical of the attitude of a certain segment of the audience — that segment (about which more will be said later) which was scandalized by Twain's masterpiece. The critic wrote:

> . . . we organized a search expedition for the humorous qualities of this book with the following hilarious results:
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> A very refined and delicate piece of narration by Huck Finn, describing his venerable and dilapidated "pap" as afflicted with delirium tremens, rolling over and over, "kicking things every which way," and "saying there was devils ahold of him." This chapter is especially suited to amuse children on long, rainy afternoons.
>
> An elevating and laughable description of how Huck killed a pig, smeared its blood on an axe and mixed in a little of his own hair, and then ran off, setting up a job on the old man and the community, and leading them to believe him murdered. This little joke can be repeated by any smart boy for the amusement of his fond parents.
>
> A graphic and romantic tale of a Southern family feud, which resulted in an elopement and from six to eight choice corpses.
>
> A polite version of the "Giasecutus" story, in which a nude man, striped with the colors of the rainbow, is exhibited as "The King's Camelopard; or, The Royal Nonesuch." This is a good chapter for lenten parlor entertainments and church festivals.
>
> A side-splitting account of a funeral, enlivened by a "sick melodeum," a "long-legged undertaker," and a rat episode in the cellar.[75]

In May, 1885, one of the important critics and scholars of the day wrote an "Open Letter" to the editor of the Century. Thomas Sergeant Perry provided one of the most intelligent critiques of Mark Twain's art thus far produced. He began his essay with a brief account of Tom Sawyer, pointing out in what ways its sequel was superior. Huckleberry Finn, he asserted,

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[75]"Mark Twain's Blood-Curdling Humor," Life, 5 (Feb. 26, 1885), 119.

had "the great advantage of being written in autobiographical form. This secures a unity in the narration that is most valuable; every scene is given, not described; and the result is a vivid picture of Western life forty or fifty years ago." He found the plot of the second work "more intelligible" than that of the first. "This plot gives great opportunity for varying incidents." He believed the book to be "a most valuable record of an important part of our motley American civilization."

> What makes it valuable is the evident truthfulness of the narrative, and where this is lacking and its place is taken by ingenious invention, the book suffers. What is inimitable, however, is the reflection of the whole varied series of adventures in the mind of the . . . hero. His undying fertility of invention, his courage, his manliness in every trial, are an incarnation of the better side of the ruffianism that is one result of the independence of Americans, . . . The total absence of morbidness in the book — . . . gives it a genuine charm; and it is interesting to notice the art with which this is brought out. The best instance is perhaps to be found in the account of the feud . . . , which is described only as it would appear to a semi-civilized boy of fourteen, without the slightest condemnation or surprise, — either of which would be bad art, — and yet nothing more vivid can be imagined.

As for the humor, "It lends vividness to every page." Perry concluded: ". . . the story is capital reading, and the reason of its great superiority to 'Tom Sawyer' is that it is, for the most part, a consistent whole."[76]

Soon after its publication Huckleberry Finn achieved notoriety and became something of a cause celebre. On March 21, 1885, the Literary World of Boston, a periodical which had never really liked Mark Twain, announced tersely and smugly:

> The Committee of the Public Library of Concord, Mass., have unanimously voted to exclude from their shelves Mark Twain's latest book, Huckleberry Finn. We are glad to see that the commendation given to this sort of literature by its publication in the Century has received a check by this action at Concord.[77]

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[76]"Mark Twain," Century, 30 (May, 1885), 171-2.

[77]16 (March 21, 1885), 106.

Four months later, the Literary Life carried a notice which provided a few more details.

> Mark Twain's new book, Huckleberry Finn, has been excluded from the public library at Concord because, as is alleged, it is trashy and irreverent. The charge of indecency is not raised against it, but the daily papers are industriously announcing that this also is one of the objections. Books, like people, often prosper under persecution; and it is interesting to note the effect of such action as this on the part of library managers.[78]

Clemens was quick to note the effect of such action. In a letter to Charles L. Webster, in New York, he wrote:

> The Committee of the Public Library of Concord, Mass, have given us a rattling tip-top puff which will go into every paper in the country. They have expelled Huck from their library as "trash and suitable only for the slums." That will sell 25,000 copies for us sure.[79]

A mild sort of furore was aroused by the Concord Committee's action,[80] and sides were taken in the controversy. The Critic printed excerpts from two newspapers in parallel columns under the heading: "Not Without Honor, Save In His Own Country." The first excerpt (violently anti-Clemens) was from the Springfield Republican. It attacked the "Huckleberry Finn stories" on the grounds that "They are no better in tone than the dime novels which flood the blood-and-thunder reading population. . . . Their moral level is low, and their perusal cannot be anything less than harmful." The second excerpt (vigorously pro-Clemens) was from the London Saturday Review.

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[78] 3 (July, 1885), 198.

[79] Letter dated March 18, 1885. Letters, II, 452.

[80] See Autobiography, II, 340-1, for Clemens's recollections of the episode and of the numbers of "letters of sympathy and indignation" he received. As late as 1902 Huck was in trouble with the libraries — this time in Denver. When news of the ban reached Harper's Weekly, that periodical wrote: ". . . it is an offence against our national common-sense which ought to be quickly removed." — 46 (Sept. 6, 1902), 1253.

It defended Huckleberry Finn and said that some passages had "poetry and pathos blent in their humor." "In Mark Twain," it continued, "the world has a humorist at once wild and tender, a humorist who is yearly ripening and mellowing."[81]

As though to make some sort of reparation for the unfriendly action of its Library Committee, the Concord Free Trade Club in March, 1885, elected Clemens an honorary member, thus providing him with an opportunity to vent his spleen with characteristic humor and irony upon "the great Commonwealth of Massachusetts." Excerpts from his letter of reply were printed in the newspapers and magazines of the day.[82] He wrote first of the court decision

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[81]6 (March 28, 1885), 155. An interesting side light of the Huckleberry Finn controversy is provided in the correspondence of Richard Watson Gilder, who, as editor of the Century, had printed the Huck Finn chapters referred to above. On January 8, 1886, he wrote to Mark Twain: "I have a letter from a superintendent of public schools in a distant part of the West, and am sending you my letter to him." Then he quoted his letter to the unnamed superintendent. "We understand the points to which you object in Mark Twain's writings, but we cannot agree with you that they are 'destitute of a single redeeming quality.' We think that the literary judgment of this country and of England will not sustain you in such an opinion. . . . To say that the writings of Mark Twain are 'hardly worth a place in the columns of the average county newspaper which never assumes any literary airs' seems to us to be singularly untrue. Mr. Clemens has great faults; at times he is inartistically and indefensibly coarse, but we do not think anything of his that has been printed in the 'Century' is without very decided value, literary and otherwise. At least, as a picture of the life which he describes, his 'Century' sketches are of decided force and worth.

"Mark Twain is not a giber at religion or morality. He is a good citizen and believes in the best things. Nevertheless there is much of his writing that we would not print for a miscellaneous audience. If you should ever carefully compare the chapters of 'Huckleberry Finn,' as we printed them, with the same as they appear in his book, you will see the most decided difference. These extracts were carefully edited for a magazine audience with his full consent." — Rosamond Gilder, ed., Letters of Richard Watson Gilder, Boston and New York, 1916, pp. 398-9. Gilder has been called "the literary arbiter of the times." — William Allen White, "Fiction of the Eighties and Nineties," in American Writers on American Literature, John Macy, ed., New York, 1931, p. 390.

[82]For example, in the New York World, the Library Journal (June, 1885), and the Critic (April 11, 1885). This is the same letter from which the quotation concerning the decision of the judge was taken. See above, note 74. The letter was first printed in full by Mr. DeVoto in The Portable Mark Twain, pp. 762-3.

against him, second of the banning of his new book, and third of the honorary membership.

> And finally, the Free-Trade Club of Concord comes forward and adds to the splendid burden of obligations already conferred upon me by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts an honorary membership, which is worth more than all the rest just at this juncture, since it endorses me as worthy to associate with certain gentlemen whom even the moral icebergs of the Concord Library Committee are bound to respect. May the great Commonwealth of Massachusetts endure forever, is the heartfelt prayer of one who, long a recipient of her mere general good-will, is proud to realize that he is at last become her pet.[83]

Huckleberry Finn was a great popular success, but critical opinion remained sharply divided until well into the next century. The genteel tradition could not take Huck to its heart — at least those guardians of it who were conscious of their gentility could not. Louisa May Alcott, for example, (one of whose Little Men Huck certainly was not) said: "If Mr. Clemens cannot think of something better to tell our pure-minded lads and lasses, he had best stop writing for them."[84] Sarah K. Bolton, a lady critic of the eighties, found in the novel a moral — "that society is responsible for the Huck Finns in our midst, and must do more uplifting if we would see the millennium dawn in our century."[85] Henry C. Vedder, lamenting that Clemens had to pay the penalty of humor, observed: "It is only when, as 'Mark Twain,' he writes some such trash as 'The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,' that this really capable writer can make sure of an appreciative hearing."[86]

But the Mississippi River vagabond had his advocates, too. Among them was Joel Chandler Harris, the creator of Uncle Remus. On the occasion of

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[83] Quoted in Critic, 6 (April 11, 1885), 180.

[84] Quoted in Frank Luther Mott, Golden Multitudes, p. 245.

[85] Famous American Authors, New York, 1887, p. 385.

[86] American Writers of To-Day, New York, 1894, p. 94.

Twain's fiftieth birthday Harris wrote a sort of testimonial letter to the editors of the Critic in the course of which he said:

> . . . there is not in our fictive literature a more wholesome book than "Huckleberry Finn." It is history, it is romance, it is life. Here we behold human character stripped of all tiresome details; we see people growing and living; we laugh at their humor, share their griefs; and, in the midst of it all, behold we are taught the lesson of honesty, justice and mercy.[87]

English literary men were generally quicker to appreciate the merits of Huckleberry Finn than were American. Robert Louis Stevenson, for instance, said: "It is a book I have read four times, and am quite ready to begin again tomorrow."[88] But the highest praise came from Andrew Lang, who found in Mark Twain's masterpiece what American readers and critics had been searching for ever since nationalism became a literary issue.

> Already "Huckleberry Finn" is an historical novel, and more valuable, perhaps, to the historian than "Uncle Tom's Cabin," for it is written without partisanship, and without a "purpose." The drawing of character seems to be admirable, unsurpassed in its kind. . . . The story, to be sure, ends by lapsing into burlesque, . . . But even the burlesque is redeemed by Tom's real unconscious heroism. There are defects of taste, or passages that to us seem deficient in taste, but the book remains a nearly flawless gem of romance and of humor. The world appreciates it, no doubt, but "cultured critics" are probably unaware of its singular value. A two-shilling novel by Mark Twain, with an ugly picture on the cover, "has no show," as Huck might say, and the great American novel has escaped the eyes of those who watch to see this new planet swim into their ken. And will Mark Twain never write such another? One is enough for him to live by, and for our gratitude, but not enough for our desire.[89]

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[87]Letter dated Nov. 21, 1885. Quoted in Critic, 7 (Nov. 28, 1885), 253.

[88]Quoted in Paine, p. 794.

[89]"Mr. Lang on the Art of Mark Twain," Critic, 19 (July 25, 1891), 46. The Lang essay had originally appeared in the Illustrated News of the World.

It would be supererogatory to collect critical comments of today concerning Huckleberry Finn. Professor Lionel Trilling has summed up opinion by calling it "one of the world's great books and one of the central documents of American culture."[90]

The middle eighties were busy years for Mark Twain. Somewhere along the line he found time to collaborate with Howells on a play, The American Claimant, in which a revived and exaggerated Colonel Sellers returns with his visionary schemes for making millions. Howells should have known better, if Twain did not, and eventually he realized the mistake of such an enterprise. On May 5, 1886, he wrote to Clemens: "I've just read over the 3d Act, and I reviewed the whole play in my mind, and I must say that I think it will fail."[91] And it did. Howells gave up all rights, Twain financed it for a week of one-night stands, but it never reached New York. At least one critic, however, saw it and wrote a rather long review. "There is in the play humor, sharp, quick, observant and effective, yet it is not the true, human humor of The Gilded Age. . . . In The American Claimant the exaggeration is over-done, . . . The humor . . . is constantly forced, made and mechanical. The perspective of incident is weak."[92] And so on in a discouraging vein concerning what everyone must have known, including Mark Twain, namely, that he simply could not construct a play.

The success of the new business venture with Webster so satisfied Clemens that for the next few years he devoted most of his time and energy

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[90]The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, New York, 1948, Introduction, p. vi. It would be a mistake to assume that Twain's masterpiece had to wait till mid-century for academic approval. As early as 1901 no less an authority than Professor Barrett Wendell of Harvard described Huckleberry Finn as "a book which in certain moods one is disposed for all its eccentricity to call the most admirable work of literary art as yet produced on this continent." -- A Literary History of America, New York, 1901, p. 503.

[91]Life in Letters of William Dean Howells, I, 382.

[92]"Mark Twain's New Play," Book Chat, 2 (Sept., 1887), 227-8.

to publishing books instead of writing them. The most auspicious project — and one of the truly phenomenal undertakings in American publishing annals — was the Grant Memoirs of 1885.[93] This was followed by The Life of Pope Leo XIII, published in 1887 in six languages, a collection of Sandwich Island tales by the King of Hawaii, The Library of Humor, a memoir of General Sheridan, and The Library of American Literature in ten volumes. It was with some degree of truth that the Literary World observed: "Mr. Clemens is now so busy publishing other people's books, that we can hardly expect to see very soon two new ones of his own which he holds still in manuscript."[94]

One of the two new ones was A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, a book Clemens had worked on desultorily ever since he conceived the idea of writing an Arthurian satire in the fall of 1884 when George Washington Cable, with whom he was on a lecture tour, gave him a copy of Malory.[95] The publication of the Yankee book completed Twain's second decade as a man of letters. Before we investigate its reception, let us examine the general reputation of the famous humorist. A half dozen or so miscellaneous articles about Twain were published in the middle and late eighties. Some were chatty, informal and anecdotal, and one or two were serious attempts to evaluate his contribution to American letters. Of the first type was an essay called "Authors at Home: Mark Twain at 'Nook Farm' (Hartford) and Elmira," which appeared in the Critic. It consisted largely of an

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[93] Mrs. Grant, then a widow, received a first check for two hundred thousand dollars in February, 1886. See Samuel Charles Webster, ed., Mark Twain, Business Man, Boston, 1946, p. 352.

[94] 17 (March 20, 1886), 105.

[95] Notebook, p. 171.

account of Twain's personal appearance, his house in Hartford, his life there, his summers in Elmira, his working habits, and so forth. Of special interest was a statement concerning his popularity: "He is one of the few living persons with a truly world-wide reputation. . . . There is no living writer whose books are now so widely read as Mark Twain's; . . ."[96] Howells, in the "Editor's Study" of Harper's, appeared at his critical best concerning fiction in general, and made some special references to Twain. He spoke of "the vast popularity of our humorists" and mentiond one — "the greatest, whose pseudonym is at this moment as well known, in America at least, as the name of Shakespeare."

> We need not blink any of his shortcomings in recognizing that his books are masterpieces of humor; they are so, and yet our public does care for them in prodigious degree, and it cares for them because incomparably more and better than any other American books they express a familiar and almost universal quality of the American mind, they faithfully portray a phase of American life, which they reflect in its vast kindliness and good-will, its shrewdness and its generosity, its informality, which is not formlessness; under every fantastic disguise they are honest and true. That is all we ask of fiction — sense and truth; . . .[97]

The June 16, 1888, number of Literature, an Illustrated Weekly Magazine, was practically a Mark Twain issue. There was a half-page portrait, an excerpt from Tom Sawyer, and four articles about Twain, including one reprinted from the London World. The lead essay, by Charles H. Clark, emphasized Twain's world-wide fame.

> His books have been translated into all the modern languages, and his name has become a household word wherever people read. . . . He has taken a leading place in literature, in society, and in business in America, . . . And now, past 50, a gentleman of culture, each year adds to his fame and strengthens his

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[96] Charles H. Clark, 6 (Jan. 17, 1885), 25. Clark, editor of the Hartford Courant, was a friend of Twain's and a member of the Nook Farm Circle.

[97] 74 (May, 1887), 967.

> position. His was no accidental success, for if so his light would have long ago gone out. On the contrary, his wit is as keen, his humor as fresh, his satire as sharp and his imagination as fantastic as when people first realized the power of these gifts that he possesses.

The writer continued, calling attention to Twain's conscientious studies of language, literature and history by means of which he attempted not only to repair the deficiencies of his early education but also to build a broad culture. The result of this activity has made Clemens, the writer asserted, "a man of letters in the true sense of the term."[98] An interesting and perceptive piece of criticism, which praised Twain's universality, appeared in the Literary News of New York.

> however the fashions of fun may change, human nature has remained pretty unchangeable since it first began to act independently in the Garden of Eden. The secret of Mark Twain's universal popularity is that he has always made exquisitely appreciative and sympathetic studies of this universal nature, and his characters, however caricatured, show the sure touch of the artist as well as the tricksy imagination of the humorist. He has never ridiculed a good or holy thing. His fun is pure fun, restful, refreshing, and always moral.[99]

There were dissenting voices. A critic in Literature compared Clemens and Bret Harte, and found the humor of the latter "allied to that strong sympathetic power which is . . . akin to the Divine." Mark Twain, on the other hand, the writer contended, possessed a faculty which was lacking in sympathy and which, through exaggeration and contortion, turned everything to ridicule. While admitting that such an assertion might be construed as "rank heresy," Twain being held in such high esteem by the public, the critic nevertheless insisted: "Yet he is only funny, after all."[100]

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[98]"Samuel Langhorne Clemens," 1 (June 16, 1888), 45; 47.

[99]10 (March, 1889), 101.

[100]Maria L. Eve, "Some American Humorists," 2 (March 16, 1889), 379.

One wonders how much of Mark Twain this critic had read, or how closely she had read him. Such short-sighted views continued to be expressed, especially among the academic critics. Of special interest is the two-volume work of Professor Charles F. Richardson, American Literature, 1607-1885.[101] Volume Two, which is entitled "American Poetry and Fiction," contains no reference to Clemens at all. In the first volume, entitled "The Development of American Thought," is a chapter headed "Borderlands of American Literature." Here is where we find Mark Twain.

> Crude and repulsive writing, sometimes adorned with appropriate pictures, is read with delight in parts of Europe, and deemed not only amusing but national, characteristic, representative. . . . Bret Harte, Mark Twain, Artemus Ward, Nasby, and the various professional newspaper "wits" have been put, by the half-educated, into the representative seats that belong to Emerson and Hawthorne. . . .
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> The reigning favorites of the day are Frank R. Stockton, Joel Chandler Harris, the various newspaper jokers, and "Mark Twain." But the creators of "Pomona" and "Rudder Grange," of "Uncle Remus and his Folklore Stories," and of "Innocents Abroad," clever as they are, must make hay while the sun shines. Twenty years hence, unless they chance to enshrine their wit in some higher literary achievement, their unknown successors will be the privileged comedians of the republic.[102]

Professor Richardson left himself a loophole — "unless they chance to enshrine their wit in some higher literary achievement" — but it is curious and rather significant that by 1887 he had not noticed in the best work of Mark Twain something more than mere buffoonery.

The decade of the eighties was the period of Clemens's greatest achievement. Huckleberry Finn represents the high point on the upward curve of his excellence; his next work is just below it at the beginning of the downward sweep. Of Mark Twain's great books A Connecticut Yankee in King

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[101] New York, 1887, 1889.

[102] Pages 520-1. These comments have been described as "a typical instance of the position of literary culture in regard to Mark Twain." — Archibald Henderson, Mark Twain, New York, 1910, p. 154.

Arthur's Court is perhaps the most baffling. It seems to have been shaped out of a profound and burning sense of the worth of the individual, out of a vigorous hatred of oppression, bigotry, tyranny and autocracy, out of an impatience with sham and pomp and pretension. It fairly cries out for a humane treatment of the downtrodden and the weak, of the poor and the underprivileged. Its democratic coloring is indelible, its humanity pervasive. And yet the work is marred by an almost incredible tastelessness, a staggering want of tact, a naive, almost childish and petulant, disregard of custom and established patterns of behavior. Mark Twain may very well have been acting the part, as he said, of "champion of hard unsentimental common sense and reason," but in so doing he gave way to a series of excesses which practically invalidated his most telling arguments. One need only mention the numerous tirades against the established church; the occasionally inane satire on knight-errantry ("Every year expeditions went out holy grailing, and next year relief expeditions went out to hunt for them."); the introduction of nineteenth-century "conveniences" (the telegraph, fireworks, Arkansas journalism, "Persimmons's Soap — All the Prime-Donne Use It") into medieval England; the eleventh-hour rescue of the King and the Yankee by an army of Round Table knights on bicycles; the ludicrously exaggerated tales of penury and persecution; and so on, endlessly. Yet, we would not want to do without the Connecticut Yankee, for here more than anywhere else does Mark Twain provide us with some of his most trenchant social criticism; and the insight we get into the workings of his truly fine and liberal mind is worth whatever price we have to pay in the way of painfully forced laughter.

The Yankee appeared in December, 1889. Before publication Clemens had Howells and Edmund Clarence Stedman read the manuscript critically. Stedman

reported his impressions at length.

> My belief is, on the whole, that you have written a great book, in some respects your most original, most imaginative, — certainly the most effective and sustained. . . . Whether the ordinary critical reader will take in its real claims to importance, is a serious question. But here and there somebody will, and that somebody, soon or late, will open the windows of the dullards. . . .
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> However, I am most impressed by the magnificently riotous and rollicking imagination and humor and often poetry, of the whole work. You have let your whole nature loose in it at the prime of your powers. Of course, when you let yourself loose, 'tis somewhat like a stallion just out of the paddock, but 'tis remarkable how finished, and in what good taste, your whole work — considering the theme and its possibilities — is. There is scarcely anything which I wished to change — in so long a book one finds a few matters out of tone, and to these I now refer you — fearlessly, . . .[103]

Howells was equally pleased and wrote: "It's a mighty great book, and it makes my heart burn and melt. It seems that God didn't forget to put a soul into you; He shabs most literary men off with a brain merely."[104]

Mark Twain claimed that the Connecticut Yankee "was not written for America; it was written for England. So many Englishmen have done their sincerest best to teach us something for our betterment that it seems to me high time that some of us should substantially recognize the good intent by trying to pry up the English nation to a little higher level of manhood in turn."[105] The English nation, however, had no great desire to be elevated by the likes of Mark Twain and pretty generally deplored the

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[103] He appended a series of annotations, none of them very important. See Laura Stedman and George M. Gould, Life and Letters of Edmund Clarence Stedman, New York, 1910, vol. 2, pp. 370-1. Letter dated July 7, 1889.

[104] Life in Letters of William Dean Howells, I, 428. Letter dated Oct. 22, 1889. Howells's opinion did not change. Writing to Clemens almost ten years later about the Connecticut Yankee, he mentioned "the colossal grandeur of its imagination." Ibid., II, 86. Letter dated Jan. 9, 1898.

[105] Letter (undated) to Chatto and Windus, his English publishers. Letters, II, 524-5.

new book.[106] Andrew Lang, who had admired Huckleberry Finn extravagantly, refused to read the Yankee volume. "I have abstained from reading his work on an American at the Court of King Arthur, because here Mark Twain is not, and cannot be, at the proper point of view. He has not the knowledge which would enable him to be a sound critic of the ideal of the Middle Ages."[107]

The American reading public, however, was beset by no such nice compunctions, and the book was, in general, well received. Howells set the tone for most of the reviews. In the "Editor's Study" column of Harper's he published a long critical notice in which he said, in part:

> More he is to the full the humorist, as we know him; but he is very much more, and his strong, indignant, often infuriate hate of injustice, and his love of equality, burn hot through the manifold adventures and experiences of the tale. . . . The delicious satire, the marvellous wit, the wild, free, fantastic humor are the colors of the tapestry, while the texture is a humanity that lives in every fibre. At every moment the scene amuses, but it is all the time an object-lesson in democracy. . . . The book is in its last effect the most matter-of-fact narrative, for it is always true to human nature, the only truth possible, the only truth essential, to fiction. The humor of the conception and of the performance is simply immense; but more than ever Mr. Clemens's humor seems the sunny break of his intense conviction.[108]

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[106] With one notable exception. The London Review of Reviews was favorably impressed and selected the Yankee for condensation as "Novel of the Month." William T. Stead, the editor, in recommending the book to his readers, termed it "one of the most significant of our time" for an understanding of "what the mass of men who speak English are thinking." Calling it "the latest among the volumes whereby Americans are revolutionising the old country," he classed it with Progress and Poverty and Looking Backward as "books which have given the greatest impetus to the social-democratic movement in recent years." — 1 (Feb., 1890), 144.

[107] Critic, 19 (July 25, 1891), 45.

[108] 80 (Jan., 1890), 319-21. Paine found Howells's high praise "hard to explain," and observed with more acumen than he exhibited on other occasions: "As an example of Mark Twain at his literary worst and best the Yankee ranks supreme." — pp. 890-1.

Most of the favorable criticism tended to be second-rate. The reviewers apparently were not up to this new twist of Mark Twain's genius, and outside of merely mentioning the novelty of the basic situation, contented themselves with cataloguing humorous incidents. The Book Buyer, for example, admitted that the basic situation — the transportation of a nineteenth-century Yankee to ancient Camelot — would have occurred only to Mark Twain.

> The incongruity of ideas which constantly follows from this juxtaposition of the life and manners of the sixth century with the language and civilization of the nineteenth century, is a never-ending source of amusement.
> By the great majority of people, however, the book will be read for its humor, and of this there is an abundance, . . .[109]

The reviewer for Public Opinion, after summarizing the plot, stated merely: "The book is full of 'Mark Twain' fun, which is sometimes a little coarse and misplaced, but a great deal of it is very enjoyable."[110] The Atlantic devoted little space to the work.

> It was a delightful idea to take a Hartford man of the present day to the England of the sixth century. For an account of the pleasing and natural adventures which befall our countryman among the hardware gentlemen of the Table Round, the reader is referred to the pages of the ingenious humorist. Incidentally the feudal system gets some hard knocks, but as the feudal system is dead there is no great harm done, and the moral purpose shines.[111]

The reviewer for the Critic pretended to be shocked.

> How far is it permitted a modern iconoclast to go in demolishing idols, mutilating the Hermae, knocking off the noses of the gods, and desecrating the sanctuary? . . . We do not at all approve of Mark's performance: it is very naughty indeed: but — and that is all he and his publishers want — we cannot help laughing at it. A more

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[109] 7 (Feb., 1890), 10-13.

[110] 8 (April 5, 1890), 615.

[111] 65 (Feb. 22, 1890), 286.

> grotesque knot of chapters and illustrations on the foolishness and fooleries of knight-errantry has never been bound between two covers.[112]

Paradoxical as it may seem, the best review of A Connecticut Yankee was the only really hostile one -- that appearing in the Literary World of Boston, a periodical which rarely had anything complimentary to say about Mark Twain. The reviewer called the Yankee "the poorest of all his productions thus far," and felt that the plot might have been successfully handled in a briefer space but that the present treatment was too "long-drawn out" to be enjoyable. The critic continued:

> The serious aim under Mark Twain's travesty is the glorification of American Protestant democracy. The effort fails through the extreme partiality of the procedure. Even a Mark Twain, the persistent teacher of irreverence for great men and great events, should have some little respect left for fair play. Mr. Clemens' previous books have been bad enough in their strong encouragement of one of the worst tendencies in a democratic State, the inclination to sheer flippancy and unmanly irreverence in the face of the natural sanctities of private life and the grand heroisms of human history. But this volume goes much further in its endeavor to belittle a century surrounded with romantic light by men of later times, who thus fall back upon poetry as a slight relief to the hard prose of their actual lot. A buffoon, like the hero of this tale, playing his contemptible tricks where Sir Thomas Malory has trod with a noble teaching of knightly courtesy, and uttering his witless jokes where Tennyson has drawn so many a high moral of true gentleness, is a sorry spectacle. It is not calculated to make a reflecting person proud of a shallow and self-complacent generation which can enjoy such so-called humor.
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> The one consolation to be derived from this melancholy product of the American mind in the ninth decade of the nineteenth century is that, equally in its serious and in its jesting parts, it must bring about a healthy reaction in some of its admiring readers because it overshoots the mark; because its history is perverse, in its one-sided accumulation of evils; and because its humor will be wearisome in the

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[112] 16 (Feb. 22, 1890), 90. An inconsequential review appeared in the Epoch, 6 (Jan. 31, 1890), 640. Eva Lovett Carson wrote of "the exquisite absurdity" of the plot. "The book," she asserted, "will call up something besides a smile. The satire on monarchical and Aristocratic institutions is very keen." The rest of the article was devoted to listing quotes.

extreme when its falsity is seen.

> When Mr. Clemens relates his life on the Mississippi with characteristic American exaggeration, we cannot fail to laugh and become friends. But when he prostitutes his humorous gift to the base uses of historical injustice, democratic bigotry, Protestant intolerance, and nineteenth-century vainglory, we must express the very sincere animosity we feel at such a performance.[113]

A Connecticut Yankee was one of Mark Twain's most controversial books. It is still read widely today -- by serious students of Clemens's thought as well as by the novel-reading public. In 1948 a handsome edition was published by the Heritage Press of New York. Carl Van Doren, in his introduction, admitted that the work had "lost some of the force it had for readers of its own year." "Some of the Yankee's irreverences," he continued, "now seem vulgarisms. . . . But the inconsistencies of the book, the variations in tone from matter-of-fact to idyl to tragedy to hilarious clowning, do not deprive the Yankee of its share of Mark Twain's natural fun and charm."[114] Mr. DeVoto has said of it: "It is the last of Mark Twain's books which we can call certainly of the first rank, . . ."[115]

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[113] 21 (Feb. 15, 1890), 52. An important review, indicative of the persistent hostility of the Boston critics toward Mark Twain -- a hostility which was justified, perhaps, more in this case than it had been in the past. Two critical comments on the Yankee were published in 1896. One, by Howells, appeared in a retrospective essay on Mark Twain as a historical novelist. The occasion was the publication of Joan of Arc. A Connecticut Yankee, Howells wrote, "will remain the enduring consolation of old and young alike, and will be ranged in this respect and as a masterpiece of humor beside the great work of Cervantes." -- Harper's Weekly, 40 (May 30, 1896), 535. The other comment was distinctly hostile. The reviewer claimed that it was "a pity that an author who has at his command so fascinating a style and can write so well, should let himself down into such depths of slang as we have in the volume before us. The book is, of course, amusing, sometimes very much so, but to those of us who love the Arthurian legends and approach this round table and its knights with a reverence approaching to veneration it is sacrilegious to transform them into farce. The electric glare of the nineteenth century when thrown on them in Mark Twain's style proves fatal to the romance of the sixth century. We still say, in spite of the many bright things and sensible things in the book: 'Hands off!'" -- Independent, 48 (July 23, 1896), 1008. The occasion of this belated review was apparently the issuing by Harper's of a new edition of Twain's works in the summer of 1896.

[114] Pages vii-viii.

[115] Mark Twain at Work, p. 106.

When Clemens published A Connecticut Yankee he was fifty-four years old and had completed two decades as a man of letters. A retrospective view of his career during the eighties discloses some interesting facts. In this decade the campaign for establishing Mark Twain as a writer not only of humorous effect but of serious import gathered momentum. Howells continued to praise his humanitarian and democratic instincts, his love of justice and his hatred of tyranny as manifested in such works as A Tramp Abroad, The Prince and the Pauper, and A Connecticut Yankee. Critics also found noteworthy his scorn of sham, affectation, pretension, and the like. Especially significant was the necessity on the part of some reviewers to point out his underlying earnestness. His growing historical sense (the result of careful study) and his increased ability to handle the details of plot structure were also traits which critics saw fit to mention. His universality was praised. The novelty of each successive book impressed his critics, who conceded to him (some of them grudgingly) a remarkable versatility and a surprising breadth of interests. Twain was credited with displaying in some of his books a "poetic instinct" and an ennobling purpose. Alongside these comments the notion of Clemens as a professional humorist continued to persist until the paradoxical picture emerged of an alleged funny man attempting to be serious but marring his seriousness with misplaced jests and thereby puzzling his readers, who were never certain when they were to laugh or when they were to listen respectfully. The high point in Twain's achievement during the eighties, however, was the publication of the two Mississippi River books. In connection with the earlier, Clemens's critics praised his descriptive powers, his narrative skill, and his concern with supplying facts for his readers. In addition, they called

attention to his historical accuracy and his marvelous ability to evoke the past. In connection with Huckleberry Finn, some reviewers praised Twain's realism, his characterization, his truthfulness, his literary artistry, and the "new vein of humor" he had struck, while others questioned the morality of the work. One thing is certain concerning his reputation during these years — it was a very lively issue over which critics and readers could take definite sides and express themselves with vigor and conviction. Twain seldom drew lukewarm notices — a fact which clearly indicates that he impinged forcibly upon the consciousness of his age. At least such was the case when he was in his prime. If later he was to be met with critical indifference, the recollection of his golden day was to tide his reputation over the barren stretches until time had blurred the memory of his feebler efforts and had placed the handful of masterpieces securely in the realm of American classics.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Third Decade

The nineties were critical years for Mark Twain. Bernard DeVoto describes him at the beginning of the period as "the most widely known and admired writer in America, very likely in the world. He was at the summit of his personal happiness. His books had won him not only world-wide fame but a fortune as well."[1] The summer of 1890, which the Clemens family spent in the Catskills, was a happy one. Then storm clouds began to gather. In October, Mark Twain's mother died; in November, his wife's mother died. In the beginning of 1891, his financial condition became acute owing to further failures of the Paige typesetter (into the manufacture of which he had poured almost two hundred thousand dollars.) In February, he was stricken with a severe attack of rheumatism. In April, Charles L. Webster, his nephew and partner, died, and Mrs. Clemens developed a heart condition. In June, the family fled the country. They wandered about Europe for two years, Clemens travelling back and forth to the United States — his itineraries are unimportant — trying unsuccessfully to salvage something from the wreck of the fortune sunk into the machine. In April, 1894, he was back in New York, for the Webster company was in difficulties; 1893 had been a year of panic. On April 18, the firm collapsed, carrying

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[1] Mark Twain at Work, p. 106. A contemporary account describes him at this time: ". . . there is no one in the United States who has a more extended reputation." ". . . he . . . has fairly earned the position of a cultivated man of letters. . ." "The sale of his books in the United States long ago crossed 500,000, . . ." " . . . his success is one of the romances of American life and letters." — "Mark Twain," Book Buyer, 7 (May, 1890), 149-51.

to ruin the remnants of both Mark Twain's fortune and his wife's. In 1895, bankrupt, nearly an invalid, almost sixty years old, he set out on a round-the-world lecture tour in an attempt to recoup his losses. Before he returned, his favorite daughter, Susy, who had remained at home, died suddenly in August, 1896. It must have seemed to Clemens as though misfortune had marked him for her own. Mr. DeVoto maintains that this series of personal catastrophes had a powerful effect upon Twain's writings, first, being partially (though not entirely) responsible for the strain of pessimism which became more and more a motif in his work at this time, and second, being the cause of a noticeable decline in the quality of his literary output.[2]

Nine volumes by Mark Twain were published during the nineties, of which three only (possibly four) can be called major works. First off the press during this period was a relatively inconsequential collection entitled Merry Tales (spring, 1892). Paine makes no mention of it. Published as part of the "Fiction, Fact, and Fancy Series," it quite possibly represented the efforts of either the author or the Webster company (or both) to come by some sorely needed money. The book contained seven sketches of which nearly all had appeared previously in Harper's Monthly and the Century, the most notable item being "The Private History of a Campaign That Failed," a piece which the Century had printed in 1885 as part of its famous series on Battles and Leaders of the Civil War. This sketch supplies some valuable autobiographical information and is otherwise a worthwhile piece of writing. In "Mrs. McWilliams and the Lightning" Twain re-introduced a character from Sketches New and Old who is one of his most amusing creations. The other

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[2] Ibid., Chapter 3. It should be pointed out that this decline in quality, especially as regards Twain's most ambitious project of the nineties, Joan of Arc, is more noticeable to investigators of today than it was to the readers of the period. Generally (there were a few exceptions) they prized the book much more highly than we do.

items are of varying merit. The Merry Tales volume was generally ignored by the periodicals; only two brief comments have been discovered. The Independent said merely that the work showed Clemens at "his very best." These "corruscations of Mark Twain's humor" the paper declared "too good to be left scattered through monthly magazines."[3] The Atlantic observed:

> One of the attractions in reading Mark Twain is that one never knows when he may be coming upon something serious. Though laughter rules, for the most part, now and then the jester puts aside his bells, and the tragic passage comes upon one with striking force. There are seven stories in the book, and the fun is at times stupendous. We recommend that it be read at seven sittings.[4]

Also in the spring of 1892 the Webster company brought out The American Claimant, which Clemens had re-written in novel form from the play he and Howells had constructed nine years before. He finished the writing just prior to sailing for Europe in June, 1891. It had been done frankly to make money, but even as a potboiler the book is feeble stuff. A sort of Connecticut Yankee in reverse, it describes the disillusionment of a young English idealist who discovers that there is a vast difference between American democracy in theory and in fact. Miss Gladys Bellamy calls the Claimant Twain's "worst literary failure," a judgment with which few would wish to quarrel.[5] Only one review of the novel has been found, and that is such a wretched piece of criticism as to be next to worthless.[6]

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[3] 44 (June 2, 1892), 776.

[4] 70 (Oct., 1892), 563.

[5] Mark Twain as a Literary Artist, p. 303. Even Paine admitted that the book was "not up to his usual standard." -- p. 953.

[6] "This new book of Mr. Clemens's is a romance, in which the old-time, well-known Col. Sellers re-appears. . . .
"He appears in a new role in this volume; that of a claimant to an English earldom. . . . The story, as a story, is bright and entertaining.

Late in September, 1892, the Clemens family settled in Florence. Here Twain was able to write uninterruptedly and with renewed enthusiasm — a story, "The £1,000,000 Bank-Note," Tom Sawyer Abroad, Pudd'nhead Wilson, and most of Joan of Arc. The "Bank-Note" story appeared in the Century for January, 1893, and a month later was collected with eight other pieces and published by Webster and Company. This volume, like its immediate predecessors, was generally ignored.[7]

During this period, as has been indicated above, Mark Twain was probably the most famous living American author. He was not yet the "grand old man of American letters" — a designation which was to come later. But he was well on the way to becoming that legendary literary figure which a hero-worshipping people finds it necessary to construct. His European exile did not isolate him entirely from his vast public. Nearly everything he did and said was newsworthy, and there came trickling back to the newspapers and magazines of the United States a steady stream of stories and reports, of "quips and cranks and wanton wiles" — all the paraphernalia by means of which a famous reputation is kept alive. But this material has nothing to do with literary criticism, and we can ignore it. One essay, however, seems of sufficient importance to examine briefly — not because it is especially good, but because it is

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The struggles of the young Englishman to affiliate with his uncongenial companions and very difficult environments is exceedingly well told.

"Of course the book abounds in delicious 'Twain-isms.' Whom [sic] else would ever have thought of the ridiculous incident of 'preserving the ashes of the deceased?'. . .

"There are shrewd touches in the story, beside the humor and the interest of the narration of events. . . ." — Fetter's Southern Magazine, 1 (Nov., 1892), 418.

[7]The American Review of Reviews published a brief notice which said: "Mark Twain rises at several points in his Century story, 'The £1,000,000 Bank Note' to his wonted pitch of audacity and humor, . . ." — 7 (Feb., 1893), 76.

the work of a fellow-writer and as such is of some interest. Frank R. Stockton, a humorist of more than passing repute, published a retrospective essay on "Mark Twain and his Recent Works" in the Forum in which he ventured to analyze Clemens's literary technique. Terming the humorist's courage his most notable trait, Stockton went on to explain that few other men, even if they could think of them, "would dare to say the things that Mark Twain says." He mentioned the "pure and unadulterated fun" to be found in Twain's writings. He declared that it was the "crude ore" of this fun and not the witty manner of presentation which set Clemens's humor apart from the more traditional humor of his predecessors.

> It must be remembered, however, that Mark Twain does not depend entirely upon the humor of his situations and conditions to make his points. His faculty and range of expression are wonderful, and it is his courage which gives to his expressions, as well as his inventions, their force and unique effect. His glittering phrases are as daring as they are bright, and they sparkle through all his books like stars in the sky.

He added that those who remembered Twain at the beginning of his writing career could not "help thinking of him as a humorist above everything else," for it was in this guise that he first achieved fame. But soon, Stockton observed, other qualities became apparent, especially philosophic depth and narrative talent. Nevertheless, he concluded, "we still think first of his brightness, . . ."[8]

In the spring of 1894 Tom Sawyer Abroad was published after serialization in St. Nicholas. This tale of Tom, Huck and Jim adrift in a balloon pleased its author mightily.[9] And it has pleased Twain's greatest modern

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[8] 15 (Aug., 1893), 673-9.

[9] "I have written 12,000 words of this narrative, and find that the humor flows as easily as the adventures and surprises — so I shall go along and make a book of from 50,000 to 100,000 words." Letter of Aug. 10, 1892, to Fred J. Hall, manager of the Webster company. Letters, II, 565-6.

critic, Bernard DeVoto, who writes:

> The best of his shorter pieces, . . . is "Tom Sawyer Abroad." Presumably because the setting (a navigable balloon) makes it look like burlesque, most critics have ignored it. It is a deliberate exploration of the provincial mind and its prejudices, ignorances, assumptions, wisdoms, cunning. It memorably differentiates three stages of that mind, by way of the familiar Tom, Huck, and Nigger Jim. It is among the very best of Mark's work, frequently on a level with Huckleberry Finn itself, and must eventually be recognized as what it is.[10]

But the novel was met with silence by the periodicals; there were no reviews.[11]

Pudd'nhead Wilson appeared serially in the Century between December, 1893, and June, 1894. When only two installments had been printed, a literary lady in the South, unable any longer to contain her anger, rushed into print with a bitter denunciation of the great humorist's latest work.

> A better title, perhaps, would be "The Decline and Fall of Mark Twain": for, looking at it solely as a piece of literature, there is no denying that his much-advertised serial is tremendously stupid. If it were nothing more, the reading, even the critical, world could afford to receive it in the charity of silence, remembering the merry heart it has had these twenty years past whenever it pleased Mr. Clemens to amuse it.
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> "Pudd'nhead Wilson" is more than stupid. So far as it has appeared — to the end of the second installment, that is — it is at once malicious and misleading.

". . . Mr. Clemens," she went on to say, "must have imagined all the local color of his tale." Concerning plot weaknesses, she observed:

> It is not too much to say . . . that there is slovenly construction in every other paragraph. But the manner is a trifling burden compared with the matter of it. First to last, the writer seems to feel his burden of humor-with-malice-aforethought. He had chosen his place, his people. If the

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[10] The Portable Mark Twain, Introduction, pp. 31-2.

[11] In 1896-7 Harper's published a New Library Edition of the works of Mark Twain. As individual volumes came from the press they were noted briefly in the magazines. The American Claimant and Tom Sawyer Abroad drew some comment which will be discussed in its proper chronological place.

> facts about them are not humorous, so much the worse for the facts.

She protested against the naming of the hero.[12]

> This is humor, as the great editors understand it. To one a little bit conversant with the folk who are supposed to be humorous, it seems, contrariwise, something cheap and thin. Throughout the Southwest, for at least seventy five years, "I'd like to own that dog — and kill my half" has been a cant saying so commonly current that it is laughed at only out of compliment to the user of it. The man who should now perpetrate it as original would perhaps be called something worse than "pudd'nhead," but very certainly nobody — not the most ignorant — would find in it a suggestion of uncanniness. For the thing is so common and proverbial that little children make use of it, or rather of its implication. . . .

But her greatest quarrel was with what she called Twain's villification of the South.

> And because he is who he is, a large part of our common country will take his circus-posters for accurate photographs of life and people in the South. Solely for that reason, I make, here and now, my protest against this injustice. I can not comfort myself with the belief that he has sinned ignorantly against half his countrymen. His experience has been too wide, his intelligence is too keen, for that. He is, it seems to me, thus unveracious for revenue only. He has found out the sort of book that sells best. It is not that which speaks the truth as it is, but as the reader wishes to believe it to be.[13]

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[12] Pudd'nhead Wilson had come by his sobriquet in the following manner: The first day he arrived in Dawson's Landing he was talking to a group of men when a dog began "to yelp and snarl and howl. . . ." Said Wilson:

"I wish I owned half of that dog."

"Why?" somebody asked.

"Because I would kill my half."

The author describes what followed: "The group searched his face with curiosity, with anxiety even, but found no light there, no expression that they could read. They fell away from him as from something uncanny, and went into privacy to discuss him." -- Writings, XIV, 6.

[13] Martha McCulloch Williams, "In Re 'Pudd'nhead Wilson," Southern Magazine, 4 (Feb., 1894), 99-102. This magazine was published in Louisville, Kentucky, and thus represents, in part, southern critical reaction to one of Twain's most controversial books. New England critical reaction at precisely the same time was more favorable. "'Pudd'nhead Wilson' continues to have the true Mark Twain flavor," commented a writer for the Boston Literary World, 25 (Feb. 10, 1894), 46.

These strictures are not so severe as they might at first seem. Pudd'nhead Wilson is marred by numerous defects. Twain himself admitted that its writing had been difficult. He said:

> I had a sufficiently hard time with that tale, because it changed itself from a farce to a tragedy while I was going along with it — a most embarrassing circumstance. But what was a great deal worse was, that it was not one story, but two stories tangled together; and they obstructed and interrupted each other at every turn and created no end of confusion and annoyance. I could not offer the book for publication, for I was afraid it would unseat the reader's reason.[14]

Any attempts to puzzle through the inordinate complexities, the vague motivations, the occasionally inane twists and shifts of Pudd'nhead Wilson are still calculated to unseat the reader's reason. The book is best approached as an autobiographical work giving an incomparable picture of Clemens's home town of Hannibal, Missouri, in the golden days before the War. Viewed on any other level it is almost a total loss.[15] As for its companion piece, Those Extraordinary Twins, the "farce" which Twain pulled out of the original by "a kind of literary Caesarean operation," the less said about it the better.[16]

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[14] Those Extraordinary Twins, Preface. Writings, XIV, 208.

[15] The corrosive comments upon human nature which serve as chapter headings have been greatly admired and are undoubtedly important in the development of Mark Twain's thought, but their connection with the novel is extremely remote. Wilson and the slave woman, Roxy, are among Twain's better characterizations, but the former seems underdeveloped while the latter seems a trifle exaggerated. Mr. Canby, however, calls Roxy "the only completely real woman in his books." — Turn West, Turn East, New York, 1951, p. 240.

[16] "Literature nowhere contains a more painful instance of mistaken genius." — Bernard DeVoto, Mark Twain's America, p. 284. The story, which has to do with a freak of nature, a double-headed man, is irredeemably tasteless. It has a certain interest, however, as furnishing yet one more example of Clemens's inability to appraise his writings justly. "I think all sorts of folks will read it. It is clean out of the common order — it

The two stories were printed in one volume and appeared late in 1894. Critical opinion was sharply divided. We have already seen how Pudd'nhead Wilson affected a loyal lady of the old South. Here is the totally opposite opinion of H. H. Boyesen, a foreigner by birth, to be sure, but a quarter-century resident of the United States, a novelist of the realistic school, and, incidentally, one of Mark Twain's friends.

> . . . if, I say, anybody else had had the hardihood to utilize afresh this venerable stage machinery of fiction, we should have been tempted to class his work with such cheap stuff as that of Wilkie Collins, . . . and the dime novelists. But Mark Twain, somehow, has lifted it all into the region of literature. . . .
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> Then again, the Missouri village in which the scene is laid, is so vividly realized in its minutest details; and the people, in all their fatuous prejudice and stolidity, are so credible and authentic, so steeped in the local atmosphere, that the illusion becomes perfect, and we swallow the melodrama without a qualm, — . . .

The qualities in Twain's novel which he found praiseworthy were the qualities which he, as a militant fighter in the ranks of the realists, would have been most apt to admire.

> He evidently has an ample fund of experience to draw upon; and he possesses, also, that high imaginative faculty which does not consist in crude invention, but in shaping remembered truth into logical and artistic coherence. His people stand squarely upon their feet, not because he has so constructed them, but because he has known their type and been familiar with their looks, speech, and habits. How deliciously rich, racy, and copious is, for instance, his negro talk. The very gurgling laugh and cooing cadence seem, somehow, implied in the text; and the fancy instinctively adds the vivid mien and gestures. Since Mark Twain wrote his "Tom Sawyer" and "Roughing It," he has published no book comparable in interest to "Puddin'-head Wilson."[17]

The "region of literature," said Boyesen — that is where Mark Twain had arrived with his time-worn materials. The reviewer for the Critic felt

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is a fresh idea — I don't think it resembles anything in literature." Letter to Fred J. Hall, Aug. 10, 1892. Quoted in Paine, p. 950.

[17]"Two Humorists," Cosmopolitan, 18 (Jan., 1895), 379.

quite differently. He admitted taking real pleasure in Twain's work, and yet he had some misgivings.

> The literary critic is often puzzled how to classify the intellectual phenomena that come within his ken. His business is of course with literature. A work may be infinitely amusing, it may abound even with flashes and touches of genius, and yet the form in which it comes into the world may be so crude, so coarse, so erring from the ways of true classicism, so offensive to immemorial canons of taste, that the critic, in spite of his enjoyment and wonder, puts it reluctantly down in the category of unclassifiable literary things -- only to take it up and enjoy it again!
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> Of such is "Pudd'nhead Wilson," and, for that matter, Mark Twain in general. The author is a signal example of sheer genius, without training or culture in the university sense, setting forth to conquer the world with laughter whether it will or no, and to get himself thereby acknowledged to be the typical writer of the West.

The reviewer continued, finding the novel

> admirable in atmosphere, local color and dialect, a drama in its way, full of powerful situations, thrilling even; but it cannot be called in any sense literature. In it Mark Twain's brightness and grotesqueness and funniness revel and sparkle, and in the absurd extravaganza, "Those Extraordinary Twins," all these comicalities reach the buffoon point; one is amused and laughs unrestrainedly, but then the irksome question comes up: What is this? is it literature? is Mr. Clemens a "writer" at all? must he not after all be described as an admirable after-dinner storyteller -- humorous, imaginative, dramatic, like Dickens -- who in an evil moment, urged by admiring friends, has put pen to paper and written down his stories?[18]

Two other magazines published brief reviews of Pudd'nhead Wilson. The critic for the Book Buyer found the atmosphere of the first story "vividly realized." The story of the twins he found to be "full of the wildest fun -- for people who think this kind of extravaganza funny. Tastes differ."[19] To the critic of the Outlook, the book was a "disappointment."

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[18] 26 (May 11, 1895), 338-9.

[19] 12 (March, 1895), 92.

> There are flashes of fun in it here and there, passages of dry humor, of amusing exaggeration, of sterling good sense; the extracts from "Pudd'nhead Wilson's Calendar" used as head-lines for the chapters are extremely clever, and the idea is original and Mark Twainish. But taken as a whole and as a work of fiction, the story is excessively melodramatic, is confused, and is not always probable.[20]

In addition to the books described above, the Italian years saw the composition of Mark Twain's major work of the nineties, The Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc. The problem of why exactly the figure of the Maid fascinated him -- haunted him, almost -- of her relation to what Mr. Canby calls Mark Twain's "dream girl," of her place in the complex of feelings he had about women in general -- all these things we had best leave to the psychologist. For our purposes here one matter is of great significance -- Clemens's attitude toward the Joan of Arc volume. Paine reports a conversation in which the author said: "I shall never be accepted seriously over my own signature. People always want to laugh over what I write and are disappointed if they don't find a joke in it. This is to be a serious book. It means more to me than anything I have ever undertaken. I shall write it anonymously."[21] He was paying -- and he was amply conscious that he had to pay -- the high price of being a comic, the penalty of humor. There are those among Mark Twain's modern critics who feel that it was not such a high price, actually -- that Clemens was only a great writer when he wrote as a humorist -- that his attempts to be anything but a humorist were generally disastrous.[22] And yet his contemporaries -- those of them who

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[20] 51 (March 2, 1895), 357.

[21] Paine, p. 959.

[22] See especially Bernard DeVoto, Mark Twain's America, Chapter 10, for the best modern discussion of this point.

were capable of seeing beneath the humorous veneer, or who took the trouble to peer beneath it -- maintained that it was a very high price he had to pay, a tragically high price. They remembered The Prince and the Pauper and the public apathy which had greeted it. They shook their heads over the likelihood that things would ever be any different. ". . . Mark Twain," said one who knew him, "made his success as a writer by donning the cap and bells, and the world will not listen to him when he tries to take them off. This is the penalty of his success."[23] And another, writing many years later but recalling this period:

> To those who knew him personally, -- . . . he was worlds removed from the newspaper funny man. He was no mountebank in motley wear, shaking the fool's zany for the momentary, thoughtless merriment of the crowd, but a wise, sane, deep-souled man teaching us the lesson of life. . . .
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> For this reason, his career, splendidly successful as the world rates success, was in a sense tragic. The great reading public and those who did not read, yet to whom his name was a household word, . . . insisted on taking him as a funny man. He felt that he could hardly get a contemporary hearing for what was in him, -- or, at least, for what was deepest.[24]

And still a third -- this one a major critic of his day, whose sanction of Mark Twain represents one of the peaks in favorable criticism of the creator of Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn. Brander Matthews professed to find in Mark Twain not only a great humorist but a master of English prose -- "one of the foremost story-tellers of the world, with the gift of swift narrative, with the certain grasp of human nature, with a rare power of presenting character at a passionate crisis." Certain chapters in Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn and Pudd'nhead Wilson he declared to be among the finest in English.

> Partly because his fiction is uneven, and is never long sustained at its highest level of excellence, partly because he has also written too much that is little better than burlesque and extravaganza, but chiefly because he is primarily a humorist,

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[23] Arthur Reed Kimball, "Hartford's Literary Corner," Outlook, 51 (June 1, 1895), 904.

[24] Richard Burton, Little Essays in Literature and Life, New York, 1914. p. 202.

> because he is free from cant and sham pathos, because he does not take himself too seriously, because his humor is free, flowing, unfailing, because his laughter is robust and contagious and irresistible, because he has made more of our scattered English-speaking people laugh than any other man of our time — because of all these things we do not see that in all fiction, since the single footprint on the shore fell under the eyes of the frightened Crusoe, there is no more thrilling moment than that when the hand of Indian Joe (his one enemy) comes slowly within the vision of Tom Sawyer, lost in the cave; we do not see that no one of our American novelists has ever shown more insight into the springs of human action or more dramatic force than is revealed in Huck Finn's account of the Shepherdson-Grangerford feud; . . . we do not see that it would be hard to select from all the story-tellers of the nineteenth century a scene of immeasurable pathos surpassing that in Pudd'nhead Wilson when the wretched Chambers knowingly sells his own mother "down the river."
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> When we find that the man who wrote these chapters, and so many more only a little less marvellous in their vigor and their truth, is set down in most accounts of American literature as a funny man only, when we see him dismissed with a line or two of patronizing comment, as though Mark Twain were only a newspaper humorist, a chance rival of John Phoenix or Artemus Ward or Orpheus C. Kerr as a vender of comic copy, then we have it brought home to us that humor is a possession for which the possessor must meet the bill. Mr. Clemens, having more humor than any one else of his generation, has had to pay a higher price.[25]

In an effort, then, to escape payment, or at least to defer it, Mark Twain published Joan of Arc anonymously, or rather, we had best say, pseudonymously, for the story of the Maid was allegedly the work of the Sieur Louis de Conte, Joan's page and secretary. Its "translator" was one Jean Francois Alden. With these names attached to it the tale ran serially in Harper's Monthly from April, 1895, to April, 1896. During the course of its publication there was much speculation as to its authorship. Soon what

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[25]"The Penalty of Humor," Harper's Monthly, 92 (May, 1896), 900. Examples could be multiplied. See, for instance, David Masters, "Mark Twain's Place in Literature," Chautauquan, 25 (Sept., 1897), 610-14; and Robert Barr, "Samuel Langhorne Clemens, 'Mark Twain,'" McClure's, 10 (Jan., 1898), 246-51.

the papers liked to call "Twainisms" began to be detected, and, though the secret was a carefully guarded one, the consensus was that Clemens was the author. In July, 1895, when only four installments had appeared, a reader sent to the Critic a letter in which he asserted: ". . . I have dipped into the book, and each spoonful was brimming with Mark Twain, . . ."[26] The Chicago Chap Book, casting a characteristically jaundiced eye upon the matter, seemed to care little who the author was: it did not like the book.

> The serial in progress in Harper's, "Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc," seems to be winning favor, if one may judge by newspaper adjectives, and the raptures of the unthinking, who are pleased by the pictures. But that, after all, is no test. . . . The name of the Maid of Orleans, potent again as it was in the stormy days of her triumphs, would at this moment carry any novel. . . . But it is not, very distinctly not, the gentleman billed as "the most popular American magazine writer," who is going to give us our Maid. He may collate her biography with a surface knowledge of "where he is at," but he lacks culture, he lacks real reverence, he lacks the historic sense. . . . The whole thing has no atmosphere, and no tone. . . . Leaving the giant exemplars alone, the crude annalist of the Maid (Mark Twain or another) might profit by a pious perusal of Marius, the Epicurean, . . .[27]

When the Personal Recollections were published in book form in the summer of 1896, the pretense of anonymity was abandoned, and Mark Twain's name appeared on the cover. The work caused a great stir in reviewing circles. Here was still another departure — Twain as a writer of history. And did the judicious grieve when the quondam "wild humorist of the Pacific Slope" presumed to retell the story of the sainted Maid of Orleans? Only partly. The critics, in general, were but lukewarm; some were hostile. But the majority of Twain's friends were loud in their approval,[28] and the reading

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[26] 27 (July 27, 1895), 63.

[27] 3 (May 15, 1895), 27-8.

[28] Paine's verdict (p. 1029) is typical. "Considered from every point of view, Joan of Arc is Mark Twain's supreme literary expression, the loftiest, the most delicate, the most luminous example of his work."

public was, if not enthusiastic, at least amply pleased.[29]

More than a dozen reviews of Joan of Arc appeared in the spring and summer of 1896 — far more than had ever been elicited by a previous Clemens work. They ranged in length from brief comments[30] to serious, full-length essays. Among the longer studies, that of Howells was characteristically sensible. He praised "the rich vein of poetry" which he found running through all Mark Twain's humor, whether of the "grotesque" or of the "pathetic" kind. The character of the narrator pleased him, and the trial and martyrdom of Joan he believed "the best part of the book." He concluded:

> I dare say there are a good many faults in the book. It is unequal; its archaism is often superficially a failure; if you look at it merely on the technical side, the outbursts of the nineteenth-century American in the armor of the fifteenth-century Frenchman are solecisms. But in spite of all this, the book has a vitalizing force. Joan lives in it again, and dies, and then lives on in the love and pity and wonder of the reader.[31]

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[29]Professor Mott (Golden Multitudes, p. 210) tells us that Joan made only "a modest success"; 1896 was also the year of Quo Vadis. Clemens, nevertheless, was pleased. In 1908, he told the members of the American Booksellers Association, at their eighth annual banquet: ". . . I wrote it for love, and never expected it to sell, but you have pleasantly disappointed me in that matter. In your hands its sale has increased each year. In 1904 you sold 1726 copies; in 1905, 2445; in 1906, 5318; and last year, 6574." — "Mark Twain, His Books, and the Booksellers," Harper's Weekly, 52 (June 6, 1908), 32.

[30]Some samples: ". . . Mark Twain's work is a historical novel, executed with fidelity to the original documents and records. . ." — Outlook, 54 (Aug. 22, 1896), 336. "A fine combination of history, biography and romance. . ." — Independent, 48 (June 4, 1896), 769. ". . . a gorgeous failure. . . . The style is artificial, . . . The actors move like figures in a panorama; . . ." — Chautauquan, 23 (July, 1896), 492. ". . . a good, straightforward, hearty story of a great and noble life." — Critic, 28 (May 16, 1896), 351. "The pathetic power of the narrative is great, and finely sustained; . . ." — Book Buyer, 13 (June, 1896), 301.

[31]Harper's Weekly, 40 (May 30, 1896), 535-6.

The reviewer for the Nation called the work a "prose epic," and added that "Dumas's talent might have made it the basis of a masterpiece." He complained that the fifteenth-century diction had been "but indifferently caught," that the style was "much too vigorous" for the eighty-two-year-old narrator, and that the sentiment was "far from being medieval." Joan's dialogue was pronounced "good and full of shrewdness"; " . . . it proves that Mark Twain can write in serious strain and with power."[32] The critic for Harper's singled out for praise what he called ". . . a most excellent specimen of simple, direct, forcible, thoughtful English prose." Of Twain's historical accuracy he said: "He has studied his subject thoroughly and profoundly, and for many years." ". . . he has entered into the spirit of the dim past period in which she /Joan/ figured."[33] The reviewer for the Boston Literary World, although he did not hesitate to point out Twain's faults, wrote a more sympathetic critique than that periodical had been accustomed to provide in its past considerations of Clemens's books. He regretted the vulgarities which detracted from the "interesting and touching" sections of the romance, and deplored the heavy-handed treatment of such fanciful episodes as the account of the fairies. He considered the trial the most interesting part of the book, since Joan's "wonderful personality and intelligence" were displayed in every word. Although he found the work tedious, he concluded that it was worth reading because of the fine job Twain had done of sifting the numerous volumes of legal Latin in which the account of Joan's trial is preserved.[34] The critic for the Literary

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[32] 63 (July 16, 1896), 52-3.

[33] 93 (June, 1896), 1-2 /supplement/. To what extent Harper's reviews degenerated into mere puffing after Harper and Brothers became Twain's publisher is not easy to determine.

[34] 27 (May 30, 1896), 163.

Digest was perhaps the most sensible of all who reviewed the Joan volume, being careful to present both sides of the picture as he saw it. Twain, he acknowledged, had given evidence in the past of possessing superior literary powers. There was no question but that in Joan of Arc he had selected a great topic on which to exercise his latent talents. But how well he succeeded was open to question. One could find no fault, the reviewer agreed, with his use of history or with the seriousness of his treatment. At some points, indeed, Joan challenged comparison with The Cloister and the Hearth and Westward Ho! -- especially in its "dignity, sweetness, force of simplicity," its "dramatic feeling and imaginative insight. . ." The character of the heroine, according to the critic, was drawn "with an exquisite and tender human reality. . ."

> Here in short is Mark Twain the serious artist, and the result is something to be grateful for, since it is the best he has ever done. But, alas, Mark Twain, the professional "humorist," is present also; and the professional "humorist" has sadly marred the effect of the artist's best achievement. This most gracious and ennobling portrait, this heroic and stupendous tragedy, is blotched and smeared with modern slang and vulgarisms, with passages that seem to have been written by a "smart" reporter, with anachronisms that all but destroy the narrative's verisimilitude for even moderately cultured readers, and with utterances that read like snippets from the current speeches of some ignorant stump orator.[35]

There were other and stronger dissenting voices -- one from a powerful representative of the Catholic point of view, another from a representative of the young intellectuals of the day. The Catholic World did not deign to review the Twain work. It referred to it quite clearly, however, in a notice of Mrs. Oliphant's Jeanne D'Arc: Her Life and Death, which was published about the same time as the Clemens volume.

> Mrs. Oliphant's standing in the literary world entitles her to attention when she gives us her views on the Jeanne d'Arc episode. She is a lady who has not been found scoffing

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[35] 13 (Sept. 5, 1896), 603-4.

> at sacred things, and does not come before us with such a claim as a circus clown might have to play the part of Hamlet. Her pen has always been bright and clean, and she views literature as a noble vehicle, not as a garbage-cart.[36]

That Mark Twain viewed literature as a garbage-cart might come as a surprise to many, but that Mrs. Oliphant viewed it as a noble vehicle would be readily acceded by anyone who took the trouble to rescue one of her novels from the oblivion into which, with barely a trace, they have sunk. The bright young men of the nineties cared little for Joan of Arc. One of their number produced an extremely interesting review.

> As for the book itself, it does not add much to history or to literature or to Mark Twain's reputation. Joan is a nice little American girl of the mid-nineteenth century. Sensitive, feminine, delicate, pretty, she blushes easily, she is moved to tears on every other page -- as heroines of Mark Twain's youth used to be moved. It is a nice, readable, popular, Sunday-school book for the young. To adult minds it is prolix and tedious, and also sad, a combination devoutly to be avoided. . . . The real Joan seems to us greater, nobler, more wonderful than the "nice little girl" Joan of Mark Twain's senile imagination. To write the book may have been a labor of love with the kindly old humorist -- but he would have done well to let the task alone. . . . As one lays aside the book one asks, Why has Mark done this thing? Has he lost his sense of humor? Is he no longer capable of amusing us? Or has he the keen sense to see that such dreadful nonsense as Innocents Abroad, Roughing It, etc., would no longer please us -- and so turns into a prosy, goody-goody writer of Sunday-school tales in his old age? No doubt this book will sell well, and a great many school-girls will cry over it, and critics will praise it to the skies -- but after all, is it worth the writing?[37]

The best and most serious criticism of Joan of Arc was Professor W. P. Trent's long study of "Mark Twain as an Historical Novelist" -- an essay always interesting, frequently provocative, and occasionally brilliant.

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[36] 63 (Sept., 1896), 832.

[37] Bachelor of Arts, 3 (July, 1896), 286-7. The magazine was described as "an organ of college graduate opinion, . . . written for college men, by college men, with all the wealth of learning that the higher education supplies." -- Springfield Daily Republican. Quoted inside front cover, 3 (Aug.-Sept., 1896).

Trent pointed out that Clemens was more than "a mere humorist," that he had, indeed, already produced works of fiction that the world would "not willingly let die." With Joan of Arc he had "challenged criticism as a historical novelist, properly speaking." But, he asked, had Twain "succeeded in writing a great book or even a thoroughly satisfactory historical novel?" His answer: ". . . a reluctant but decided 'No.'" He admitted that Mark Twain had written a sympathetic study in "a simple and moving style," that some of his scenes were "of imperishable interest and importance." He failed, however,

> to fuse properly the historic and the purely imaginary or fictive elements of his narrative. He has given us a large piece of mosaic work; first we have a slab of history, then a slab of fiction, and so on, with the history predominating over the fiction. It is true that the historical events that fill so many pages are told with an insight, a verve, a humour that professed historians might well envy; but the fusing process has not taken place, and the history and the fiction are separate, though in juxtaposition.

Trent found other defects in the work -- an inability on the part of the novelist to make his chief character "really human and alive"; an overuse of "that most disappointing form of description, to wit, exclamatory comment"; "a lack of imagination in descriptive passages that especially require it"; an occasional lapse in taste; "the lack of a sense of proportion" in the treatment of the trial. He summarized his arguments by asserting that the chief defect of the novel lay in the fact that Mark Twain was "not primarily a man of letters."

> But fortunately for American literature and for the permanent fame of a man whom no one can know without loving and honouring, the creator of Tom Sawyer is something far more than a mere man of letters, even a great one; he is something far more than a mere humorist, even a thoroughly genial and whole-souled one -- he is a great writer. Like Balzac himself he can afford to let the critics have their say about his

style, in the consciousness that he has understood and expressed the workings of the human heart.[38]

What many of his contemporaries thought to be the pure gold of Joan of Arc soon began to tarnish. The Bookman commented irreverently in 1901: "We know of one gentleman who succeeded in reading Joan of Arc to the end; but he was a book reviewer and had to do it because he was a conscientious man. We tried it several times, and then gave it up because of its egregious dulness."[39] And in 1903 the same periodical included Joan in "a list of the worst ten books in English that we have ever read through, confining ourselves to books whose authors might have been expected to do better."[40]

Although Mark Twain considered it the best of all his books,[41] modern criticism views Joan of Arc generally in an unfavorable light. To Mr. DeVoto, it is "mediocre, or worse"[42]; to Mr. Hecter, "at best a tour de force."[43] Mr. Canby would have us believe that it is "much better than later criticism has allowed," but admits that it was "unsuited" to Mark Twain's genius[44] — which is probably as good a way as any of saying that Twain should have

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[38] Bookman, 3 (May, 1896), 207-10. Trent was at this time a professor of English and dean of the academic department at the University of the South. A few years later he was to begin a thirty-year assignment as Professor of English Literature at Columbia.

[39] 12 (Jan., 1901), 441.

[40] 17 (May, 1903), 313-4.

[41] Paine, p. 1034.

[42] Mark Twain's America, p. 280.

[43] Literary History of the United States, II, 935.

[44] Turn West, Turn East, p. 186.

stuck to writing about what he knew best, for the highway to immortality seems clearly to have been, in his case, the great river.

Starting in 1896, the firm of Harper and Brothers, which had become Clemens's publisher with Joan of Arc, began issuing his collected works. Here was opportunity for a re-appraisal. Surprisingly enough, the comic magazine Life (which was able, when it took the trouble, to provide literary criticism of an unusually high caliber) set the pace. Robert Bridges, under his pseudonym of "Droch," wrote an essay on "Mark Twain Re-Discovered," which said some fairly important things about the great humorist.

> Mark Twain and laughter have been synonymous, simultaneous, and interchangeable for so long a time that the great American reading public long ago ceased to make any distinction between them.
>
> But when you get this array of imposing library volumes before you, and begin to dip into them, you discover how much more there is to him than laughter; how many kinds of writing he has done with wonderful skill, and how persistent he has been in trying new things in a literary way. From "Innocents Abroad" to "Joan of Arc" there are half a dozen kinds of Mark Twain; and you will be filled with delight to re-discover him.

He singled out Life on the Mississippi for special attention, remarking that it was an excellent picture of a particular period of American life and development which was unique in the history of the Middle West. He concluded by calling Mark Twain a serious literary artist who had infused his style with the "thought and finish that give it permanent value as literature."[45]

In a retrospective review of Clemens's work, occasioned by the publication of the New Library Edition, the critic for Harper's selected three typical volumes. Huckleberry Finn was said to possess a main character which was "one of the most original and the most delightful juvenile creations in fiction; . . ." The hero of A Connecticut Yankee was deemed "worthy of more

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[45] 28 (Aug. 20, 1896), 134-5. Not the famous English poet, this Robert Bridges was assistant editor of Scribner's Magazine, a literary adviser and director of Charles Scribner's Sons, a member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters, and a critic and author of some note.

attention, and of more sincere respect, than he has hitherto received." The Prince and the Pauper was described as one of Twain's best books, "likely to become one of the most enduring, of all his works."[46]

When Tom Sawyer Abroad and The American Claimant were re-published, each with a number of shorter pieces, the former volume was met with a less than enthusiastic reception by the critic for the Dial, who described its "inventions" as having "passed long ago into the history of American humor."[47] The Literary World emphasized the "side-splitting" quality of the collection and predicted that its readers would break into paroxysms of laughter.[48] The reviewer for the Independent liked the title story of the Claimant volume "in spots," but found it "unequal" as a whole.[49] The critic for Harper's said that both volumes showed "that wonderful versatility and absolute genius of their author which is so far above the range of mere humor, as humor, that the world is beginning, by degrees, to realize that Mark Twain is a good deal more than a humorist,. . . ."[50]

Early in 1897, Harper's brought out a collection of eight essays under the title of How to Tell a Story. The work contained some of Clemens's best pieces, all of which had seen periodical publication earlier in the decade.[51]

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[46] 93 (Sept., 1896), 1-2 [supplement]. This review, as well as most of the others in Harper's during this period, was by Laurence Hutton, literary editor of the magazine.

[47] 21 (Dec. 16, 1896), 393.

[48] 28 (Jan. 23, 1897), 29.

[49] 49 (May 20, 1897), 650.

[50] 94 (May, 1897), 2 [supplement].

[51] Among the more famous items we may list "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offences," "Private History of the 'Jumping Frog' Story," and "In Defence of Harriet Shelley."

The book was greeted with mild interest. The Literary World mentioned merely: "Eight of Mark Twain's shorter pieces, claiming to be humorous, have been brought together in a small book, . . ."[52] The Dial found that some of the essays had "so much professionalism about them as to be a trifle wearisome, . . ."[53] The Citizen was more explicit and also more severe:

> In these essays strenuous efforts to amuse are made, in a would-be serious style, and the result is depressing. "The Defence of Harriet Shelley" is long and wandering -- and arrives nowhere. The subject should be too serious a one to be handled in such a trivial manner, and one is obliged to feel that Harriet Shelley would rather be defended by silence than by an undignified attempt to be sarcastic at her husband's expense.
>
> Fortunately some of the papers are rather better. "The Private History of the 'Jumping Frog' Story" is amusing, and "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offences" is really funny. Cooper's stories are dissected logically and, it must be confessed, to the abatement of one's young enthusiasms, the Indians are treated to an amount of ridicule which would have made even the Deerslayer helpless.[54]

The critic for Harper's found Twain's English "vigorous, nervous, flexible, direct. . ." Of the individual items in the volume, he singled out the Fenimore Cooper piece.

> . . . -- he takes "Deerslayer" as an example, showing how a story should not be told in print. And shocking as it is to lose one's faith in Natty Bumpo -- as a work of art -- one cannot help feeling that Mr. Mark Twain in this case, as usual, is very nearly right, although one cannot conscientiously go so far as Mr. Twain goes when he declares of "Deerslayer" that "It has no invention; it has no order, system, sequence or result; . . ."[55]

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[52] 28 (June 12, 1897), 197.

[53] 23 (Aug. 1, 1897), 75.

[54] 3 (July, 1897), 121.

[55] 95 (June, 1897), 1 [supplement]. The Cooper sketch, still a pleasure to read, was attacked earlier, when it appeared in the North American Review. An irate critic made a point by point defense of Cooper against Twain's charges and published the results in the Dial. See D. L. Maulsby, "Fenimore Cooper and Mark Twain," 22 (Feb. 16, 1897), 107-9, in which the writer said of Twain's essay: ". . . considered as scientific criticism, his diatribe needs at least as much kindly allowance as do Cooper's 'Leather Stocking Tales' tried by modern standards of the novel."

Before we consider Mark Twain's last important publication of the nineties, perhaps we had best take note of a number of miscellaneous essays which appeared in the magazines in the final years of the century. Rev. Joseph H. Twichell, perhaps Twain's closest friend, supplied the lead article for the May, 1896, issue of Harper's. The essay was largely biographical, but it contained one interesting statement concerning Clemens's reputation: "That no other literary man of his generation has achieved so extensive favor with the universal community of readers of all ranks as he has done, is a statement that will hardly be challenged by any."[56]

Brander Matthews, long one of Twain's most perceptive and appreciative critics, wrote a comprehensive analysis of the seven volumes in the New Library Edition. He began by saying that average public opinion had not yet assessed at its true value "the work of the admirable story-teller who is known to all of us as Mark Twain." So intent have the public been upon laughing with Clemens that they are reluctant to change their attitude toward him. However, Matthews insisted, Twain is more than a "professional humorist." His later books were in every way superior to his early ones. ". . . they showed that Mark Twain had learnt how to suggest the pathos that must underlie true humor; they were better written also — indeed, . . . no American author to-day has at his command a style more nervous, more varied, more flexible, or more direct than Mark Twain's." Of Huckleberry Finn Matthews said: ". . . I do not think it will be a century . . . before we Americans generally discover how great a book 'Huckleberry Finn' really is, how keen its vision of character, how close its observation of life, how sound its philosophy, and how it records for us once and for all certain phases of Southwestern society which it is very important for us to perceive

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[56]"Mark Twain," 92 (May, 1896), 817.

and to understand."[57]

Writing a few months later in the Atlantic, Charles Miner Thompson reiterated what Matthews had said about the value of Twain's pictures of a departed way of life.

> His tenacious memory for detail, his microscopic imagination, and his real interest in the serious side of life make his pictures of the crude society in which he was born both absolutely accurate and surprisingly comprehensive. His writings cannot be neglected by any one who wishes to know that life, and it is one which is in many respects highly important for us to understand.

Thompson did not believe that Clemens was "a great or a skillful writer," although he possessed "a rude native gift for firm and vigorous narration" and "an inborn eloquence." The critic found Twain's style "technically without distinction." He felt that Twain failed "in the handling of large masses of composition" and was "devoid of any aptitude for construction." Nor did he believe that Clemens was either a great humorist or a great wit, for he had written nothing which "radiantly" expressed "some eternal truth of life." Where then, he asked, did Mark Twain's greatness lie? And he answered: In his ability to interpret the American character.

> If a man can thoroughly express the individuality of a nation, he may fairly be called great. We may lament the artist lost, but we may rejoice in the man. He has drawn the national type, interpreted the national character. For that service we may be grateful. And he has taught unobtrusively, but none the less powerfully, the virtues of common sense and honest manliness. If it comes to a choice, these are better than refinement.[58]

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[57] "Mark Twain — His Work," Book Buyer, 13 (Jan., 1897), 977-9.

[58] "Mark Twain as an Interpreter of American Character," 79 (April, 1897), 443-50. It is interesting to speculate upon the possible relationship between such utterances about the importance of the Southwest as those by Thompson and Matthews and Frederick Jackson Turner's thesis on the significance of the frontier, which was published a few years earlier in 1894. Academic criticism was similarly emphasizing the native quality of Mark Twain's genius. Fred Lewis Pattee wrote in A History of American Literature,

A critic in the Chautauquan, attempting to assess "Mark Twain's Place in Literature," wrote:

> The charge that Twain is neither elegant nor graceful in his writing may be well founded, but he has the happy faculty of writing plainly and with a blunt force that can never be misunderstood, and this pleases the average reader better than an elegance of diction made to conceal poverty of thought. Much of his work was written only for the day and generation in which it was published, and so will pass away, but meanwhile let us hope that his method of utilizing plain Anglo-Saxon will not perish from literature.[59]

A writer in the Overland Monthly discussed "Mark Twain as Prospective Classic," observing that "His most enthusiastic admirers have been farthest from suspecting in him the elements of greatness." Indeed, he continued, Twain's "magnificent abilities in serious art" have generally been overlooked. His "powers of sustained narration have been seriously questioned," the critic stated; yet it is not as a novelist that Clemens should be considered but as a story-teller. He said some interesting things about Twain's style, which he described as "a return to the living source of all inspiration and power, -- the genius of the spoken language." He saw in Twain's popularity the foundation for "an edifice of enduring fame."[60]

New York, 1896, p. 454: "He is intensely original. He mingles boisterous fun with delicate description, broad characterization with skilful narrative, and over all he throws the charm of a rare personality, one peculiarly American, and as impossible to define as is the charm of the Indian Summer." And again, in a plea for recognition of American literature as an independent body of writing, he said: "Men like Cooper and Whitman and Mark Twain would have been impossible on any other soil." -- Fred Lewis Pattee, "Is There an American Literature?" Dial, 21 (Nov. 1, 1896), 245.

[59]David Masters, 25 (Sept., 1897), 614.

[60]Theodore de Laguna, 31 (April, 1898), 364-7. For bibliographical purposes only it might be well to mention one final essay which appeared during this period: Samuel E. Moffett, "Mark Twain, A Biographical Sketch," McClure's, 13 (Oct., 1899), 523-9. Moffett was Clemens's nephew and had been asked by the humorist to write an "authentic" brief account of his life. When he read it, Twain said: "This biographical sketch suits me entirely -- . . ."

In the summer of 1896, the Clemens family completed the round-the-world lecture journey. It had been in the nature of a triumphal tour. Its success was marred only by the death in Hartford of the youngest daughter, Susy, in August, 1896. Mrs. Clemens and another daughter, Clara, had started home when the tragic news reached Clemens, who had elected to remain in London. By then it was too late for him to go back, and he waited alone and despairing for the return of the other members of his family. They spent the fall and winter of 1896 in England. Clemens worked on the account of the journey and completed it in the spring of 1897. Following the Equator was published in the autumn of that year. There had been some advance publicity in the magazines. The Literary Review, for instance, had reported:

> We hear that Mark Twain is in London writing an account of his lecturing tour, in the style of "Innocents Abroad." . . . According to Mr. Clemens, the book is a good one. Says he, "I wouldn't trade it for any book I've ever written, and I'm not an easy one to please." It will be interesting to watch its effect on the public.[61]

Its effect, as might be expected from what we have seen in connection with all his other books, was varied. But regardless of critical opinion, the book accomplished its purpose. The lecture tour in which it had its origins had been lucrative. Its sales as a subscription volume were fair. By January, 1898, the burden of debt had been lifted, and the family could breathe easily again.[62]

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[61] 1 (June 15, 1897), 91.

[62] Mrs. Clemens had written to her adopted sister in 1894: "I cannot get away from the feeling that business failure means disgrace." -- Quoted in Paine, p. 987. Some indication of the magnitude of Clemens's losses may be gained from the following note published in the Critic, 27 (Sept. 14, 1895), 173: "The American Newsman prints these interesting statistics: -- 'Mark Twain's royalties go far beyond those gained by any other American writer. His royalties upon "The Innocents Abroad" reached $100,000 in less

Following the Equator is ostensibly the account of Mark Twain's round-the-world lecture tour of 1895-6. But it is much more than that. It is a great grab-bag of miscellanea, a crowded storehouse of assorted riches and some worthless odds and ends, too. It contains many valuable bits of autobiographical reminiscence, some fine portraiture, and some gems of ripe wisdom. Splendid passages of description rub shoulders with the most barren listings of dry statistics. Much of the familiar Mark Twain is here -- the fighter for freedom, the opponent of tyranny, the deflater of overblown egos, the champion of the downtrodden. His innate fairness, his remarkable common sense, his ability to grasp fundamental issues -- these things illuminate much of the book. And over everything is the wholesome glow of his humor -- not an altogether rosy glow, but a glow shot through with sudden fiery flashes -- these in the form of the epigrams from "Pudd'n-head Wilson's New Calendar" that serve as mottoes for every chapter. Following the Equator, in short, is Mark Twain at his best and at his worst. It is all Mark and a yard wide, and in its day it had its admirers. James Whitcomb Riley, for instance, wrote to Clemens: "For a solid week . . . I have been glorying in your last book -- and if you've ever done anything better, stronger, or of wholesomer uplift I can't recall it."[63]

Following the Equator was widely reviewed by the periodicals of its day.

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than three years, . . . His royalties upon "The Gilded Age" were about $80,000, . . . His profits from "Tom Sawyer" reached far up into the thousands, and were very large for "Roughing It" and "Life Upon the Mississippi." He did very well, too, with his "Prince and Pauper," and at one time he was estimated to have gained in all about $500,000 from his writings, and from his investments so much more as to make him very nearly a millionaire. He gained the repute of being a very astute man of business, yet he had the most grievous misfortunes when he began to invest his money. . . .'"

[63] Quoted in Paine, p. 1055.

Criticism ran the gamut from highly favorable to hostile, with most of the opinions falling into the former category. A perusal of the most complimentary notices discloses some rather extravagant claims. The Independent, for example, said:

> Mark Twain has never done any better work than in this book. In mere literary craftsmanship he has done nothing as good, and his fun is as keen and as mirth-provoking as ever. the fun is not perhaps as farcical as in some former instances, and it is more broken in upon by passages of serious meaning; but these things are not to its disadvantage. The wit is genuine, and so is the wisdom; . . .
>
> As a book of travels merely this one has no superior in the art of bringing strange scenes and people vividly before the reader's mental eye; . . . Mark Twain is always fresh, interesting, stimulating. . . . In all his wit there is a large kindliness of nature that leaves no rankling sting after its well-aimed shafts.[64]

The Dial called the book "a first-rate specimen of that eminently sagacious mixture of sense and nonsense which is so characteristic of him," and added, concerning the author:

> To many refined people he may seem the vulgar buffoon, entirely unrespectful, unconventional, irreverent; but this aspect is but his surface aspect. He reverences what is essentially worthy of reverence, . . . In truth, the dominant note in this book is not jest but earnestness, moral and humane, — an earnest desire for sincerity and genuineness, but tearing sham to pieces and flinging it to the winds. If Mr. Clemens had not been Mark Twain, he might have been Carlyle. . . .

The reviewer called the manner of writing "deliciously desultory." He concluded by describing the work as

> a most brilliant and varied jumble of wit, humor, information, instruction, wisdom, poetry, irony, and jest. . . , that rara avis, a real book, full of thoroughly original characteristic impressions characteristically expressed, and thus intensely enjoyable to the real reader.[65]

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[64] 50 (April 7, 1898), 451.

[65] 24 (March 16, 1898), 186-7.

The Catholic World, as if to make amends for its recent harsh innuendoes in connection with Joan of Arc, called Following the Equator "one of the best" of Mark Twain's books and described it as "lively and interesting almost all the way through."[66] To the critic of the Overland Monthly the work was "A happy and interesting jumble . . . , a collection of odds and ends of fun, philosophy, and fantastic description, . . ." His conclusion: "The book is in every way worthy of the great reputation of its author. It is kindly where critical, just where judicial, original where humorous, and through it all runs a vein of profound wisdom."[67] The American Review of Reviews emphasized the informative aspects of the volume, suggesting that it added much "to our knowledge of the world and of human nature. . ." Although Clemens's books were intended to be entertaining, the periodical observed, they were "at the same time the repositories of a vast deal of useful and serious information."[68] Life called Twain "a writer of great acuteness in observation and felicity of phrase in description, . . ." and said that the recent book was "a strange conglomerate of philosophical reflection, travel notes, stories picked up by the way, Pudd'nhead Wilson's maxims, and elaborate and more or less tenuous satire." The notice concluded:

> There is only one Mark Twain, and he makes books according to no previous formula. Order, proportion, sequence and coherence have no conceivable part in his scheme of literary composition. He follows his own sweet will, like a spoiled child who knows he can have his own way if he is only audacious and amusing.[69]

The Literary Digest observed:

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[66] 67 (May, 1898), 266.

[67] 31 (April, 1898), 378-80.

[68] 17 (Jan., 1898), 116.

[69] 30 (Dec. 30, 1897), 578.

> Endless are the curves and angles of digression, parenthesis, interjection, anecdote, . . .
>
> On every page of this narrative we are impressed with the catholicity and comprehensiveness of the writer's sympathies; nothing human or animal is foreign to him.[70]

Because the book had been "undertaken to raise the burden of a business debt" which Twain considered "a personal obligation," the reviewer for Harper's found Following the Equator "rather more grave than gay, less lively than severe." Some of the "old-time Mark Twainy flavor" was present, the critic said, but the book was less "funny" than the earlier travel volumes, owing undoubtedly to the gloom cast by the death of the author's daughter.[71] The Critic found the subject matter "depressing," and listed some of the more offensive topics: tyranny, leprosy, slavery, savagery, mutiny, war, disease, cruelty, and so forth -- a "gruesome procession." Commented the magazine: "Mark Twain has reached the terrible frankness of maturity and fame; he tells tales like Bismarck, regardless whom he hits, so long as the blow is deserved. And yet, of humor in the old sense the book is full. . . . With less of broad farce, this latest book has more wit, and more literary value, than any other volume of the author's work."[72] The Chap Book published the one really unfavorable notice of Following the Equator and, paradoxically, the most intelligent and perceptive one. The critic condemned the book bluntly: "Viewed as a work of art, this volume is monstrous, and as a book of travel it is impossible." He found it "very uneven in respect to matter . . . ," full of "Long stretches of hack-work and cyclopaedic padding . . . ," Twain, he averred, had "broken forever" with the style of The

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[70] 16 (Jan. 22, 1898), 15-6.

[71] 96 (Jan., 1898), 3-4 [supplement].

[72] 32 (Feb. 5, 1898), 89.

Innocents Abroad, The Gilded Age, and Huckleberry Finn. He was no longer primarily a humorist but was now "ethical-minded and solemn" — a fact which the critic found "shocking." The reviewer pointed out new qualities in Twain — thoughtfulness, variety, painful didacticism. The Equator book he called "very dull in places." The author, he said,

> gives information, and worse than that elementary information, which could be picked up in a school library. It may be that he padded purposely in order to make a big subscription book, or that he wanted to increase the sales among Chautauquans, literary circles, school boards, and the other lovers of the useful commonplace. In either of these cases he is to be forgiven. But if he wrote it because it interested him, or because he thought it was new, there is no hope for him.[73]

With modern critics of Mark Twain Following the Equator enjoys little favor. Mr. Wagenknecht finds it "singularly weary,"[74] and Mr. DeVoto calls it the dullest of Clemens's books.[75] If it is not as good as his best efforts, it is considerably better than his worst. It brought its author a vast amount of publicity and enhanced his reputation much more than many of his reputedly greater works.

As he approached the turn of the century, Mark Twain loomed large on the horizon of world literature. "The Lounger" column of the Critic asked: "Who are the four most famous of living authors? Are they not Mark Twain, Tolstoy, Zola and Ruskin? These are the four I should name, if the question were put to me; and I should name them, I think, in this order."[76] Charles

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[73]8 (March 15, 1898), 371.

[74]Mark Twain, The Man and His Work, p. 15.

[75]Mark Twain at Work, p. 110.

[76]33 (Oct., 1898), 224.

Johnston, writing in the Atlantic on "The True American Spirit in Literature," spoke of Twain as "the greatest writer of them all, the greatest that this New World has yet seen, . . ."[77]

It is difficult to determine precisely upon what basis such a comment as the above was made. One may surmise, while agreeing with the sentiment whole-heartedly, that it represented an attitude towards Clemens's work in its bulk, with perhaps a special nod towards such masterpieces as Huckleberry Finn and Life on the Mississippi, rather than towards the specific volumes which had been most recently in the public eye. For, as we shall see even more strikingly illustrated when we examine the work of Twain's decline, we are dealing with a paradox. Clemens's last books drew generally poor notices, but his reputation, as set forth in a variety of miscellaneous essays and retrospective studies, continued to expand and deepen until his fame had become secure even in the loftiest academic circles. As criticism gained perspective, the great work of the eighties was seen to tower far above the rest. The nineties may have been, as Mr. Canby suggests, "singularly barren" from the point of view of a reader of today.[78] But to many of his contemporaries these years displayed Mark Twain in a variety of guises, some old, some new, all more or less challenging. And these years saw him accredited with possessing a number of hitherto unsuspected qualities and of violating a number of established canons — in short, of being Mark Twain. Let us glance back over the period briefly. One quality stands out: the controversial nature of his work. Always lively, often strenuous, and occasionally bitter discussions fairly filled the pages of the magazines. Twain was damned on one hand for slandering the South when he returned to

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[77] 84 (July, 1899), 29-30.

[78] Op. cit., p. 186.

the locale of his youth in Pudd'nhead Wilson and praised for the fine authenticity of his local color on the other hand. A new philosophic strain, deepened by the shrewd, sometimes cynical, observations of Pudd'nhead Wilson's Calendar was detected. Some critics contended that his work could not be called "literature," while others spoke of him as a master of English prose. Though he was accused of exhibiting structural weaknesses and a faulty historical sense, these defects were palliated, according to some critics, by his possession of a rich vein of poetry and an ability to paint exquisite portraits (especially in Joan of Arc, which was described as a variety of oddly dissimilar things ranging from a Sunday-school tract to a historical novel). It was alleged that in reality Twain was more than a mere humorist, that he was an excellent interpreter of the American character, and that his chances of becoming a classic were good. He was seen to possess earnestness, a strong capacity for instruction, and profound wisdom. But the quality which impressed his critics most was still, and perhaps even more than ever, his remarkable versatility. By the turn of the century his greatness seemed an established fact, and his old friend Howells could write: "You are the greatest man of your sort that ever lived, and there is no use saying anything else. . . . You have pervaded your century almost more than any other man of letters, if not more; and it is astonishing how you keep spreading. . . ."[79]

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[79]Quoted in Paine, p. 1079.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Fourth Decade

On October 15, 1900, the Clemens family returned to the United States after nine years of wandering. Mark Twain was greeted, his biographer tells us, "literally as a conquering hero."[1] He settled in New York, where hundreds of people sought him out as the city's reigning celebrity. He wrote for the magazines on political and international topics; and he made arrangements with the firm of Harper and Brothers to publish his books at extremely advantageous rates. He was excellent newspaper "copy," and his every utterance on a variety of subjects was rushed into print. He had become the grand old man of American letters. He had become something else, too, -- a sage and a moralist, a philosophical commentator upon the vices and the shortcomings of "the damned human race." His readers had long suspected the existence of a serious moral strain in his writings -- those of his readers, that is, who took the trouble to look beneath the coat of motley. But now there was no question about his didactic moralizing. His most recent book had confirmed the worst suspicions. Mark Twain's return to his homeland had been preceded by four months by the publication of The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg and Other Stories and Essays. As had been the case with former collections, these pieces had seen previous magazine publication. Nevertheless, the volume attracted a good bit of notice. Primarily,

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[1] Paine, p. 1111. Cf. also Albert Bigelow Paine, "Mark Twain: A Biographical Summary," Harper's Weekly, 54 (April 30, 1910), 9, where Paine says: "It was as if a nation had received its king."

critics were impressed with the unusual degree to which Twain seemed to be moving in a serious direction. Public Opinion's critic, for example, pointed out the "mildly philosophic vein" and the moral which nearly all the items possessed in addition to their humor. He felt, indeed, that the moral of the "Hadleyburg" tale overshadowed the comic elements and called the work "one of the most original" of Mark Twain's stories. Its realism he found so vivid as to leave "the disagreeable impression that there are many Hadleyburgs." Readers, the critic believed, who were accustomed to seek only amusement in Mark Twain's writings, would surely be impressed by this new seriousness.[2] The reviewer for the Independent doubted that the collection possessed much "literary" quality, but agreed that compensation existed in the form of other merits. He felt that the entertainment value of the stories was such that the "slipshod workmanship" could be overlooked. This was particularly true of the initial story, in which the depth of human feeling overcame "exaggerations of style and the tendency to horse-play literature."[3] The Living Age put its finger on the question which had long been puzzling readers of the great humorist. "'Mark Twain' has for some time been suspected of serious moral purpose and his latest volume confirms the suspicion. The title-story, 'The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg,' is a striking character study, in spite of whimsicalities and exaggerations."[4] The American Review of Reviews said of the items in the collection that they were diverse in every feature except "the distinctive genius of Mark Twain." The magazine also noted the continuing tendency to strike at hypocrisy and snobbishness.[5] The Critic was another periodical which called attention to

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[2] 29 (Aug. 2, 1900), 152.

[3] 52 (Sept. 6, 1900), 2170.

[4] 227 (Oct. 13, 1900), 136.

[5] 22 (Oct., 1900), 505.

the novelty of the volume. "We find here the old Mark, with a difference. The years that bring the philosophic mind have made of the inimitable humorist a writer of stories with a purpose."[6] Similarly, Mr. Charles Towne in the Book World discovered a serious core of meaning beneath the surface fun. Twain's purpose, he felt, was partly to amuse, but underneath there was a point which "the bite of satirical humor" made it easier to grasp. To the title story he conceded the most merit because he found "more of purpose in its creation." In a blaze of syntactical confusion he observed cautiously: "Some of the articles in the volume may possibly as well have been allowed to have remained magazine publications only, yet there is no possibility of doubt but that the author's many readers and admirers will be glad to have all the writings in a permanent collection." But his final judgment was clearly favorable: "Get a copy, and keep it at hand. It will help you pass many an odd half hour of enjoyment."[7] Perhaps the keenest appreciation of the title story was that of William Archer, who denied that there was anything new in Clemens's latest effort.

> Mark Twain has before now shown himself a shrewd, penetrating, and even subtle psychologist. His new apologue reveals no new aspect of his genius. It is, moreover, a parable pure and simple, with no suspicion of art-for-art's-sake about it. Were we to take it as a story, as a representation of life, its cynicism would be intolerable. It would leave Maupassant nowhere. But taken simply for what it is — a fable designed to drive home an ethical lesson — it seems to me to possess such constructive skill and literary vigor as may well give it a place among the parables that stick tight to the popular imagination.
>
> Perhaps you wonder to find Mark Twain among the moralists at all? If so, you have read his previous books to little purpose. They are full of ethical suggestion. Sometimes, it is true, his moral decisions are a little summary. Often, nay, generally, his serious meaning is lightly veiled in paradox, exaggeration, irony. But his humor is seldom entirely irresponsible for many pages together, and it often goes very deep into human nature.

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[6] 37 (Nov., 1900), 468.

[7] 5 (Sept., 1900), 218.

By way of illustrating this point, he quoted from Huckleberry Finn the section describing Huck's wrestling with his conscience, which he called "one of the master-passages in a masterpiece of fiction." Of the "Hadleyburg" story he observed: "A more tight-packed piece of narrative art it would be hard to conceive. . . . And with all its earnestness of purpose and bitterness of tone, it is full of humor."[8]

"The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" has been held in high esteem by subsequent Twain critics. Archibald Henderson, for instance, described it as being "worthy of the genius of a Swift," and said that its publication proclaimed Mark Twain "not only as a supreme artist, but also as eminently and distinctively a moralist." It was, he believed, without "parallel in literature."[9] Paine referred to it as ". . . that marvellous short story -- one of the most human in the English language," in which Twain proved that he was "a great teacher, moralist, philosopher -- the greatest, perhaps, of his age."[10] DeLancey Ferguson, while admitting that the short story, "as an art form, was not Mark's metier," suggests that in the "Hadleyburg" tale "he came near to perfection."[11] There seems to be little doubt that the story will survive along with Twain's best work, for, as Mr. Canby asks, "what anthology of American short stories is complete without 'The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg'?"[12]

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[8]"The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg -- A New Parable," Critic, 37 (Nov., 1900), 413-4. Other brief notices of the volume include Literary World, 31 (July 1, 1900), 138; Nation, 71 (July 26, 1900), 75; Literary Review, 4 (July, 1900), 164. In these last three, however, the title story is not discussed. For this reason, I have not treated them at greater length.

[9]Mark Twain, pp. 192; 176.

[10]"Mark Twain: A Biographical Summary," Harper's Weekly, 54 (April 30, 1910), 9.

[11]Mark Twain; Man and Legend, p. 278.

[12]Turn West, Turn East, p. 225.

Mark Twain's reputation was immeasurably enhanced by his exemplary conduct in connection with his bankruptcy, the retrieving of his fortune, and the payment in full of the vast debts of his ill-fated publishing house. Even critics who failed to concede him any literary merit felt obliged to praise his sterling character. A critic, for example, who insisted that "Mr. Clemens is hardly to be classified as a novelist at all, since he is a humorist or nothing," was constrained to add:

> . . . the personal qualities and genuine principles of the man are worthy of the highest esteem. Not to repeat stale platitudes, in the way of repetition of the well-known story of the fine example he has afforded us of high moral rectitude, as identified in his personality and signally manifested by this typical American author, it is none the less essential that some notice should be taken of the conduct and character of one who, in the decline of life and in the face of adversity, so bravely confronted ruin and disaster, and girding up his loins, like a true man, valorously set to work to redeem everything, alone and unaided.[13]

The hero had indeed come into his own. Nor did he shirk the responsibilities attendant upon the role of America's greatest public figure. Immediately after his return he began to make a series of pronouncements upon national policy. Concerning this activity, the Nation observed:

> No sooner had he landed than he pricked with his wit the bubble of Imperialism. An old-fashioned American, he did not conceal his disgust for the tawdry and borrowed robes in which his country had suddenly taken to flaunting. . . . But Mr. Clemens, with his fatal eye for folly and humbug, has seen the thing as the vulgar hypocrisy it is. . . .
>
> He has, rather, taken advantage of his assured position to speak words of truth and soberness to his fellow-countrymen, placing the obligations of the citizen above the amiabilities of the man of letters. This puts him as much morally above the mob of literary time-servers as his writings place him artistically.[14]

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[13]Edwin Ridley, "Modern Fiction," Anglo-American Magazine, 3 (Feb., 1900), 151.

[14]"Mark Twain, American Citizen," 71 (Nov. 29, 1900), 419-20.

The clubs of New York tried to outdo one another in honoring him -- the Lotos and the Aldine, especially. A dinner given by the latter on December 4, 1900, was extensively reported in Harper's Weekly, which carried a cover portrait, editorials, special articles and photographs. The magazine called Clemens "the American humorist par excellence," "literary guide, philosopher, and friend . . . the highest type of the American citizen, . . ."[15] Then early in 1901 came the bombshell. "To the Person Sitting in Darkness" appeared in the North American Review for February and shortly after in booklet form. Its attack on the imperialistic course of the United States was blistering and vitriolic. Howells, when consulted as to the advisability of publishing it, agreed that it should be printed, and added: ". . . but you'd better hang yourself afterward."[16] Paine says with probably only mild exaggeration: "Every paper in England and America commented on it editorially, with bitter denunciation or with eager praise, according to their lights and convictions."[17] The Outlook felt that Clemens had "violated the principle of essential justice."[18] But the Nation was effusive in its praise.

> His satirical weapons never were keener, or played about the heads of Imperialists with a more merciless swish. In one long burst of sarcasm he exposes the weariful hypocrisy of the American policy in the Philippines, and covers it with ridicule mountain-high. Mark Twain was never a respecter of persons, and in this grim satire of his he flies straight at the highest. . . .

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[15] "Mark Twain, American," 44 (Dec. 15, 1900), 1204.

[16] Quoted by Paine, p. 1129.

[17] Ibid.

[18] 67 (Feb. 16, 1901), 387.

The periodical further pointed out that Clemens's courage was as great as his writing skill. Where other satirists, the Nation observed, had attacked only the dead, Twain had boldly struck out at living targets. "Not counting the risk to his personal popularity, he has let us see the flame of his honest anger burning against shams and cheating in the highest matters of national policy. He is a man to be reckoned with in this business."[19]

This was more than fame — this was notoriety. Hardly a magazine of the period failed to devote at least a small paragraph to the activities of the famous humorist in the months following his return to his native land. His utterances were not always received with approbation; indeed, there were many who condemned him outright. But whatever their attitude, they did not ignore him. The miscellaneous articles about him are too numerous and too long to be treated in detail. A few excerpts must suffice. In January, 1901, the American Review of Reviews published "A Sketch of Mark Twain" in which the anonymous author said:

> The gentlemen who have made a study of such matters have said his literary style is naught; that his stories are ill-constructed, according to the esthetic standards; that his travel sketches are inconsequential and scrappy; that his historical novels do not create the atmosphere of their time, and so forth, — yet these same gentlemen do not deny that he is a great writer, nor do they pretend to withstand his fascination.[20]

A serious journal of education hailed Mark Twain as a dispenser of "psychic rejuvenation," and exclaimed enthusiastically:

> Few men of our day have shown a keener insight into human nature or seen men under more various aspects than Mr. S. L. Clemens. Add to this a rare capacity for sympathy, together with an unusual freedom from prejudice, and the

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[19] 72 (Feb. 7, 1901), 104-5.

[20] 23 (Jan., 1901), 41.

> qualifications of our great American humorist to speak as an oracle in educational matters are apparent.[21]

An anonymous critic in the Bookman, taking note of the almost unprecedented publicity then being enjoyed by Clemens, attempted an impartial appraisal of his work.

> Putting aside all prejudice and looking at his work in a purely achromatic way, a critical and truthful judgment upon Mark Twain can be summed up in a very exiguous space. Mark Twain is first and last and all the time, so far as he is anything, a humourist and nothing more.

The writer called The Jumping Frog, The Innocents Abroad and Roughing It "all the real books that he ever wrote," and Colonel Sellers, Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn "all the real characters that he ever drew." As for Twain's later volumes, these were declared to be unreadable except in parts. He continued:

> Some unduly optimistic persons who are fond of literary cults grown under glass have tried very hard to make the world believe that Mr. Clemens has great gifts as a serious novelist and romancer. By dint of iteration the world, perhaps, has temporarily come to think that this is true; but all the same, it will not read these novels and romances, and it thereby shows that common sense and real discrimination may exist in practice even while they hold no place in theory. A hundred years from now it is very likely that The Jumping Frog alone will be remembered, . . .[22]

Even Howells, so long and consistently a champion of Mark Twain's, was moved to break into print once more.[23] The occasion of his article was the publication of the Royal Edition of Mark Twain's Works by the American Publishing Company of Hartford. Writing with some charm but also with a

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[21]Clemens J. France, "Mark Twain as an Educator," Education, 21 (Jan., 1901), 265.

[22]"As to Mark Twain," 12 (Jan., 1901), 441-2.

[23]On October 9, 1899, Howells had written: "I want to get a chance somehow to write a paper about you, and set myself before posterity as a friend who valued you aright in your own time." -- Life in Letters of William Dean Howells, II, 108.

nebulous verbosity that is quite the despair of the reader, Howells said:

> But his great charm is his absolute freedom in a region where most of us are fettered and shackled by immemorial convention. He saunters out into the trim world of letters, and lounges across its neatly kept paths, and walks about on the grass at will, in spite of all the signs that have been put up from the beginning of literature, warning people of dangers and penalties for the slightest trespass.

Speaking of Twain's Americanism, or, more specifically, his Westernism, Howells observed:

> It is not alone in its generous humor, with more honest laughter in it than humor ever had in the world till now, that his work is so Western. Any one who has really known the West . . . is aware of the profoundly serious, the almost tragical strain which is the fundamental tone in the movement of such music as it has. Up to a certain point, in the presence of the mystery which we call life, it trusts and hopes and laughs; beyond that it doubts and fears, but it does not cry. It is more likely to laugh again, and in the work of Mark Twain there is little of the pathos which is supposed to be the ally of humor, little suffusion of apt tears from the smiling eyes. It is too sincere for that sort of play; . . .

After discussing Twain's important works, Howells concluded:

> The exceptional observer must have known from the beginning that he was a thinker of courageous originality and penetrating sagacity, even when he seemed to be joking; but in the process of time it has come to such a pass with him that the wayfaring man can hardly shirk knowledge of the fact.[24]

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[24] "Mark Twain: An Inquiry," North American Review, 172 (Feb., 1901), 309-10; 319. Current Literature, 30 (March, 1901), reprinted the Howells essay and commented (p. 261): "The seriousness with which Mr. Clemens has commented upon public affairs since his return to this country has brought down upon his head no little adverse criticism. The New York Times, for example, does its best to discredit him as a serious writer, and the Bookman is indulging in what makes rather unpleasant reading, so that the estimate by Mr. Howells, presented in other pages of this issue, is not agreed to in all quarters."

Howells praised Twain yet once more in the April North American Review, where he commented at length upon "Professor Barrett Wendell's Notions of American Literature." Wendell, Professor of English at Harvard, had written in his A Literary History of America, New York, 1901, p. 513: "If there be any contemporary work at once thoroughly American, and, for all its errors of taste, full of indications that the writer's power would have been exceptional anywhere, it is that of Mr. Clemens, more widely known as Mark Twain."

R. E. Phillips in the Book Buyer agreed that Twain was the great American humorist, but insisted: ". . . he is more than that." He praised Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn and "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg," and added that the novelist's Americanism gave his work "the sovereign merit of being honest, unaffected, vigorous and above everything fearless."[25] W. P. Trent in the Century observed that Twain had "evolved from a humorist into a great writer of picaresque fiction and something of an international censor morum!"[26] The climax of the year's honors to Clemens occurred in November, when Yale, celebrating its two hundredth anniversary, bestowed upon him an honorary Doctor of Letters degree.[27]

There were, inevitably, in the midst of the great chorus of praise, some dissenting voices. Charles M. Sheldon, for instance, author of the best-selling novel of personal uplift called In His Steps; or What Would Jesus Do?, stated:

> More than one of Mark Twain's books is marred by a coarseness of thought and a treatment of theme which smirches the whole story. It may be funny, but it is not real entertainment. It may make us laugh, but it does not make us any better; . . .[28]

Howells, with this statement in mind, asserted:

"But by far the most signal instance of Professor Wendell's open-mindedness is his recognition of Mark Twain's positive value as a talent almost unique, his relative importance in the literature of his country, and his representativity as a Westerner.

"No man, and I least of all men, will wish to question such a characterization of a humorist whom I think the greatest that has lived; . . ." — 172 (April, 1901), 631-2.

[25]"Mark Twain: More Than Humorist," 22 (April, 1901), 199.

[26]"A Retrospect of American Humor," 63 (Nov., 1901), 52.

[27]Other honorary Lit. D. degrees went at the same time to Thomas Bailey Aldrich, George Washington Cable, Richard Watson Gilder, Howells, Brander Matthews, Thomas Nelson Page and Woodrow Wilson.

[28]"The Use and Abuse of Fiction," Independent, 54 (April 24, 1902), 966.

And H. W. Boynton announced that although Clemens possessed superior powers, as Huckleberry Finn proved, "his 'genius is rebuked' by his superlative quality as a magician of jokes."[29]

The job of settling down to being America's first citizen was a taxing one, and Mark Twain's literary work suffered as a result. There may have been more deep-seated psychological reasons for the falling off, as Mr. De Voto has suggested.[30] But whatever the reasons, the results were clear, and Twain's critics were well-nigh unanimous in calling attention to his artistic decline. In 1902 he published only one book, A Double-Barrelled Detective Story, in which he returned from the field of polemics to that of fiction. Here again the keynote was novelty. The publishers described the work as a "novelette in which the author enters upon a field that is entirely new."[31] Exactly what they had in mind is not clear. The work is a burlesque of the detective story (which Twain had done before in The Stolen White Elephant). The scene is a mining camp, certainly familiar ground. Perhaps the reference was to the introduction of Sherlock Holmes as a character — a bit of audacity which several critics scored roundly. At any rate, the novel is an inferior production. The beginning is quite vigorous and serious — indeed, rather luridly melodramatic. The rest deteriorates rapidly into the most inane sort of bathos.[32] Nine reviews of A Double-Barrelled Detective

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[29]"American Humor," Atlantic Monthly, 90 (Sept., 1902), 415.

[30]Mark Twain at Work, passim.

[31]Quoted in Public Opinion, 32 (April 24, 1902), 537.

[32]The book contains a famous Twain passage, representing one of the numerous occasions in which, under the guise of seriousness, he slyly betrays that he is being funny. It is too good to pass by: "It was a crisp and spicy morning in early October. The lilacs and laburnums, lit with the glory-fires of autumn, hung burning and flashing in the upper air, a fairy bridge provided by kind Nature for the wingless wild things that have their

Story have been found — an unusually large number for so mediocre a work. Eight of them are wholly or predominantly unfavorable.[33] The Literary World called the book "nondescript as most of Mark Twain's writings are," and added: ". . . it is rather pitiable to see great gifts exercised to no better purpose."[34] The Dial called the story "slight," and claimed that it left the reader "disappointed."[35] The Living Age said that Twain had "laid on his satire with the trowel which seems to be his favorite tool of late, and the result is not effective."[36] Public Opinion described the book as "too tame to be a burlesque, and too far-fetched to be humorous."[37] The Independent provided a clever and whimsical "apology" for the unfortunate volume.

> Mark Twain has endured in dignified silence all the opprobrium which critics have visited upon him merely because A Double-Barrelled Detective Story bears his name upon the title page. . . .
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> They said that the book was stupid, that its leading man and leading lady were impossible, that the first juvenile was

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homes in the tree-tops and would visit together; the larch and the pomegranate flung their purple and yellow flames in brilliant broad splashes along the slanting sweep of the woodland; the sensuous fragrance of innumerable deciduous flowers rose upon the swooning atmosphere; far in the empty sky a solitary esophagus slept upon motionless wing; everywhere brooded stillness, serenity, and the peace of God." Writings, XXIII, 304.

[33]The one favorable review is worthless as criticism — so much so that one wonders if the critic read the book. Its tenor may be gauged by the following sentence: "The story is just one of Mark Twain's little airy nothings that come our way every now and then and afford us an hour of genuine amusement and then flit away to smile their cheerful smiles upon some other beings equally forlorn." — Book News Monthly, 20 (May, 1902), 689.

[34]33 (May 1, 1902), 76.

[35]32 (June 1, 1902), 390.

[36]233 (May 24, 1902), 510.

[37]32 (April 24, 1902), 537.

> a farcical monster and that the author skipped narrative chasms like a chamois, instead of carefully bridging them so that his toiling readers might follow. We don't deny it and we don't affirm it.
>
> All this may be — . . . ; we simply say that Mark Twain is innocent. He never wrote A Double-Barrelled Detective Story. It is the work of a person named Samuel L. Clemens, who has been persecuting Mark for many years and seems to have him entirely in his power.[38]

The Critic was almost offensive.

> Who but a man with an unassailable reputation would dare to make game of his constituents in such a fashion as is here done? It is doubtful if a publisher could have been found who would have printed this one-hundred and seventy-nine page joke had it been written by a nobody. In the first place, he has taken in vain the sacred name of Mr. Sherlock Holmes; and, in the second place, the public, who is also taken in, must pay one dollar and fifty cents per head for the privilege of a having a gifted author laugh at it. The worst of it is, the joke is not even a very good one. The pseudo-dramatic style in which the first part is written would make any one pause to wonder what Mr. Clemens was up to this time. So the denouement, with all its farcical elements, does not come as a complete surprise.[39]

The Atlantic felt that the basic situation in the novel was eminently unsuited to a humorous treatment and that the Sherlock Holmes episode was "totally out of place." The review concluded: "Elsewhere ingenuity rather than power is the noticeable characteristic. One is irresistibly convinced that the story can have taken very little hold of the author himself."[40] By far the most curious notice of A Double-Barrelled Detective Story was the one written by Horace Traubel, the intimate friend and one of the literary executors of Whitman. It is worth reading entire as a horrible example of criticism — pretentious, stylistically immature, and almost

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[38] 54 (June 12, 1902), 31-2.

[39] 41 (Nov., 1902), 479.

[40] 90 (Sept., 1902), 415-6.

incoherent.

> I do not doubt Mark Twain's genius for satire. But even genius nods. And this is a case in which it has nodded. For while a lesson is administered it comes along drowsily at a pace too slow for pregnant results. It sounds like an effort to be funny. And efforts to be funny always fail. When men are funny because they must be there is fine fun. Mark at his best is funny because he must be. His attack is prompt and vigorous. He knows when to begin and when to stop. He can tell a story with tears in it. He can break into your reverie with a laugh. And when you think you have indulged yourself in some hour of empty wit with Mark you suddenly find that he has pressed home upon you adroitly the pith of an unexpected lesson. In this particular composition Mark is almost as prosy as the rest of us. Even a master cannot drag wit down to this level and expect it to flash. Wit is only wit when it answers to all its own imposed requisites. Mark is never so serious as when he jokes. He can do more with a joke than any man writing English. He can bring tears to the eyes of a joke. He can so make a joke you worship it. He can make a joke as holy as the cross. He is a man of lofty temperament to whom the vehicles of the jolly and the satire become weapons sacred as scripture. But in this attempt to do up the Sherlock Holmes vogue he has only done a passable job. This is not Mark the Twain victorious. This is the Mark in defeat. But after so many successes one failure will not injure the status of his fame. Almost contemporaneously Mark has done up Funston after a style magnificently his own. This shows that Mark has lost no cunning.[41]

By 1903 the flurry of excitement over Mark Twain's return in the rather spectacular role of public figure had subsided. Comparatively few articles of any significance appeared in the periodicals. Two minor comments might be mentioned which, taken together, illustrate the continued controversial nature of the man and his work. J. P. Lowbray, reviewing Howells's Literature and Life, said:

> We will not even object to Mr. Howells's condition that if we love him we must love Prof. Brander Matthews -- but Mark Twain! isn't that rather crowding the alien mourners? Really,

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[41] Conservator, 13 (May, 1902), 415-6. The Conservator (Philadelphia), Traubel's own magazine, was devoted to the spread of two things -- Marxian socialism and the fame of Walt Whitman. The reference to Funston is not clear. Funston was the American Army officer in charge of the Philippine's campaign who, by the use of ethically questionable tactics, had captured Aguinaldo, the leader of the native insurgents.

> it would seem that when Mr. Howells is trying his best to be commensurate with Literature with a big L he is passing the time of day and other amenities with Mark Twain. . . .
>
> Now, we have no hesitation in saying that we believe Mr. Mark Twain lives in the hearts of his countrymen as securely as Americus Vespucius, . . . or P. T. Barnum, or the Country Circus. But he does not and cannot live there by virtue of the literary qualities which Mr. Howells has been extolling, in and out of season, for the last twenty years as the prime requisites of acceptance into his coterie.[42]

This certainly sounds clear and definite enough, but listen to a critic in Harper's Weekly:

> Is the influence of Mark Twain's earlier work beginning to be felt in our fiction? It looks like it. I heard it contended the other day that the greatest American novel was Tom Sawyer and not The Scarlet Letter. I believe that library statistics show that no living author's old books are so widely read in this country as Mark Twain's, so that the influence of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn must be widespread indeed.[43]

Early the following year T. M. Parrott published a long retrospective study of Clemens in the Booklover's Magazine. He began by describing the prevailing attitude of serious criticism toward Mark Twain: ". . . the fastidious niceness of the professional critic has too often been unable to perceive in the creations of our greatest humorist anything more than the contortions of the professional buffoon." He struck a surprisingly modern note by asserting: "He is at his best when he is recording his own experiences; and in his happiest vein when he is transfusing them into a work of art, as in his crowning achievements of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn."

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[42]"Mr. Howells's Réchauffé," Critic, 42 (Jan., 1903), 23-4. Howells, in Literature and Life, New York, 1902, p. 9, apropos of a discussion of magazine publication vs. book publication, had written: "The most monumental example of literature, at once light and good, which has first reached the public in book form is in the different publications of Mark Twain."

[43]James MacArthur, "Books and Bookmen," 47 (Nov. 14, 1903), 1841. He pointed out further that the current trend in fiction found novelists "emulating Mark Twain's democratic and simple ideals." One such work, he claimed, was John Fox, Jr.'s The Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come, a local-color tale of the Kentucky mountains.

His critical commentary upon all of Twain's works to date displayed an acute, shrewd and perceptive grasp of the subject. He called The Innocents Abroad "not a great book; . . . but . . . a very typical piece of work." Of A Tramp Abroad he said: "It lacks something of the first, fine, careless rapture of the earlier work. And yet it is full of fun." Roughing It he found "distinctly more important" than the Innocents because of its American background. The first half of Life on the Mississippi he termed "gold without alloy." Although he felt The Gilded Age to be "an incoherent and sensational satire on the era of speculation and political corruption," he found in the Colonel Sellers characterization and the River scenes "for the first time distinct evidences of Mark Twain's real creative power." Of the Mississippi River books he considered Tom Sawyer "the lightest, brightest, and most simply entertaining." Huckleberry Finn was described as a "masterpiece" notable for its "power of characterization." Of Pudd'nhead Wilson, "a grave and powerful piece of art," he said:

> It is a strong, direct, and simple piece of narrative; it has an ingeniously constructed plot and a startling climax; and like its predecessors it is a genuine and realistic picture of that phase of American life with which the author is most familiar.

He turned to the historical romances and found The Prince and the Pauper "a good story — simple, sweet, and interesting." The Connecticut Yankee he called "the least successful of Mark Twain's novels." Joan of Arc, "the least characteristic of Mark Twain's works," he claimed was deficient in narrative power and "fresh and vigorous dialogue." Also, it was frequently dull. Of Twain's later works, Parrott said: ". . . none of them constitutes any very distinct addition to his fame." He concluded his summary with a particularly astute, laudatory and far-seeing appraisal.

> . . . Mark Twain is by no means the mere "funny man" of popular conception, but a humorist of extraordinary powers, wide range, and deep human sympathies. He is a past master

> of farce, burlesque, and grotesque exaggeration; but he is also an inimitable story-teller, and at his best an unsurpassed delineator of character. His humor does not depend upon bad spelling or worse grammar, although he knows better than any man alive, perhaps, how to use dialect to heighten his effects. . . . He does not connect with any of the established traditions of humor, but represents a new force, . . . It is not, I think, too much to prophesy that, when the time comes for a final estimate of Mark Twain, he will be recognized as one of the most national of American authors, and one of the peculiar glories of American literature.[44]

In the spring of 1904, Harper's brought out Extracts from Adam's Diary, a brief, inconsequential work which is pleasant enough and innocuous, but which hardly warrants the harsh description of "inane flatness" with which Professor Pattee characterized it.[45] The famous author was clearly resting on his laurels. The Bookman was quick to point this out, and went, indeed, even further.

> There is something unutterably pathetic about a book like Mark Twain's Extracts from Adam's Diary. It shows just how far a man who was once a great humorist can fall. We thought when we read A Double-Barrelled Detective Story that Mark Twain could do no worse. But we were wrong. The other book may have been more ridiculous; but this one is more pitiable. We glance at the paper wrapper; we see the advertisement of the "Complete Works of Mark Twain"; we read the titles: . . . and we remember a man who through the sheer strength and originality of his genius won the world's laughter. Then we read Extracts from Adam's Diary. Had these Extracts been written by a man without a great name, no amount of "pull" or adroit argument would have enabled him to palm them off on a first-class metropolitan daily as "Sunday Special" matter.[46]

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[44]"Mark Twain: Made in America," 3 (Feb., 1904), 144-54.

[45]A History of American Literature Since 1870, p. 58.

[46]"Mark Twain at Ebb Tide," 19 (May, 1904), 235-6. Notices of little worth appeared in Public Opinion, 36 (April 28, 1904), 539 and Independent, 56 (April 28, 1904), 973. Again the originality of the work must be stressed. A critic in Harper's, writing a few years later, called Adam's Diary a "very successful experiment in a new kind of humor. . . ." — 113 (July, 1906), supplement. Cf. Richard Watson Gilder, "Mark Twain: A Glance at His Spoken and Written Art," Outlook, 78 (Dec. 3, 1904), 844, for a generalization on this aspect of Twain's mind. "So varied is his curiosity and so

Later in the same year A Dog's Tale appeared. Written from motives which are not known, this story originally appeared in Harper's Monthly, December, 1903. It is an anti-vivisection tract, "fathomlessly mawkish," in Mr. DeVoto's words,[47] and was generally ignored by the reviewers. The Outlook said of it: "This pathetic little story by a humorist is interesting, not only as a piece of writing, but because it brings out in striking contrast the two sides of Mark Twain's mind."[48]

In 1905 Harper's issued a volume of reprint material under the title of Editorial Wild Oats. The items date back to an earlier period, and hence the collection cannot be construed as a current one. Whatever praise it occasioned was for the "old" Mark Twain, not for the writer in his decline. Public Opinion said: "To try to separate the chaff from the oats would only spoil a good story. Who cares, anyway, whether it's reminiscences or inventions, so long as it is Mark Twain?"[49] A writer in the Book News Monthly observed: "With his usual human touch we come close to the author and find in his charming simplicity that which is pure and healthful in tone, bright and attractive in humor. The situations and characters are radiant with life."[50] And the Critic: "Mark Twain's fund of humor seems inexhaustible

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great his spirit of literary adventure that he is continually experimenting; and the experiments are of varying success. But there is a general advance in artistic qualities; and one never knows but that the next piece from the hands of 'the world's greatest living humorist' may be an addition to a line of masterpieces, put forth for the edification and good cheer of countless numbers of his fellow-men."

[47] The Portable Mark Twain, p. 31.

[48] 78 (Oct. 15, 1904), 435.

[49] 39 (Nov. 11, 1905), 637.

[50] 24 (Dec., 1905), 257.

so here again it remains at its old-time high level in a volume of sketches that put the reader in mind of . . . 'Roughing It.'"[51]

To this period also belongs the pamphlet entitled King Leopold's Soliloquy, a vituperative attack upon the brutal exploitation of the Congo natives by their Belgian sovereign. It is a fine example of Twain writing at the top of his polemic powers. There were no reviews as such, but one comment is worth reporting, considering its source.

> Several succinct statements of the case against the Congo State are available in this country. But the brochure which is likely to do the most popular execution is King Leopold's Soliloquy, by Mark Twain. The great humorist never wielded his pen more pointedly in behalf of honesty and humanity.[52]

On November 30, 1905, Mark Twain celebrated his seventieth birthday. The occasion was the signal for a burst of enthusiastic acclaim in most of the newspapers and magazines of the country. Harper's Weekly published a souvenir supplement to serve as a record of a giant banquet given in Twain's honor at Delmonico's on December 5. Most of the great and near great of the day were present.[53] The details are interesting. A letter from Theodore Roosevelt was read in which the President said of Mark Twain:

> He is one of the citizens whom all Americans should delight to honor, for he has rendered a great and peculiar service to America, and his writings, though such as no one but an American could have written, yet emphatically come within that

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[51] 47 (Dec., 1905), 575. The punctuation, or rather the lack of it, is the periodical's.

[52] L. Gail Barnes, "Fresh Light on the Dark Continent," American Journal of Theology, 10 (Jan., 1906), 198.

[53] Among the more prominent names were the following: Joseph Altsheler, George Ade, Henry M. Alden, Frances Hodgson Burnett, Irving Bacheller, John Kendrick Bangs, Rex Beach, John Burroughs, Gelett Burgess, Dorothy Canfield, Bliss Carman, Andrew Carnegie, G. W. Cable, Robert W. Chambers, Willa Cather, F. P. Dunne, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, R. W. Gilder, W. D. Howells, Rupert Hughes, Julian Hawthorne, J. Henry Harper, Richard LeGallienne, Alice Duer Miller, Charles Major, Hamilton W. Mabie, Edwin Markham, Harold MacGrath, Brander Matthews, A. B. Paine, Emily Post, Agnes Repplier, May Sinclair, Joseph H. Twichell, Henry van Dyke, Carolyn Wells.

> small list which are written for no particular country, but for all countries, and which are not merely written for the time being, but have an abiding and permanent value.

Howells read a twenty-eight line "sonnet," and Twain made a speech. A cablegram from the author's friends abroad was read. Brander Matthews spoke, saying in part:

> He seems to me one of the great masters of the English language. His is a great style. It is a style of his own, of course, a style direct, however, -- flexible, unacademic, rich with the fervor and the style of the American character, of the undistilled American, like the style of Franklin, like the style of Lincoln. . . . He seems to me one of the real masters of our vigorous English speech.

A letter from Joel Chandler Harris was read in which the creator of Uncle Remus declared: "Having no purpose to do so, he has written the great American novel; . . ."[54]

Two editorials stand out from the numerous tributes. The Outlook called Twain "much the most widely read American man of letters; . . ." and added:

> His work is very uneven in interest and form; some of it is distinctly slovenly and lacking in spontaneity, with grave defects not only of conventional but of fundamental taste; but much of it is fresh, vivid, original, and of a quality not yet fully appreciated by cultivated Americans. Mark Twain belongs, . . . not with the writers of culture, but the writers by impulse of nature and gift of God. He lives where Lincoln lived, in the rich soil of the common life; and he has had the good fortune to deal with life in primary rather than in secondary terms — the happy chance to know a great mass of broadly significant human experience, and to deal with it freely and boldly after the manner of original writers.[55]

The Nation praised his style.

> He has not devoted himself to carving cherry-stones according to academic rules, but to the best of his ability he has written books to read. Delicate questions of usage

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[54] 49 (Dec. 23, 1905), 1884-1914.

[55] 81 (Dec. 2, 1905), 808.

> have not troubled him any more than they troubled Shakspere or Defoe; he has had larger problems on his mind. . . . His swift, racy style — words of the people as the people understand them — smelling of the soil, is as excellent in its kind as the classic sentences of Hawthorne. In "Huckleberry Finn" and "Tom Sawyer" he had matter enough to last an ordinary novelist a lifetime. That, after all, is the essential. The manner, we admit, is not that of the late Walter Pater in "Marius the Epicurean." It is — if the two writers be at all commensurable — far better.[56]

Interest in Clemens subsided for a while after the birthday celebration. It was revived mildly in the summer of 1906 by the publication of Eve's Diary, a slight and trivial work not without charm. The few reviews were generally favorable. The Independent found only one fault with this book and its earlier companion volume — namely, "that there is so little of them."[57] Harper's, perhaps not averse to puffing one of its publisher's offerings, called the book "a literary masterpiece," which it assuredly is not.[58] Said the Critic: "Possibly the book is less individual than some others by the same author, but there is no little charm in its pages. Every one will wish to read it."[59] The Outlook found Eve's narrative full of "charming naivete and unconscious humor."[60]

The big event of 1906, however, was the publication of excerpts from Twain's Autobiography in the North American Review beginning with the issue

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[56] 81 (Dec. 14, 1905), 479.

[57] 61 (Aug. 16, 1906), 397.

[58] 113 (July, 1906), supplement.

[59] 49 (Sept., 1906), 288.

[60] 83 (Aug. 18, 1906), 910.

of September 7.[61] The history of its composition is too complex to attempt to describe here, and there is no necessity for doing so. Suffice it to say that as early as 1876 Clemens was discussing the matter with friends. Mrs. James T. Fields, wife of the former editor of the Atlantic Monthly, recorded in her diary: "His wife laughingly said she should look it over and leave out objectionable passages. 'No,' he said, very earnestly, almost sternly, 'you are not to edit it — it is to appear as it is written, with the whole tale told as truly as I can tell it.'"[62] By the summer of 1906 a quarter of a million words had been written — dictated, actually, to a stenographer at the instigation of Paine, who in Twain's last years served the great author in the capacity of amanuensis, Boswellian interlocutor and companion. Mrs. Clemens was dead and could not censor the work. Colonel George Harvey, publisher of the North American, was importunate, and an arrangement was made for publishing in the magazine what Clemens considered the less inflammatory passages.[63] Justly proud of his literary coup, Harvey wrote:

> It is a wonderful autobiography that he is writing, — wonderful, because of the variety of experiences it depicts, wonderful because of its truth, its sincerity, its frankness, its unhesitating and unrestricted human feeling.

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[61] With the publication of the first installment of the Autobiography the periodical changed from a monthly to a fortnightly. Mention should be made at this point that in August, 1906, Clemens had What Is Man? privately and anonymously printed. There were no reviews. The work was re-issued in 1917 with Mark Twain's name on the title page. There were then some reviews. The work will be discussed later.

[62] M. A. DeWolfe Howe, ed., "Bret Harte and Mark Twain in the 'Seventies: Passages from the Diaries of Mrs. James T. Fields," Atlantic, 130 (Sept., 1922), 347.

[63] An expanded version was published in two volumes by Paine in 1924. A third volume (containing much material that Twain had wanted suppressed until one hundred years after his death) was published by Mr. DeVoto in 1940 under the title of Mark Twain in Eruption. Much still remains in manuscript.

He described the forthcoming installments as "all painted deftly and simply with no regard for sequence or stereotyped narration, but with the consummate art of the master." ". . . a life story of such surpassing interest was never told before."[64] Current Literature praised Twain's memory for details, his truth-telling faculty, and his beautiful, dignified, warm-hearted style.[65] The Nation, which seems to have been one of Clemens's most faithful advocates, predicted that the Autobiography would be more interesting than the Adam and Eve diaries, because the realistic personal background always supplied him with material for his best work. His most enduring books, the magazine continued, were those which sprang from the soil of the Middle West and the life Twain actually knew.[66] The reputation which the Autobiography enjoyed in its own day has declined somewhat as later scholars of Mark Twain's life have discovered numerous inaccuracies. The rather perverse method of presentation has been harshly criticized. Stuart Sherman, for instance, calls the work "a kind of superior hodge-podge — . . ."

> . . . Mark Twain, in the weariness of age and the nonchalance of sufficient glory, adopted a highly questionable plan, pursued a poor method in a slack and desultory fashion, and produced, or left behind him, a book which, as an autobiography, is pretty bad.[67]

Another collection of stories and sketches was brought out late in 1906. It bore the title of The $30,000 Bequest and Other Stories. Issued

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[64] North American Review, 183 (Sept. 7, 1906), 321.

[65] 41 (Oct., 1906), 389.

[66] 83 (Sept. 13, 1906), 215.

[67] "Mark Twain's Last Phase," in The Main Stream, New York, 1927, p. 81.

in a standard-sized volume for "set" purposes, the publication is unimportant in view of the fact that all the material was old. Indeed, three items, Adam's Diary, A Dog's Tale and A Double-Barrelled Detective Story had been issued as separate volumes, and all had been reviewed. Still, the collection drew some attention. The Outlook said merely that Twain was loved and honored by the people of the United States, who "eagerly read his writings, new and old."[68] The Nation remarked simply that there was "much of entertainment" to be found in the volume.[69] The Living Age called the collection "by no means the least diverting" of his works.[70] The title story is deserving of some mention for being another of Twain's corrosive comments on human nature. The theme of the tale, the disintegrating effects of cupidity, places it in the same category as the more familiar and better story of "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg."

1907 was perhaps the most important year for Mark Twain's reputation. It began inauspiciously with two articles -- the first a rather superficial study by Henry Mead Bland in the Overland, which stressed the humorist's "sternly philosophic side";[71] the second a brief note in Life, which described Twain in rich, beautiful prose as a "merry old philosopher, who has punctuated life with laughter and sweetened it with honesty, /and who/ goes down the shadowed road like vagrant sunshine, blessed with health, sense and sentiment, and adorned with humor, sanity and serenity."[72]

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[68] 84 (Oct. 27, 1906), 534.

[69] 83 (Oct. 11, 1906), 304.

[70] 251 (Dec. 1, 1906), 574.

[71] 49 (Jan., 1907), 26.

[72] 49 (Jan. 31, 1907), 161.

Then Christian Science came out in February, and howls of pain and of glee arose on all sides. The book was in no sense a surprise, for some of the opening chapters had appeared in Cosmopolitan in 1899 and others in the North American Review a few years later. And Clemens's attitude toward religion in general was (or was thought to be) well known. Nevertheless, a lively controversy got under way and continued through the whole year. The first part of the book is an excruciatingly funny account of the author's experience with a Christian Science healer, while the second is in part an effort to evaluate the work of Mary Baker Eddy and in part a rather vitriolic attack upon her claims concerning the writing of Science and Health. Critical opinion was in general clearly divided. The most favorable comment, again almost suspiciously fulsome, was made by Harper's.

> His book is by far the sanest, shrewdest, and most radical criticism of Christian Science that has ever been written. Though its language is outspoken, it is scrupulously just; and whatever one's opinion may be, one can hardly resist the allurement of its humor, or fail to be impressed with the sincerity and force of its author.[73]

J. B. Kerfoot in Life called the book "a frank, non-partisan, complimentary and pitiless analysis; the delightfullest imaginable blending of logic and laughter."[74] World Today praised Twain's earnestness and his "incisive and not altogether reverent style. . . ."[75] The Catholic World, while maintaining that Clemens was hardly the person to pass judgment on any religious creed, "even though it be one so grotesque and extravagant as Christian Science," nevertheless commended the author's seriousness.[76] The Nation

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[73] 114 (March, 1907), supplement.

[74] 49 (March 21, 1907), 420.

[75] 13 (Sept., 1907), 949.

[76] 86 (Nov., 1907), 244-6. Three favorable notices of little consequence appeared in the Book News Monthly, 25 (May, 1907), 624, Current Literature, 42 (March, 1907), 321-4, and North American Review, 184 (March 15, 1907), 641-5.

led the opposition, finding the book "distinctly disappointing," and adding:

> . . . we see no reason for putting on the market such a deal of skimble-skamble stuff as is here bundled together. The book is without beginning, middle, or end; it is extremely repetitious. It cannot be regarded as either a serious or a humorous contribution to the discussion.[77]

The Dial felt "natural regret" that it was necessary to report that Mark Twain's new book "adds nothing to the fame of the author."[78] A writer in the North American Review was impatient with Clemens for employing humor in his discussion, as there was some question concerning the value or reliability of the comic point of view in considering religious matters. He found Christian Science "misleading," and added that it was neither funny enough to be considered a satisfactory piece of humor nor serious enough to be convincing.[79] Cosmopolitan, which had been involved in the controversy from the beginning, was eager to present both sides and invited "a prominent Christian Science author" to review Twain's book. The resulting essay was both an excoriation of the humorist and a brief for Science. Many of Twain's statements, said the writer, "are hoary with age and worn with much use, and moreover, they are insufferably cheap." He concluded by characterizing Clemens's work as a "riot of inconsistency."[80]

By far the most important event of 1907 -- indeed, one of the most important events of Clemens's career -- was the awarding by Oxford of the degree of Doctor of Letters. Early in June he travelled once again across

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[77] 84 (Feb. 14, 1907), 154.

[78] 42 (March 16, 1907), 190.

[79] Charles Klein, "Mark Twain and Christian Science, I," 184 (March 15, 1907), 636-41. Part II is mentioned above, note 76.

[80] Edward A. Kimball, "Mark Twain, Mrs. Eddy, and Christian Science," 43 (May, 1907), 35-41.

the ocean to be met, in the words of his biographer, with an "almost unheard-of demonstration of affection and honor. . ."[81] Naturally, the newspapers and magazines of the United States made the most of such an event. The Dial asked: "But why . . . has staid old Oxford thus honored our great humorist?" The answer was that the award recognized more than Twain's "native hilarity." It was "for his great heart," the magazine suggested, "for his sympathy with the under side — . . . that Mark Twain has been admitted to the 'grade of doctor in letters.'"[82] Harper's Weekly reported the event in great detail. Its London correspondent announced that England looked upon Twain as "the national author of America in a sense in which England at present has no national author." George Bernard Shaw was quoted as saying: "Mark Twain is by far the greatest American writer."[83] An editorial in Harper's Weekly remarked that Clemens was honored at Oxford

> not as a miscellaneous celebrity, but as a writer of such ability, such skill, such renown, and such a volume of accomplished labor, as qualified and entitled him to be called across the ocean to receive the scholastic recognition he had earned.[84]

Inevitably, of course, there were some who registered a note of dissent. Clemens's nephew said that when news of the award began to circulate "a few captious voices were heard suggesting that it was perhaps a little beneath the dignity of Oxford to bestow her honors upon a mere fun-maker."[85] The

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[81]Paine, p. 1381. Other recipients of honorary degrees with Clemens included Kipling, Saint-Saens, Rodin, General William Booth, Sidney Lee and Sidney Colvin.

[82]43 (July 16, 1907), 29.

[83]Sidney Brooks, "Mark Twain in England," 51 (July 20, 1907), 1053-4. See also Sidney Brooks, "England's Ovation to Mark Twain," Harper's Weekly, 51 (July 27, 1907), 1086-9.

[84]51 (July 13, 1907), 1010. An editorial in the Outlook, 86 (July 20, 1907), 578, mentioned "his stalwart moral integrity and his self-restraint" as two qualities which would have recommended him to Englishmen.

[85]Samuel E. Moffett, "Mark Twain, Doctor of Letters," American Review

Literary Digest, for example, quoted the bitter denunciation of an anonymous writer in Blackwood's, who said: "Mark Twain the humorist is a bull in the china-shop of ideas. He attempts to destroy what he could never build up, and assumes that his experiment is eminently meritorious."[86] And the Bookman remained skeptical of the flood of praise occasioned by the Oxford proceedings.

> But these journalistic public "ovations" always look the week after like public funerals of common sense. No living man deserves such awful proofs of "unanimity," when a hush falls on personal opinions and "appreciations" appear simultaneously in the magazines and meaning fades from all the words and character from all the faces. So long as he lives he is entitled to a little diversity in the attitude of his fellow-beings. The "appreciations" of Mark Twain consisted mainly of waxen wreaths tendered by persons from whom the mind had fled, . . . Somehow we cannot avoid these funereal comparisons. Literary "ovations" always do make us sad. . . .[87]

At the height of the enthusiasm which followed in the wake of the Oxford honors, William Lyon Phelps published an appreciation of Mark Twain which represents, certainly, one of the high-water marks in pro-Clemens criticism during the author's lifetime. Here was further evidence of the existence of a tide of academic approval which was destined to rise steadily in the years that followed. Phelps began by looking backward.

> During the last twenty years, a profound change has taken place in the attitude of the reading public toward Mark Twain. I can remember very well when he was regarded merely as a humorist, and one opened his books with an anticipatory grin. Very few supposed that he belonged to literature; and a complete, uniform edition of his "Works" would perhaps have been received with something of the mockery that greeted Ben Jonson's folio in 1616.

Next, he stated his own forthright opinion.

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of Reviews, 36 (Aug., 1907), 167.

[86]35 (Aug. 31, 1907), 299. In all fairness to the disparager, it should be mentioned that he suggested a few complimentary things about the Mississippi River books.

[87]"Mark Twain's Publicity. R. I. P.," 26 (Sept., 1907), 9-10.

> Indeed, it seems to me that Mark Twain is our foremost living American writer. He has not the subtlety of Henry James or the wonderful charm of Mr. Howells; . . . But the natural endowment of Mark Twain is still greater. . . . If there be a living American writer touched with true genius, whose books glow with the divine fire, it is he. He has always been a conscientious artist; but no amount of industry could ever have produced a "Huckleberry Finn."

After analyzing Clemens's humor, Phelps observed:

> Although Mark Twain has the great qualities of the true humorist — common sense, human sympathy and an accurate eye for proportion — he is much more than a humorist. His work shows very high literary quality, the quality that appears in first-rate novels. He has shown himself to be a genuine artist.[88]

Late in 1907, Hamilton W. Mabie, the well-known author, critic and associate editor of the Outlook, published an appreciative essay calculated to establish Mark Twain's reputation as more than humorist. He singled out the three Mississippi River books for enduring fame, for in them, he claimed, the author acted as interpreter and historian of a vanished way of life. One must not overlook Twain's profound seriousness, he went on to say, for only when it was recognized could the writer's true literary significance be determined. Twain was not a mere fun-maker, but a true humorist -- that is, a man who saw life "not irresponsibly and superficially, but in its broadest and most fundamental contrasts." He had the highest praise for Twain's style.

> . . . his art lies beyond the reach of all save the few to whom the gift of style is intrusted. He has that feeling for words in their first estate, when they are still warm with human association and belong to the family instead of the Academy, which is the exclusive possession of the masters of speech. . . . He writes vividly, with a kind of vibrating energy, with precision, and with the freshness and audacity of a man who is not afraid of the authorities, because he obeys the law of his own nature.[89]

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[88]"Mark Twain," North American Review, 185 (July 5, 1907), 540-5.

[89]"Mark Twain the Humorist," Outlook, 87 (Nov. 23, 1907), 649-53.

Before we take leave of this wonderful year, two final notes must be offered. The first concerns the vicissitudes of Tom and Huck. Presumably there had occurred another incident in the long skirmish between the unco guid and the immortal boys, for, as the writer of "a brief for the defence" said of the novels bearing their names: "The word has gone forth that these two books are to be condemned." He added that almost any of hundreds of other works for children contained in juvenile collections could be better spared. The apprehensive Children's Librarian, he observed, might be eminently qualified for her position by virtue of special training and years of experience. "But one advantage she has not had. She has never been a boy." He viewed any attempts to suppress the books with "a rising sense of sorrow and indignation," for these two novels by Mark Twain

> almost alone among boys' books, deserve the appellation "great"; because they present real boys. Not Henty's wooden heroes, nor golden-curled Fauntleroys; but real boys, with all of boys' absurd superstitions, hunger for romance and adventure, and disregard for smug respectability.[90]

The second note concerns the publication late in 1907 of a maudlin little tract called A Horse's Tale. It had been written at the behest of Minnie Maddern Fiske, the actress, who was at the time engaged in a crusade against bullfighting.[91] Her sympathy seems to have been not so much for the bull as for the horses which carried the picadors and which more often than not were disemboweled during the course of the festivities. Regardless of how laudable Twain's motives may have been, the sad fact remains that his novelette is pretty atrocious stuff and plumbs what must certainly be the lowest depths of maudlin sentimentality. There is no need to rehearse the absurdities of the plot or of the narrative technique, although in the

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[90] E. L. Pearson, "The Children's Librarian versus Huckleberry Finn: A Brief for the Defence," Library Journal, 32 (July, 1907), 312-14.

[91] Paine, p. 1245.

latter it must be confessed that Twain gets off a few delicious jibes at the damned human race through the rather shopworn device of having animals converse about their betters.[92] The book was sparsely reviewed. The Independent merely sketched the plot and mentioned the author's compassion for suffering man and beast.[93] The Nation was a bit testy about the small size of the volume, calling it a short story, "transformed by means of large type, double leading, wide margins, and thick paper, into a thin book."[94] The Book News Monthly asserted that the story was told with "amazing skill." The book, "one of the most important published this fall in fiction," said the reviewer, was "so far above the average best-seller . . . that comparison is scarcely possible."[95]

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[92] A Horse's Tale is worth special mention also for containing a passage of such super-charged ferocity that most of Twain's earlier denunciations of man's inhumanity pale beside it. It is worth quoting in small part. Antonio, a Spaniard, is describing the bullfight to his American friend, Thorndike, who, after hearing a particularly bloody account says:

"Ah, Antonio, it is the noblest sport that ever was. I would give a year of my life to see it. Is the bull always killed?"

"Yes. Sometimes a bull is timid, finding himself in so strange a place, and he stands trembling, or tries to retreat. Then everybody despises him for his cowardice and wants him punished and made ridiculous; so they hough him from behind, and it is the funniest thing in the world to see him hobbling around on his severed legs; the whole vast house goes into hurricanes of laughter over it; I have laughed till the tears ran down my cheeks to see it. When he has furnished all the sport he can, he is not any longer useful, and is killed."

"Well, it is perfectly grand, Antonio, perfectly beautiful. Burning a nigger don't begin." — The Complete Short Stories and Famous Essays of Mark Twain (One Volume Edition), New York, n. d., pp. 910-11.

[93] 63 (Dec. 5, 1907), 1377.

[94] 85 (Dec. 5, 1907), 519.

[95] 26 (Dec., 1907), 306. This last assertion may not be so far-fetched as it at first seems. Best-sellers in fiction of 1907 included Elinor Glyn's Three Weeks, Frank G. Haddock's Power of Will, Harold Bell Wright's The Shepherd of the Hills, O. Henry's The Trimmed Lamp and Gilbert Parker's The Weavers.

Mark Twain published no books in 1908, nor were there any articles of importance in the magazines. Brander Matthews supplied an essay on "American Humor" for the Saturday Evening Post, but much of what he said about Clemens he had said earlier in the "Penalty of Humor" article of 1896. A bit of novelty was added in the form of a comparison between Twain and Ben Jonson, in which the American writer was said to have "the same sturdy sincerity and the same artistic conscientiousness" as the Englishman.[96]

Clemens spent the fall and winter in his new house in Redding, Connecticut, receiving a steady procession of visitors, collecting books for the foundation of a local library, and reading a couple of recent works on the Shakespeare-Bacon controversy. In April, 1909, the fruit of the reading was given to the world in the form of a medium-sized volume called Is Shakespeare Dead? One of Twain's more curious aberrations, the work bears the subtitle "From My Autobiography," and represents the author's attempt to prove that if Bacon did not write Shakespeare's plays, it is quite clear that neither did Shakespeare. He bases his argument on the hypothesis that the complete mastery of the technicalities of the legal profession that the plays manifest could have been possessed by but one Elizabethan — Bacon. Twain's reasoning is not convincing. He frequently becomes shrill in his protestations, and remains rather stubborn in his insistences. Yet, some of the opening passages describing his piloting days when Shakespeare was read aloud under surprisingly novel circumstances are full of characteristic charm and humor. Is Shakespeare Dead? was received with widespread interest; there were some dozen reviews, divided about equally between praise and censure. Among the favorable comments was the notice in Harper's, which found the book full of

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[96] 181 (Nov. 21, 1908), 7.

"robust humor, enlivening satire, and shrewd common sense. . ." It commended the "ingratiating informality of the style," and had a good word to say for the strong strain of reminiscence.[97] Life found the book "delightfully intemperate, and logical, and witty."[98] Howells, writing in the Editor's Study of Harper's, believed the work to be a burlesque and said that it should put an end to the silly controversy for all time and restore people to sanity. "The controversy is forever destroyed," he asserted, "and only the miracle of Shakespeare remains."[99]

Unfavorable criticism of Is Shakespeare Dead? ranged from the mild comment of the Nation, which said that the humor was forced,[100] to the stronger attack of the Outlook, which described the book as an "extraordinarily thin volume in construction, material, form, and size. . . ," and added that Twain's friends sincerely hoped he would "spare his reputation any further assaults of the kind represented by this book." The critic, in conclusion, found some of the passages describing life on the Mississippi occasionally entertaining, but decided that there was also much "dreary

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[97] 118 (May, 1909), supplement.

[98] 53 (May 27, 1909), 734.

[99] 119 (July, 1909), 316. The American Review of Reviews mentioned the "iconoclastic brochure" and said that it abounded in humor. — 39 (June, 1909), 767-8. The Independent was less cordial, possibly because the reviewer was a bit puzzled. He thought the work was an elaborate joke but was not sure. At any rate, he continued, Twain, in saying the most that could be said in behalf of the Baconian theory, had "delivered a feeble argument with such violence as to make it seem like an exquisite parody." — 67 (July 8, 1909), 90. The Book News Monthly declared that Clemens's work added nothing to the Shakespeare-Bacon problem, but that it was "singularly entertaining" as an expression of its author's personality. — 27 (July, 1909), 889.

[100] 88 (April 22, 1909), 423.

reading." The title of the book, he suggested, ought to have been "Extracts from the Autobiography of a Humorist, Unfortunately Selected by Himself."[101] A writer in the Bookman took Twain to task for arguing with such vehemence against the scholars who disagreed with him, suggesting that it would be quite simple to ridicule his fitness to engage in the controversy.[102] Two reviews of the Shakespeare volume stand out. One was a shrewd and witty essay by a young writer just beginning a brilliant career as a critic. H. L. Mencken attempted to point out wherein Twain's arguments were untenable and called the book "sorry reading for those who hold him in reverence." Then he launched forth into one of the most able and reasoned summaries of the humorist's literary reputation and career that had been published up to that time.

> He is, by great odds, the most noble figure America has ever given to English literature. Having him, we may hold up our heads when Spaniards boast of Cervantes and Frenchmen of Molière. His one book, "Huckleberry Finn," is worth, I believe, the complete works of Poe, Hawthorne, Cooper, Holmes, Howells and James, with the entire literary output to date of Indiana, Pennsylvania and all the States south of the Potomac thrown in as makeweight. But since "Following the Equator," his decline has been almost pathetic. Once a great artist, he is now merely a public character. He has gone the road of Wycherley: the old humanity and insight have given place to the smartness of the town wit. Let us try to forget this latter-day Mark Twain, with his pot boilers and his wheezes, and remember only the incomparable Mark Twain that was — and will be through the ages — . . .[103]

The second notice of Is Shakespeare Dead? which is worthy of special attention was an extraordinarily clever, witty, mock-serious essay by Eugene M. Angert called "Is Mark Twain Dead?" The answer to this irreverent question was a

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[101] 92 (May 8, 1909), 69.

[102] Edward Fuller, "Much Ado About Nothing," 29 (Aug., 1909), 634.

[103] "Novels and Other Books — Chiefly Bad," Smart Set, 28 (Aug., 1909), 157.

decided Yes. Twain, the writer alleged, had died in 1906 in an obscure European village, but the news had been suppressed and a false Mark had been provided. An enormous hoax had thus been perpetrated upon the reading public. Because Clemens had lived abroad for many years, he was an unfamiliar figure to most Americans, and so the imposture has been relatively successful. A steady stream of inferior books allegedly written by Twain has poured from the press, but no one who knew the work of the true Mark has been deceived. As for public appearances, these have been confined to audiences of college girls, "to whom the person of the real Mark Twain is about as well known as that of Napoleon." Concerning the subject of the essay, the Shakespeare volume, Angert insisted that Twain could not possibly have written it because he had little formal education. Is Shakespeare Dead? he characterized with tongue firmly in cheek as "a work of profound erudition." Who, then, could have written it? He supplied the answer in a delicious bit of ironic literary evaluation.

> Applying the principles of deductive ratiocination, made popular by Sherlock Holmes, we know that the real author is a writer unhampered by any sense of humor. He combines a mastery of all subjects of human knowledge with a complete understanding of all religions. He possesses the commercial instinct which makes him an author for revenue only. He is willing to write as the dead for the living there is in it. He is an erudite Shakespearian scholar and has read Macaulay's Essay on Bacon. Jealousy of literary honors has made him the arch enemy of Mrs. Eddy. To enumerate these essential attributes is to name the author. Other writers may lay claim to some of the qualifications; he alone possesses them all. The name springs instinctively to the lips — Elbert Hubbard.[104]

The most important miscellaneous article on Clemens which appeared in the magazines of 1909 was Archibald Henderson's appreciation in Harper's.

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[104] North American Review, 190 (Sept., 1909), 319-29. There is no record that Mark Twain read this essay. If he did not, it is a great pity. It is the sort of thing he would have relished.

Henderson felt that some doubt existed in the public mind concerning Mark Twain's true worth. This he attributed to the inevitable penalty a humorist has to pay. He praised the "universality and humanity" of his humor, its wide range, its comprehension of the human heart, its sympathy with human shortcomings, and its profoundly serious strains. Clemens's rightful position, he averred, was that of moralist. He was of the opinion that Twain was a great story-teller and an excellent portrayer of character. He commended Twain's powers of observation, his reportorial ability, his mastery of the comic, his robust outlook upon life and his effervescence. Throughout his long career, the writer continued, "he has been a factor of high ethical influence in our civilization; and the philosopher and humanitarian look out from the twinkling eyes of the humorist." He concluded by calling Clemens "America's greatest sociologist in letters."[105]

To many such charges of profundity, seriousness, depth and subtlety made against Mark Twain in his latter years, certain critics were opposed. A strongly demurring opinion was registered by the editor of the Bookman, who wrote in June, 1909:

> It must be embarrassing to a humourist to be put down so much deeper than he really is. Till some ten years ago Mark Twain escaped the least suspicion of profundity. Then Mr. Howells, we believe, proclaimed him a great philosopher, and reviewers of a thoughtful cast have since been busy with his deeper truths. . . . When a humourist is willing graciously to meet us on an equal footing, why this mad wish to put him in a hole? At the risk of throwing many persons out of employment, we say, let the buried treasures of our humorous writers be forever unexhumed. If they are wise without knowing it, let us not know it, too; tell them no more about their meanings than they have told themselves.[106]

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[105] "Mark Twain," 118 (May, 1909), 948-55. Henderson was long an admirer of Mark Twain's. They had travelled on the same ship to England in 1907 when Clemens went over for the Oxford degree and Henderson went over to meet George Bernard Shaw, whose biography he was contemplating. In 1910, Henderson published a short critical biography of Mark Twain with the author's sanction.

[106] 29 (June, 1909), 340-1.

The last book which Mark Twain published in his lifetime was Extract from Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven. Surprisingly enough, it was not the ripe fruit of his mature years; but rather it had been written in part as early as 1868, a year or so after he had first heard Captain Ned Wakeman tell the story en route from San Francisco to the Nicaraguan Isthmus when Clemens was travelling from the West Coast to the East. In 1873, Twain worked on the tale again, and in 1878 made further revisions.[107] In his Autobiography the notation appears: "In the thirty-eight years which have elapsed I have taken out that rusty old manuscript several times and examined it with the idea of printing it, but I always concluded to let it rest."[108] To what extent Mrs. Clemens was responsible for keeping the Captain's narrative out of circulation one can only surmise. It contains the kind of religious satire upon which she customarily turned thumbs down, and some of the salty sea dog's language is representative of Mark Twain at his most robust. At any rate, after the death of his wife he turned to the manuscript again, extracted several chapters from the middle of it, and published them in Harper's preparatory to their appearance as a slim volume in October, 1909.[109] If Clemens had any doubts about the propriety of some his utterances on the subject of the hereafter, they were unquestionably dispelled by the favorable reception of the book. A critic in Current Literature called Stormfield "one of the cleverest fantasies that has been published in a long while,"

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[107] For a discussion of the vicissitudes of the Stormfield piece, see the Introduction by Dixon Wecter to Report from Paradise by Mark Twain, New York, 1952.

[108] Mark Twain in Eruption, p. 247.

[109] Mr. Wecter printed the complete version for the first time in Report from Paradise.

described the humor as "subtle," and declared the whole work to be unoffending to "even the most delicate susceptibilities."[110] The Bookman shrewdly perceived that there was no "later manner" in Twain's latest book. (The fact of its early composition had not been made known, and it was naturally assumed that the book was a recent production.) The writer found Twain's manner to be that of such earlier works as A Connecticut Yankee and even The Innocents Abroad, which to a large extent it is. The critic held up the style of Stormfield as an example that Clemens was not (as many critics had been claiming) becoming increasingly didactic. "His humor is still of the brand labelled American, . . ." was the final verdict.[111] Clarence H. Gaines in the Book News Monthly felt Twain's latest story to be "nearly the most perfect thing he has ever written. . . ." He detected in the work the expression of "a ripened character" and a "spiritual" quality. In addition to "the humor of immensity" contained in the story, there was also a marked pathos underlying the laughter. "All in all," Gaines concluded, "it is hardly possible to read Captain Stormfield without tears; . . . it has a deep religious feeling, salted with strong common sense, and whosoever takes it for profane or irreverent is not wise."[112]

Only two unfavorable notices of Stormfield have been found — one but mildly derogatory and the other simply a brief comment. The Literary Digest

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[110] 47 (Dec., 1909), 653. The reviewer also called attention to the "deep philosophic meanings" which lurked beneath the humor. Other commentators also discovered profundity in the work.

[111] 30 (Dec., 1909), 323-4.

[112] "Mark Twain the Humorist," 28 (April, 1910), 586-8. In the course of the essay Gaines called Twain "perhaps the sincerest writer in America," and said that it was a great injustice to consider him merely a humorist. In a later notice the Book News Monthly, 28 (May, 1910), 717, suggested that Stormfield be placed among the theological works, for "the spiritual truth between the lines of the book is big with vitality and convincing power."

called Twain's manner of treating his subject "good-natured, liberal, and rollicking," but added that his treatment was "somewhat machine-made, and always banal," and quite lacking in humor. The magazine admitted, however, that the book contained nothing that might offend the pious.[113] The brief comment appeared in the Idler, a curious sort of adult joke book published in East Orange, New Jersey, by Robert J. Shores and modeled on the Chicago Chap Book. The author of the comment described the Twain story as "A facetious account of a mariner's first impressions of the hereafter which might pass if written by Carolyn Wells but will hardly do for the author of Tom Sawyer and Innocents Abroad."[114]

Interest in Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven has recently revived with the publication in 1952 of Report from Paradise.[115] Critics, in general, greeted it favorably. Edward Wagenknecht called the book "a tender thing,"[116] and H. N. Smith, in the Nation, termed it "An unusually charming volume."[117] Mark VanDoren described the work as vigorous, but only mildly amusing and rather forced.[118] Its republication in expanded form some thirty-five years after it originally appeared illustrates the continuing interest in Mark Twain's work.

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[113] 40 (Jan. 1, 1910), 33.

[114] 1 (March, 1910), 31.

[115] See supra, note 107.

[116] Chicago Sunday Tribune, Sept. 7, 1952, p. 5.

[117] 175 (Sept. 27, 1952), 275.

[118] New York Herald Tribune Book Review, Sept. 7, 1952, p. 4.

It is perhaps advisable to pause briefly at this point and in a backward glance try to determine the direction this continuing interest took in the first decade of the new century. The most striking fact to emerge from a re-surveyal of the years 1900-1909 is that during this decade Clemens's evolution from humorist to philosopher was completed. Critics constantly mentioned his profundity, his strong philosophic vein, his serious moral purpose, his subtle psychology. To be sure, there were those who pointed out that his humor had always been freighted with a heavy cargo of seriousness, but in these years the cargo seemed, upon occasion, heavy enough almost to sink the frail craft. Twain began at this time to assume the role of public figure, of censor morum, and his comments on world affairs of the most burningly controversial nature were usually characterized by sanity and wisdom. In spite of the mediocrity of much of his last work, he was able, secure in his sunset fame, to sink back into the comfortable position of grand old man of American letters. The public gave voice to its love and esteem at the time of the seventieth birthday celebration, and England added its voice to the swelling chorus by means of the Oxford degree of 1907. There was a tendency among critics, notably Phelps, Matthews, Mencken and Henderson, to minimize the recent mediocre work and to look back to the masterpieces of the eighties -- those gigantic national assets that proclaimed their creator one of the world's immortals.

CHAPTER SIX

The Last Phase

As the year 1909 drew to a close, it became apparent that the end was not far off for the great humorist. But he was able to joke about it: "I hear the newspapers say I am dying. The charge is not true. I would not do such a thing at my time of life. I am behaving as good as I can. Merry Christmas to everybody!"[1] And then, quite unaccountably and without warning, came the last of the many assaults upon his weary spirit -- his daughter Jean was found dead the morning of Christmas Eve. He poured out his grief in an essay which Paine called "one of the most exquisite and tender pieces of writing in the language"[2] and escaped from the scene of the catastrophe to Bermuda. There he spent the winter in an effort to regain his failing strength. It was there also that he received from his old friend Howells a letter complimenting him on the success of his most recent publication.[3] In March, he wrote to his biographer that he was having "a most uncomfortable time," and early in April, Paine went to

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[1] Quoted in Paine, p. 1549.

[2] Paine, p. 1552.

[3] "The Turning-Point in My Life" appeared in Harper's Bazar for February, 1910. Howells wrote on January 18: ". . . I want to tell you . . . that you never wrote anything greater, finer, than that turning-point paper of yours. I shall feel it honor enough if they put on my tombstone, 'He was born in the same Century and general Section of middle western Country with Dr. S. L. Clemens, Oxon., and had his Degree three years before him through a Mistake of the University.'" -- Life in Letters of William Dean Howells, II, 278.

Bermuda to arrange for his return home. On April 14, he was back at Stormfield, his house in Connecticut. One week later he was dead. Then the dam broke, and the magazines and newspapers of the day were flooded with eulogies and encomiums, "all full of tears and flapdoodle," Twain, borrowing from himself, might have said; but they were sincere tributes and honest expressions of sentiment for the most part. The obituary material is extensive, and only the briefest sort of summary can be given here. A few articles stand out either because what they say is important or because the person who spoke is worth listening to. Henry W. Alden, for instance, in an essay not intended as an obituary, emphasized Twain's story-telling qualities: "No writer, not even Rabelais, has shown such powers of invention, . . ."[4] The Independent looked back to Clemens's last years and referred to him as "the dean of our literary fellowship, grand and gray, honored and loved, the most distinguished figure in the American and perhaps in all the English-speaking world of letters."[5] The Nation provided an extremely provocative essay. The literary historian of the future, said the writer of the article, will have to choose between Mark Twain and Henry James as the greatest American writer of the end of the nineteenth century. He suggested that although both had gone "as far as it is possible to go in diametrically opposite directions," there was yet a point at which their talents met -- both were essentially frontiersmen. Twain, the writer explained, was "the

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[4] "Mark Twain: Personal Impressions," Book News Monthly, 28 (April, 1910), 579. Alden was editor of Harper's and one of Twain's close friends. The Book News Monthly had announced in the March issue that the following number would be a Mark Twain "special." It appeared (with Clemens's picture on the cover) with prophetic warning, for on April 21, Mark Twain died.

[5] 68 (April 28, 1910), 934-5. The Literary Digest, 40 (April 30, 1910), 857, quoted a statement by Woodrow Wilson, then President of Princeton. Harper's Weekly, 54 (April 30, 1910), 4, wondered if Twain's equal had ever existed and settled upon Whitman and Hawthorne as the only two American writers worthy of comparison. The Outlook, 94 (April 30, 1910), 972, admitted that he had many shortcomings: he was occasionally tedious, his plots were sometimes weak, and once in a while he was melodramatic. But his best was so excellent that his fame is assured both in this country and abroad.

chronicler par excellence of the palpable frontier of robust America," and James "the scrupulous analyst of the spiritual frontier which robust and nostalgic America had established in the old countries." Calling Twain "A great figure who knew his bent and followed it to culmination with instinctive and unperturbed consistency," the critic surmised that the future would choose him as the greater writer.[6]

The Dial, which had had some harsh things to say in the past, forgot its grievances against Clemens and rose to unsuspected heights of encomium. After mentioning the vast extent of the humorist's fame and the typically American qualities of his temperament, the critic suggested that his best work was so excellent that there was no danger of its ever disappearing. He briefly sketched Twain's progress from humorist to serious commentator to sage and moralist. Concerning the critical attitude toward Twain as a literary figure, the writer described the change of the past thirty years wherein Clemens had come to be considered no longer a funny man but "one of our foremost men of letters." The writer concluded by placing Twain with Irving, Swift and Carlyle -- humorists who were also "creative artists, and critics of life in the deeper sense, and social philosophers whose judgments are of weight and import."[7]

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[6]"Two Frontiersmen," 90 (April 28, 1910), 422-3. The essay anticipates the recent work of Henry Seidel Canby, Turn West, Turn East: Mark Twain and Henry James, Boston, 1951.

[7]"Mark Twain," 48 (May 1, 1910), 305-7. Twain's evolution was the subject of an essay by Stuart P. Sherman, "Mark Twain," Nation, 90 (May 12, 1910), 477-80, in which the humorist's belated recognition as "'foremost American man of letters'" was applauded. By the time of his last few years, the critic stated, he had moved successively through the following stages -- funny man, literary man, public man. "When he died, we abandoned the last reservation. We said with one voice: He was an American."

Other minor notices included an editorial in Collier's, 45 (May 7, 1910),

H. L. Mencken in the Smart Set called attention to William Lyon Phelps's Essays on Modern Novelists, which, he said, contained "the first honest and hearty praise of 'Huckleberry Finn,' by a college professor in good standing, that these eyes had ever encountered, . . ." There is hope, he continued, that by 1950 it might be possible for academicians to admit that Clemens "was a greater artist than Irving, than Lowell, than Fenimore Cooper, than all and sundry of the unbearable bores whose 'works' are rammed into the heads of schoolboys by hunkerous pedagogues, and avoided as pestilence by everyone else." He concluded with praise of Huckleberry Finn, whose pictures of Mississippi River life, he asserted, belonged "to universal and almost flawless art."[8]

William Lyon Phelps, writing on "Mark Twain, Artist," spoke of the universality of Clemens's humor and added a note on his artistry: "The funniest man in the world, he was at the same time a profoundly serious artist, a faithful servant of his literary ideals." "What does it matter," he asked, "if our great American had his limitations and his excrescences? To borrow his own phrase, 'There is that about the sun that makes us forget his spots.'"[9]

8, in which Clemens was called "not only the biggest literary artist possessed by his country, but one of the sweetest, most generous, and most stimulating of men"; a notice by William Lyon Phelps in the Independent, 68 (May 5, 1910), 956-60, wherein the humorist's fame was said to seem "permanently secure, for he has apparently contributed some things to world literature, and his books represent the spirit of America as no others have ever done"; a comment in the Nation, 90 (June 30, 1910), 645-6, which claimed that Mark Twain was essentially a humorist rather than a serious thinker; and an essay in the Chautauquan, 59 (June, 1910), 9-10, which called Twain "one of the most original and gifted men of letters of America."

[8]"The Greatest of American Writers," 31 (June, 1910), 153-60.

[9]American Review of Reviews, 41 (June, 1910), 702-3. A critic in the Century, 80 (June, 1910), 315, suggested that Twain had "no other purpose but to amuse." He was, he added, "in his way as truly American as Abraham Lincoln."

The North American Review printed tributes from English admirers[10] and from a group of ten Americans including Andrew Carnegie, A. B. Paine, Booker T. Washington, Booth Tarkington, Hamlin Garland and Brander Matthews.[11]

The Bookman for June, 1910, was practically a Mark Twain obituary issue. Of the seven articles on Clemens,[12] one is worth reporting in full. Harry Thurston Peck, on the subject of "Mark Twain A Century Hence," predicted somewhat perversely that only three of the humorist's works would survive; "The Jumping Frog . . . and The Innocents Abroad . . . are never likely to go out of print or out of favour." Roughing It, he declared, would be valued for its humor and its history. To Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn he gave two decades. The rest, he asserted, "will not be read." He briefly characterized a few of the later works: The Connecticut Yankee made one "feel sorry for its author"; Joan of Arc was "distinctly dull." He found the Autobiography "formless and in places without any meaning whatsoever." Twain's friends, Peck asserted, are sorry he wrote it and hope his heirs will suppress it. He characterized the later writings as

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[10]". . . having no national author of our own, we have perforce claimed Mark Twain as the representative 'racial' author of his day. . ." — "England and Mark Twain," 191 (June, 1910), 823.

[11]"Tributes to Mark Twain," ibid., pp. 827-35. Matthews wrote prophetically: ". . . his writing was curiously unequal, with a wide chasm yawning between his loftiest work and his lowest; his touch was often uncertain and his taste was on occasion perverse. But his best is very high in quality; the peaks of his achievement tower aloft unchallenged and indisputable. No one of the men of letters of his time bids fair to loom larger in the perspective of time." (p. 834)

[12]These included — Bookman, 31 (June, 1910) — Firmin Dredd, "Mark Twain's Biographer," pp. 363-5; Henry L. Alden, "Mark Twain — An Appreciation," pp. 366-9; Bailey Millard, "Mark Twain in San Francisco," pp. 369-73; Arthur Bartlett Maurice, "Best Sellers of Yesterday: Mark Twain's 'The Innocents Abroad,'" pp. 374-9; William H. Rideing, "Mark Twain in Clubland," pp. 379-82; and Frederick A. King, "The Story of Mark Twain's Debts," pp. 394-6.

"irrelevant, eccentric, void of either wit or humor. . ."[13]

On the evening of November 30, 1910, a memorial ceremony celebrating Mark Twain's birthday was held at Carnegie Hall in New York City under the auspices of the Mark Twain Memorial Committee of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. William Dean Howells presided, and most of the literary great of the day attended. Howells's description of his old friend is interesting: "Sanguine, sorrowful, despairing, exulting, loving, hating, blessing, cursing, mocking, mourning, laughing, lamenting; he was a congeries of contradictions as each of us is, but contradictions confessed, explicit, aggressive; . . ." Speakers included Joseph H. Choate, Rev. Joseph Twichell, Champ Clark, George W. Cable, Colonel Henry Watterson and Henry VanDyke, who read an original poem of indifferent merit in which he referred to Mark Twain as "dear Yorick of the West."[14]

The year 1910 drew to a close with the publication of two miscellaneous articles on Clemens. George Ade wrote on "Mark Twain as our Emissary" in the Century,[15] and Archibald Henderson described "The International Fame of Mark Twain" in the North American Review.[16] The former article need not detain us, but the latter makes an important assertion. Henderson bracketed Twain's name with that of Whitman as "the two great interpreters and embodiments of

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[13] Bookman, 31 (June, 1910), 382-93. Peck, former editor of the Bookman, was professor of Latin at Columbia. Two other obituary notices were Henry Watterson, "Mark Twain — An Intimate Memory," American Magazine, 70 (July, 1910), 372-5, and "In the Interpreter's House" [monthly column] ibid., 428-32, in which Twain was called "our most brilliant man of letters."

[14] "Mark Twain, In Memoriam," Harper's Weekly, 54 (Dec. 17, 1910), 8-10.

[15] 81 (Dec., 1910), 204-6.

[16] 192 (Dec., 1910), 805-15.

America" and said that they represented "the supreme contribution of democracy to universal literature. . ."

The two years immediately following the death of Mark Twain saw little in the periodicals of any significance. One attempt was made to revive interest in Joan of Arc, but that met with no success.[17] When Paine's Life was published late in 1912, there was a resurgence of acclaim in the press. The work was widely reviewed; and most of the critiques included some comment on Twain's place in the life and literature of his country. For example, the novelist Irving Bacheller listed Twain as one of seven men "who in the last sixty years have reconstructed America and voiced its spirit."[18] The North American Review ventured a prophecy:

> As time passes, doubtless Mark Twain will come more and more to his own, and will stand not only as one of our most original and vital geniuses, but as one of our truly great Americans. His mind was unfettered by traditions, and he was, beyond all other American writers of his time, unless one except Walt Whitman, the vigorous natural growth of young American soil.[19]

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[17] George Wharton James, "How Mark Twain Was Made," National Magazine, 33 (Feb., 1911), 525-37. The essay was almost entirely biographical and anecdotal. In it, however, the writer praised Joan of Arc as "one of the finest pieces of biography ever written and certainly Mark Twain's masterpiece, from a literary standpoint. . . ."

[18] "Mr. Paine's Biography of Mark Twain," Literary Digest, 45 (Nov. 16, 1912), 909. The six other notables: Lincoln, Commodore Vanderbilt, Edison, Greeley, Howells, Whitman. Twain, said Bacheller, "found the East still in the bondage of ancient Puritanism. Lincoln freed the negro. Mark Twain freed the white man." The Outlook, 102 (Nov. 9, 1912), 528-9, called Twain "one of the most fascinating personalities of the age," but said he was never "in any sense a literary man." Current Literature, 53 (Nov., 1912), 582, declared that Clemens, whom it called "the supreme figure in our literature," was "haunted by the sense of a great failure." He tried to be a seer and prophet, the magazine asserted, but his public insisted upon considering him always as a clown. Howells in Harper's, 126 (Jan., 1913), 310, compared Twain with Cervantes, Molière, Swift and Dickens. William Lyon Phelps in the Independent, 74 (March 6, 1913), 533, called Twain "one of our few world-figures."

[19] 197 (Jan., 1913), 138.

About this time an academic critic predicted of Mark Twain that "future generations are sure to read him seriously if they read him at all, . . ."[20]

In May, 1916, there occurred one of the literary events of the year — the beginning of the serialization of The Mysterious Stranger in Harper's. The book was published in the fall of that year. It was like a voice from the grave, and its message was not a happy one. As early as 1899 Clemens was writing Howells from Austria about a story he was working on which was to contain "what I think of Man, and how he is constructed, and what a shabby poor ridiculous thing he is, . . ."[21] He never completed the tale, or at least he thought he had failed to complete it; but when it was found (in at least two versions) among his papers, there seemed to his executors no reason, except possibly dialectic ones, why it should not be given to the world. Only recently, in the light of Mr. DeVoto's vastly illuminating investigation, has The Mysterious Stranger been revealed in its true perspective as an important product of the almost crippling series of catastrophes which Mark Twain experienced in the nineties.[22] Along with What Is Man?, written about the same time, it presents his mature philosophy. But it is more successful than its non-fiction companion piece because, as Mr. DeVoto suggests, it is highly symbolical, and it was only through the use of symbols — not by means of closely reasoned, systematized arguments — that Mark Twain's mind could successfully express itself. The Mysterious Stranger is Tom Sawyer in the twilight after the glory has departed from the

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[20] Wilbur Marshall Urban, "Mark Twain: Pure Fooling," Neale's Monthly, 1 (May, 1913), 515. Urban was Professor of Philosophy in Trinity College.

[21] Letter of May 12, 1899. Letters, II, 681.

[22] See Mark Twain at Work, p. 126, and pp. xix-xxi of the Introduction to Mark Twain in Eruption.

bright day. Parts of it read like the Yankee all over again -- with the fierce scorn of tyranny and oppression -- but this time the bitterness has about it a detached quality, a sort of philosophical serenity which seems to be the result of great age but may only be the result of maturity. It is his final word on the damned human race, and as such it is as Mrs. Clemens pronounced it when Mark read the opening chapters to her in 1899: ". . . perfectly horrible -- and perfectly beautiful."[23]

A feeling of uneasiness on the part of the critics seems to have been the predominant emotion elicited by this most curious of Mark Twain's books. Many reviewers saw in it only a depressing pessimism. A writer in Current Opinion, for instance, said: "It would be difficult to imagine a message carrying a grimmer credo of despair, disillusion, and contempt of human existence, . . ."[24] The Independent called it "the strange, ironic, bewildering, but beautifully written wonder tale. . ."[25] The Dial said of the Stranger: "Shocking to all the conventionalities are his freely expressed opinions on many themes. Not a few of his bitterly satirical utterances are peculiarly appropriate to the present time. Perhaps he might be regarded as a kind of first cousin to the same author's Connecticut Yankee, the same disconcerting perspicacity appearing in both."[26] George Soule in the New Republic attempted to palliate the bitterness. "It is

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[23]Letter to Howells of May 12, 1892. Letters, II, 681.

[24]61 (Dec., 1916), 410.

[25]88 (Dec. 11, 1916), 464.

[26]61 (Nov. 30, 1916), 479-80.

not portentous at all," he wrote, "but a story by Mark Twain, familiar and American, . . ." He admitted that the philosophy might be pessimistic but preferred to regard it as "satire from the courageous heart of a lover of mankind." He claimed that this was the sort of thing that came "straight from the soul of America," and was "national in the sense that Tolstoy and Dostoevsky are national; . . ."[27] The critic for the Nation found the book important for revealing the serious undercurrent of Twain's humor, and for illustrating that Clemens was actually a graver, more complex and more interesting person than a surface knowledge of his works might have led one to suspect. The reviewer called attention to the irony of the work and especially to its unorthodox presentation of the devil. He viewed the book as "a biting arraignment of the folly and the brutality of mankind" in which Mark Twain's hatred of oppression was never more vigorously presented. Although he detected in Twain's laughter a despairing quality, he felt that behind it lay a firm belief in love and freedom.[28] George Nauman Shuster in the Catholic World described what he called "The Tragedy of Mark Twain." Terming The Mysterious Stranger "utterly pessimistic and depressing in its outlook upon life," the critic found it strange that an American noted for his qualities of mirth and humor should have written such a book in a land of prosperity, optimism and material progress. The crux of his argument was that Clemens was a disillusioned man, his disenchantment having been caused by the collapse of the Spencerian and Positivist philosophies to which he subscribed. "He drank the cup to the dregs and found all the bitterness of the draught of Nothing." Shuster's conclusion was that if Twain had been able to turn to Catholicism, he would never have

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[27] 9 Nov. 18, 1916), 8.

[28] 103 (Dec. 21, 1916), 588-9.

written The Mysterious Stranger. He found in the tragedy of Mark Twain a lesson for Catholics: "There must be a reconstruction of the battle lines, a new machinery of war, new armies and new kings to meet the onrush of groping souls."[29]

The year 1917 saw the publication of a few significant articles on Mark Twain. Edith Hyatt in the North American Review described Clemens as "An Inspired Critic" of American life, government, politics and morals, and collected many of his comments on democracy, imperialism, patriotism, the injustices of civilization, modern culture and religion to illustrate her arguments. She singled out Christian Science for special consideration, calling it "a suggestive and fascinating work," and claiming that if Twain had never written another book, this one would reveal him as a great social critic. She placed it alongside such influential works as Thus Spake Zarathustra, Sartor Resartus, The Shortest Way with Dissenters and Thoreau's Civil Disobedience. She concluded by calling Twain "a sincerely denunciatory and damaging critic of extraordinary genius."[30]

Later in the same year What Is Man? and Other Essays came out in a volume for uniform edition purposes. It was the first time the title essay had appeared in this country attributed to Mark Twain.[31] That Clemens had written a book expounding in detail his pessimistic philosophy was pretty widely known by this time. Paine in the Life had described the anonymous

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[29] 104 (March, 1917), 731-7. The essay is especially interesting as an example of partisan pleading. A more purely Protestant writer than Mark Twain can hardly be imagined. He may have been a groping soul, but that he was groping toward Catholicism is certainly doubtful.

[30] 205 (April, 1917), 603-15.

[31] The work had been privately printed (anonymously) in 1906 in a limited edition of 250 copies for distribution to the author's friends. There were no periodical reviews. In 1910 a British edition appeared (unauthorized) attributing the work to Mark Twain. This occasioned at least one review in the United States -- "Mark Twain's Pessimistic Philosophy," Current Literature, 48 (June, 1910), 643-7, which contained an elaborate exposition of the arguments with numerous quotations.

private printing of 1906. There was no reason why the work should not be made generally available. The great stir which Twain had felt would result if the essay had been openly published when it was written did not occur. Reviews were few. The Nation merely called attention to the title piece, described it briefly, and said that it tended to explain the pessimism which many readers had detected in the recently published Mysterious Stranger.[32] H. L. Mencken wrote a review of sorts for the Smart Set, in which he attacked the New York Times for deploring publication on the grounds that the views expressed were probably not Twain's settled and mature convictions. Mencken claimed that they were and asserted that if Mark Twain was anything, "he was an absolute skeptic and determinist; nothing offended and enraged him more than the sloppy idealism and optimism which the Times now seeks to ram down his aesophagus. . . ." With characteristic energy he castigated the "national grandmas of letters" who, he said, had first greeted Twain as a "childish buffoon," had next hailed him as a "purveyor of refined entertainment," and were now praising him as a "chaser of the blues." Such judgments, he maintained, were "worse than errors"; they were "indecencies."

> It is as if Italian organ-grinders should essay to estimate Beethoven. The truth about Mark is that he was a colossus, that he stood head and shoulders above his country and his time, that even the combined pull of Puritanism without and Philistinism within could not bring him down to the national level. The result is that he remains mysterious — a baffling puzzle to the critics of the country.[33]

If Mark Twain seemed mysterious to the critics of 1917, as Mencken suggested, it could hardly have been because of any hidden profundities in What Is Man? The work, in dialogue form, is as simple as it is

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[32] 105 (Nov. 1, 1917), 489-90.

[33] "Si Mutare Potest Aethiops Pellum Suam. . . ," 53 (Sept., 1917), 138-44.

derivative. In detailing man's helplessness in the clutch of inexorable circumstance and man's essential depravity, it could easily have stemmed from Lecky, whose History of European Morals was one of Twain's favorite books,[34] or from Shaftesbury, whom Twain may have known, perhaps at second hand. As Paine points out, the doctrine was not new: ". . . philosophers in all ages have considered it, . . ."[35] Mr. DeVoto finds the work more than merely an exposition of "the familiar logic of determinism." It is also, he says, "a plea for pardon."[36] But to the psychologist must fall the task of determining to what extent Mark Twain felt the burden of guilt which is the legacy of original sin. Our concern is with literary criticism. It is interesting to note that the sadness which is the inevitable harvest of the seeds of humor called forth from one of the most brilliant critics of the period a paean of praise which is as strong and clear and triumphant as anything ever written about Mark Twain. H. L. Mencken's faith was not misplaced — nor was Howells's, nor Phelps's, nor Matthews's, nor Henderson's, nor that of all the other critics who saw in Twain an American artist of the first rank. His star has risen steadily since his death and has not yet, in all probability, reached its zenith. His reputation has been taken over by the academicians, for better or worse, for, as Stuart Sherman has said, ". . . he is one of those great men of letters whom we shall always revisit and about whom the 'last word' will never be uttered."[37]

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[34] Paine, p. 1104.

[35] Paine, p. 744.

[36] Mark Twain at Work, p. 116.

[37] "Mark Twain's Last Phase," in The Main Stream, New York, 1927, p. 80.

CONCLUSION

The investigator into the vicissitudes of Mark Twain's literary reputation is faced at the outset of his inquiry with a special, complex, often baffling problem — namely, the clear dichotomy between the overwhelming acceptance of Twain by the American reading public on one hand, and on the other the apparent reluctance of literary critics, in general, to accord him (until his last years, at least) more than a bare modicum of recognition. To be sure, the fault, if the matter is one which involves blame in any way, was largely Clemens's own. He made his debut in the guise of a literary circus performer, so to speak, at a time when such a phenomenon was a familiar, indeed, a traditional, one involving not the slightest expectation of more than the most transitory popular favor. It is almost a certainty that Twain in his early years as a professional writer had little notion of his potential greatness, if, indeed, he ever fully realized his true significance. His casual attitude toward the composition of Huckleberry Finn is a prime case in point. Nearly everything about him, from his literary productions to his personal appearance, was calculated to inspire the polite critic of the genteel tradition with dismay and alarm. There were, of course, exceptions. William Dean Howells was from the first one of Twain's strongest advocates. But Howells, as he liked to point out, was almost as much a Westerner as was Clemens. And Howells had an uncanny ability to see beneath the crude exterior the sterling virtues which resided deep inside. Such exceptional appreciations as those provided by Howells and later by the Nation, Brander Matthews, William Lyon Phelps, Henry M. Alden, and the like,

represent peaks of judicious critical reasoning that tower above vast stretches of barren, nondescript verbiage. This latter, which made up the bulk of Mark Twain periodical criticism during his writing career, was colored by two definite tendencies in Clemens's work.

First was the humor, comprised of about equal parts of burlesque, exaggeration and horseplay. It was difficult to treat seriously compositions which refused to be serious. Or so it must have seemed to Twain's critics — at least to the average ones who lacked the ability to see beneath the coat of motley. To be sure, there frequently was nothing beneath the coat of motley but the grinning mask of comedy, and in such cases the critics doubtless felt justified in either ignoring the works or treating them with quite a cavalier attitude. More often than not, they simply used them as occasions for humorous flights of their own, and criticism went by the board. The results of such an attitude can be anticipated. As Mark Twain developed from a frontier funny man to a serious, sensitive, artistic craftsman and a profound commentator on the ways of the world, criticism, in general, which should have been able to keep up with him (even if the mass of his readers could or would not), failed to do so. Thus we find conflicting estimates running in parallel streams throughout his career. One critical contingent persisted in finding in Twain's works simply the clownish antics of a funny man, while another smaller but equally insistent group claimed to find a seriousness of intent and an artistry of execution far above and beyond what would ordinarily be expected of a mere humorist. Led by such superior critics as Howells, Matthews, Phelps, Alden, Pattee, Boyesen, Trent and Mencken, this group produced a body of criticism of remarkable perspicacity and high literary quality which not only does full justice to its subject but reflects equal credit upon its authors.

The second characteristic of Clemens's work which colored the bulk of criticism, especially in the early period, involved the predominantly American, even Western, quality of his writings. In an age which still looked, for the most part, to British models for literary guidance, there was an inevitable tendency, despite certain nationalistic stirrings on the intellectual front, at least to minimize if not actually to ignore native works bearing the rugged and sometimes uncouth American stamp. Many critics were perplexed and troubled by this element, and their attitude undoubtedly is reflected in their awarding a greater share of acclaim to such a work as The Prince and the Pauper, which conformed to established cannons of taste, than to Huckleberry Finn, which did not. Conversely, the reading public thought less of The Prince and the Pauper than of Huckleberry Finn because the former work was not what Mark Twain the humorist was expected to produce, whereas the latter (in its more obvious and superficial aspects) was. This inclination to measure Clemens's work according to a preconceived and generally accepted pattern was a piece of critical shortsightedness which plagued his reputation throughout his writing career. As has been pointed out, he frequently gave aid and comfort to the enemy by his insistence even in his most serious moments upon wearing the cap and bells. This dual nature, then, this split personality, as it were, was a characteristic of the author and found reflection in the criticism of the works.

Thus any conclusions we reach concerning the course of Mark Twain's reputation must be based upon two conflicting sets of pronouncements. We may largely ignore the first set, the one which denied Clemens seriousness of purpose or success of achievement, except to point out that it persisted throughout Twain's writing career and beyond. Of far more interest and significance is the second set, the one which asserted positively that Mark Twain

possessed enduring qualities of greatness. This body of criticism had its origins in the review by Howells of The Innocents Abroad (1869). The critic praised the humorist's style and characterization, but what is more important, he called attention to such wholesome qualities of temperament as benevolence, sympathy, and innate nobility — qualities which were to become closely associated with Mark Twain as the years passed.

Between the publication of the Innocents in 1869 and Roughing It in 1872, there was a definite slump in Twain's popularity, caused undoubtedly by the appearance of the wholly unworthy Burlesque Autobiography (1871), which was roundly condemned. Perhaps because they thought Twain had not kept faith with them, reviewers generally ignored Roughing It, a work which deserved much better than it received. Nevertheless, the two periodical notices which it elicited are significant for calling attention to the author's superior descriptive and narrative powers as opposed to his purely humorous qualities. The Gilded Age (1874) drew mixed notices. While generally according a greater degree of praise to the collaborator, Charles Dudley Warner, presumably because they felt on familiar ground in dealing with his contributions, reviewers tended to minimize Twain's part. Yet some favorable mention was made of Clemens's realism and his ability to portray character. About this time appeared the first full-length miscellaneous critical study of Twain — George T. Ferris's essay in Appleton's Journal. Ferris considered Bret Harte a better writer, but felt that the world might expect much from Clemens.

Sketches New and Old (1875) did little to enhance his reputation, although Howells provided a generally favorable review which emphasized the humorist's growing seriousness, a quality which was also stressed by Edward P. Whipple's Harper's essay. The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (1876) was praised enthusiastically by Howells for its realism, but critics in general ignored

the work apparently because its appearance was delayed until considerably long after it had been announced and reviewed from advance sheets by Howells.

By the end of his first decade as a professional man of letters Clemens had achieved world renown. There were not, and have never been, any doubts about his popular acceptance. Among periodical critics, however, the situation in this first phase was somewhat different. As was to be expected, Clemens was considered primarily as a humorist. But a few discerning critics found in his works more than mere humor: excellence of description, narration, and characterization; shrewd observations on American life; mental acuteness and insight; a fine sense of realism; even universality and artistic sincerity.

The decade of the eighties saw the production of Mark Twain's masterpieces, but, as is inevitably the case, criticism generally did not recognize them as such at the time. Howells, in his review of A Tramp Abroad (1880), not one of Clemens's great works, but certainly one of his good ones, found an intensification of those qualities of pity, justice, and hatred of sham which were to come to brilliant fruition in Huckleberry Finn. The Prince and the Pauper (1881) was more favorably received by its critics than almost any other of his books, primarily because in it he followed accepted patterns of novel writing. The work, however, marked a distinct departure from the type of writing for which Twain had become famous, and it drew notice on that score accordingly. Some critics even went so far as to detect a poetic quality in the book, and some praised the author for the apparent care with which he handled historical details. In a miscellaneous essay of this period Howells praised Clemens's universal qualities and pointedly attempted to persuade public and critic alike that in Twain they were dealing with a man of letters in the realest sense of the word.

One cannot emphasize too strongly the sense of wonder and the feeling of surprise with which critics (and presumably readers) greeted each volume from the pen of Mark Twain. Critics may have been able to deny that this work was literature, but they could not and did not deny that it was novel and unusual. Life on the Mississippi (1883) was hailed as a descriptive and historical work — not as a humorous compilation, and Huckleberry Finn (1885) was praised by one critic as a valuable record of a departed civilization. The latter work was a popular success but a critical failure. Guardians of American culture found it trashy, and it was banned from at least one library, a circumstance which undoubtedly enhanced its popular appeal. A Connecticut Yankee (1889) drew expressions of protest on many sides from critics who objected to Twain's irreverent handling of classic material. But few failed to see in the work a strong didactic purpose. A Boston reviewer called the book the least successful of his productions, but generally it was well received.

By the end of the eighties Mark Twain was well on his way to becoming a controversial figure in American literature. Efforts to establish his reputation along lines other than merely humorous ones continued. The figure of Clemens as an interpreter of the American as well as of the European past began to emerge. Lively discussions were precipitated by Huckleberry Finn and A Connecticut Yankee. Mark Twain as a serious literary artist began to gain wider consideration, especially with the publication of Huckleberry Finn, but this aspect of the author's career was neglected slightly in favor of discussions of his serious qualities as they were revealed in the Yankee.

In the nineties artistic considerations were overshadowed by personal ones as Mark Twain's conduct in connection with the failure of his publishing house and the payment of his debts captured the popular imagination. Critics tended to ignore what they considered the shortcomings of the literary man in

favor of magnifying the virtues of the human being. The major books of the decade drew mixed critical reaction. Pudd'nhead Wilson (1894) was both denounced for flagrant inaccuracies in its handling of local color and praised for its verisimilitude, both lauded as a work of literature and condemned as being in no sense literary. Advocates of Clemens began to call attention more frequently to the penalty he was forced to pay for being a humorist -- a penalty which led him ultimately to publish his supposed masterpiece anonymously. Joan of Arc (1896) was called everything from "a gorgeous failure" to a tedious Sunday-school tract. But, significantly, most reviewers agreed that here at last was Mark Twain as a true literary artist. His intentions were clear if his success was but indifferent. It would no longer be possible to consider him as simply a humorist, much less as a frontier funny man, for he had shown in Joan of Arc remarkable powers of evoking the past, of creating a marvellously sympathetic tragic figure, and of elevating his material into the pure air of romance if not indeed of poetry. Articles began to appear on Mark Twain's place in literature, and many critics agreed that he was a force to reckon with.

Following the Equator (1897) was widely reviewed, and, in general, its reception was favorable. The author's all-inclusive interests were stressed as well as the breadth and depth of his humanity. Emphasis upon a comparatively new strain -- cynicism -- was detected -- a cynicism which had been seen earlier in "Pudd'nhead Wilson's Calendar" and was here found strengthened and broadened in "Pudd'nhead Wilson's New Calendar." But critics and readers alike were prepared to overlook this in anticipation of finding a return to the old familiar Mark Twain of The Innocents Abroad and A Tramp Abroad, which they assuredly did not find, although some were for a

time deceived.

By the turn of the century Mark Twain was a world figure and was rapidly becoming America's grand old man of letters. With The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg (1900), he put on the guise of moralist pure and simple and provided for the dismay and delectation of his readers as clear an example of the parable as one is apt to find outside of ecclesiastical literature. Even more notorious were the political utterances of the first years of the new century. Literary criticism was smothered under a blanket of praise and blame, especially in connection with the papers on imperialism. Then there was a slight decline in interest in Clemens's work until 1905. The years between had seen the production of much second-rate material -- satires, burlesques, humorous tales -- thin stuff, most of it, and largely decried by the critics.

It was in this period, however, that serious critics began to turn from the trivial productions of these artistically barren years to a re-consideration of the masterpieces of the seventies and eighties -- the Mississippi River volumes, which in retrospect seemed to have gained considerably in stature. T. B. Parrott's review of Twain's major works in the Book-lover's Magazine is a case in point. Parrott found Clemens at his best when he recorded his own experiences and translated them, as he was singularly able to do in Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, into works of art. His conclusion was that Twain would ultimately be recognized as one of the glories of American literature. Joel Chandler Harris's congratulatory letter on the occasion of Clemens's seventieth birthday is another case in point. Twain, said Harris, had written the Great American Novel.

Interest in Clemens declined somewhat after the seventieth birthday celebration of 1905 to be revived briefly in 1906 with the publication of chapters from the Autobiography and again early in 1907 when Christian

Science created a flurry of excitement. In the late spring of 1907, enthusiasm for Mark Twain reached a climax of unparalleled intensity with the awarding of the Oxford degree. A few dissenting voices were raised, but mainly the occasion was one for heaping praise upon the head of America's most distinguished man of letters. Academicians, who had discovered Twain long ago but who had generally remained cautious in their statements concerning his merit, began to rally behind the body of popular critics and the public. William Lyon Phelps boldly asserted that Clemens was America's foremost writer, a genuine artist greater in natural endowment than both James and Howells. Hamilton W. Mabie, not, strictly speaking, an academician, but associate editor of a semi-religious magazine, called Twain a true humorist — one who saw life in its fundamental contrasts.

The next two years saw a decline in attention given to Twain in the periodicals. In 1909 there was a revival of interest with the publication of Is Shakespeare Dead? and Extract from Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven. Neither was a major work, and criticism reflected this fact accordingly, ranging, in the case of the former work, from casual mention to elaborate parody.

Practically all of the major periodicals carried obituary notices when Mark Twain died in the spring of 1910. Criticism tended to be displaced by encomium, but several important attempts at serious evaluation were provided. The Nation, for example, suggested that literary historians of the future might well choose Twain over Henry James as the greatest writer of the end of the nineteenth century. The Dial agreed substantially with this verdict, as did H. L. Mencken, William Lyon Phelps and Archibald Henderson.

The years immediately following his death saw a decline in interest in Mark Twain, but a revival set in with the publication of Paine's Life in

1912. There was another decline which lasted until 1916 when The Mysterious Stranger caused a resurgence of interest. This volume, together with What Is Man? (1917), provided an opportunity for a revaluation of sorts. A number of critics professed to be shocked and distressed by Clemens's pessimism and his deterministic philosophy, while a few ignored these aspects of the books and concentrated upon other matters. These testaments from beyond the grave occasioned no great number of reviews. The final disillusioned utterances of a man who had brought joy into the lives of millions seemed to have no place alongside of his fondly remembered works, and they were ignored accordingly. Twain's reputation by 1917 had become fixed in the public mind: he was America's greatest humorist and the beloved spokesman for eternal boyhood. Let the scholars and academic critics decide whether he was a frustrated genius or a consummate artist or a profound philosopher or a disillusioned cynic or all these things and more besides. The scholars and academic critics had already begun to claim him for their own, and it was not long before essays on Clemens began to appear in the learned journals: Modern Language Notes in 1919, the South Atlantic Quarterly in 1920, the Sewanee Review in 1921, and the Publications of the Modern Language Association in 1922.[1] After this, the deluge; and the end is not yet in sight. But this is part of another and a later story.

From frontier funny man, to writer of humorous travel books and stories for boys, to historical novelist, to social critic, to literary artist: Mark Twain travelled a long way. The chart of his course, at times erratic and perverse and devious, is preserved in the periodicals of his day. What of this periodical criticism in general? Comment has already been made on

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[1] Friedrich Schönemann, "Mark Twain and Adolf Wilbrandt," Modern Language Notes, 34 (June, 1919), 372-4; H. Houston Peckham, "The Literary Status of Mark Twain, 1877-1890," South Atlantic Quarterly, 19 (Oct., 1920), 332-40; Maurice Hewlett, "Mark on Sir Walter," Sewanee Review, 29 (April, 1921), 130-3; and O. H. Moore, "Mark Twain and Don Quixote," PMLA, 37 (June, 1922), 324-46.

the group of major essays by first-rate critics. As for the great bulk of the material — the casual notices and routine reviews — it is neither worse nor better than the mass of material that was being written about any of a dozen other authors of the period, which is to say that it is pretty mediocre stuff, for the most part, but by no means without interest. And in helping to establish Mark Twain's literary reputation it is, indeed, of great significance.

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[1] Numerous bibliographies of Mark Twain are in existence, both as individual volumes and as appendices to critical and biographical studies. This list is not intended to be a complete bibliography. It includes only the titles of works that have been cited directly in the foregoing text. With a few exceptions (certain articles of special interest) it does not include the reviews and articles cited in footnotes.

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Arcadian (1872-1878)

Atlantic Monthly (1869-1917)

Bachelor of Arts (1895-1898)

Book Buyer (1867-1905)

Book Chat (1886-1893)

Booklover's Magazine -- see Appleton's Magazine.

Bookman (1895-1917)

Book News Monthly (1882-1917)

Book Notes (1898-1902) -- 1900-1902 as Book World.

Book World -- see Book Notes.

Catholic World (1869-1917)

Century -- see Scribner's Monthly.

Chap Book (1894-1898)

Chautauquan (1880-1914)

Christian Union (1870-1893) -- continued as Outlook.

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[2]The following selective list includes, with a few minor exceptions, all periodicals in which criticism of Mark Twain was found. Excluded are a number of purely religious papers and learned journals which were not systematically checked because their editors were not in the habit of publishing critiques of Mark Twain's works, although single articles and references were found in them and were mentioned in the foregoing text. The dates in parentheses (unless otherwise indicated) represent one of two things -- first, the years during which the magazine was published; or, second, the years during which it was checked if its publication dates overlapped at either or both ends the dates which this dissertation covers.

Citizen (1884-1885)

Citizen (1895-1898)

Collier's (This magazine did not carry literary criticism. Since, however, it published at least one editorial on Mark Twain, it has been included here.)

Conservator (1890-1917)

Continent (1882-1884) -- also Our Continent

Cosmopolitan (1886-1917)

Critic (1881-1906)

Current Literature (1888-1913) -- continued as Current Opinion.

Current Opinion (1913-1917)

Dial (1880-1917)

Eclectic (1870-1871)

Education (1880-1917)

Epoch (1887-1892)

Forum (1886-1917)

Galaxy (1869-1878)

Godey's Lady's Book (1869-1898)

Harper's Monthly (1869-1917)

Harper's Weekly (1869-1916)

Hearth and Home (1869-1885)

Idler (1910-1912)

Independent (1869-1917)

Life (1883-1917)

Lippincott's Magazine (1869-1916)

Literary Digest (1890-1917)

Literary Life (1884-1886)

Literary News (1880-1904)

Literary Review (1897-1901)

Literary World (1870-1904)

Literature (1888-1889)

Littell's Living Age (1900-1917) -- (Before 1900 this periodical was almost entirely a reprint journal. After 1900 it carried original literary notes.)

McClure's (This magazine did not carry literary criticism. Since, however, it published at least one article on Mark Twain, it has been included here.)

Nation (1869-1917)

National Magazine (1894-1917)

North American Review (1869-1917)

Old and New (1870-1875)

Outlook (1893-1917) -- continuation of Christian Union

Overland Monthly (1868-1917)

Pacific Monthly (This magazine did not carry literary criticism. Since, however, it published at least one article on Mark Twain, it has been included here.)

Penn Monthly (1870-1882)

Public Opinion (1886-1906)

Putnam's Magazine (1869-1870)

Putnam's Monthly and the Critic (1906-1910)

Review of Reviews (1890-1917) -- Beginning in 1891 an American edition of this English periodical was published. It was sometimes referred to as the American Review of Reviews.

Round Table (1869)

Saturday Evening Post (This magazine did not, as a rule, carry literary criticism. Since, however, it published an occasional article on Mark Twain, it has been included here.)

Scribner's Magazine (1887-1917)

Scribner's Monthly (1870-1917) -- Beginning November, 1881, The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine.

Smart Set (1900-1917)

Southern Magazine (Baltimore) (1871-1875)

Southern Magazine (Louisville) (1892-1895)

World Today (1902-1912)

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