UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI

12 May, 1939.

I hereby recommend that the thesis prepared under my supervision by Paul Jefferson Carter, juu'r *entitled* The Social and Political Ideas of Mark Twain

be accepted as fulfilling this part of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Approved by:

Robert Shafer

(Read & Approved)
F. W. Chambers
Rudolf B. Gottfried

FORM 668—G.S. AND ED.—1M—7-33

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

THE SOCIAL AND POLITICAL IDEAS OF MARK TWAIN

A dissertation submitted to the

Graduate School
of the University of Cincinnati

in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

1939

by

Paul Jefferson Carter, Jr.

A. B., Centre College, 1934
A. M., University of Kentucky, 1935

UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

UMI Number: DP15687

INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

UMI®

UMI Microform DP15687

Copyright 2009 by ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest LLC
789 E. Eisenhower Parkway
PO Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

CONTENTS

I

INTRODUCTION

II

CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND

i. Heritage and Youth 9

ii. Apprentice in the World 29

iii. Pilot, Miner, and Reporter 41

iv. "Innocent" versus the "Genteel Tradition" 73

v. Reader 125

III

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL IDEAS

i. Morality 153

ii. Religion 176

iii. Philosophy and Science 199

iv. Imperialism 226

v. Patriotism 246

vi. War 255

vii. Race Prejudice and Sectional Characteristics 263

viii. American Institutions 279

ix. Democracy 325

IV

CONCLUSION

. 367

V

BIBLIOGRAPHY

. 373

17 Ag '39

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

I

INTRODUCTION

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

INTRODUCTION

In view of the growing number of books and theses which represent a revival of interest in Mark Twain among students of American literature in the last decade, one feels almost apologetic for his temerity in offering an additional study of one aspect of the great humorist's literary career. But the ever-increasing eagerness on the part of critics to pigeon-hole Twain in terms of his achievement is an inducement to consider his political and social criticism, an inducement which is strengthened by the absence of a thorough, objective evaluation of his contributions in those fields. Certainly such an investigation can add an important bit of coloring to the portrait of Mark Twain which is gradually taking shape as a tangible product of the new interest in his work.

Archibald Henderson attempted an appraisal of Mark Twain in his biography published in 1912. In the same year appeared the official life by Albert Bigelow Paine, a eulogistic work which did little more than characterize the subject and his writings. Henderson, on the other hand, dramatized Twain's serious side--a phase of his personality paraded in his pessimistic remarks after 1900--by devoting a section of his book to a discussion of the humorist as a philosopher, moralist, and sociologist. He decided that "Mark Twain's supreme title to distinction as a great writer inheres in his natural, if not wholly conscious, mastery in that highest sphere of thought ...which we call sociology."[1]

This judgment was either accepted or ignored until 1920, when Van Wyck Brooks shattered the complacency of Twain's admirers with the Ordeal of Mark Twain. In it he attacked the Twain legend by charging that

---

1. Mark Twain, New York, 1912, p.200.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the supposedly great moralist and reformer had been in reality a cowardly compromiser: he had, under the pressure exerted upon his creative impulses by an alien environment and a conservative New England wife, suppressed his natural bent for satire, had avoided unpopular causes, had succumbed to the materialism he should have satirized, and had donned the garb of court jester to hide his breaking heart. He had failed because the spirit of the martyr had been omitted from his make-up. The potential satirist had been sacrificed to the tastes of the sterile genteel writers who were his friends and advisers. Brooks made a stinging accusation--the more so because there was some truth in it--and it had the effect of precipitating a controversy which still rages. At the same time his attack worked a real service by stimulating an interest in Twain which continues to uncover new and valuable material.

Every book written about Mark Twain since 1920 has had, as a matter of course, to weigh Brooks's thesis. The most recent biographer expresses the general critical attitude when he writes: "One may agree with Mr. Brooks or one may disagree with him. One may even disagree with him acrimoniously. The only thing that one cannot do with Mr. Brooks is to ignore him."[2] Reaction has grouped itself roughly along the lines suggested by this observation. De Voto, for example, disagrees acrimoniously and runs up his banner on the same pole with those of Paine, Howells, Matthews, Phelps, and Sherman:

> Criticism has said that he directed no humor against the abuses of his time: the fact is that research can find few elements of the

---

2. Edward Wagenknecht, Mark Twain; the Man and His Work, New Haven, 1935, p.166.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> age that Mark Twain did not burlesque, satirize, or deride. The whole obscene spectacle of government is passed in review--the presidency, the congress, the basis of politics, the nature of democracy, the disintegration of power, the corruption of the electorate--bribery, depravity, subornation, the farce of the people's justice. Criticism has said that he assented in the social monstrosities of his period: yet the epithet with which criticism batters corrupt America, The Gilded Age, is his creation, and in the wide expanse of his books, there are few social ulcers that he does not probe. Criticism has said that he was incapable of ideas and all but anaesthetized against the intellectual ferment of the age: yet an idea is no less an idea because it is utilized for comedy, and whether you explore the descent of man, the rejection of progress, or the advances of feminism or the development of the insanity plea or the coalescence of labor, you will find it in that wide expanse. 3

The opposing forces--Mumford, Hicks, O'Higgins, and more recently Edgar Lee Masters--have grouped themselves behind Brooks. Each side bases its conclusions on evidence which has been selected judicially, with a view to underscoring the thesis it supports. This is particularly true of the illustrations selected to prove or disprove Twain a sociologist. An objective presentation of all the material is still needed before there can be any sound basis for judgment; my intention is therefore to offer a summary of the opinions Twain expressed on social and political matters. Edward Wagenknecht, to be sure, holds to this objective approach in his book; he believes the true estimate of Twain's social satire lies somewhere between the widely-divergent opinions of DeVoto and of Brooks. Accordingly he makes no attempt to avoid the paradoxes in Twain's nature and presents the material impartially. The scope of his entire study, however, is so broad as to necessitate a restricted, cursory survey which discusses adequately only that portion of Twain's political and social criticism which has contemporary significance. In view, therefore, of Wagenknecht's limited

---

3. Mark Twain's America, Boston, 1935, pp.267-268.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

treatment and the biassed approach of the other critics, an objective and comprehensive summary of Twain's opinions is desirable. Such a summary is offered in the conviction that by letting the evidence speak for itself, it will afford a basis for a sounder appraisal of Twain's importance as a social and political critic.

My chief objective, however, is not fully realized with the discussion of Twain's criticism itself. There remains to be considered the reasons for Twain's attitudes and opinions: Why did he tend to ignore important issues for trivialities? Why were his interests usually superficial? Did his concern with certain evils trace back to early experiences? Possible and probable answers to these and related questions are offered in the opening section, which summarizes the biographical factors that are necessary to clarify the theories themselves, and in the survey of his reading, which reveals his tastes in literature and the use to which he put the knowledge gained from reading. Included in this sketch of Twain's intellectual background is a re-examination of his life in New England: his environment, his interests, and his associations.

The nature and extent of the so-called censorship imposed upon the humorist by his wife and friends is one of the most interesting as well as controversial questions involved in a study of this kind. In formulating my answer I have adopted a different point of view in an attempt to throw new light on the problem, and have studied the attitudes and ideas of the genteel writers--especially William Dean Howells and Charles Dudley Warner--with a view to ascertaining whether or not their opinions were reactionary and conservative enough to warrant the conclusion that the men who held them prevented Mark Twain from becoming a

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

great social satirist.

Finally, I wish to emphasize the fact that I hold no brief for Mark Twain as a political and social satirist. Believing his reputation needs no additional support, I am interested primarily in clearing the air, so to speak, by supplying a nucleus of evidence from his own works, upon which the arguments presented by each faction may be judged. Perhaps my attitude is best expressed in the warning which Howells gave in 1901 to a generation which was tempted to renounce Twain's humor for his social diatribes:

> What we all should wish to do is to keep Mark Twain what he has always been: a comic force unique in the power of charming us out of our cares and troubles, united with as potent an ethic sense of the duties, public and private, which no man denies in himself without being false to other men. I think we may hope for the best he can do to help us deserve our self-respect, without forming Mark Twain societies to read philanthropic meanings into his jokes or studying the Jumping Frog as the allegory of an imperializing republic. 4

---

4. My Mark Twain, New York, 1910, p.185.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

II

CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND

1.

Heritage and Youth

Samuel Langhorne Clemens was born on November 30, 1835, in a one-story frame building near the center of the little village of Florida, Missouri. But the student of Mark Twain's career, searching out those clues in the record of heredity and environment which may help to explain the emotional and mental nature of his subject, finds it necessary to go beyond the incident of birth for a starting point. Mark Twain was fond of tracing the continuity of what he called "the real turning-point of my life" to the Garden of Eden. "It was there," he wrote, "that the first link was forged of the chain that was ultimately to lead to the emptying of me into the literary guild".[1] For a more limited purpose, however, the immediate forebears of Samuel Clemens supply all that is needed in the quest for contributions of heredity to his makeup.

The Clemens family was not, as might be inferred from Twain's indirect descriptions of their poverty in The Gilded Age, devoid of what is commonly termed "background." To the credit of their lineage, even after discarding the tradition ascribing to it Gregory Clemens--the English judge who signed the death-warrant of Charles I--, there was Grandfather Samuel, "a man of culture and literary taste," and Twain's father, John Clemens, "sober, industrious, and unswervingly upright."[2] In 1823 John Clemens had married Jane Lampton, a Kentucky belle noted for her wit and beauty. The Lamptons conceded nothing to the Clemenses in the

---

1. Albert B. Paine, Mark Twain: a Biography, New York, 1935, II, 1545. Hereafter referred to as Biography.

2. Ibid., I, 2.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

matter of ancestors. If anything, they had the advantage, for there was an earldom in the English family, and there were then claimants in the American branch. As a boy, Sam Clemens, knowing that his mother was secretly proud that the Lamptons (to use the English spelling of the name) had occupied the family lands for nine hundred years, liked to argue with her that the only merit in the achievement was attributable to the entail and that she might as well be proud of being descended from a mortgage.[3] Her quiet pride, he admitted, was harmless, but he contended that at least two of the other Lamptons, notably James--who became Colonel Sellers --and a distant relative who was the American claimant to the earldom, wasted their lives away dreaming of their future as aristocrats. So deeply did Clemens feel on this subject that he wrote of it later in his Autobiography: "'The earl' was a man of parts, and might have accomplished something for himself but for the calamitous accident of his birth."[4] Furthermore The American Claimant, which depicts the debilitating effect of too much concern for titled ancestry, was based upon the Lampton's pride in their family tree. Perhaps this early-formed idea that preoccupation with heritages--in the narrow social aspect--handicapped the claimants may be a minor source of Twain's hatred for the entire system of aristocracy.

A year after his marriage John Clemens started the series of moves that was eventually to bring him and a somewhat larger family to

---

3. Mark Twain's Autobiography, New York, 1924, I, 121. Referred to hereafter as Autobiography.

4. Ibid., I, 122.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Missouri. One important stop was in Jamestown, Tennessee, where he built the first Court House and was elected circuit clerk of the Court. So confident was he of the brilliant future of the section that he bought 75,000 acres of timber land, thereby, as he thought, insuring wealth and security to his heirs. According to the testimony of Twain, however, his father succeeded only in making himself and his family miserable with the ever-deferred hope of becoming prosperous through sale of the property.

> "This land...influenced our life...during more than a generation .... It kept us hoping and hoping during forty years.... It put our energies to sleep and made visionaries of us--dreamers and indolent. We were always going to be rich next year.... To begin [life] poor and prospectively rich! The man who has not experienced it cannot imagine the curse of it". 5

Long before he wrote that observation in the Autobiography he had recorded the memories of his own youth in struggles and disappointments of the Hawkins family in The Gilded Age.

The curse of the land took its toll early. From his envied position as "the most opulent citizen of Fentress County," John Clemens gradually slipped into the comparatively menial post of storekeeper and postmaster in a tiny village about nine miles from Jamestown.[6] So rapid was his decline that when John Quarles, Jane Clemens's brother-in-law, wrote to him suggesting that he bring his family to Florida, Missouri, he immediately sold the store and turned his face westward, as so many dreamers of his kind were to do after him. In writing of this decision in later years Twain revealed something of his opinion of his father. He

---

5. Autobiography, I, 94.

6. Ibid., I, 5.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

said that when the financial crash of 1834 wrecked John Clemens's prospects the blow was too much for him to face. "He was a proud man, a silent, austere man, and not a person likely to abide among the scenes of his vanished grandeur and be the target for public commiseration."[7] To such a man the West offered the promise of freedom and a fresh start.

After what must have been an exciting and harrowing journey by land and water, the little band of Clemenses reached Florida, Missouri. They were seven in number, counting Jennie, the slave girl, last of the three negroes John Clemens had inherited from his father's estate. In a short time the birth of Samuel increased the family to eight and the population of Florida by one per cent.[8]

John Clemens practiced law when he got any cases and ran a store until an ill-advised partnership proved disastrous. Then when the Salt River Navigation Project, which was to make Florida accessible to river boats, was rejected by Congress, he moved his family to Hannibal in Marion County, "politically and socially the first town in northeast Missouri in the 1830's."[9] There he was to spend the remaining eight years of his life.

During his four years' residence in Florida, John Clemens had become a respected citizen, a leader in the little community. When the Missouri Legislature had authorized the incorporation of the Salt River

---

7. Loc. cit.

8. Ibid, I, 95.

9. Minnie M. Brashear, Mark Twain: Son of Missouri, Chapel Hill, 1934, p.61.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Navigation Company, his name had headed the list of Commissioners from three interested counties; when it had been suggested that a railroad be substituted for a navigable river, John Clemens's name had appeared first among the nine men appointed as Commissioners to create the Florida Railroad Company; when an act had established the Florida Academy, John Clemens and John Quarles had been listed as trustees.[10] This capacity for public service he apparently continued to exercise in the larger town of Hannibal. His name was included on committees chosen to appraise property, draft resolutions, report on roads, found libraries; and his obituary notice in the Hannibal Gazette of March 25, 1847, praised him as a public spirited citizen:

> He was noted for his good sense and a clear discriminating mind. These added to a high sense of justice and moral rectitude, made him a man of uncommon influence and usefulness. His public spirit was exercised zealously and with effect upon every proper occasion. His efforts to establish a library and institute of learning in our city were such as to entitle him to all commendation, and his untimely death is felt...as a loss to the whole community. [11]

Apparently John Clemens's failures were entirely economic.

But what did Samuel, the third son and fifth child, inherit from this unhappy, restless visionary, his father? At first glance the traceable attributes appear negative. Most evident is the burning optimism as regards material progress. John Clemens bought the Tennessee land at its behest; Orion, the eldest son, tried one newspaper venture

---

10. Ibid., pp.49-50.

11. Reprinted in the Hannibal Evening Courier-Post, March 6, 1935, p.13c. As part of the celebration of his centenary one section of this special edition is devoted to items relative to Mark Twain's life and career.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

after another because of it; and Sam became the amateur book-publisher, promoter, and inventor when under its sway. It was this almost blind confidence in future prosperity that later betrayed him into the various money-making enterprises which brought him only worry and stress and bankruptcy. This is not to say that he would have done otherwise had his father been indifferent to the call of the speculative spirit, for that spirit permeated the American people during the Gilded Age, and Mark Twain would doubtlessly have fallen under its sway. But the surrender was probably made easier because of John Clemens's contribution to his son's nature by way of example, if not blood. Surely what Paine wrote of the father became strikingly true of the son: "With all his ability and industry, and with the best of intentions, John Clemens would seem to have had an unerring faculty for making business mistakes."[12]

In later life Mark Twain recalled that he and his father did not enjoy an intimate relationship.[13] In fact, John Clemens had litte time to devote to the company of his children. When he was not engaged in supplying food for his family, he was absorbed in tinkering on a perpetual-motion machine which he was trying to construct.[14] Yet Mark Twain's character was enriched by certain of his father's positive virtues, such as his moral integrity and his firmness of mind. The latter quality is of particular significance, since it may have inspired in

---

12. Biography, I, 5.

13. "My father and I were always on the most distant terms when I was a boy--a sort of armed neutrality, so to speak" ("A Memory," The Curious Republic of Gondour and Other Whimsical Sketches, New York, 1919, p.12).

14. Biography, I, 14.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

him a desire to emulate his father's indifference to rigid thought molds, an indifference which became in Twain the independent spirit that marked his thinking. John Clemens and John Quarles were both free-thinkers, when independence of thought was taboo and sometimes dangerous. The impression his father's heterodoxy made upon him was strong enough to endure until Mark Twain described it in 1897: "My father was a refined and kindly gentleman, very grave, rather austere, of rigid probity, a sternly just and upright man, albeit he attended no church and never spoke of religious matters, and had no part nor lot in the pious joys of his Presbyterian family, nor ever seemed to suffer from this deprivation."[15] Probably John Quarles's deviation from the orthodox religious beliefs of the day further impressed young Sam, although he does not mention his uncle's religious views in any of his writings. Quarles's biographer, T. V. Bodine, describes the current attitude toward those who, like Quarles, unable to reconcile the question of human destiny with the accepted dogmas of the people, became "Universalists": "It was even worse than being an 'Infidel,' and often converted a man into a social pariah, though Judge Quarles did not suffer this fate, his natural kindness and his general usefulness as a man and citizen saving him from the common penalty."[16] It is unlikely that the boy of ten or twelve understood the

---

15. Following the Equator, II, 18. Where no publishing data is recorded, the book is included in the Author's National Edition issued in 25 volumes by Harper and Brothers, New York, 1910.

16. "A Visit to Florida," Kansas City Star, XXXII (May 19, 1912), 9D. Quoted in Brashear, op. cit., p.53.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the full significance of his father's and uncle's unpopular religious views, but their ultimate influence on him is probable, and as Miss Brashear points out, the definite importance of the men's conduct is in the answer it affords to those critics who have emphasized as repressive forces the Calvinistic elements in Twain's training.[17] When Twain thundered at the intolerance and bigotry of organized religion, the spirit of his heretical father and uncle probably inspired his outbursts quite as much as his scorn for Calvinistic theology.

The question of the influence of Calvinistic teaching upon Samuel Clemens brings into the discussion the boy's relationship with his mother and her contribution to the direction and content of his thinking. Such exponents of psychological literary criticism as Van Wyck Brooks and Harvey O'Higgins emphasize the importance of Calvinism in his development. For Brooks, Jane Clemens was a tragic example of the Freudian Mother-love, which injures that which it seeks most to nurture. "If Jane Clemens had been a woman of wide experience and independent mind, in proportion to the strength of her character, Mark Twain's career might have been wholly different," and his failure to become what Brooks would have had him is thrown on the mother's narrow shoulders.[18] "Jane Clemens, in short, was the embodiment of that old-fashioned, cast-iron Calvinism which had proved so favorable to the life of enterprising action but which perceived the scent of the devil in any least expression of what is now known as the

---

17. Brashear, op. cit., p.54.

18. Van Wyck Brooks, The Ordeal of Mark Twain, rev. ed., New York, 1933, pp.51-52.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

creative impulse."[19] Calvinism thus becomes for these critics the first of the many influences which eventually make of the embryo creative artist a mere buffoon, a teller of jokes, a typical representative of the repressed American of the Gilded Age.

But if the ghost of John Calvin is to be found guilty of frightening Sam Clemens into a blind conformity which thwarted his artistic impulses, one of two inferences must be accepted: either the non-conformity of John Clemens and John Quarles was not so important as has been intimated, or the orthodoxy of Jane Clemens was of such magnitude as to dwarf all who attempted to stand before it. Lack of proof makes it impossible to substantiate the first inference, but new evidence has made refutation of the second plausible. Given Twain's descriptions of his somnambulism, his terror in the wake of childish wrong-doing or in the presence of a storm, the psychologists could not resist the temptation to read into these not too unnatural childhood experiences the awful testimony of a life damned by "a well-developed case of that Puritan anxiety--that soul-fear--which the new psychology finds at the bottom of most of the peculiarities of the typical American mind."[20] This interpretation, however, rests so squarely

---

19. Ibid., pp.52-53. O'Higgins is even more psychic than Brooks: "She [Jane Clemens] was an orthodox believer in a stern Calvinistic God ...and she planted the fear of this avenging deity ineradicably in Mark Twain's young mind"; "His hatred of his Mother was always repressed and unconscious, but it was so strong that it 'conditioned' as the psychologists say, all the impulses of affection in him throughout his life" (Harvey O'Higgins and Edward H. Reeds, The American Mind in Action, New York, 1924, pp.29 and 32).

20. O'Higgins, op. cit., p.31.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

upon the character of the Mother that it is demolished when she is revealed by her descendants as a person relatively indifferent to the darker teachings of Calvinism. In fact, they testify that

> as far as her religious convictions are concerned, Jane Clemens seems to have been unusually liberal for her day. Her granddaughter, who lived with her for twenty-five years, both in St. Louis and Fredonia, and heard her mention about everything that was in her mind, does not remember that she ever referred to the retribution of a stern Calvinistic God, or similar subjects which current literature asserts lay so near to her heart. Indeed, the granddaughter does not remember that Mrs. Clemens went to church at all in St. Louis. Her impression is that she usually had the seat to herself.... But Mrs. Clemens went several times to the Jewish synagogue.... Of course if there was anything queer about a religion or theory, Jane Clemens took a fancy to it at once, and followed it up, though not to the point of becoming a convert. Anything out of the common infatuated her, and the queerer the religion the greater her interest in it. 21

The granddaughter alluded to is Anne Moffett Webster, Twain's niece. Recently she wrote:

> Grandma, like most women, cared nothing for theology and would have been just as happy in the Methodist, Christian, Swedenborgian or Unitarian [churches]. She was never one whose life centered in the church; she was not a very steady church goer. If Uncle Sam had any Calvinistic teaching he certainly did not have it from his mother. She was not a student.... She did not read the Bible a great deal. 22

It can be objected, of course, that the Websters knew Jane Clemens in her old age, after her family had scattered and her views had mellowed. But the psycho-analysists did not know Mark Twain's mother in either youth or age; hence it is certainly more logical to accept the testimony of one who lived with her for twenty-five years than these hypotheses

---

21. Doris Webster and Samuel Webster, "Whitewashing Jane Clemens," Bookman, LXI (July, 1925), 532.

22. Hannibal Evening Courier-Post, March 6, 1935, p.11.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

unless we acquiesce in their contention that they know more about our repressed emotions than we do. If we do agree to that assertion, then, for us, as O'Higgins rationalizes, "Humour is a conspicuous quality of American life because in that life repressions are so general," and "Mark Twain tapped a well of hatred and revolt in the subconscious minds of his generation, and it paid him like an oil gusher."[23] In view of this new evidence it is an unjustifiable conclusion that Jane Clemens and her Calvinism represented a disastrous influence in Mark Twain's life.

Yet the place of Jane Clemens's Calvinism in her son's life, must not be wholly discounted. Sam was brought up on the old theology. "Intellectually...he was able to throw off the stamp of his early environment; emotionally, he retained his scars as long as he lived."[24] The blacker tenets of Calvinism hovered like shadowy specters in the background of his mind, shading his attitude toward morality, the Church, the Bible, God, superstition, man.[25] The truth of this observation will be verified in the summary of his social theories. But here the principal concern is to establish a balanced, practical estimate of the extent to which Calvinism was impressed on him by his mother. And it is maintained that although Calvinism was an important one of the environmental and hereditary factors in the molding of his mind, and it must be admitted a negative one, it was not the damning blight on his youth that psychographers would have us believe.

---

23. O'Higgins, op. cit., p.34.

24. Wagenknecht, op. cit., p.213.

25. Cf. ibid., pp.189-218 for a terse, brief discussion of the evidence for this statement.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

In the light of certain positive characteristics of Mark Twain, the figure of his mother looms large. It is pointless to argue about what Jane Clemens definitely transmitted by the genes to her son; but that he remembered with wonder and admiration, and wrote of her movingly in his Autobiography, suggests his acute perception of various facets of her nature during his childhood. Her capacity for sympathy impressed him most, a capacity, it should be noted, which he possessed also to a remarkable degree and which motivated much of his so-called social criticism. He saw her sympathy as the component and effect of her interest in life. "The greatest difference", he wrote, "which I find between her and the rest of the people...is this: ...those others felt a strong interest in a few things, whereas to the very day of her death she felt a strong interest in the whole world and everything and everybody in it.... She was the natural ally and friend of the friendless."[26] He discovered that she could even be tricked into saying a good word for Satan if he too freely and vigorously condemned that worthy. All dumb animals had a friend in her: Paine tells us that when she was forced to drown any of the numerous litters of kittens she always heated the water first.[27] Most memorable to Twain, however, were the occasions on which her pity and compassion stirred her to action. He was fond of describing the picture his mother made when she defied a vicious brute to get past her to his grown daughter, whom he had tried to catch, intending to flog her with a heavy rope; or when she walked into the street in St. Louis one day to

---

26. Autobiography, I, 116.

27. Biography, I, 36.

28. Autobiography, I, 118-119.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

take a whip away from a burly wagoner who was beating his horse.[28] Apparently her courage made a deeper impression on her growing son than her warnings that the fires of Hell awaited bad little boys, a warning, it seems plausible to assume, as much the weapon of a harassed mother of a very mischievous boy as the admonition of a dutiful disciple of Calvin.

The other member of the Clemens family who imparted direction to the aspiring Samuel was Orion, the oldest boy. Miss Brashear, in fact, thinks it no exaggeration to say "that the greatest single influence in Mark Twains' life was his older brother, lasting through the publication of Roughing It."[29] Orion's numerous failures, on the one hand, probably evoked a conscious or unconscious resolve in Samuel to succeed, just as the misfortunes of his father had made him promise himself to do better. Orion's influence did not stop with the example, however; his "three hundred and sixty-five red-hot new eagernesses every year" acted as a whirring emery stone on which Sam whetted the blades of his intellect and interest.[30] One could not be associated with Orion long without being drawn into a heated controversy over a moral, religious, or political issue:

> He woke with an eagerness about some matter or other every morning; it consumed him all day; it perished in the night and he was on fire with a fresh new interest next morning before he could get his clothes on.... Another characteristic... was his deep glooms, his despondencies, his despairs.... Every day he was the most joyous and hopeful man that ever was, I think, and also every day he was the most miserable man that ever was. 31

---

28. Autobiography, I, 118-119.
29. Op. cit., p.106.
30. Autobiography, II, 269.
31. Loc. cit.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

UNIVERSITY

An interesting feature of Twain's description is its applicability to himself. One sees in the portrait the optimism, the pessimism, the desire for approval, the tendency to dream, the strict honesty that were likewise characteristic of the younger brother. The passages devoted to Orion constitute in one sense the most autobiographical portions of the Autobiography. In them there is a note of condescension; the sympathetic "joshing" has touches of the superior attitude sometimes assumed by the successful brother. Yet Twain loved Orion and admired his integrity, vitality, and generosity. Their arguments must have contributed something to Twain's stock of ideas, opinions, and prejudices.

From his father, mother, and oldest brother, then, Samuel Clemens received impulses and attitudes which underlay in a vague, frequently intangible form in his conduct and thought as Mark Twain. His father's and brother's visionary optimism, his mother's "Calvinism" and compassion, these qualities and their various ramifications persisted in certain of his acts and ideas in later life.

But what of the village of Hannibal, Missouri, and its place in the background of Mark's social and political thinking? Did it do more than provide the setting and local color for the important books derived from the experience of his boyhood? Until such recent studies of Hannibal and its environs as those of Miss Brashear and Bernard De Voto, the answer had been negative. The judgment of William Dean Howells that "if we can know nothing of Mr. Clemens from Hannibal, we can know much of Hannibal from Mr. Clemens" led to the general acceptance of Twain's picture of "a loafing, out-at-elbows, down-at-the-heels,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

slaveholding Mississippi River town."[32] A similar conception underlies the theories of Brooks, Frank, and Mumford. But in Mark Twain's America, De Voto flatly denies the generalizations of these writers, supporting his rejection of their theories with a detailed account of his interesting and illuminating research into the problem of the life and times of the Missouri frontier of the 1840's. He found that the Puritan "who hates loveliness, fears passion, represses his instincts, and abstains from joy" was nowhere discoverable on the frontier; that sexual customs, like all its customs, were freer than those of the seaboard; and that the people sang, danced, and loved with an abandon hardly characteristic of what Waldo Frank saw as "a drooping generation, godless yet stomachless; without any joy beyond the dogged cultivation of self-pain."[33]

Hannibal, furthermore, was frontier only as it existed in "a condition of simplicity, isolation, and noncompetitive society." Actually the boundaries of Missouri were the border of the real frontier. Indians no longer threatened the tamed wilderness stretching westward from the Mississippi across the width of Missouri.[34] In 1833, twenty-four years after its founding, Hannibal had only fifty inhabitants and three stores.[35] By 1839, however, when John Clemens moved his family to the river town, it boasted approximately four hundred and fifty people, a newspaper, a book store, several enterprising businesses, and

---

32. Howells, op. cit., p.134.

33. De Voto, op. cit., pp.40-46.

34. Ibid., p.30.

35. Hannibal Evening Courier-Post, March 6, 1935, p.14 c.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

a promising future. It was the asset last-named that drew John Clemens from Florida, and his judgment was vindicated although he did not profit to any great extent in the town's progress. By 1847, the year of his death, the population had soared to about twenty-five hundred, and there was a proportionate increase in all enterprises.[36]

Samuel Clemens was four years old when brought to Hannibal; he was eighteen when he left for New York in 1853. During his fourteen-year stay the town continued to thrive. By 1853 there were five newspapers instead of one. Religion had kept pace with journalism, establishing First and Second Presbyterian, Northern and Southern Methodist, Baptist, and Episcopalian churches, while the papers printed serious and heated discussions of the advisability of admitting a Catholic church.[37]

Nor was Hannibal lacking in the equipment of education. There was the Marion Female Seminary, the English and Classical School, Miss McDonald's School, the Hannibal Female Academy, not to list the numerous private schools, such as those of Mrs. Horr and Mr. Cross, which Samuel had to be persuaded to attend.[38] In addition to these more regular educational institutions of the period there was Marion College, located in nearby West Ely, which represented an attempt to establish a form of higher education. The experiment failed when it was discovered that President David Nelson was a militant aboritionist. Marion County, fifteen hundred of whose ten thousand inhabitants were slaves in 1840 was

---

36. Brashear, op. cit., pp.76-79.

37. Ibid., p.141.

38. Ibid., p.142.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

pro-slavery; and the slave-holders engineered an anti-abolition crusade which forced Nelson to leave the state.

> Several persons living about or near the College, suspected of entertaining abolition sentiments, had to leave the county with the utmost precipitation.... So strong was the excitement that if it was remembered that any man had, at any time, been heard to say anything on the subject of slavery at all that might by any possibility be construed into an opinion against it, even in the abstract, he was made a doomed man. 39

The history of the College and the conflict it precipitated between the abolitionists and the slave-holders is of two-fold importance here: first, as evidence of the section's interest in furthering education; secondly, as indicative of its pro-slavery sentiment. The former supports De Voto's claim for the enlightened frontier; the latter represents an element in Samuel Clemens's environment of which his hatred of slavery was probably an effect. He used the anti-abolition movement as the basis for a supposedly autobiographical sketch, A Scrap of Curious History, which, in reality is, fictional in all the details of the plot. Since he was not quite one year old at the time of the abolition excitement, the inaccuracy is understandable.

Sam Clemens's relations with negroes during the impressionable period when he lived in Hannibal are significant as the basis for his later denunciations of slavery in any form. When he came to write his Autobiography, among his tenderest and happiest memories were those of his companionship with the blacks on John Quarles's farm:

---

39. Minnie M. Brashear, Formative Influences in the Mind and Writings of Mark Twain (Ph. D. thesis), University of North Carolina, 1930, p.65, note 62, quoting John P. Rutter's A Thirty Year's View of Marion County (1861), p.40. Miss Brashear's work will hereafter be designated Thesis.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> All the negroes were friends of ours, and with those of our own age we were in effect comrades. I say in effect, using the phrase as a modification. We were comrades, and yet not comrades; color and condition interposed a subtle line which both parties were conscious of and which rendered complete fusion impossible.... It was on the farm that I got my strong liking for the race and my appreciation of certain of its fine qualities. This feeling and this estimate have stood the test of sixty years and more, and have suffered no impairment. The black face is as welcome to me now as it was then. 40

Through his associations with negroes, moreover, he was made conscious of the superstitions of the race. Jennie, the slave girl John Clemens brought with the family from Tennessee, and Uncle Ned, another black, watched over the growing children, entertaining them with tales of horror and imagination. One story of Ned's about a weird golden arm made such an impression on little Sam that it became in an amplified version one of the most popular features of Mark Twain's lectures of later years. In a cabin on the Quarles's farm lived a bed-ridden old slave woman whom the children held in awe because she was supposed to have talked with Moses.[41] Then there was old Dan'l, who sent the children shivering off to bed with his ghost stories. They believed in the spells, charms, and bad-luck signs of the negroes; they grew up in an atmosphere of fancy and superstition. "The world was ominously corrupted with malevolence looking toward the terror of death, but time had heaped up a variety of defences and forewarnings in which the slaves were always busy.... Childhood was thus seasoned in miracle and terror."[42] De Voto sees in these experiences

---

40. Autobiography, I, 100-101.

41. Biography, I, 33.

42. De Voto, op. cit., p.73. Cf. pp.66-77 for a general description of the voodooistic beliefs and practices of the negroes.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

reason for Twain's lifelong pre-occupation with a Calvinistic creed whose hold had vanished with his youth. "The religion against which Mark Twain was perpetually in revolt is, if the religion he writes and talks most about can be accepted as the one he objects to, the religion of the slave."[43]

In Twain's protestations against religion and its institutions he thought he was assailing the formal creeds and popular superstitions he had known as a boy. Perhaps he was, as De Voto charges, thinking of voodooism in terms of Calvinism. At any rate, he opposed in religion and the Church those forces which seemed to him to conflict with the best interests of society, and his opposition owed some of its strength to his early experiences with the superstitions and practices of both Calvinism and voodooism. Furthermore, these boyhood experiences probably gave rise to his later contempt for any form of superstition.

Just as the superstition Twain knew in his youth engendered his disgust of it in manhood, so, too, the violence and brutality which occasionally shattered the peace of Hannibal deepened the spirit of compassion already instilled in him by Jane Clemens. Little Sam saw men murdered; he saw negroes flogged. Terrible in themselves, these darker aspects of his environment bred in him a deep and abiding loathing for the malignant evils men suffered chiefly at each other's hands, a loathing responsible in a large measure for his social criticism at a later period.

---

43. Ibid., p.77.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

One other feature of the Hannibal of Twain's youth should be noted as contributing to his social criticism: the Southern element in the population. Hannibal had its own little aristocracy in the 1850's; there was a hierarchy of social groups--people of good family, of unclassified family, and of no family.

> Everybody knew everybody, and was affable to everybody, and nobody put on any visible airs; yet the class lines were quite clearly drawn and the familiar social life of each class was restricted to that class. It was a little democracy which was full of liberty, equality, and Fourth of July, and sincerely so, too; yet you perceived that the aristocratic taint was there. It was there, and nobody found fault with the fact, or ever stopped to reflect that its presence was an inconsistency. 44

The inconsistency was the product of instinct rather than principle, the instinctive class-consciousness of the Southerners who constituted a sizable majority of the Hannibal citizenry.[45] The division was not on the basis of wealth. Twain wrote: "Everybody was poor, but didn't know it;

---

44. Autobiography, I, 120.

45. F. J. Turner, Rise of the New West, 1819-1829, New York, 1906, p.77: "Missouri's population was chiefly Kentuckians and Tennesseeans. The leaders of this southern element came, in considerable measure, from well-to-do classes, who migrated to improve their conditions in the freer opportunities of a new country. Land speculation, the opportunity of political preferment, and the advantages which these growing communities brought to practitioners of the law combined to attract men of this class. Many of them.... brought their slaves with them, under the systems of indenture which made this possible. Missouri, especially, was sought by planters with their slaves."

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and everybody was comfortable, and did know it."[46] Therefore the Clemenses, who were members of the Southern group by virtue of their ancestry and residence in Tennessee, were accepted as people of "good family" despite their poverty. They were also slave-holders, although John Clemens repeatedly asserted that he would have freed his negroes if he could have done so without hurting his family. His attitude, as Twain later pointed out, was not typical of other Southerners. All "the wise and the good and the holy" Twain recalled, "were unanimous in the conviction that slavery was right, righteous, sacred, the peculiar pet of the Deity, and a condition which the slave himself ought to be daily and nightly thankful for." Even his kindhearted mother was not conscious "that slavery was a bald, grotesque, and unwarrantable usurpation. She had never heard it assailed in any pulpit, but had heard it defended and sanctified in a thousand; her ears were familiar with Bible texts that approved it, but if there were any that disapproved it they had not been quoted by her pastor."[47]

The domestic form of slavery in Hannibal was so mild as not to excite indignation; Twain said that he seldom saw a slave misused. Yet one of his most poignant memories was of the sad faces--"the saddest faces

---

46. Autobiography, I, 120. Lately a niece of Mark Twain's, Mrs. Annie Moffett Webster, made an interesting observation: "I have always felt their [the John Clemenses] poverty was too much stressed. After all they had only the usual ups and downs of life; they seldom referred to those hard days.... Life there had many pleasures; all the children were of the highly intellectual type. My mother played the piano and the harp" (Hannibal Evening Courier-Post, March 6, 1935, p.11).

47. Autobiography, I, 123.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

I have ever seen"--of the black men and women, chained together on the Hannibal wharf, awaiting shipment to southern slave markets.[48] He was taught with the other children to regard a runaway negro as worse than a wild beast, to accept as natural that he should be treated as such when caught. It was these brutal aspects of even the mildest forms of slavery that he remembered and incorporated in his denunciation of the institution.

Furthermore, he later came to interpret slavery as an evil which was complementary to another legacy of the South, the existence of an aristocracy.

> Our slaves were convinced and content. So, doubtless, are the far more intelligent slaves of a monarchy; they revere and approve their masters, the monarch and the noble, and recognize no degradation in the fact they are slaves--slaves with the name blinked, and less respectworthy than were our black ones.[49]

This identification of slavery with aristocracy underlay much that Twain had to say about the slaveries and aristocracies he condemned in a post-war world. And the fact that both evils as found in Hannibal were attributable to the South led ultimately to Twain's repudiation of that section and its Walter Scott heroics.[50]

In Following the Equator Twain wrote: "All that goes to make the me in me was in a Missourian village, on the other side of the globe".[51] If the "all" is discounted as artistic license and "much" substituted, the

---

48. Ibid., I, 123-124.

49. Ibid., I, 123-124.

50. Brashear, Thesis, p.58.

51. II, 19.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

statement summarizes the contribution to his makeup of the section of Missouri which he knew intimately for eighteen years. From the point of view of a study of Twain's social and political criticism, his experiences in Hannibal laid the foundations for the construction of his notable opposition to superstition, slavery, and aristocracy. Permeating his criticism, and frequently responsible for it, was the tenderness and sympathy which his mother bequeathed him, reinforced by the spirit of integrity and independence of John Clemens and John Quarles. "Much" that went into the making of the social critic was derived from his heritage and his life in the Hannibal of the 1850's. Together they determined largely what his interests would be when he came to survey the world of men.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Apprentice in the World

Samuel Clemens projected himself into a larger stage of activities in his twelfth year. Having harassed his mother into permitting him to quit school and become an apprentice to a local newspaper editor, he set about learning his trade well. Perhaps he realized that, once he became an expert type-setter, he would have the means by which to reach those far-off places of which he dreamed.

From the spring of 1848 until June, 1853, Sam was printer's-devil, compositor, sub-editor, and reporter on the Hannibal papers; for two years on the Missouri Courier of J. P. Ament; and for three years on the Hannibal Journal of Orion Clemens. This youthful start in the fields of journalism at a time when he was naturally curious about life was to influence all phases of his later development. The newspapers of the period were organs of entertainment and of pseudo-learning rather than of information on current events.

> They mightily boomed the real estate of a hundred Herculaneums and Constantinoples. They made a mechanism for the common man's politics, battling to the death over conflicting platforms and the morals of candidates. They warred upon each other. They perished--but meanwhile they set down the literature of the frontier. 1

The numerous "fillers" were drawn from literary sources. They generally consisted of anecdotes from Greek mythology; references to such classical writers as Cicero; allusions to the contemporary British novelists, particularly Thackeray and Dickens; much comment on books answering Harriet B. Stowe's "blackmanity;" many quotations from the writings of the eighteenth-century men of letters, especially Johnson, and from the

---

1. De Voto, op. cit., p.95.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

almanacs of Benjamin Franklin.[2] Slowly the boy began to absorb bits of this miscellaneous material, which in turn whetted his appetite for more curious and interesting facts. His environment was broadened by the pages of the exchanges which came to the office. He became increasingly conscious of a greater, more exciting world than the one he had always known. The Crystal Palace in New York glittered alluringly in his mind's eye. Finally, his curiosity got the better of him, and he started for St. Louis, with New York as his ultimate destination.

With the comparatively recent studies of frontier newspapers has come an increasing emphasis on their influence in the development of Mark Twain. In addition to broadening his perspective and acquainting him with the "literature of oral anecdote," as De Voto characterizes the prevailing type of journalistic humor, his active professional association with frontier journalism incited his interest in the problems and controversies of his environment.[3] Miss Brashear credits a feature story, "Blabbing Government Secrets," which was printed in the issue of the Hannibal Journal for September 23, 1852, to the seventeen year old boy. The article explained that the extra session of the State Legislature was called by the Governor, not, as the people supposed, for the purpose of transacting the Railroad business, but for changing the writer's surname from Perkins to Blab. "My title was altered, shortened, and greatly beautified," the

---

2. Brashear, Mark Twain: Son of Missouri, pp.139-143.

3. De Voto, op. cit., p.92: "It is a literature of oral anecdote, whose purpose is the embodiment of character and the revelation of a point, whose aim is the entertainment of listeners, and whose origin is the life immediately at hand.... It is the frontier examining itself.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

correspondent boasted, "and all at a cost of only a few thousands of dollars to the State!--These Democratic Legislators work cheap, don't they, Editor?"[4] Because My Great Literary Venture, in which Twain relates the events of his week's editorship, does not identify the Blab item there must remain some doubt concerning its authorship. Whether or not he wrote it and it is a temptation to accept it as his first political satire--he was familiar with such attacks in the papers, and his interest in political controversies was probably stimulated by them. His five years' work in the newspaper offices of Hannibal therefore must have furnished him with a general idea of the political, moral, and social issues confronting his world. The period was preparatory, so to speak, in that it sharpened his perceptivity and directed his curiosity rather than endowed him with stock opinions and prejudices.

One of those promptings of fate, or chance, which seem to figure so largely in Twain's life, occurred before he left Hannibal, and it merits inclusion here as the starting point for another important influence on his thinking. On his way home one evening, he picked up from the street a leaf from a book. There was enough reading matter left on the torn page to arouse in Clemens a desire to read the history of Joan of Arc of which it was a fragment. In this way there was kindled in him a passion for history "which became the largest feature of his intellectual life." The event "crystallized suddenly within him sympathy with the oppressed, rebellion against tyranny and treachery, scorn for the divine right of kings.... He read hungrily now everything he could find relating to the French Wars,

---

4. Brashear, Mark Twain: Son of Missouri, p.117.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and to Joan in particular. He acquired an appetite for history in general."[5]

Clemens's budding interest in the world came to full bloom with the spring of 1853. The limitations of his life had chafed more with the passing of each year. The spirit of adventure personified in the river traffic, in the overland treks to California, and in the glowing newspaper stories of the New York World's Fair filled the boy with wanderlust. In his Autobiography he recaptured something of his poignant longing at this earlier period in a passage describing the start of one of his friends for the gold fields:

> I remember the departure of the cavalcade when it spurred westward. We were all there to see and to envy. And I can still see that proud little chap sailing by on a great horse, with his long locks streaming out behind. We were all on hand to gaze and envy when he returned, two years later, in unimaginable glory--for he had traveled. None of us had ever been forty miles from home. [6]

One so eager to enlarge his environment could not be restrained for long. In the end, it was Orion's disapproval of his brother's editorial pranks which combined with a growing distaste for the work to fix upon him a determination to leave Hannibal. He told his mother that he was going to St. Louis to work and to be near his sister Pamela. His real intention was to go see the fabulous Crystal Palace, a feature of the New York Fair, but he did not tell Jane Clemens that. Reluctantly, we suppose, she gave her permission, having made him promise not "to throw a card or drink a drop of liquor" while he was away. Thus, he "became a journeyman and

---

5. Biography, I, 81-82.

6. II, 183.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

wandered, in the tradition of the trade, over a good part of America--during years vital in the formation of his personality and vital also in the formation of American society."[7]

For a period of four years Clemens literally drifted in and out of composing rooms in St. Louis, New York, Philadelphia, Keokuk, and Cincinnati. His trade enabled him to get work, and his ability did not go unnoticed. Miss Brashear prints an unsigned letter, which she found in the Hannibal Journal and attributed to Clemens, in which the writer boasted to his mother that he set the cleanest proofs in the large establishment of John A. Gray in New York.[8] That he was trying hard to convince himself of his ability to care for himself is suggested by the tone of a passage in a letter he wrote to Pamela from New York in 1853:

> You need not bother yourself about me; for if you have a brother nearly eighteen years of age, who is not able to take care of himself a few miles from home, such a brother is not worth one's thoughts: and if I don't manage to take care of No.1, be assured you will never know it. I am not afraid, however; I shall ask favors from no one, and endeavor to be (and shall be) as "independent as a wood-sawyer's clerk." [9]

---

7. De Voto, op. cit., p.86.

8. Brashear, Mark Twain: Son of Missouri, p.155-157.

9. Mark Twain's Letters, ed. Albert Biglow Paine, New York, 1917, I, 24. (This volume is hereafter referred to as Letters.) Twenty-five years later Twain, recalling this attitude of the youth of eighteen, saw himself as a "callous fool, a self-sufficient ass, a mere human tumble-bug, stern in air, heaving at his bit of dung, imagining that he is remodeling the world and is entirely capable of doing it right .... That is what I was" (Biography, I, 105). He did not deny the characterization supplied by the 1853 letter; he simply professed to disparage the spirit of the earlier portrait.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The boy was struggling to live up to the standard of self-reliance and independence set for him by the frontier and his own pride. The same standard later entered into Mark Twain's concept of freedom.

The young printer did not spend any more time in press rooms than was required. He had come to New York to see the marvels of that city, and he saw them. Letters to various members of his family written during this period are interesting and important for what they reveal of the nature of his sight-seeing, thinking, and writing. What he saw and thought worthy of describing illustrates the further development of his natural curiosity into an eager concern to get knowledge and an insatiable spirit of inquiry. He found the greatest satisfaction in concrete things, particularly those bits of fact which were singular and unusual, the items used as "fillers" in papers. His fact-finding bent led him to the libraries. He wrote Pamela: "You ask me where I spend my evenings. Where would you suppose, with a free printers' library containing more than 4,000 volumes within a quarter of a mile of me, and nobody at home to talk to?"[10] He saw Edwin Forrest play in the Gladiator and thought some portions of it "really splendid."[11] The pro-slavery atmosphere of Hannibal lingered with him, and he told his mother that when he saw the Court House in Syracuse, on his way to New York,

> ...it called to mind the time when it was surrounded with chains and companies of soldiers, to prevent the rescue of McReynolds' nigger, by the infernal abolitionists. I reckon I had better black my face, for in these Eastern States niggers are considerably better than white people.[12]

---

10. Letters, I, 22.

11. Ibid., I, 24.

12. Brashear, Mark Twain, Son of Missouri, p.154.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

That he was taking an increasing interest in the slave problem is suggested by his closing query in a letter to Orion, who had moved to Muscatine, Iowa: "How do you like 'free soil?'--I would like amazingly to see a good old-fashioned negro."[13]

When Clemens moved on to Philadelphia, the letters from there were similar in content to those sent from New York. He continued to visit historic sites, art-galleries, and libraries. Frequently his reading was called to the support of his descriptions and impressions of the places which impressed him: "I saw small steamboats, with their signs up--'For Wissahickon and Manayunk--25 cents.' Geo. Lippard, in his Legends of Washington and his Generals, has rendered the Wissahickon sacred in my eyes, and I shall make that trip."[14] He also wrote, "if you will get a back number of Lady's Book, you will find a better description of the Works than I can give."[15] His common sense made him aware of the petty and priggish in social customs, and he praised the sensible practice, observed in Philadelphia, of letting the men on the stages hand the fares of the ladies forward to the driver: "Yesterday I sat in the front end of the 'bus, directly under the driver's box--a lady sat opposite me. She handed me her money, which was right. But, Lord! a St. Louis lady would think herself ruined if she should be so familiar with a stranger."[16] His youthful contempt for such customs did not, however, cause him to throw

---

13. Letters, I, 29.

14. Biography, I, 100.

15. Brashear, Mark Twain: Son of Missouri, p.161.

16. Biography, I, 100.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

off the moral prejudices imposed upon him by his mother. He confessed to Orion: "I believe I am the only person in the Inquirer office that does not drink," and he requested Pamela to tell Jane Clemens that his "promises are faithfully kept."[17] Above all, he was still fighting to preserve his courage and confidence in the face of growing home-sickness. Refusing to admit any loss of self-assurance, he only resented the efforts of his fellow type-setters to cheer him:

> Unlike New York, I like this Philadelphia amazingly, and the people in it. There is only one thing that gets my "dander" up--and that is the hands are always encouraging me: telling me "it's no use to get discouraged--no use to be downhearted, for there is more work here than you can do!" "Downhearted," the devil! I have not had a particle of such a feeling since I left Hannibal, more than four months ago. 18

It is probable that he was whistling to keep his spirit up; but that he did succeed to some extent is evident in that he stayed in the East until summer. Then his yearning for home got the better of his resolve, and he went to Muscatine to visit his mother and Orion. The first fifteen months of his ramblings were over, but he was not satisfied.

Only one incident of Clemens's visit to Muscatine, Iowa, need be noted here. His story was that he arrived too early to go directly to Orion's house and while he waited for daylight in the office of a little hotel, he amused himself by learning the information contained in a book about the English kings and their reigns. "This incidentally acquired knowledge proved of immense value to him. It was his groundwork for all

---

17. Ibid., I, 101 and 95.

18. Ibid., I, 99.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

English history."[19] Therein lay the beginnings of the Connecticut Yankee and The Prince and the Pauper, books loaded with his hatred of vested authority in Church and State. He stayed but a short time in Muscatine, preferring rather to return to his old place on the St. Louis Evening News. In St. Louis he lived with Frank E. Burroughs, a chairmaker who had a marked fondness for the writings of Dickens, Thackeray, Scott and Disraeli. From this association with Burroughs may date Clemens's interest in Dickens and distaste for Scott, for during his subsequent residence in Keokuk his friends noticed that he often carried a volume of Dickens with him.

But the desire to see strange places was still too strong in him to permit his remaining in one locale long. Lieutenant Herndon's account of his survey of the Amazon fired him with a yearning to go to the headwaters of that river and make a fortune collecting coca. Once again the wind of chance intervened, this time blowing a fifty-dollar bill to his feet instead of the page from Joan of Arc. He advertised the find, and left for South America on the same day.

> I started for the Amazon without reflecting and without asking any questions. That was more than fifty years ago. In all that time my temperament has not changed, by even a shade. I have been punished many and many a time, and bitterly, for doing things and reflecting afterward, but these tortures have been of no value to me: I still do the thing commanded by Circumstance and Temperament, and reflect afterward. Always violently. [20]

What he did not say was that his analysis was also significantly true of his manner of thinking. It will be only too evident in the study of his

---

19. Letters, I, 51.

20. "The Turning-Point of My Life," What is Man? and Other Essays, New York, 1917, pp.133, 134-135.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

opinions that the majority of them were the product of the union of his temperament with the proper circumstances.

Having made an arrangement with the Keokuk Saturday Post to pay him five dollars apiece for his travel letters, Clemens went to Cincinnati, Ohio, to work until he had enough money to go on to New Orleans or New York, from one of which points he expected to sail for the Amazon. During his five or six months' stay in Cincinnati he came to know a Scotchman named MacFarlane, who "beyond doubt forwarded Samuel Clemens's general interest in books, influenced his taste, and inspired in him certain views and philosophies which he never forgot."[21] All that we can know about MacFarlane must come from Twain's recollection of him and his ideas in the sketch written in 1898 for the Autobiography. We learn there that he owned two or three dozen weighty books--philosophies, histories, and scientific works--; that he was a diligent talker about anything but himself; that he considered himself a philosopher and a thinker, and had hit upon the idea of evolution fourteen or fifteen years before Darwin's publication of the Descent of Man. There was, however, a negative conclusion to MacFarlane's general theory which Darwin, the scientist, ignored. It was MacFarlane's concept that animal life had developed progressively from a few seed germs deposited by the Creator toward ultimate perfection until man was reached; at that point the progressive scheme broke down and went to ruin. Man's heart was the only bad one in the animal kingdom; man was the only animal capable of feeling malice, selfishness, patriotism, of persecuting, robbing, enslaving members of his own tribe. Man's

---

21. Biography, I, 114.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

intellect was a brutal addition to him, because "there was never a man who did not use his intellect daily all his life to advantage himself at other people's expense."[22] It was this darker aspect of the Scotchman's point of view that penetrated the consciousness of the impressionable youth. Judging impersonally and objectively the obvious parallels to this pessimistic philosophy in the passages on man in the Autobiography and in What Is Man?, Twain's so-called "gospel," the student concludes that in them Twain was simply repeating much of what he had heard from MacFarlane in 1856. To press that conclusion too vigorously, however, is to overlook the possibility that in 1898 Twain was supplementing his admittedly erratic memory with such views as he had come to hold more recently.[23] Whether or not, then, he took the ideas he expressed about man directly from MacFarlane cannot be ascertained conclusively; nevertheless, the very fact that he thought he had done so indicated that he looked back upon his association with MacFarlane as one from which he derived considerable inspiration at an impressionable period of his development. If it had done nothing else, the relationship would have sharpened the youth's curiosity in regard to the things about which his friend talked. On the other hand, the example may have strengthened in Clemens an attitude of mind frequently productive of superficial thinking. For, as Wagenknecht points out, what Twain said of MacFarlane's ideas could certainly be said of his own: "His thinking and reasoning and

---

22. Autobiography, I, 143-147.

23. Paine thinks that What Is Man? was written in Vienna about 1898 (Biography, II, 1321).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

philosophizings were those of a but partly taught and wholly untrained mind, yet he hit by accident upon some curious and striking things."[24] The drawbacks of this kind of thinking--generalizations from insufficient data, emotionalism, lack of information, unoriginal originality--are characteristic of Twain's thought.[25]

---

24. Autobiography, I, 146.

25. Wagenknecht, op. cit., pp.117-118.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Pilot, Miner, and Reporter

In April, 1857, Clemens booked passage on the Paul Jones for New Orleans, and he walked up her gangplank into a new career. His ten years' work as a journeyman printer was ended; his four years of piloting were just beginning. The ten years marked his evolution from a mischievous boy, who hated school, to an adventurous young man, who missed nothing which happened around him. He had acquired the kaleidoscopic assortment of information which is derived from experience and desultory reading, and an insatiable curiosity about life in general. He had certain inclinations, habits, and prejudices acquired from his heritage and environment. The four years on the river would alter, obliterate, and strengthen various of these characteristics. They would subject him to a type of mental and emotional disciplining heretofore unknown but badly needed.

Had Sam Clemens consciously made a selection of possible careers, it is doubtful whether he could have chosen one which would have contributed more to his development at that period than piloting. In the first place, the almost superhuman requirements of the profession naturally strengthened the person who undertook to meet them. For the first time in his life Clemens faced a task which demanded untiring industry and perseverance. His finely-penciled notebooks attest the magnitude of the factual information the pilot had to have to guide his boat through the twelve hundred miles of murky, swirling waters and shifting, shallow channels without the aid of markers or searchlights. But Clemens mastered the river and became an expert pilot in less than two years.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

His success naturally bolstered the feeling of independence and self-confidence which he had sought so zealously to cultivate while a printer in the East. "At twenty-three he had acquired a profession which surpassed all others for absolute sovereignty and yielded an income equal to that then earned by the Vice-President of the United States."[1] That he loved piloting for itself and, what is more important, for the freedom it afforded him is evident from his apology for describing it in Life on the Mississippi:

> If I have seemed to love my subject, it is no surprising thing, for I loved the profession far better than any I have followed since, and I took a measureless pride in it. The reason is plain: a pilot, in those days, was the only unfettered and entirely independent human being that lived in the earth. Kings are but the hampered servants of parliament and the people.... The editor of a newspaper...must work with one hand tied behind him by party and patrons, and be content to utter only half or two-thirds of his mind; no clergyman is a free man and may speak the whole truth, regardless of his parish's opinions; writers of all kinds are manacled servants of the public. We write frankly and fearlessly, but then we "modify" before we print. In truth, every man and woman and child has a master, and worries and frets in servitude; but, in the day I write of, the Mississippi pilot had none. [2]

The eulogy was written in the rosy haze of retrospection after Twain had been an editor, had known one clergyman intimately, and had completed a satire on monarchy; but there can be no doubt that he sensed the unique independence of his former profession and that his natural individuality was broadened and hardened by the experience.

The years on the river, however, not only sharpened Clemens' powers of observation and self-assurance; they also plunged him into the world of men and stimulated his natural tendency to imaginative speculation.

---

1. Biography, I, 145. 2. pp.118-119.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Life on the Mississippi is neither a complete nor a realistic representation of life on the river between 1857-1861. Where the amenities of literature would not have forbidden mention of the less glowing aspects of that life, Clemens's romantic point of view did. His riotous imagination even invented romance. Neglected are the brutality, ruthlessness, irresponsibility spawned by the impersonal, fierce competition; the squalid venery, the gambling, the frauds find no-place in the book's pages. All, nevertheless, was education. Because of the experience he could say "that the average shore-employment requires as much as forty years to equip a man with this sort of an education.... When I find a well-drawn character in fiction or biography I generally take a warm personal interest in him, for the reason that I have known him before--met him on the river."[3] The talk of hard-living, imaginative men swirled about his ears, talk free of abstract concerns but alive with stories of feuds, murders, and all the various progeny of the tall tale. The fount of knowledge was no longer a printer's library but a boiler-deck; the medium was men, not books.

He struggled to embrace this cosmic chaos in miniature. The damned human race became clearer, but his understanding of it remained jumbled and warped. He was made conscious of the pretense and failure, the courage and kindness, in the human animal, but he saw little evidence of reason or intellect.[4] It was not a world conducive to the

---

3. Life on the Mississippi, p.163.

4. Much of this paragraph is based directly on De Voto's discussion of the river and its importance (op. cit., pp.106-110).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

forming of a social and political philosopher in the academic sense; on the other hand, it was one capable of inciting a sensitive mind with a burning desire to discover the causes behind it. Clemens's thinking dropped into the speculative tract, to which it returned frequently during his life, and toyed with the eternal questions of life, death, creation, evil, good, cause, and effect. Alone in his high glass pilothouse during the night watches he laid the foundation of the edifice of unphilosophic philosophy which he constructed in later years. He began to study astronomy, fascinated by the incredible possibilities in which it dealt.[5]

Clemens did not, however, become so immersed in the new world of sensation that he neglected books. "The pilots regarded him as a great reader--a student of history, travels, literature, and the sciences .... When not at the wheel, he was likely to be reading."[6] His river note-book contains a neatly written French exercise from the Dialogues of Voltaire; Paine concludes that he studied French, and Miss Brashear that he read Voltaire. Apparently he knew Cervantes and Goldsmith by this time, for he finds that Orion's letter in "its quiet style resembles Goldsmith's Citizen of the World, and Don Quixote," his "beau ideals of fine writing."[7] It is interesting and significant that he should find "beau ideals" of writing in two satirists. There is a faint Goldsmithian distrust of conventional, inconsistent conduct in a letter to

---

5. Biography, I, 154.

6. Ibid., I, 151.

7. Letters, I, 45.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Orion of that date, in which he describes his mother's trip down the river with his cousin and a friend, "Ma was delighted with her trip, but she was disgusted with the girls for allowing me to embrace and kiss them --and she was horrified at the Schottische as performed by Miss Castle and myself. She was perfectly willing for me to dance until 12 o'clock at the imminent peril of my going to sleep on the after watch--but then she would top off with a very inconsistent sermon on dancing in general."[8] Out of this increasing awareness of irrational concepts of conduct and morality eventually grew Mark Twain's scorn of petty traditional behavior patterns. Unfortunately he was frequently guilty of over-emphasizing his attitude and spending his energies, like Cervantes' gentle knight, jousting with moral windmills.

Samuel Clemens's five years on the Mississippi, then, mark a further widening and deepening of his mental and emotional perspective. Furthermore, life on the Mississippi afforded him education in terms of people rather than of principles as is suggested by his indifference to the major issues which were then leading the country to war. By February, 1861, Louisiana had joined the other seceding states in setting up a provisional government; yet his letter to Orion from New Orleans, dated February 6, 1861, did not mention secession talk, or any special excitement in the city, or the approaching inauguration of Lincoln. Instead, the letter contained a detailed report of the writer's visit to a clairvoyant, who had apparently foreseen the coming of everything but the civil struggle.[9] Two months later, Fort Sumter was fired upon and the

---

8. Ibid., I, 46-47.

9. Letters, I, 48-51.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

bitter conflict began.

Although the pilots had discounted the war talk before the cannonading of Sumter, they began to take sides once its echo loosed the avalanche. Since they had little knowledge of the problems involved, their differences were too new and shallow to prompt bitterness and hatred. Some, according to Clemens, changed their allegiance several times before joining the actual fighting. In the "Private History of a Campaign that Failed," published in 1865, he recalled the confusion in the minds of the pilots as they wrestled with their doubts:

> During the first months of the great trouble...it was hard for us to get our bearings.... My pilot mate was a New-Yorker. He was strong for the Union; so was I. But he would not listen to me with any patience; my loyalty was smirched, to his eye, because my father had owned slaves.... A month later the secession atmosphere had considerably thickened on the Lower Mississippi, and I became a rebel; so did he.... In the following summer he was piloting a Federal gunboat and shouting for the Union again, and I was in the Confederate army. 10

The facetiousness found in the general history of the so-called campaign is no doubt present in the description just quoted. It is apparent, however, that Clemens and his fellow pilots were of that mass which swung, without conviction or determination, between the two factions. Clemens, being of the less radical element, decided to go home and reflect on the matter.[11] His trip up the river from New Orleans to St. Louis on the Uncle Sam was the last he took until after the war. He did not tarry in St. Louis. Despite the pressing demand for pilots, he hurried back to Hannibal. There he joined a company of playful youths who proposed to

---

10. American Claimant and other Stories, pp.255-256.

11. Biography, I, 161.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

help Governor Jackson repel the Federal invader. Such companies were common in the border states during the early days of the war before every community split north and south. Clemens's military interest and activity were short-lived, however: a boil, a sprained ankle, and heavy rains combined to make soldiering distasteful, and a week's service marked the extent of his participation in the cause of the Confederacy. As soon as he had recovered sufficiently from the injury to his ankle to be able to travel, he went to Orion's home in Keokuk, Iowa. Orion was a Union abolitionist; hence it is conceivable that he easily converted his wavering brother to his point of view, although it is equally probable that he was too little interested to try. Both left almost immediately for the Nevada Territory, thereby obviating any need for other than tacit acceptance of the Union cause.

Certain virile chest-beaters like Edgar Lee Masters have called Clemens a coward and suggest that he went as Orion's assistant to the Nevada Territory in order to escape military service. "He wanted to travel, to make money," charges Masters, and then neglects, unfortunately, to prove that indifference to the war and its issues constituted cowardice.[12] Clemens's attitude toward the civil struggle, on the contrary, should qualify any reflections on his bravery. Ignorant, as were most of his associates, of the causes for the break and of the claims of both groups, he saw no reason, as he put it, "to get up into a glass perch and be shot at by either side."[13] Thrown out of a good profession, he recognized in

---

12. Mark Twain: a Portrait, New York, 1938, p.36.

13. Biography, I, 161.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Orion's appointment as Secretary to the Governor of the Territory of Nevada a convenient means of continuing his odyssey, seeing a portion of his country about which he had heard much, and perhaps striking it rich. Doubtless he believed that the quarrel between the States would be quickly settled and that he could return to his old place on the river after a vacation in the West.

The very fact that Clemens did not catch the mining fever immediately upon reaching Nevada indicates that he was apparently more interested in seeing the wonders and beauties of that new world than in garnering its wealth. His early letters home give the impression that he looked upon the trip as an outing. The first excursion he made from Carson City was to Lake Bigler, where he staked out a timber claim. But he and his companion "were too full of the enjoyment of camp-life to complete" a fence that should have been built around the property.[14] Furthermore, when Twain wrote of his trip to Carson in Roughing It, he implied that he had not planned to remain long in the Territory: "In two or three weeks I had grown wonderfully fascinated with the curious new country, and concluded to put off my return to 'the States' awhile."[15] This evidence does away with Masters' accusation. The only stigma, therefore, which may be fairly attached to Clemens's decision to go to Nevada should rest on his failure to sense and to understand the crisis the country faced. If conduct prompted by ignorance is equivalent to that motivated by fear, then Clemens was guilty of cowardice in going West at that crucial period. The point of real interest for this study is that at twenty-six, after

---

14. Letters, I, 56. 15. I, 155.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

eight years of wandering in the world of men and affairs, he should have been uninterested in the problem of slavery. The fact sustains and deepens the impression expressed heretofore that he was attracted by the more immediate and superficial aspects of what he saw and read in his ramblings around the country and on the river. His career as pilot gave him no insight into the broad, fundamental problems of social and political thought, although, like all of his experiences, it comprised a rough kind of education which was in his later years at once the source and inspiration for his views on similar occurrences and questions. When he headed for Carson City, Nevada, he opened for himself one more avenue of such development. His sojourn in the mining camps and newspaper offices of Nevada and California would expose him to a type of thinking which would leave an indelible stamp upon his mental processes.

The Carson City into which the Overland Stage carried Orion and Sam Clemens on August 14, 1861, was the capital of Nevada and the center for most of the mining activities of the section. "Gold and silver hunting and mine speculations were the industries--gambling, drinking and murder were the diversions."[16] To Sam, writing home to his mother, "it was 'the d--dest country under the sun'."[17] It held the fascination, nevertheless, of any new environment for a youth who had already lived in the East and on the Mississippi. It afforded a new setting for the same old spectacle of life, and the young spectator experienced the surge of renewed interest that for him accompanied any change of scene. On the river he had met every type of character; here he could watch them act

---

16. Biography, I, 176.

17. Letters, I, 54.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

out their destinies in quite different surroundings. Finding neither duties nor salary contingent upon his position as Assistant Secretary, Clemens "devoted himself mainly to the study of human nature as exhibited under frontier conditions."[18]

His innate craving for freedom and individualism found particular satisfaction in the limitless expression of these qualities in his new surroundings. He had loved piloting and the river because they had enabled him to be "the only unfettered and entirely independent human being that lived in the earth."[19] As he had journeyed westward, "the life, the gladness and the wild sense of freedom had made the blood dance in his veins."[20] Now he could throw himself into the turbulent current of swirling hopes, grandiose dreams, and repeated failures that was the miner's life. All about him men hacked frantically and doggedly at the stubborn earth, tearing her metallic treasures from their hiding places. The madness bred by lust of gold and silver drove men to battle with nature and each other. Only the "fit" survived. Everyone stood on his own feet, free to follow the dictates of his own conscience so long as he could physically maintain his right to do so. Clemens thrilled at the opportunity to live free of all artificial restraints. Some self-discipline had been necessary in one's life on the river; here the freedom of the individual was absolute.

As it has been noted above, Clemens did not succumb to the mining craze immediately, preferring instead to camp on Lake Bigler until a

---

18. Biography, I, 177.
19. Life on the Mississippi, p.118.
20. Roughing It, I, 51.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

fire destroyed his timber claim. The fire did not discourage him, though, and he wrote of a plan to go back to the Lake and build a fence around a new tract of land. But in his next letter, written October 25, 1861, although he referred to a timber claim, his real interest was obviously turning to the mining ground that he and Orion had acquired in an Esmeralda camp. The letter is permeated with the Colonel Sellers brand of optimism which would be characteristic of all Clemens's subsequent business enterprises. He was certain that Washoe (the name given the mining region on the eastern slope of the Sierra) was just the country for Cousin Jim Lampton, the original of the character of Colonel Sellers, to live in. He believed that with a $5,000 investment Cousin Jim could make $10,000 there in six months. He and Orion, as a matter of fact, had confidence enough in the country to think that if the war would only let them alone they could make Pamela's husband rich "without it ever costing hima cent of money or particle of trouble."[21]

From October until August, 1862, Clemens gave himself up wholeheartedly to the task of realizing his dreams of fabulous wealth. He expended more hard manual labor during that period than he had ever done before or would ever do again. He would have been, as he admits in Roughing It, "less than human" if he had not been captivated like the rest by the exciting quest for riches. Cart-loads of solid silver bricks, as large as pigs of lead, were arriving from the mills every day, and such sights gave substance to the wild talk he heard. "I succumbed," he wrote, "and grew as frenzied as the craziest."[22]

---

21. Letters, I, 59-62. 22. I, 184.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Leaving Orion to his affairs of state in Carson, Sam first made an unproductive prospecting trip to the exploited Humboldt region and then went to the Esmeralda Hills to look after his and Orion's interests. He had, he wrote his mother, "convinced Orion that he hasn't business talent enough to carry on a peanut stand, and he has solemnly promised me that he will meddle no more with mining."[23] He was not, however, blindly confident of the reliability of his own judgment, except in comparison to Orion's. One of the very interesting facets of his nature was his consciousness of his weaknesses and his inability to strengthen them. In the above letter, for instance, he warned Pamela to be wary of his reports:

> Pamela, don't you know that undemonstrated human calculations won't do to bet on? Don't you know that I have only talked, as yet, but proved nothing?.... Don't you know that people who always feel jolly...who have the organ of hope preposterously developed...are very apt to go to extremes, and exaggerate with 40-horse microscopic power? [24]

Then, for fear of appearing too uncertain, he added a quotation,

> In the bright lexicon of youth,
> There's no such word as Fail--

"and I'll prove it!"[25] The hopes, fears, and dedications of himself to his endeavors, expressed repeatedly in the letters written while he was a prospector, were not to pass with his interest in mining. They would become a characteristic manifestation of his approach to any undertaking, be it publishing, speculating, writing. The Sellers type of ebullient

---

23. Letters, I, 67.

24. Ibid., I, 65.

25. Loc. cit.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

optimism was part of his heritage, the product mainly of his speculative tendencies. To every project it gave a bewitching, rosy hue. It was at once the reason for his literary achievements and his financial failures. Out of it evolved his bitter disappointment in man, God, and the universe; for in a limited sense his life may be said to be a history of great expectations.

It was Clemens's inability to make any success of his mining ventures that eventually directed his talents back into their proper channel--writing. Not that he had ever ceased to write, even as a pilot; Horace Bixby, the man who taught him the river, remembered that "'Sam was always scribbling when not at the wheel.'"[26] Similarly, when snow covered the Nevada claims so that they could not be worked, he frequently withdrew from the group chatting in the cabin and wrote. Paine saw in this "the old literary impulse stirring again, the desire to set things down for their own sake, the natural hunger for print."[27] Clemens sent an occasional contribution to the Territorial Enterprise, signing it with the pen-name "Josh." Eventually he was offered a place on the staff of that paper. He was not over eager to take the job, because, as Paine pointed out, "It meant the surrender of all hope in the mines, the confession of another failure."[28] He was very much in need of something to do since his debts were greater than he had thought, and he was faced with the necessity of living from July to November on about one-hundred dollars.[29] But he wrote, "I have no fear of failure.... Do not tell anyone that I had any idea of

---

26. Biography, I, 149.
27. Ibid., I, 194.
28. Ibid., I, 205.
29. Letters, I, 82.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

piloting again at present.... This country suits me, and--it shall suit me, whether or no."[30] He accepted the Enterprise offer near the end of August, 1862, and his ten months' struggle for gold in its raw state was over. Thereafter words would be his primary source of income.

The Enterprise was an unusual journal. Joe Goodman, the aggressive and astute editor-in-chief, had in two years made it "the most remarkable paper on the frontier...the brainiest sheet on the coast."[31] It was rumored that it could make or break any man in the Territory, and every one knew Goodman would not hesitate to do either if he saw fit. The one thing required of an editor in Virginia City in the sixties was that he have convictions and the courage to back them. Goodman had both, and he expected every reporter to emulate him. His instructions to Clemens imply this:

> Never say we learn so and so..., or it is rumored, or we understand so and so; but go to headquarters and get the absolute facts; then speak out and say it is so and so. In the one case you are likely to be shot, and in the other you are pretty certain to be; but you will preserve the public confidence. [32]

The dictum was applicable, however--and the exception is important for its effect on Clemens--only when serious statements were made. Otherwise the writers for the paper were free to invent preposterous hoaxes and wage abusive personal attacks on rival newspapermen. Goodman, realizing that hardened miners wanted an escape literature, encouraged a spirit of

---

30. Ibid., I, 85.

31. George D. Lyman, Saga of the Comstock Lode, New York, 1934, p.205.

32. Biography, I, 206; Paine's paraphrase of the passage in Roughing It, II, 5.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

exaggeration in all but factual reporting. Men who faced death daily from cave-ins, explosions, and bullets wanted humor, not news; they wanted to laugh, not think. And the more absurd, ridiculous, and fantastic the source of their laughter, the better they liked it. Goodman accordingly, encouraged his reporters to write squibs, burlesques, fictions, which might gratify, if they did not inform, the Comstock readers.[33]

Clemens fell in readily with this type of journalism. He "had not been long with The Enterprise," Lyman says, "before he began to develop a vast indifference to news as news;" and Arthur McEwen adds that "the indifference to "news" was noble--none the less so because it was so blissfully unconscious. Editors Mark or Dan would dismiss a murder with a couple of inches and sit down and fill up a column with a fancy sketch."[34] Dan De Quille treated the statistical items because his companion would only give them "a lick and a promise." The features which Clemens could handle best at that time were the caricatures which were expected to supplement the news. It had been his ironical sketch of George Turner, chief justice of the Territorial Supreme Court, as Professor Personal Pronoun, and his mock Fourth of July oration that had first drawn the attention of the Enterprise staff. Such hoaxes as the Dutch Nick Massacre, whose fictitious, gory details completely obscured the satire, and The Petrified Man, whose hero thumbed his nose so subtly that inland papers and even the London Lancet were made the victims of their credulity, spread his name over the Pacific Coast.[35] Once Clemens understood the

---

33. Ibid., p.208.
34. Lyman, op. cit., p.207 and Biography, I, 208 note.
35. Cf. Sketches New and Old, pp.288-297, for Twain's account of these famous burlesques.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

style of writing the mining camps wanted, he never faltered. Murders and crimes of violence were routine, daily occurences. A casual postscript in a letter to his mother is illuminating:

> P.S. I have just heard five pistol shots down street--as such things are in my line, I will go and see about it.
>
> P.S. No.2--5 A.M.--The pistol did its work well--one man...shot two of my friends, (police officers) through the heart--both died within three minutes. 36

The readers, however, demanded more than records of such tragedies, and Clemens supplied the deficiency. Washoe taught him the value of extravagant narration, of seriously related, pseudo-learned tales. It is little wonder that he "let fancy get the upper hand of fact too often."[37]

The Comstock Lode and in particular The Enterprise, then, were important environmental influences in the development of Samuel Clemens the humorist. The one provided a congenial, eager audience for his brand of humor; the other, a means of distribution. From the point of view of the growth of his powers of thought and reasoning, however, the contribution of the Lode and the paper is a debatable and, in this writer's opinion, a negative one. How, for instance, could Clemens abide by Goodman's demand for dogmatically supported opinions, which were little more than snap judgments, and still formulate constructive habits of calm analysis, thorough investigation, and disciplined reason? How could a mind preoccupied with mirth-provoking sketches and mental El Dorados attain the balance, flexibility, and perceptivity essential to a social and political

---

36. Letters, I, 89.

37. Roughing It, II, 5.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

theorist? It is probably true that "it was Washoe that matured Sam Clemens...that brought into harmony the elements of his mind which before had fumbled for expression."[38] It is conceivable that "coming to The Enterprise was the making of Sam Clemens."[39] But only in a restricted sense; the Nevada miners and Joe Goodman's newspaper were vital factors in molding the humorist, but they also created mental attitudes and processes detrimental to one who aspired later in life to be a philosopher. It is at once logical and understandable that what Paine considered "the proper class-room for Mark Twain" afforded a type of training responsible in large measure for his naïve, chaotic, inconsistent thinking and his marked indifference to major problems and principles.[40]

The contention that Clemens's training in Western journalism emphasized the trivial and fanciful at the expense of the vital and rational is forcefully demonstrated in his continued indifference to such a political and social crisis as the Civil War had become. It will be remembered that it had been his unwillingness to fight for a cause about which he had no convictions that had sent him to Nevada with his brother, an abolitionist. There he had expected to await the end of the short fracas, returning to his home and possibly the river when the firing ceased. Like so many others, he had no conception of the bitterness and irreconcilable social and economic cleavage that would keep the armies clashing for four bloody years; such a lack of judgment can be explained and understood in

---

38. De Voto, op. cit., p.133.

39. Lyman, op. cit., p.206.

40. Biography, I, 208.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the light of the general confusion that existed. What cannot be explained or understood--except in terms of Clemens himself--was his continued unconcern when the war dragged on and the issues began to penetrate the West. Lincoln had sent Governor Nye to the Nevada Territory in a determined attempt to thwart Jefferson Davis's move to win that section of the South. As Secretary to the Governor, Orion must have known these things and commented on them. The younger brother's reaction, however, remained limited. In 1861 his concern was purely material; "If the war will let us alone we can make Mr. Moffett rich."[41] After 1862 the war continued for him only in the persons of those involved; and then his interest was relegated to the postscript of a letter: "You see [saw?] Bixby is on the flag-ship. He always was the best pilot on the Mississippi, and deserves his 'posish.' They have done a reckless thing, though, in putting Sam Bowen on the 'Swan'--for if a bomb-shell happens to come his way, he will infallibly jump overboard."[42]

By the time Clemens joined the staff of the Enterprise, Washoe was divided over the question of secession. The miner's reason for his allegiance to one side or the other was frequently superficial, but the support he gave it was aggressive, stubborn, and usually bloody. During the first year and a half of the War, the Unionists were a powerful minority centering in the personnel of the Virginia City Engine Company, No. 1. The rebels were not only better organized but also more militant having planned at one time to capture Fort Churchill and claim the

---

41. Letters, I, 60.

42. Ibid., I, 76.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Territory for the Confederacy.[43] The reverses to the Union forces, which Joe Goodman publicized with bi-weekly extras, served, however, to fan the spark of loyalty in those who supported the North, and volunteers were soon marching down Sun Mountain to the aid of their country.

All of this Clemens seemingly ignored. Busy with his mining ventures and then with his peculiarly limited reporting, he let the War fight itself out. The conflict meant to him little more than the rumors of battles won and lost, the auctioning of Reuel Gridley's famous sack of flour, and the attempt to proclaim Nevada a state.

Clemens's part in the effort to raise money for relief of the soldiers and sailors of both forces by means of Gridley's sack of flour is significant here as suggesting his quick response to humanitarian appeals from a nonpartisan organization, although he was comparatively uninterested in the reasons for the need. He became a hard-working member of the group who sponsored the auctions at which Gridley's sack was sold over and over to the bidders. Clemens and his fellows raised about $40,000 in currency, which was given to the National Sanitary Commission to be used in relief measures for both Northern and Southern soldiers. It was his interest in getting the pledges collected that led as we shall see, to his accusing a rival paper of nonpayment, which in turn brought on the duel that made it necessary for him to leave Virginia City.

His connection with the movement for statehood in the Territory is also of interest as his first experience with politics. With the encouraging words of Lincoln for a spur, the proponents of statehood went

---

43. Lyman, op. cit., p.171.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

into action under Bill Stewart, who had visions of being the first Senator from Nevada. Clemens was sent to report the proceedings of the Territorial Legislature, not because he knew anything about political procedure but because his reports would be interesting.[44] He rapidly assumed a place of importance by virtue of his witty articles and shrewd jibes at the politicians; he was eventually recognized as the most influential person after Stewart. "With his wit Sam could swing more votes than Bill could win with oratory."[45] He saw that a law was passed requiring every corporation to record its charter in full with Orion, a service which Clemens contended netted an average fee of one thousand dollars a month.[46] Stewart's political moves were exposed in burlesque reviews of his speeches, which credited the orator with ridiculous, twisted statements. To Stewart's pleas and threats Clemens answered: "I don't mean anything by that .... I wrote it because it was humorous.... My employers demand it, and I am helpless."[47] It did not mean anything to Clemens. He was the skeptical observer, pricking political bubbles, rather than the constructive, informed critic. At one time he would fight the proposed state constitution because he thought the undeveloped mines--the only taxable properties --could not carry the load of a state government; at another he would conceive a lengthy satirical sketch designed to ridicule a law restricting

---

44. Ibid., p.212.

45. Ibid., p.213.

46. Autobiography, II, 308.

47. Lyman, op. cit., p.266.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the number of notaries.[48]

His career as a political commentator reached an appropriate climax with his election to the Governorship of the Third House, or Play-House, as it was called by the playful members of the Constitutional Convention. With this event Mark Twain--he had taken the pseudonym on February 2, 1863,--was now on the verge of that fame which would gain in brilliance and intensity during the rest of his life. Lyman finds evidence in the minutes of the mythical legislature of Twain's "triple personality 'which so distressed his mentors and still intrigues his biographers. Here he is scathing satirist, delightful boy, and crude comedian, simultaneously or in inexplicable swift succession.'"[49] That he was conscious and proud of his importance is evident in a letter of the period to his mother: "I am prone to boast of having the widest reputation, as a local editor, of any man on the Pacific Coast.... Everybody knows me, and I fare like a prince wherever I go, be it on this side of the mountains or the other. And I am proud to say I am the most conceited ass in the Territory."[50] His contributions to the Enterprise were reprinted in San Francisco papers, thereby establishing his reputation as an original, humorous newspaperman on the Coast. These reprints are doubly important because they are the only evidence of the type of writing

---

48. Roughing It, II, 113-114. A sketch reprinted in the Golden Era, Feb. 28, 1864, is available in Ivan Benson's Mark Twain's Western Years, Stanford, 1938, pp.178-181.

49. Lyman, op. cit., pp.387-388. Note 1 for Chapter L.

50. Letters, I, 91-92.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

he did for Goodman's paper, no file of the Enterprise being extant today.

Occasionally in the San Francisco papers of 1863 there appear items which suggest that Twain was not wholly preoccupied with hoaxes and political burlesques. In his letter to the Morning Call on November 19, 1863, for instance, there was evidence that the humorous local of the Territorial Enterprise was concerned about crime conditions on the Comstock. He wrote ironically:

> We average about four murders in the first degree a month, in Virginia, but we never convict anybody. The murder of Abel, by his brother Cain, would rank as an eminently justifiable homicide up there in Storey county. When a man merely attempts to kill another, there, and fails in his object, our Police Judge handles him with pitiless severity. He has him instantly arrested, gives him some good advice, and requests him to leave the country. This has been found to have a very salutary effect. The criminal goes home and thinks the matter over profoundly, and concludes to stay with us. But he feels badly...for days and days together. 51

The fact that The Golden Era reprinted this letter of Twain's to the Call on November 22 attests to the reception his articles enjoyed on the Coast. He was evidently aroused for a short period, at least, by the homicides around Virginia for his dispatch to the Call on December 2 carried a death notice and the following comment: "A teamster was murdered and robbed on the public highway, between Carson and Virginia, today. Our sprightly and efficient officers are on the alert. They calculate to inquire into this thing next week. They are tired of these daily outrages in sight of town." 52 These satiric bits represent the earliest expressions of a type of social criticism which Clemens was to indulge in all his life. The

---

51. The Washoe Giant in San Francisco, ed. Franklin Walker, San Francisco, 1938, p.57.

52. Benson, op. cit., p.178.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

lawlessness of Washoe inspired the development of only a superficial social consciousness, which voiced itself later in protests against the American jury system and law enforcement in general. Thus, while Clemens wrote indifferently about the gunmen of Sun Mountain, he unconsciously stored up resentment against the injustice of various social systems; but, as will be seen in the discussion of his criticisms, his attacks were narrow, personal, and naive, missing what was of the most vital concern, the cause of that injustice.

It was his penchant for personal abuse which eventually brought about his departure from Virginia City. During Goodman's absence from the editorial chair of the Enterprise, Twain took it upon himself to accuse the members of his rival paper, the Union, of failing to pay their pledges to the Sanitary Fund. The upshot of the controversy was the arrangement of a duel between Twain and Laird, the rival editor. Whether or not the pair ever met on the field of honor is debatable, students now being prone to doubt the versions of Twain, Steve Gillis, and numerous other purported witnesses.[53] At any event, Twain and Gillis left Virginia City at the end of May, 1864, and went to San Francisco in order to dodge a warrant for the former's arrest under the new law which made it a felony even to send or to accept a challenge to a duel.

His cronies and the readers of the Enterprise were probably sorry to see the wild humorist go, but the rival newspapermen shed no tears. The Union was silent, probably in order to protect Laird. The Gold Hill News, however, drew a journalistic moral which serves to

---

53. De Voto, op. cit., pp.159-160 and Benson, op. cit., pp.106-112.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

characterize Twain as a reporter:

> Is it necessary to say that we allude to the lamented Twain? That loved and lost journalist, tortured by a demand for "news" when it was not, did manufacture some that he fondly believed would satisfy the public craving. He filled the pine forest at Dutch Nick's with the ghastly corpses of the Hopkins family.... That "news" satisfied the greedy mind of the public, and it stared itself out of countenance in frozen horror for a few brief hours, and was content. But mark the sequel: the indignation of the non-manufacturer and the diabolical damnation of the deceived. The fate of that unhappy man is ever before us, and warns us to avoid the rock upon which he split whenever we asked "What's the news?" 54

The editors were evidently still piqued over the "Bloody Massacre" hoax.

Thus, under somewhat dramatic circumstances, Mark Twain closed another vital period of education. He had spent almost three varied, impressionable years in the silver centers of the West. His experiences there made a lasting impression upon the man and the writer. At thirty years of age he was at last established in the profession in which he would gain fame and fortune. Washoe had broadened his perspective, had revealed human nature in the raw to an extent unknown on the river. He had lived intimately with men who existed by the grace of their own prowess, who were either ignorant of or indifferent to the values of human life. He knew from direct observation how human emotions looked when stripped of the camouflage of social standards and restraints. He thrilled to an elemental quality, which he came to think was fundamental to true democracy. He exulted in the sense of boundless freedom and individuality indigenous to the mining camps.

Beyond giving him the materials for development as a writer, this period witnessed his first real successes with the pen. De Voto finds that

---

54. Benson, op. cit., pp.112-113, quoting Gold Hill Daily News of June 8, 1864.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

"his Washoe work contains in embryo the fantasy, the burlesque, the satire, and the irony that will henceforth occupy him."[55] Here he not only took the penname but also the methods that were to become known the world over.

But if this environment, on the one hand, gave life--naive, sensuous, crass, humorous, energetic, on the other it deprived him of thought, destroying both the need and the opportunity for mental development of a serious, constructive kind. The peculiar requirements of Western journalism molded Twain's mental habits until he became almost wholly insensitive to the intrinsic values of important problems and occurrences. He readily acquired the necessary facility for making impulsive judgments and the dogmatism for supporting them. He soon found that fiction afforded a pleasant escape from the dull and laborious task of searching out facts. The whoops of laughter that greeted his burlesques, hoaxes, quips were music to his ears, and he fed his readers what they apparently wanted. The satire that he claimed for his burlesques was so effectively hidden that everyone missed it, and he was forced to admit years later "how really hard it is to foist a moral or a truth upon an unsuspecting public through a burlesque without entirely and absurdly missing one's mark."[56] During this period he also fell under the magic of Artemus Ward's personality, and his determination to emulate Ward's success served to strengthen his tendency to write extravagant fancies.

Such an environment, then, was not one conducive to the

---

55. De Voto, op. cit., p.159.

56. Sketches New and Old, p.288.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

cultivation of strong, precise powers of judgment, rationality, reflection, or insight. From the point of view of students interested in Mark Twain as a social and political critic, the mining camps of Nevada in general and the journalism of Virginia City in particular exerted an important negative force in the evolution of his mind. They conspired to encourage in him an indifference to the analytical approach to problems, a tendency toward impulsive, emotional reasoning, and a narrow dogmatism, at the same time as they nurtured an interest in political and social matters. The product of this combination was, unfortunately, loose, inconsistent, shallow thinking on these questions. It is therefore impossible to agree wholly with Paine's opinion:

> How fortunate Mark Twain was in his schooling, to be kept away from institutional training, to be placed in one after another of those universities of life where the sole curriculum is the study of the native inclinations and activities of mankind! Sometimes, in after-years, he used to regret the lack of systematic training. Well for him--and for us--that he escaped that blight. 57

Is it not possible and probable that Twain's regret emanated from his realization that he was unprepared to cope with the philosophies and theories which intrigued him? No one would deny that his experiences constituted a rich background and education for the type of author he became. What seems evident, on the other hand, is that these experiences explain in a large degree his inadequacy as a social and political philosopher--or more accurately--critic.

From May, 1864, until December, 1866, San Francisco was the hub of Twain's activities. During these two and a half years the lines of his development as man and writer became more sharply drawn; the attitudes

---

57. Biography, I, 219.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and inclinations of the Nevada period deepened. Two years of living by his pen had given him a reputation and confidence. He began to speak out; his humor became more impregnated with social criticism. When the Morning Call--he had joined its staff upon coming to San Francisco--refused to print his articles criticizing the police and city officials he grew indifferent and finally severed his connection with that paper. Almost immediately he arranged with Joe Goodman to write a daily letter to the Enterprise, reporting as freely and caustically as he cared to do any matters of interest in San Francisco. This was the freedom which Twain cherished and required. He began to assail whatever irked him in the corrupt city.

When Paine came to write of these later contributions to the Enterprise he could only guess at what they contained, and he said: "Those who remember Mark Twain's Enterprise letters...declare them to have been the greatest series of daily philippics ever written."[58] Now that long and diligent research has uncovered reprints of them in various San Francisco papers of that day, it is apparent that Paine's comment is too strong. The severest attacks, which are directed at the police, are too similar to Twain's earlier pieces on Washoe murders to be considered important advances in satirical writing. The following paragraph on the San Francisco police, copied from the Enterprise by the Golden Era of January 21, 1866, illustrates the point rather conclusively:

> Ain't they virtuous? Don't they take good care of the city? Is not their constant vigilance and efficiency shown in the fact that roughs and rowdies here are awed into good conduct?--isn't

---

58. Ibid., I, 264.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> it shown in the fact that ladies even on the back street are safe from insult in the daytime, when they are under the protection of a regiment of soldiers?--isn't it shown in the fact that although many offenders of importance go unpunished, they they infallibly snaffle every Chinese chicken-thief that attempts to drive his trade, and are duly glorified by name in the paper for it?--isn't it shown in the fact that they are always on the look-out and keep out of the way and never get run over by wagons and things? And ain't they spry?--ain't they energetic?--ain't they frisky?--Don't they parade up and down the sidewalk at the rate of a block an hour and make everybody nervous and dizzy with their frightful velocity? 59

He went on to attack the negligent cruelty of an officer who broke a poor wretch's skull when he caught him stealing flour sacks and then let him die in his cell from lack of medical aid. Such brutality inevitably moved Twain and usually brought a written outburst; but in view of the public and private corruption in San Francisco, which was responsible for such evils in the police department, Twain's ironic commentaries stand as rather petty social criticism, capable of doing little more than angering the police. Martin G. Burke, then Chief of Police, became so incensed that he sued the Enterprise for libel, an action which only served to increase the paper's circulation and Twain's reputation. Goodman and Twain formed an effective combination, the former being perfectly willing to print anything the latter sent him, despite the frightened admonitions of his associates. But the police could prosecute their own case diligently, even if they were not interested in cleaning up San Francisco, where Twain wrote, "the air is full of lechery, and rumors of lechery." 60 He was forced to retreat to a cabin in the Tuolumne Hills when Burke instituted action against him as bondsman for his friend Steve Gillis, who

---

59. Walker, op. cit., p.97.

60. Biography, I, 264.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

had been arrested for fighting and had subsequently broken bail.

When he returned to San Francisco on February 25, 1865, after a two month's vacation in the hill country, Twain resumed his letters to the Enterprise without further interference from the officials. Apparently he decided to concentrate his fire on abuses for which the administration was not directly responsible. He became a sort of general censor, Paine says, earning for himself the title of "Moralist of the Main."[61] That he was now accepted first as a moralist and second as a humorist is conclusively demonstrated by Charles H. Webbs's advertisement for The Jumping Frog, Twain's first published volume. Over the pseudonym John Paul, which Webb used, the publisher said:

> "Mark Twain" is too well known to the public to require a formal introduction at my hands. By his story of the Frog he scaled the heights of popularity at a single jump and won for himself the sobriquet of The Wild Humorist of the Pacific Slope. He is also known to fame as The Moralist of the Main; and it is not unlikely that as such he will go down to posterity. It is in his secondary character, as humorist, however, rather than in the primal one of moralist, that I aim to present him in the present volume.... It was necessary to snatch threads of humor wherever they could be found--very often detaching them from serious articles and moral essays. [62]

One need only read in the volume, Twain's answer to a correspondent who signed himself "Moral Statistician" to recognize that his reputation was founded on the vein of superficial reflection and moralizing already uncovered in the Enterprise articles. The retort, which Paine found "fairly alive with human wisdom and righteous wrath," denounced the hateful people who "are always ciphering out how much a man's health is injured, and how much his intellect is impaired, and how many pitiful dollars and

---

61. Ibid., I, 274. 62. Ibid., II, 1605.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

cents he wastes in the course of ninety-two years' indulgence in the fatal practice of smoking." The author reminded them that money could not save their infinitesimal souls, that since they were enemies to comfort and enjoyment they had no use for accumulating cash or years of life, and that they should "go off somewhere and die, and not be always trying to seduce people into becoming as 'ornery' and unlovable as themselves."[63]

His crusading also produced essays on spiritualism, which he considered a wildcat religion, as compared with Presbyterianism; on the clergy for its interest in business; and on numerous moral precepts, which he ridiculed as trite and illogical.[64] These articles served to balance his humorous extravaganzas and to give his writing an occasional semi-serious note that placed him at the head of what he characterized as "my breed of scribblers in this part of the country."[65] The recognition did not, however, bring him adequate benefits in the way of money or interesting work; therefore he made an agreement with the Sacramento Union, by which it was to send him as its special correspondent to the Sandwich Islands. The commission came at an opportune time, for it required him to do serious reporting and to direct his attention to matters of importance, such as the government of the Islands, the function of the Missionaries, and the activities of foreign nations. What he said concerning these problems will be discussed in connection with his social and political theories in general. They are mentioned here, with the San Francisco items, as

---

63. Ibid., I, 319 and Sketches New and Old, p.69.

64. Walker, op. cit., pp.120-137; Sketches of the Sixties, ed. John Howell, San Francisco, 1927, pp.166-177. Sketches New and Old, pp.44-55.

65. Letters, I, 102.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

illustrations of his serious criticism at the age of thirty. It will be found that many of the interests and attitudes revealed in the writings of this early period persisted in the mature man of letters, and that he continued to express his opinions for the most part in the manner which prompted the Westerners to consider him a moralist. Naturally the range of his criticism broadened with the extension of his environment in subsequent years, but his sense of the relative importance of social and political problems was not increased; his critical powers were still frequently expended on trivial or long forgotten abuses. Twain became a modern Don Quixote, so far as his serious critiques were concerned, and dissipated his energy jousting with straw knights. Occasionally his satire was forceful and to the point, as when he denounced blind patriotism and the American system of selecting juries; but even then his views were too obvious and shallow to be considered vital forces for reform. They represented in most instances what the average man knew already and did nothing about. The difference was that Twain wrote about these apparent evils in a humorous way. There is a tremendous power in laughter, but Twain could not imbue his humor with that quality which would show convincingly that he hated the things he ridiculed. His inability to do so is largely attributable to the nature of his development in the West.

When Twain left San Francisco on December 15, 1866, he ended a period of education which had figured markedly in his growth as man and writer. Paine pointed out that those eventful five and a half years "had made him over completely, at least so far as ambitions and equipment were concerned."[66]

---

66. Biography, I, 304.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The printer and pilot added three professions--mining, journalism, lecturing--and a new name to his repertoire. He had decided that he could make a living and see the world by writing. Harper's Magazine had encouraged this conclusion by accepting his article on the burning of the Hornet at sea; he intended to write a book about his experiences in the Sandwich Islands; and he had contracted with the Alta California to publish travel letters describing the trip to the Mediterranean upon which he was embarking. "Washoe and California had finished what the mid-western frontier and the Mississippi had begun.... The rest is only development."[67] Mark Twain had settled upon the career for which his extensive and varied life admirably fitted him.[68] By his thirtieth birthday he had lived Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn, the Gilded Age, Life on the Mississippi, and most of Roughing It; and he was ready to write these books.[69] He had also been hailed as a social critic and a moral satirist, but he was not prepared to write important, constructive social and political criticism. Living amid those surroundings which demanded a life of activity rather than of contemplation during his impressionable years, he had had neither the temperament nor the inclination to cultivate the qualities necessary to the social philosopher. His habits of thought and many of his more fundamental ideas had been set before he left San Francisco, and when he settled in New England they were strengthened rather than altered by his new environment.

---

67. De Voto, op. cit., p.166.

68. Letters, II, 541-543 for Twain's listing of his qualifications.

69. Letters from the Sandwich Islands, ed. G. Ezra Dane, Stanford, 1938, p.v.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The "Innocent" versus the "Genteel Tradition"

Mark Twain was thirty-two years old when he returned to New York from his Mediterranean cruise. His travel letters had already won for him considerable reputation in the East, and several New York newspapers immediately solicited contributions from him. The lecture circuits also sought his services; he wrote his family that he had "18 invitations to lecture, at $100 each, in various parts of the Union," which he declined because he was "for business now."[1] The "business" was a position as secretary to Bill Stewart, then Senator from Nevada. He had taken the place because it promised to give him a steady income without hampering his newspaper correspondence and because through it he had hope of getting a government appointment for Orion. There were no openings for Orion, but when Twain resigned his secretaryship after a few weeks of service, he was offered a consulship and the San Francisco postmastership, the latter a position much coveted since it was "the heaviest concentration of political power on the coast."[2] His low opinion of politicians and their governments, however, had been strengthened rather than changed by his stay in Washington, which he considered "the place to get a poor opinion of everybody in," and he wrote Orion that "Government pap must be nauseating food for a man--a man whom God has enabled to saw wood and be independent. It really seemed to me a falling from Grace, the idea of going back to San Francisco nothing better than a mere postmaster, albeit the public would have thought I came with gilded honors, and in great glory."[3]

---

1. Biography, I, 346. 2. Letters, I, 148. 3. Ibid., I, 150.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

His attitude toward these appointments is made doubly interesting by his despondency over his literary prospects at this time. The letter to Orion had been written about a month after Twain had signed a contract for a Quaker City book at a percentage "a fifth more than they [the American Publishing Co.] have ever paid any author, except Greeley."[4] During that interval, however, he had learned that the Alta-Californian, for whom the letters which were to make the book had been written, had copyrighted them, intending to issue their own book; consequently he was ready to bet that his volume would never see the light.[5] The uncertainty depressed him, and he poured out his dissatisfaction with his life to his brother: "We chase phantoms half the days of our lives. It is well if we learn wisdom even then, and save the other half. I am in for it. I must go on chasing them--until I marry--then I am done with literature and all other bosh,--that is, literature wherewith to please the general public. I shall write to please myself, then."[6] His subsequent career revealed that the statement was prophetic. He chased phantoms--literary and economic--the rest of his life and continued to write such passages in moments of chagrin and despair.

His immediate difficulties were resolved when he persuaded the Alta owners that the book rights to the letters remained with him. The Innocents Abroad was published July 20, 1869, and it was an immediate

---

4. Ibid., I, 145. As printed in the Biography, the phrase reads: "My percentage is to be a fourth more..." (I, 358).

5. Biography, I, 359.

6. Letters, I, 150.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

success.[7] Even then, Paine says, "Mark Twain held himself to be, not a literary man, but a journalist."[8] In negotiating with the publishers of The Innocents Abroad he had been primarily interested in the amount of money he might possibly make out of it, and he had explained that he had rejected other propositions for books because he had "doubted the propriety of interfering with good newspaper engagments."[9] He still thought himself a Western newspaper humorist, and "his ambition lay in the direction of retirement in some prosperous newspaper enterprise."[10]

The realization of that ambition became imperative when Olivia Langdon accepted Samuel Clemens's proposal of marriage. She was the daughter of a wealthy coal-dealer and mine-owner of Elmira, New York. Her brother, Charles Langdon, had been one of the travelers on the Quaker City, and it had been in his stateroom that Twain had seen a miniature of Livy. Through Charles the intrepid Westerner had met the original of the portrait, and had inaugurated a courtship that culminated in an engagement on February 4, 1869.

The Langdons, with the probable exception of Livy, had not been enthusiastic over the prospect of having Twain for a son-in-law, but when she decided to marry him they became reconciled immediately. Jervis

---

7. Biography, I, 381. Paine reported that it sold up to 67,000 volumes by the end of the first year following publication (Ibid., I, 426).

8. Letters, I, 162. He had written his mother and sister upon signing the contract, that he had made up his mind that he "wasn't going to touch a book unless there was money in it, and a good deal of it"(Ibid., I, 145.).

9. Ibid., I, 141.

10. Biography, I, 385.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Langdon's token of acceptance was particularly generous and opportune. He insisted on advancing the money required to buy a third interest in the Buffalo Express. Twain had hoped to manage the transaction himself. Three weeks after his engagement had been announced, he had written his family declaring his independence in words reminiscent of earlier assertions:

> I am particularly anxious to place myself in a position where I can carry on my married life in good shape on my own hook, because I have paddled my own canoe so long that I could not be satisfied now to let anybody help me--and my proposed father-in-law is naturally so liberal that it would be just like him to want to give us a start in life. But I don't want it that way.... I can run this institution without any outside assistance, and I shall have a wife who will stand by me like a soldier...and never complain. 11

Even before Langdon's offer Twain had planned to raise enough money to enable him to get an independent start by lecturing. He had urged "Petroleum V. Nasby" (David Ross Locke) to join him in a tour of the West, on which Nasby would give his famous denunciation of slavery, "Cussed be Canaan." This scheme was abandoned when Nasby objected that the slavery lecture was too old:

> You know that lemon, our African brother, juicy as he was in his day, has been squeezed dry. Why howl about his wrongs after said wrongs have been redressed?.... You see, friend Twain, the Fifteenth Amendment busted "Cussed Be Canaan." I howled feelingly on the subject while it was a living issue;...but now that we have won our fight, why dance frantically on the dead corpse of our enemy? 12

Nasby's reply is quoted here because it phrases one of the conspicuous characteristics of Twain as a social and political critic: his failure to distinguish between dead and living issues. It is significant for an understanding of his individual point of view toward social happenings that

---

11. Letters, I, 156-157. 12. Biography, I, 385-386.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

four years after the negroes had been freed by a civil war which he had practically ignored, and just prior to his assuming the editorship of a newspaper, he should urge a lecturer to harangue the people on the wrongs done the blackman. At thirty-five Twain still had the sense of social values found in the Western journalist of an earlier period.

With the $25,000 advanced by his father-in-law Twain bought a third interest in the Buffalo Express on August 14, 1869, and assumed his editorial duties. He began characteristically by stating his platform:

> I only want to assure parties having a friendly interest in the prosperity of the journal that I am not going to hurt the paper deliberately and intentionally at any time. I am not going to introduce any startling reforms, nor in any way attempt to make trouble.... I shall not make use of slang and vulgarity...and shall never use profanity except when discussing house rent and taxes. 13

Van Wyck Brooks, with singular indifference to the facetiousness of the writer, sees in this promise evidence of an innocent surrender of the creative will.[14] This opinion is obviously refuted by the tone of the statement itself and by the testimony of Twain's co-worker, J. N. Larned, who told Paine that "what one saw of him was always the actual Mark Twain, acting out of his own nature, simply, frankly, without pretense, and almost without reserve."[15]

Twain's contributions as literary editor of the Express were in much the same vein as his earlier San Francisco pieces. He avoided political comment, however, because Larned handled the political policy of

---

13. Ibid., I, 387.

14. Op. Cit., p.152.

15. Biography, I, 399.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the paper and because, as he once remarked editorially, "I do not know much about politics, and am not sitting up nights to learn."[16] He was still the champion of the oppressed, however, and his editorials were frequently "savage assaults upon some human abuse, or fierce espousals of the weak."[17] Such a one was his denunciation of some farmers who had punished a couple whom they considered undesirables. Twain published a full list of their names and labeled them "very bastards of the devil."[18]

He did not limit his critical attacks to the columns of his own paper. He had accepted a proposal to conduct a humorous department for the Galaxy, a New York magazine, but he had warned his readers that his "Memoranda" would not be wholly humorous: "I would not conduct an exclusively and professedly humorous department for any one," he wrote. "I would always prefer to have the privilege of printing a serious and sensible remark...without the reader's feeling obliged to consider himself outraged."[19] The sketches in the first number of the "Memoranda" justified his threat. "About Smells" blasted, as only Twain could, the Rev. T. DeWitt Talmadge, who had publicly argued against workingmen attending church because the odors they brought with them offended the good Christian brethren. A second article depicted the cruel treatment of the Chinese immigrants, as Twain had witnessed it in San Francisco. "The

---

16. Ibid., I, 399.

17. Ibid., I, 400. For reprints of these editorials cf. Merle Johnson, A Bibliography of the Works of Mark Twain, rev. ed., New York, 1935, pp.164-186.

18. Biography, I, 401.

19. "Introductory to 'Memoranda,'" Curious Republic of Gondour, p.23.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Facts in the Case of the Great Beef Trust" satirized government red-tape, a condition the author had probably observed while in Washington. The rest were burlesques and anecdotes of a lighter nature, among them his version of the typical Sunday-School story, a favorite subject for ridicule with him. The similarity of this material to that which Twain contributed to Western newspapers should be apparent. The "Moralist of the Main" had found ample provocations for the use of his pen in his new environment. He would never lack for subject matter, but he would continue to exercise little judgment in his choice of abuses to attack and in the energy he devoted to phrasing his criticism. From now on Mark Twain's social interests broadened, but his perspective remained almost provincial.

He ended the Buffalo period in April, 1871, when he sold his share in the Express and moved to Hartford, Connecticut, in order to be near his many friends there. This change of residence marked his farewell to journalism and the beginning of his long sojourn in New England. Although he would continue to contribute miscellaneous articles to periodicals and newspapers for the rest of his days, he would, thereafter, be primarily concerned with writing books, publishing books, and financing inventions.

He had started writing Roughing It even before leaving Buffalo, and had also had a little volume published which contained a burlesque autobiography and a reprint of an Express item, "The Awful, Terrible Medieval Romance." This third book of Twain's is mentioned here because it contained, in addition to the sketches, a series of picture cartoons of the Erie Railroad Ring, presented in an adapted version of "The House That Jack Built." Jay Gould, James Fisk, Jr., and John T. Hoffman were

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

portrayed in "The House," which was the Erie headquarters, and the purpose of the burlesque was to illustrate the swindling methods of the Ring. It is interesting to conjecture what was in Twain's mind when he assembled that series, and what prompted him a year or two later "to realize the mistake of this book" and to destroy the plates.[20] He must have experienced a change of opinion in regard to the literary content of the book, or of the efficacy of combining literary and political burlesque; in The Gilded Age he elaborated the type of political satire embodied in the cartoons, a fact which would indicate that his attitude toward the men had not changed.

Once established in Hartford, Twain set about finishing Roughing It and uncovering other means of making money. He was in debt for a portion of his share in the Express, and he wanted to build a house in Hartford. It was inevitable that he should turn to the lecture platform, the most reliable source of immediate income and one to which he resorted frequently in later years. Repeatedly he would return, and each time, after he had earned enough money to pay his obligations of the moment, he would quit the platform, insisting it was his last appearance on the boards. He was to know this necessity oftener than one would have suspected of an author whose books proved so popular; but, then, Twain was never satisfied to be just an author. He aspired to be a publisher and a promoter too, and his aspirations cost him his peace of mind and his leisure.

Beginning with his settlement in Hartford and continuing to his

---

20. Biography, I, 433.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

death at Stormfield, the story of Twain's life becomes a succession of variations on certain major themes, the mood depending upon the fortunes of the moment. Financial difficulties culminated in emotional outbursts of a darkly pessimistic tone, only to be followed by periods of tranquility marked by an optimistic note. Neither can be called wholly representative of Twain; he was a puzzling composite of both; his work reflected the influence of both. Expanded and developed, these two dominant moods offer a logical starting point for a consideration of the contradictions which were characteristic of his business ventures, his associations, even his philosophy. For the biographical details which have been carefully sketched up to this point in order to provide an adequate background for interpreting Twain, we may now substitute the briefest summary of the contrasts upon which rest the various explanations of his career in the East.

The remainder of Twain's life contains a succession of financial and emotional upheavals interspersed with periods of security and tranquility. He wrote at least two books which are still known all over the world, as well as some which it is strange to think were the work of the same man. He permitted his wife, friends, and publishers to censor his writings; but he denounced others for a perverted sense of loyalty which stifled the expression of sincere opinions. He had the business acumen to realize the market value of General Grant's Memoirs and to make a down payment for more than the Century Company had been willing to advance for the complete work;[21] on the other hand, he had the stupidity to wreck his

---

21. Ibid., I, 801. He was proud to boast that the first check of two

(cont'd p.82)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

publishing house and deplete his personal fortune by spending nearly $190,000 in trying to build an automatic type-setter. Each year saw him either inventing gadgets or financing those of other inventors. His friendships were as varied as his business ventures: his most intimate associates were a minister, a "parlor socialist," and a Standard Oil baron. The contrasts, furthermore, carry over into his philosophy: he never tired of damning "the damned human race"; yet he was always the crusading champion of the unfortunate and the oppressed. He boasted of the nineteenth century's progress in terms of machines, but he attacked the age for making money its ideal. Finally, he died the most optimistic pessimist of his generation.

These paradoxes, which best summarize the Mark Twain that the East knew, are important, for it is concerning them and their meaning that the critics have divided. The division has been, generally speaking, in accord with one of the two points of view already sketched in the Introduction. The first is that of Van Wyck Brooks and his supporters, whose approach has been psychological. The second is that of a heterogeneous group who may be thought of as numbering all who differ with the psychological interpretation. The nature of the problem has made a neutral opinion impossible. Before forming a conclusion, however, it is necessary that related spheres of difference among the critics be examined in detail.

The part that Olivia Langdon and her family had in the

---

21. (cont'd) hundred thousand dollars was the largest single royalty check in history, and that between four hundred and twenty and four hundred and fifty thousand dollars were paid to Mrs. Grant (Ibid., I, 816).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

development of Twain is a question about which argument has raged hot and long. Brooks, of course, began it by charging that "marriage had been, for Mark Twain's artistic conscience, like the final whiff of chloroform sealing a slumber that many a previous whiff had already induced."[22] "For Mark Twain had not married an awakened soul; he had married a young girl without experience, with little imagination, who had never questioned anything, who had never been conscious indeed of any horizon apart from that of her parents, her relatives, her friends."[23] And of that Elmira horizon, Brooks had this to say:

> Those "up-State" towns had a civilization all their own: without the traditions of moral freedom and intellectual culture which New England has never quite lost, they had been so salted down with the spoils of a conservative industrial life that they had attained, by the middle of the nineteenth century, a social stratification more rigid than that of New England itself. A provincial fresh-water aristocracy, resting on a basis of angular sectarianism, imposed its own type upon all the rest of society, forcing all to submit to it or to imitate it.... The whole tenor of this new life was to feminize Mark Twain, to make him feel that no loyalties are valid which conflict with domestic loyalties, that no activities are admirable which do not immediately conduce to domestic welfare. 24

Worse still, from Brooks's point of view, the narrow, provincial wife had been entrusted with the proof-reading of her husband's books. Twain, it seems, preferred to submit his work to the censorship of his wife and his friends because he had sense enough to realize that there was considerable difference between the literary tastes of Virginia City and those of the East. He remembered that Anson Burlingame had urged him, when they met

---

22. Op. cit., p.152.

23. Ibid., p.140.

24. Ibid., pp.139 and 146.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

in Honolulu in 1866, to seek refinement through association and that Mrs. A. W. Fairbanks had been a frank and constructive critic of the travel letters he wrote aboard the Quaker City; it was inevitable that he should turn to his wife and literary friends for the surveillance he felt his writing needed.

But those who contend that Mark Twain was a thwarted artist point to this dependence upon critics whose judgments were nurtured in "up-State" towns and the Genteel Tradition as fatal. Unfortunately for their contention, they made the mistake of generalizing their characterization of the towns, of the tradition, and of the censorship. They ignored important exceptions to their ideas of the influences in Twain's life and frequently drew conclusions from a minimum of fact.

Max Eastman, for example, proves that Brooks's concept of Elmira, the Langdons, and Twain's relationship with both, is not derived from the actual facts. Eastman moved to that city in 1894, when his mother was called to be the associate pastor to the renowned Thomas K. Beecher in the Park Church. Jervis Langdon, his wife, and a little group of abolitionists had formed this church by splitting off from the Presbyterians in 1846 on the slavery issue, "an act which cost them social ostracism and contempt."[25] Jervis Langdon had been the type of man implied in the letter of Twain's quoted above rather than in Brooks's portrait of the coal-tycoon. He was not only fantastically generous, but he was an independent and aggressive thinker. When Beecher was expelled from the Ministerial Union for conducting his services in the local Opera

---

25. "Mark Twain's Elmira," Harper's Magazine, CLXXVI (May, 1938), 622.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

House, Langdon headed a movement to buy shares in the Opera House in order to keep it for Beecher. "'My purse is open to you,' he had said, 'You can do more good with it than I can.'"[26] He was obviously not the man to shanghai Mark Twain into the business man's paradise.[27] Nor was the force of Langdon's example wasted upon Twain. Inspired by Beecher's personality, Langdon's conduct, and his own hatred of religious bigotry, Twain wrote a mock defense of the irate Union Ministers which appeared in the Elmira Advertiser over the signature "S'cat." "Happy, happy world," one passage read, "that knows at last that these obscure innocents are no longer responsible for the blemishless teachings, the power, the pathos, the logic, and the other and manifold intellectual pyrotechnics that seduce, but to damn, the Opera House assemblages every Sunday night."[28]

Several years afterward, when Beecher started his campaign to raise $65,000 with which to build a model church--incidentally the Langdon's doubled the sum pledged--, Twain wrote an article about Beecher's unique plans. He was deeply impressed by the provisions for rooms to be used for social gatherings, children's parties, and family reunions. "You will notice," he wrote, "in every feature of this new church one predominant idea and purpose always discernible--the banding together of the congregation as a family, and the making of the church a home. You see it in the play-room, the library, the parlours, the baths, the

---

26. Ibid., p.624.

27. Brooks, op. cit., p.143.

28. Biography, II, 1622.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

infirmary.... It is the great central, ruling idea."[29] The description represented Twain's nearest approach to a positive statement of what he considered to be an ideal church. Twain's father and uncle as free-thinkers had laid the foundations upon which Beecher helped his young friend erect a religion designed to help mankind to a freer, happier life. "The central figure in that Elmira," Eastman thinks, "the dominant and molding intellectual and spiritual force, not only to Olivia Langdon, but...to Mark Twain himself, was this...eloquent and great Beecher."[30] No "angular sectarianism" was possible to the followers of that champion of non-sectarianism:

> The roots of his [Twain's] wisdom go back just as surely to Thomas K. Beecher's complete and singularly majestic revolt against the whole New England scheme of being...as they do to Western mining camps and Mississippi steamboats. His contact with that was his first contact, after the war which he so lightly dipped into and backed out of, with a great iconoclasm, a living and courageous moral and political ideal. 31

The fact that his wisdom was not as vital as some would have had it is attributable to the nature of the man rather than to his environment.

This point of view, moreover, has been ignored by the psychographers in their denunciation of Olivia Clemens as a seriously restrictive influence in the life of her husband. From the discussion of Beecher, it should be apparent that Olivia's environment "was the least provincial...to be found in all American Churchdom."[32] Not only was Thomas

---

29. "A New Beecher Church," Curious Dream and other Sketches, London, 1872, pp.33-34.

30. Harper's Magazine, CLXXVI (May, 1938), 622.

31. Ibid., p.630.

32. Ibid., p.625.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Beecher her pastor, but Mrs. Beecher, "quite as headstrong as her husband in smashing through forms and conventions," was her Sunday School teacher.[33] In view of this evidence one can believe with Eastman that "if she suspected that Mark Twain had unorthodox views about religion, that could only have helped him to fit into the environment in which she had been born and reared."[34] The inference does not, of course, explain away her suppression of his fulminations against God and man in The Mysterious Stranger, What Is Man?, and numerous unfinished sketches, but it does suggest that the explanation lies elsewhere than in the Calvinistic spell imposed upon him first by his mother and then re-established over him by his wife, as Brooks contends.[35] It is conceivable that she objected to his publication of his most unorthodox, pessimistic tracts because she dreaded the emotional effect of their nihilistic views upon the readers as well as on the author. Clara Clemens gives a plausible reason for her mother's insistance that Twain not publish What Is Man?: "She thought it would have a harmful influence on many people, and according to her understanding of human beings the article was not true, anyway."[36] The theory is supported by the evidence that Mrs. Clemens was not opposed to all satire. She did not censor, for example, the political criticism running throughout The Gilded Age and A Connecticut Yankee; she consented to the publication of the articles criticising the

---

33. Ibid., p.626.

34. Ibid., p.627.

35. Op. cit., p.147.

36. My Father Mark Twain, New York, 1931, p.208.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

missionaries, the imperialistic moves of the United States, and the leader of the Christian Science Church. Although she realized that the opinions her husband expressed on such topics would provoke bitter retorts, she did not falter on her own account but only on his. Clara testifies that "cutting, abusive letters and newspaper attacks flooded our home... and it was pathetic to see the effect they had on Mother. She was sure that they must cause her husband pain, however valiantly he mightly [sic] conceal it, and this was hard for her to endure."[37] Olivia Clemens knew better than any one else the nature of Mark Twain, and it was her ever-active desire to protedt him, rather than her provincial Calvinistic scruples which led her to exercise her power as censor. The efforts were misguided and over cautious perhaps, but that they were disastrous is not substantiated by the content of the repressed material, some of which was published after her death.[38]

The same motives, furthermore, were responsible for her verbal censorship of Twain's writing. Here again it was a desire to "preserve his best," as Paine says, and not a wish to destroy his personality and to make him over which prompted her to delete profanity, vulgarity, and extreme burlesque.[39] She, like Howells and Gilder, understood the demand for refinement in literature which was characteristic of the period, and she realized that if her husband's writing was to have an unprejudiced

---

37. Ibid., p.220.

38. Paine described portions of this material in the Biography, I, 561-562. De Voto will doubtless publish more of it in his forthcoming volumes.

39. Biography, I, 410.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

reception, it must be kept free of some of the expressions and mannerisms which his Western readers had permitted, even demanded. Her attitude appears more realistic and far-sighted when it is recalled that Huckleberry Finn was thrown out of the public library of Concord, Massachusetts, in 1885, and that of Denver, Colorado, in 1900, because Huck was a liar and used profanity; and that both Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer were ordered to be removed from the Children's Department of the Brooklyn Public Library in 1905, because they might have an unwholesome effect upon children.[40]

No one appreciated his need of supervision more than did Mark Twain. Once Mrs. Fairbanks had made him realize that indelicate, coarse expressions and situations hurt the general tone and effect of a passage while adding nothing to it, he willingly sought proof-readers. Livy had started the task on the Innocents Abroad during their engagement, and she continued to exercise her power until her death. No doubt she was largely responsible for the absence from the Innocents of material similar to that found in the Sandwich Island letters, where, for instance there is a description of seasick voyagers and the questionable aid offered them by a heartless observer:

> I found twenty-two passengers leaning over the bulwarks vomiting and remarking, "Oh, my God!" and then vomiting again. Brown was there, ever kind and thoughtful, passing from one to another saying, "That's all right--that's all right, you know--it'll clean you out like a jug, and then you won't feel so ornery and smell so ridiculous." [41]

---

40. Autobiography, II, 333-337.

41. Sacramento Union, April 16, 1866, quoted in Ivon Benson, Mark Twain's Western Years, Stanford, 1938, p.141.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Such bits had to be excluded from the books Twain wrote for a nation-wide reading public if he was to be evaluated justly; consequently he was as anxious to have them expunged as were his censors. Clara heard him confess to her aunt that

> ...whenever I have failed to follow the advice of Livy to change this or that sentence or eliminate a page, I have always come to regret it, because in the end my better taste in thoughts and their expression rises up and says: "...she is right." And never once can I remember wishing I had left something as I had originally written it after it had received the censure of her unfailing vision. 42

It should not go unnoticed that in the tribute there is evidence that his acceptance of his wife's judgment was neither absolute nor unquestioned. His questions, however, were not the protests of a thwarted artist, as Brooks would have it. Twain admitted that most of them were motivated by a spirit of fun. "I often interlarded remarks of a studied and felicitously atrocious character purposely to achieve the children's delight.... I often joined my supplications to the children's for mercy.... Now and then we gained the victory.... Then I privately struck the passage out myself." 43

Paine prints a sample of the give and take of this now notorious censorship. Once more the lack of a sense of humor has betrayed some critics into discovering evidence of ominous and terrible frustration and revolution in the playful duel between author and wife:

> Page 1002. I don't like the "shady-principled cat that has a family in every post."
> Then I'll modify him just a little.

---

42. Clara Clemens, op. cit., p.68.

43. Autobiography, II, 90.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Page 1020. 9th line from the top. I think some other word would be better than "stench." You have used that pretty often.
> But can't I get it in anywhere? You've knocked it out every-time....And yet "stench" is a noble, good word.
> Page 1038. I hate to have your father pictured as lashing a slave boy.
> It's out, and my father is whitewashed.
> Page 1050. 2nd line from the bottom. Change breech-clout. It's a word that you love and I abominate. I would take that and "offal" out of the language.
> You are steadily weakening the English tongue, Livy. 44

"We can see from this," Brooks indignantly charges, "that to Mrs. Clemens virility was just as offensive as profanity.... We can see also...that she regarded his natural liking for bold and masculine language...merely as a literary equivalent of bad manners, as something that endangered their common prestige in the eyes of conventional opinion."[45] All of this is true; it is the conclusion drawn from these facts, however, which inclines one to attribute a greater commonsense to Mrs. Clemens than to Brooks. To infer that deletions such as those included here stunted the growth of the artist and made him a "candidate for gentility" is to pose an absurd definition of literary art. Neither Mark Twain nor his books suffered enough from Olivia Clemens's guardianship to justify the controversy over it. And the attempts of a group of critics to prove otherwise deserve the metaphor Twain applied to the ministers who attacked Beecher: "After all their labor-pains, their...mountain had brought forth only a mouse--and a still-born one at that."[46] Twain had a coarse streak, which was the natural product of his days on the river and in

---

44. Biography, II, 1040.

45. Op. cit., p.157.

46. Biography, II, 1622.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the mining camps; to have permitted it to jeopardize the reception of the books would have been a stupid sacrifice to verbal vigor, His words on the subject indicate, furthermore, that he fully appreciated the need for careful supervision in order to avoid that sacrifice: "I don't always know just where to draw the line in matters of taste. Mrs. Clemens has kept a lot of things from getting into print that might have given me a reputation I wouldn't care to have, that I wouldn't have known any better than to have published."[47] And that admission was not made by the young bridegroom but by an old man, who was supposedly becoming a pessimist because his artistic development had been thwarted--principally by a wife whose "taste...was infantile."[48]

De Voto offers further vindication of Mrs. Clemens--if it is necessary--in an article demonstrating that "nowhere in America would an editor or publisher have permitted in print much of what Olivia Clemens

---

47. Outlook, XCVI (December 24, 1910), 962. When asked once why the serious spirit had crept into his humor, Clemens replied: "'I never wrote a serious word until after I married Mrs. Clemens. She is solely responsible...for any deeply serious or moral influence my subsequent work may exert.... She not only edited my works, she edited me! After I had written some side-splitting story, something beginning seriously and ending in preposterous anti-climax, she would say to me: "You have a true lesson, a serious meaning to impart here. Don't give way to your invincible temptation to destroy the good effect of your story by some extravagant comic absurdity. Be yourself! Speak out your real thoughts as humorously as you please, but--without farcical commentary. Don't destroy your purpose with an ill-timed joke." I learned from her that the only right thing was to get in my serious meaning always, to treat my audience fairly, to let them really feel the underlying moral that gave body and essence to my jest'" (Archibald Henderson, Mark Twain, New York, 1912, p.183).

48. Brooks, op. cit., p.155.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

may have deleted in manuscript."[49] His assertion, however, does open the problem of the nature and importance of the censorship of Mrs. Clemens' abettors in crime; William Dean Howells and Richard W. Gilder. Charges similar to those brought against Mrs. Clemens are directed at these allies; namely, that as custodians of gentility they had forced upon Mark Twain "the eternal, universal, instinctive American subservience to...'the genteel tradition.'"[50] In the matter of verbal censorship, the point of view argued in support of Mrs. Clemens likewise applies to them. As editors of the respectable Atlantic Monthly and Century magazines, Howells and Gilder carefully edited contributions Twain submitted to them. De Voto, by comparing the portions of Huckleberry Finn printed in the Century with the published book, discovered that Gilder had excluded passages which seemed to gibe at religion, morality, death; that he had corrected the grammar and the spelling.[51] The expurgated material is of no importance to the book or the characters. Twain included all of it in the published volume. A superintendent of schools in the West had written to the Century complaining "that the writings of Mark Twain are hardly worth a place in the columns of the average country newspaper which never assumes literary airs."[52] Gilder in his answer had admitted that Twain had great faults: "At times he is inartistically and indefensibly coarse,

---

49. "Mark Twain and the Genteel Tradition" Harvard Graduate Magazine, XL (December, 1931), 157.

50. Brooks, op. cit., pp.159-160.

51. Harvard Graduate Magazine, XL (December, 1931), 155-163.

52. Ibid., p.160.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

but we do not think anything of his that has been printed in the Century is without very decided value.... Nevertheless there is much that we would not print for a miscellaneous audience."[53] Like Mrs. Clemens, Gilder did Twain a real service in helping to make his writing conform to the literary criteria of the period without destroying its real value.

Howells, as editor and personal friend, extended his literary jurisdiction beyond the Atlantic to include the manuscripts of Twain's books. Twain took his editing for granted and was grateful for it; "Nothing that has passed under your eye," he once wrote Howells, "needs any revision before going into a volume, while all my other stuff does need so much."[54] Howells objected to much the same things which were ruled out by Mrs. Clemens and Gilder. He was responsible for Huck's being combed "all to thunder," rather than "all to hell." Interestingly enough, Twain had to call Howells's attention to the phrase, after he and Mrs. Clemens had let it pass: "I was...afraid you hadn't observed it.... Did you question the propriety of it? Since the book is now professedly and confessedly a boy's and girl's book, that darn word bothers me some, nights, but it never did until I had ceased to regard the volume as being for adults."[55] Other alterations were of a similar nature. There is no evidence in them that Howells did more than attempt to keep his friend's literary work within the bounds of propriety. That, in the final analysis, was the primary objective of all who corrected Twain's manuscripts.

---

53. Loc. cit.

54. Biography, I, 618.

55. Letters, I, 272.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

To point to their function as an enervating force in his career is to label him a very weak artist. The nature of the material excluded is strong evidence that the censorship was judicial in view of the times and that the writings were not much poorer for the verbal deletions.

There remains to be considered, on the other hand, a far more important aspect of the problem of restrictions. Purely verbal revisions have been discussed thus fully in order to illustrate that the tangible type of correction Twain's manuscripts underwent had virtually no connection with the thoughts expressed; and that, consequently, his political and social opinions could not have been affected by it. Such a limited approach, however, does not treat of the more intangible form of repression embodied in the spirit of a period and the intellectual code of the men who represented it. Did Twain become, for example, a victim of the Gilded Age? Did he surrender independence and integrity in attempting to make himself a part of the Genteel Tradition? Did his intimate friendships with Howells, Warner, Aldrich, and other literary leaders turn him from satirizing the present to romanticizing the past? Did his financial ventures and his association with Henry Rogers, Andrew Carnegie, and other Robber Barons force him to refrain from attacking the hard materialism and tyrannical capitalism he saw about him? The same critics who contend that censorship was disastrous to the artist in Twain make affirmative answers to these questions. Their accusations are directly related to Twain's political and social criticism and must be completely resolved before any theory explaining his failure as a satirist can be formulated.

Granville Hicks charges (regarding Mark) that the Genteel Tradition

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> ...could not suppress his inborn genius, but neither could it develop that genius, shape it, summon forth all its potentialities, conduct it to a level on which it could richly function. Could the genteel writers encourage Mark Twain's realism when they were themselves both less courageous and less keen-sighted than he? Could they help him to understand American life when they persistently ignored the forces that were shaping it? No, they could correct his grammar and chasten his exuberance, but they could give him no inkling of what it might mean, to a man with his talents and his experience, to be an American author in the Gilded Age.... If he had understood, if he had been at home in, the world of his own social interests, his own investments, his own ambitions, he might have written about it. The frontier humorist and realist might have become a great social novelist. 56

The Aldriches, Stedmans, and Gilders, furthermore,--to whose direction Twain trusted his literary development--were "governed by prejudice, incapable of realistic thought, committed to the worship of respectability... mistook...timidity for self-restraint, and abstinence from the taking of bribes for civic duty."[57] Aldrich wrote G. E. Woodberry that "we shall have bloody work in this country some of these days when the lazy Canaille get organized.... We shall bring out an American edition (illustrated with cuts) of the beautiful French Revolution."[58] Brooks readily accepts the remark as representing the attitude of Twain's intimates toward social and political questions. "The literary confraternity of the generation was almost a solid block behind the financial confraternity,"[59] he concludes. Mumford finds Twain's capitulation to his environment complete: "Mark Twain was incapable of active choice. He accepted the values that surrounded him.... When he exercised his aristocratic capacities for

---

56. The Great Tradition, New York, 1933, pp.42-and 46.

57. Ibid., p.20.

58. Ferris Greenslet, The Life of Thomas Bailey Aldrich, Boston, 1908, p.178.

59. Op. cit., p.275.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

standing alone, it was on minor and safe matters, like Christian Science and Foreign Missions. An automaton should not risk his mechanism on more precious human issues."[60]

It would be futile and foolhardy to insist that there is no truth in these assertions. Many of Twain's genteel literary associates were incapable of encouraging his realism or of helping him to understand American life. Many of them were indifferent to "the revolution that was going on in American life." Mark Twain did tend to accept the values surrounding him; he wanted very much to be a "smart" business man; he refused to print a book arraigning the Standard Oil, because Henry Rogers, vice-president of the oil company, was a beloved friend; and he was proud of America's mechanical progress. Nevertheless, these concessions do not reveal the whole truth, either about the writers of the Gilded Age or about Mark Twain. The psychological critics are again guilty of drawing generalizations from partial truths. They place the blame for Twain's failure to become a great satiric novelist on his contemporaries rather than on his own temperament and development, where this study proposes to center it. Their characterization of literary men, for instance, does not apply to Howells or Warner. It is time that some of the members of the New England literary fraternity be relieved of responsibility for the direction Twain's development took. It is time to concede that not all of those writers believed that the American way of the last quarter of the nineteenth century was the best, that not all of them were champions of Philistinism at a time when "virtually every writer of eminence [in

---

60. The Golden Day, New York, 1934, pp.178-179.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Europe] was inalterably set against the life-destroying tendencies of capitalistic industrialism."[61]

The evidence for such a concession and revaluation is to be found in the writings of the two leading members of the reviled Tradition. That Hicks and Brooks and Mumford should ignore it is itself a sufficient criticism of their methods and conclusions. Of even greater importance to a study of Twain is the fact that his closest friends, Howells and Warner, prove to be the conspicuous exceptions to the observations of those critics on the interests of the genteel authors. Howells, in particular, was certainly not indifferent to "the life-destroying tendencies of capitalistic industrialism." With his discovery of Tolstoy, in the late eighties, his thinking took a definitely sociological turn, and his novels changed in tone and material, although not in method. He described Tolstoy in My Literary Passions as "the noblest of all these enthusiasms."[62] From him Howells felt that he had received the ethical standards which dominate his later works: "I can never again see life in the way I saw it before I knew him. Tolstoy awakens in his reader the will to be a man l... He leads you back to the only true ideal, away from the false standards of the gentleman, to the Man who sought not to be distinguished from other men, but identified with them."[63] Evidently Howells apprised his friend of this momentous rebirth if we may judge by a letter from Twain in 1887. Twain closed his observations on the ways in which old age

---

61. Brooks, op. cit., p.174.

62. My Literary Passions, New York, 1895, p.250.

63. Loc. cit.,

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

shrinks man's perspective with an estimate of the compensations in maturity: "You tilt the tube skyward and bring planets and comets...into the field. Which I see you have done, and found Tolstoi. I haven't got him in focus yet, but I've got Browning."[64] Twain never did get Tolstoy in focus.

But Howells' mind was not opened to the crimes of the capitalistic order by Tolstoy alone. Walter F. Taylor finds evidence in Howells's letters and novels of his consciousness of, and interest in, certain contemporary American events and movements of a social nature.[65] There was, for example, his attempt to save the "Chicago Anarchists," at the risk of his reputation and livelihood. Eight labor leaders had been found guilty of the murder of several policemen in a riot on Haymarket Square, although, as Governor Altgeld held in his pardon, "the prosecution was forced to proceed on the theory that the men indicted were guilty of murder because it was claimed they had at various times in the past uttered and printed incendiary and seditious language, practically advising the killing of policemen."[66] Howells wrote Judge Roger A. Pryor, leading counsel for the defense, a letter on September 25, 1887, expressing his opinion that the men had been unjustly convicted. Pryor replied with the suggestion that an appeal to the public for a fair test of the Anarchists's claims before the Supreme Court, if made over

---

64. Letters, II, 491.

65. "On the Origins of Howells' Interest in Economic Reform," American Literature, II (March, 1930), 3-14.

66. Mildred Howells, Life in Letters of William Dean Howells, New York, 1928, I, 396.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Howells's name, would have a wholesome effect. Howells refused to publish his letter to Pryor, as the latter suggested, but when the Supreme Court affirmed the sentence of the men, he forgot caution and wrote a letter to the New York Tribune explaining the higher court's decision and urging all "who believe that it would either be injustice or impolicy" to execute the condemned men to join him in petitioning the governor to mitigate their punishment.[67] His letter provoked some of the papers to abuse him, he told Thomas Perry, "as heartily as if I had proclaimed myself a dynamiter."[68] His stand is made even more courageous when one realizes that he and Mrs. Howells believed that he was hazarding his career in making it: "His wife, in spite of her anxiety for their children, and especially for their invalid daughter, faced the possible loss of his position with him, and upheld him in his efforts."[69]

The depth of his feeling about the crime he thought he saw American justice committing is apparent in phrases found in letters written after his public appeal. "While I write," he confessed to Francis F. Brown, founder and editor of the Dial, "that hideous scene may be enacting in your jail yard--the thing forever damnable before God and abominable to civilized men."[70] He quoted to his father letters from the President of the American Press Association and Harriet P. Spofford praising him for his words on the case, and he added that "the historical perspective is that this free Republic has killed five men for their

---

67. Ibid., I, 399.
68. Ibid., I, 413.
69. Ibid., I, 393.
70. Ibid., I, 402.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

opinions."[71] To his sister he described the utter despondency which he and Mrs. Howells suffered:

> Elinor and I both no longer care for the world's life, and would like to be settled somewhere very humbly and simply, where we could be socially identified with the principles of progress and sympathy for the struggling mass.... The last two months have been full of heartache and horror for me, on account of the civic murder committed last Friday at Chicago.... It's all been an atrocious piece of frenzy and cruelty, for which we must stand ashamed forever before history.... I can't write about it. Some day I hope to do justice to these irreparably wronged men." [72]

The words are certainly not those of a man indifferent to the revolution in American life "except insofar as the prosperity it brought augmented...incomes and made possible...prestige."[73]

Howells himself recognized that his defense of the Anarchists had contributed to his own development. He admitted to Hamlin Garland that his "horizons have been indefinitely widened by the process," and that he was "reading and thinking about questions that carry me beyond myself and my miserable literary idolatries of the past." To this statement he added a significant hint: "Perhaps you'll find that I've been writing about them."[74] Naturally he became eager to be taken seriously, and was annoyed with people who, he said, "take me so viciously awry, and think (or say) that I have no serious meaning when my whole trouble has been to sugar-coat my medicinal properties."[75]

---

71. Ibid., I, 402.

72. Ibid., I, 404.

73. Hicks, op. cit., p.20.

74. Mildred Howells, op. cit., I, 407 and 408.

75. Ibid., p.409.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The part of Howells in the case of the Chicago labor leaders had directed his attention to the labor movement, and subsequent developments brought forcibly to him the need for a better relationship between employer and employee. The late eighties was a period of rapidly increasing labor trouble. Taylor records that there were 10,057 commercial and manufacturing establishments involved in strikes in 1886 as against 2,284 in 1885.[76] Howells was particularly interested in the 1888 strike of the engineers on the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Railroad, and in the great Homestead Steel Strike of 1892. Even Twain was excited over the "Knights of Labor" and wrote an essay by that title, an essay which was never published, apparently because the newspapers refused to print it. Howells expressed his approval of it:

> It is about the best thing yet said on the subject; but it is strange that you can't get a single newspaper to face the facts of the situation. Here the fools are now all shouting because the Knights of Labor have revenged themselves on the Engineers, and the C. B. & Q. strike is a failure. No one notices how labor has educated itself; no one perceives that next time there won't be any revenge or any failure! If ever a public was betrayed by its press, it's ours. No man could safely make himself heard in behalf of the strikers any more than for the anarchists. 77

It is significant that, instead of restraining Twain's social thinking, Howells thus took every opportunity of encouraging it. Certainly he cannot be held accountable for his friend's selection of sixth-century England as the background for his protest against inequality and inhumanity. The fact remains that Howells incorporated his attack on contemporary social

---

76. American Literature, II (March, 1930), 7.

77. Mildred Howells, op. cit., I, 411.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

maladjustments in a contemporary setting, that the climax of A Hazard of New Fortunes, for instance, was built around the New York traction strike of 1886.

In addition to his active interest in specific social upheavals of his day, Howells was also aware of current trends of thought on economic questions. Hamlin Garland tried repeatedly to win him to a belief in Henry George's single tax. "'He gave it his allegiance,' Garland later explained, 'to the point of saying, "It is good as far as it goes but reforms should go further." In other words he was more socialistic than I.'"[78] Howells knew George personally, and while strongly attracted by his program, he never committed himself in support of it; and Taylor finds that his direct literary indebtedness to George was slight. There are only two instances in the novels which seem to support the single tax theory; in them Howells avoids any statement on his own responsibility, merely assigning the remarks to his characters.[79]

Another reform plan of the period which did contribute to the substance of Howells' thought was that of the "Nationalist" party. The platform of this group had its inception in Edward Bellamy's Looking Backward, a book written as a fantasy, describing an ideal commonwealth operated on a communistic principle. The work was extremely popular, and the party attracted considerable public attention. Taylor demonstrates the influence of Bellamy's ideas upon Howells by citing several parallels

---

78. Ibid., I, 407.

79. American Literature, II (March, 1930), 10. Lawyer Putney in Annie Kilburn and The Quality of Mercy, Mrs. Camp in A Traveller from Altruria are Georgites.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

between the thought of the two men and Howells's verbal acknowledgment of the debt. Both men, almost alone among the novelists of their time, emphasized the tragic power of chance in a society founded on a competitive economic system.[80] Howells's denunciation of this element of uncertainty is found particularly in The World of Chance and A Traveller from Altruria, published in 1893 and 1894 respectively; but the traces of it are evident in his other sociological novels. In A Hazard of New Fortunes Basil March, whom Taylor rightly considers the exponent of Howells's philosophy, says:

> What I object to is this economic chance-world in which we live.... It ought to be law as inflexible in human affairs as the order of day and night in the physical world, that if a man will work he shall both rest and eat, and shall not be harassed with any question as to how his repose and his provisions shall come. Nothing less ideal than this satisfies the reason. But in our state of affairs no one can be sure of this. No one is sure of finding work; no one is sure of not losing it. I may have my work taken away from me at any moment by the caprice, the mood, the indigestion of a man who has not the qualification for knowing whether I do it well or ill. [81]

Howells was convinced that most of the evils of modern life were the consequence of this instability inherent in the capitalistic system, and that the only hope was not reform but exchange of a barbarous, competitive economic order for a co-operative one. "The best that is in men," he wrote Edward E. Hale, "cannot come out till they all have a fair chance. I used to think America gave this; now I don't."[82] For him America had become "the most grotesquely illogical thing under the sun,"

---

80. Ibid., pp.11 and 12.

81. New York, 1889, II, 252-253.

82. Mildred Howells, op. cit., I, 418-419.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and he wanted to try, in his small way, to make his countrymen realize it.[83] His effort certainly indicates that at least one prominent author of the Genteel Tradition was neither ignorant of the forces shaping American life, nor incapable of encouraging Mark Twain to satirize those forces had the latter been receptive. In the reasons for Twain's failure to respond to this stimulus lies the explanation of his superficial social criticism, as well as the refutation of the psychological interpretation.

Moreover, it is apparent that Howells did try to impart his new point of view to his friend and to strengthen whatever social consciousness Twain had. During the long, animated talks which Howells describes so glowingly in My Mark Twain, there must have been a general exchange of ideas. Surely, in view of Howells's preoccupation with strikes and trials and inequality, he poured out his economic theories. Twain must also have encountered them in reading his friend's novels. Howells must have even suggested some specific books, for he recalled how Twain raged at him "for recommending to him a certain author whose truthfulness he could not deny, but whom he hated for his truthfulness to sordid and ugly conditions."[84] It is significant, too, that Howells repeatedly suggested that Twain increase rather than diminish the amount of satire in his books. He liked the Prince and the Pauper immensely but thought Twain "might have let in a little more of [his] humor the whole way through, and satirized things more."[85] When he read the Connecticut Yankee in manuscript, having

---

83. Ibid., I, 417.

84. My Mark Twain, p.49.

85. Mildred Howells, op. cit., I, 290.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

already published three novels of his own which were concerned with evils of the industrial order, Howells was delighted with the revolutionary subject-matter. "Passages in it do my whole soul good," he wrote. "I suppose the Church will get after you; and I think it's a pity that you don't let us see how whenever Christ himself could get a chance, all possible good was done."[86] In a letter written five days later he added: "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."[87] Twain was flattered by this whole-hearted approval, and he was particularly pleased that Howells had agreed with what he had written of the French Revolution, "the noblest and the holiest thing and the most precious that ever happened in this earth," with the exception of the Fourth of July.[88] He was sorry, however, that he did not have the book yet to write, for then "there wouldn't be so many things left out. They burn in me...but now they can't ever be said. And besides, they would require a library--and a pen warmed-up in hell."[89] The reason Twain thought they could never be said was to be found in his conviction that the Connecticut Yankee represented his "retirement from literature permanently."[90] Critics have assumed that statements of this kind are evidence that Twain's was repressed, and they have blamed Howells for it. Howells's attitude toward the book proves the opposite.

---

86. Ibid., I, 427.

87. Ibid., I, 428.

88. Letters, II, 514.

89. Ibid, II, 514.

90. Ibid., II, 515.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

A Connecticut Yankee did represent the author's nearest approach to sociological fiction, if not his permanent retirement from literature; but even in it the remoteness of the setting and the medieval society he described rendered his social criticism of secondary importance to that of Howells. He denounced everything that he hated; he conveyed something of his ideas of justice and equality; but he sacrificed to burlesque most of the satire which had even a potential contemporary significance, nor did he develop the subject in subsequent novels; thereafter his attacks were confined largely to periodicals, with only an occasional outburst in the books written after 1889.

The greater part of this material, moreover, was concerned with political, rather than social, problems. The capitalistic system, against which Howells inveighed continually, was almost ignored by Twain as he fulminated against dangerous political loyalties and American imperialism. Paine reports that, following the appearance of the Connecticut Yankee, "there had been what was evidently a concerted movement to induce him to write a novel with the theories of Henry George as the central idea. Letters from every direction had urged him to undertake such a story."[91] He already had made the attempt in The American Claimant, into which addresses based upon Progress and Poverty and Looking Backward are introduced; but he had failed when Colonel Sellers reappeared to lead him away from the sociological issues. He had greater success with his political articles, which Howells praised for their vehemence, although he sometimes questioned their premises. Twain's letter to Sylvester Baxter, of the Boston Herald, the letter

---

91. Biography, II, 917.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

in which he berated the American Government for its indifference to the New Brazilian Republic, brought a comment from Howells which strikingly reveals the divergence in the two men's understanding of current opinion:

> I have just heated myself up with your righteous wrath about our indifference to the Brazilian Republic. But it seems to me that you ignore the real reason for it which is that there is no longer an American Republic, but an aristocracy-loving oligarchy in place of it. Why should our Money-bags rejoice in the explosion of a Wind-bag? They know at the bottom of the hole where their souls ought to be that if such an event finally means anything it means <u>their</u> ruin next; and so they <u>don't</u> rejoice; and as <u>they</u> mostly inspire the people's voice, the press, the press is dumb. 92

Further comparison of the political principle of Howells and Twain reveals even more clearly how independent of each other the two men were and how frequently Twain, unlike Howells, was apt to miss the deeper implications of his point of view in his enthusiastic espousal of various causes. His reaction to the Spanish-American War effectively illustrates this. He was in Austria when the conflict began, but he lost no time in publicly defending his country's noble gesture in behalf of the oppressed Cubans. He answered an American in Paris, who had written of his shame at his government's meddling, by reminding him that Europe's bloody record nullified her criticism of what was a purely humanitarian action.[93] To Twichell he wrote of his enjoyment of the war, "the worthiest one that was ever fought," and he warned him not to mind Charley Warner, whose philosophy was "Don't ever disturb <u>anything</u>, where it's going to break

---

92. Mildred Howells, <u>op. cit.</u>, I, 429.

93. "A Word of Encouragement for Our Blushing Exiles," <u>Europe and Elsewhere</u>, New York, 1923, pp.221-225.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the soft smooth flow of things and wobble our tranquility."[94] It was not until capitalism discarded the pretence and the sugar interests persuaded the government to hold the Philippines that Twain recognized the true motives of American imperialism. Then he joined Howells in denouncing the campaigns in the East and West Indies as another territory grab. Howells, on the other hand, had from the very first opposed "the most stupid and causeless war that was ever imagined by a kindly and sensible nation."[95] His disgust with the entire mess was voiced in numerous letters of the period. He insisted that the United States had no right to interfere in Cuba, no cause of quarrel with Spain, that only the jingo press and politicians wanted intervention. He may have had an influence in bringing about Twain's change of heart, for he wrote the latter that "Providence ...has turned our war for humanity into a war for coaling stations."[96] Thereafter they both condemned all invasions, regardless of pretexts, particularly the English move against the Boer state. Twain, moreover, wrote article after article condemning the conquest of the Philippines and the general conduct of the army on the Islands. The realization that he had been completely fooled by the politicians's excuses for the war put a sharp edge on his satire. His attacks on imperialism, which will be summarized in another section, represent his closest approach to important political criticism; and Howells was obviously not responsible for his failure to go further.

---

94. Letters, II, 663.

95. Mildred Howells, op. cit., II, 89.

96. Ibid., II, 96.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The conclusion concerning the nature and significance of Twain's relationship to Howells is likewise applicable to his friendship with Warner, Twichell, Gilder, and Aldrich. Those who have considered them as satisfied with their American, as behind the financial confraternity, as indifferent to the larger problems confronting their era, have neglected their respective opinions; the critics have accepted the complacency of Aldrich and the conservatism of Twichell as representative of the group, while blandly ignoring the social polemics of Warner and the reform measures of Gilder. Aldrich, whose sparkling conversation betrayed Twain into thinking him "the most brilliant of living men," has, it is true, been called little more than "a hollow reed through which blew into flawless form the refinements of his world and group."[97] His social and political philosophy is summarized in a passage from a letter which has already been quoted in part:

> I...smile at the present Administration.... The best kind of Democracy (as per sample) is no better than the worst kind of Republicanism. The Income Tax is the deformed child of Coxey and his brother scalawags. I vote for McKinley. We shall have bloody work in this country some of these days when the lazy canaille get organized. 98

Twichell, too,--Twain's most intimate friend--was struck dumb

---

97. Letters, I, 184; and V. L. Parrington, The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America, New York, 1930, III, 55.

98. Greenslet, op. cit., pp. 177-178.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

by the financial confraternity in his "Church of the Holy Speculators," as Twain dubbed it. Since he had once made the mistake of listening to Twain until persuaded to bolt the Republican Party and vote for Cleveland --an exercise of political independence which almost cost him his church--, Twichell voted right thereafter, with a persistency which drew vicious letters from Twain. But the letters were all a pretense, the latter confessed, because he found no fault with Twichell's Republicanism:

> Situated as he was, with a large family to support, his first duty was not to his political conscience, but to his family conscience.... He sacrificed his political independence, and saved his family by it. In the circumstances, this was the highest loyalty, and the best. If he had been a Henry Ward Beecher it would not have been his privilege to sacrifice his political conscience, because in case of dismissal a thousand pulpits would have been open to him, and his family's bread secure. 99

Martyrdom did not appeal to Twain, particularly at a cost to others. The fact has been twisted to fit into the explanation of his failure as a satirist. Some things he did keep from print because of his family, but, as we have seen, they were for the most part expressions of his religious opinions rather than of his social and political philosophy.

Twichell, then, should be classified with Aldrich as far as his public influence on Twain is concerned. The fact that he was forced to suppress his views in the pulpit, however, is no reason for believing that he refused to air them when alone with Twain on their walking excursions. Probably Twain was more impressed by them because they were taboo in Hartford churches. Certainly there is no reason for assuming that Twichell's experience convinced Twain that independence would be a costly privilege for him, too. It did provoke him into protesting against destructive

---

99. Autobiography, II, 25.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

public opinion and writing such quips as the much quoted, "It is by the goodness of God that in our country we have those three unspeakably precious things: freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, and the prudence never to exercise either."[100] It was implied in his remark that he did not write a certain type of book because he had a family. These and numerous similar items were taken by some critics to mean that he suppressed his satire because he saw too clearly the inevitable consequences. But the critics forgot that after Twichell had been silenced by public opinion, Twain bolted the Republican Party, made political speeches, and wrote essays condemning perverted political loyalties. They forgot that the books Twain said he would have written as a single man were those which would have scoffed "at the pitiful world, and the useless universe and violent, contemptible human race--books that laugh at the whole paltry scheme and deride it."[101] They forgot that three years after he made that statement he wrote just such a book, What Is Man?, which Mrs. Clemens refused to let him publish during her lifetime only because it offered nothing constructive. Once more the facts destroy the theory.

There was one other close friend of Twain's, moreover, whom Brooks and the rest overlooked, and yet whose influence might have been almost as constructive as that of Howells. Granted that the Gilders, the Aldriches, the Twichells could have been the negative forces they are charged with being--although Gilder by his zeal for reform and reputation

---

100. Mark Twain's Notebook, ed. Albert B. Paine, New York, 1935, p.347. This volume is hereinafter referred to as Notebook.

101. Ibid., p.256.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

for liberalism must immediately be considered an exception--Charles Dudley Warner, like Howells, brought active, progressive social thinking into Twain's environment. To Twain he seemed to prefer to maintain the smooth flow of things at the cost of progress; but, in reality, he was merely conserving his energies for enterprises in which there was hope of success. While Twain raved about the righteousness of America's war with Spain and Howells denounced it, Warner apparently hung back from either extreme. Twain urged Twichell not to mind Warner's placidity. "He would interrupt the raising of Lazarus," Twain quipped. "He would say, 'The will has been probated, the property distributed, it will be a world of trouble to settle the row--better leave well enough alone; don't ever disturb anything, where it's going...to wobble our tranquillity.'"[102] Even if this characterization of Warner were true, it did not mean that he was satisfied with the status quo, or that he had sold out to the financial confraternity. As editor of the Hartford Evening Press from 1860 to 1867 and as editorial writer on the combined Press and Courant for another decade, Warner was "a most effective and forcible leader-writer on political and social questions,"[103] particularly during the Civil War. He had resigned his position when the Courant had decided to forget all that it had printed against Blaine and support him because he was the Republican nominee.[104] "During the latter years of his life he became increasingly interested

---

102. Letters, II, 663.

103. The Complete Writings of Charles Dudley Warner, ed. Thomas R. Lounsbury, Hartford, 1904, XV., xiii.

104. Autobiography, II, 19.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

in social questions," and wrote several magazine articles on his theories for correcting various weaknesses in the social system. Most of these articles appeared in the "Editor's Study" of Harpers Magazine, which he conducted from 1892 until 1898.[105]

Warner, unlike Howells, believed that the evils of the capitalistic system could be eradicated by a proper exercise of the democratic principle. "So long as the body of the American people hold fast to the simple and primitive conception of a republican society,--to the ideals of a century ago,--the nation can survive, as England did, a period of political corruption."[106] He expressed that opinion in 1875, some three years after he and Twain had made a partial exposure of the petty political evils of their day in The Gilded Age. But he was convinced that democracy rather than socialism gave man the best opportunity of living his life as he desired, and of eradicating the abuses of the political and economic structure. "It must not be forgotten," he wrote, "that the ballot in the hands of all is perhaps the only safeguard against the tyranny of wealth in the hands of the few. It is true that bad men can band together and be destructive; but so they can in any government."[107] He realized that the political boss typified just such a destructive concentration of authority, and he blamed the mass of voters for the parasite's existence: "What republics have most to fear is the rule of the boss, who is a tyrant without responsibility.... We strike directly at his power for

---

105. Warner, op. cit., XV., xxxii and xxxi.

106. Ibid., IV, 521.

107. Ibid., XV., 201.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

mischief when we organize the entire civil service of the nation and of the States on capacity, integrity, experience, and not on political power."[108] He insisted, furthermore, that since it was this indifference of the majority which permitted mishandling of a capitalistic economy, it was in their power to correct these wrongs through judicious use of the ballot rather than through destruction of the system:

> We are in no vain chase of an equality which would eliminate all individual initiative, and check all progress, by ignoring differences of capacity and strength, and rating muscles equal to brains. But we are in pursuit of equal laws, and a fairer chance of leading happy lives than humanity in general ever had yet. And this fair chance would not, for instance, permit any man to become a millionaire by so manipulating railways that the subscribing towns and private stockholders should lose their investments; nor would it assume that any Gentile or Jew has the right to grow rich by the chance of compelling poor women to make shirts for six cents apiece. The public opinion which sustains these deeds is as un-American, and as guilty as their doers. While abuses like these exist, tolerated by the majority that not only make public opinion, but make the laws, this is not a government for the people, any more than a government of bosses is a government by the people. 109

When Warner said that his objective was not "an equality which would eliminate all individual initiative," he hinted at a concept of equality foreign to Howells and Twain. As early as 1880, he wrote an essay for the Atlantic Monthly in which he laid down what he considered an undeniable principle: "All men are created unequal." He argued that the attempt to make the unlimited phrase "all men are created equal" the basis for realistic action was responsible for most of the prevailing

---

108. Ibid., XIV., 325.

109. Ibid., XIV., 331, from an address delivered before the New England Society in Indianapolis, December 21, 1892.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

discontent in the country. "In connection with the doctrine of laissez-faire--this popular notion of equality is one of the most disastrous forces in modern society."[110] To it was also attributable the stupid and dangerous theory of an unrestricted suffrage. "No matter what the majority is in intellect and morals. [sic] Fifty-one ignorant men have a natural right to legislate for the one hundred, as against forty-nine intelligent men," and he added, as illustration, the story of the newly-elected congressman from Maine who repudiated as slander the accusation that he was educated.[111] His questioning of unlimited suffrage is obviously inconsistent with his faith in the power of the ballot in the hands of all, and it arose from Warner's concern over the illiterate voter. He believed in universal suffrage as a safeguard against socialism and despotism, but he believed that the potent instrument needed safe-guarding, too, and his emphasis betrayed him into inconsistency. Twain, it will be seen, suggested that the importance of the vote should vary in accordance with the formal education of the voter. Warner, likewise, thought that one of the absolutely necessary protections against misuse of voting power was an educational qualification: "No one should cast a ballot who had not a fair conception of the effect of it, shown by a higher test of intelligence than the mere fact of ability to scrawl his name and to spell out a line or two in the Constitution.... Suffrage is an expediency, not a right belonging to universal humanity regardless of intelligence or of character."[112]

Related to his objection to an unrestricted suffrage was Warner's vital and constructive interest in the proper education for the negro,

---

110. Ibid., XIV., 348. 111. Ibid., XV., 108. 112. Ibid., XIV., 314.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

since his assertion of inequality was the starting point of both. Whereas Twain was sentimental and vague in his pronouncements concerning the black race, Warner attacked the classical education offered its members as wasteful and unproductive; the negro was unprepared to assimilate and use learning of that type. Taught in slavery to work as agriculturalists, mechanics, and laborers, the majority of the bewildered, irresponsible freemen needed an elemental training, to which was added moral instruction and guidance in habits of industry, if they were to assume the burden of their freedom. Since the South needed their man power, deportation was an idle and impractical dream. Hence, to remove the drag on civilization, to decrease the peril to society of an ignorant mass, the negro had to be transformed "into an industrial, law-abiding citizen, identified with the prosperity of his country."[113] He had to be encouraged, like the other races within the state, to develop in his own field rather than to demand the type of equality implied in the Constitution:

> Race distinctions ought to be maintained for the sake of the best development of the race, and for the continuance of that mutual reaction and play of peculiar forces between races which promise the highest development for the whole.... It is not a question between the two races of inferiority or superiority.... It is a question of difference of endowment and difference of destiny.... In short the African must be civilized in the line of his capacities. [114]

Warner's fundamental objection to the nature of the instruction offered the negro was also found in his criticism of the general educational system in the United States. Nurtured by the chimera of equality, the educators had been forced to disregard the individual differences and cater

---

113. Ibid., XIV., 374-389. 114. Ibid., XV., 118-120.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

to the mediocre. The attempt had resulted in superficial learning, a low average intelligence, and, worst of all, discontent with the trades and handlabor as means of livelihood;[115]

> We cannot ignore the danger...of an education that is necessarily superficial...that breeds in two-thirds of those who have it a distaste for useful labor.... There must be something wrong in an education that sets so many people at odds with the facts of life.... Universal and superficial education in this country has been accompanied with the most extraordinary delusions and the evolution of the wildest theories. It is only necessary to refer ...to the greenback illusion, and the whole group of spiritualistic disturbances and psychological epidemics. [116]

Twain agreed that it was wrong to lead the young away from the trades, although he did not blame faulty education for the wild theories of the period. He did believe with Warner, that women deserved to be educated, for both felt, as the latter expressed it, that "the education of woman and the development of her powers hold the greatest promise for the regeneration of society."[117] She should not, on the other hand, misinterpret the implications of her equality, Warner cautioned, and aspire to perform man's functions in society. Rather she should emphasize the differences in the sexes, for "it is in diversity, and not in an equality tending to uniformity that we are to expect the best results from the race."[118]

Inequality rather than equality, concluded Warner, appeared to be the divine order, which no theories would change and which had to become the working dogma of a democracy which was to resist the philosophy of socialism and communism;

> Fortunately, if today we could make every man white, every

---

115. Ibid., XV., 112.
116. Ibid., XIV., 354-355.
117. Ibid., XV., 114.
118. Ibid., XV., 116.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> woman as like man as nature permits, give to every human being the same opportunity of education, and divide equally among all the accumulated wealth of the world, tomorrow differences, unequal possession, and differentiation would begin again. We are attempting the regeneration of society with a misleading phrase.... The damage from the current exaggeration of equality is that the attempt to realize the dogma in fact...can lead only to mischief, and disappointment. 119

Out of this attempt evolved most of the discontent felt by the masses of the era.

Absurd notions of equality and the false practices based upon them were not, however, wholly responsible for popular discontent. Beyond all the actual hardships and suffering, Warner saw a serious mental dissatisfaction, which was at once more serious and more difficult to deal with. It arose primarily from the materialism which was the natural product of the capitalistic system. Capitalism not only put the accumulating of wealth above the good of individual humanity, but also fostered the astonishing growth of luxury and the habits of sensual indulgence which marked the interests of the leisure class. It was natural that the workingman, witnessing the value the supposedly intelligent and well-to-do set upon material things, came to desire them passionately.

The worker was made even more discontented with his own slowness in accumulation and by the public's apparent indifference to the means the more fortunate employed in acquiring wealth. Public morality bowed to financial smartness. Dickens wrote in his American Notes that he had repeatedly heard men excused for their profligacy because their smartness merited admiration.[120] Now Warner charged that "the toleration of men who

---

119. Ibid., XV., 121-122.

120. Brooks, op. cit., pp.82-83.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

secure wealth by well known dishonest and sharp practices is a chief cause of the demoralization of the public conscience." Furthermore, since one philosophy underlies all the movements of an age, regardless of social and political lines, "if our philosophy is material, resulting in selfish ethics, all our energies will have a materialistic tendency.... The world is ruled by ideas, by abstract thought. Society, literature, art, politics, in any given age are what the prevailing system of philosophy make them.... If the utilitarian spirit is abroad, it accounts for the devotion to the production of wealth, and to the consequent separation of classes and the discontent."[121]

Although he had analyzed the background of the labor movement and the causes of the workingman's dissatisfaction, Warner did not support labor's methods or objectives. He considered the leaders of the movement trouble-makers, who lived by their successes in stirring up the workingmen. Agitation was a business with them, and they prospered at the expense of their followers. He believed, furthermore, that their objectives were dangerous and illogical. How, for example, could state regulation of hours and wages result in anything but "an iniquitous and meddlesome despotism"? How could the closed shop and the strike be interpreted as compatible with liberty of action? "It is safe to say of the boycott and the strike," he concluded, "that they both introduce an insupportable element of tyranny, of dictation, of interference, into private life. If they could be maintained, society would be at the mercy of an irresponsible and even secret tribunal."[122]

---

121. Warner, op. cit., XIV., 368-369.

122. Ibid., XIV., 356-357.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Warner's attitude toward labor does not, on the other hand, indicate any blindness to the faults of the employer group. He found its members guilty of injustice amounting to cruel inhumanity, and he could not understand why a conspiracy against labor was not as illegal as a conspiracy against capitalism. Too many employers considered only the arithmetic of supply and demand in fixing wages, while ignoring the legitimate rights of their workers to a fair return. He admitted, therefore, that some form of "organized labor-getting power" was necessary to exact fair play from capital. He admitted that the power would frequently be used unjustly and tyrannically, but he could tolerate that because of the objective: "to call the attention of the world to certain hideous wrongs, to which the world is likely to continue selfishly indifferent unless rudely shaken out of its sense of security."[123] It was this indifference that was the real source of any tyranny. Rather than denounce labor for its costly agitations, society should wake up to its responsibility and lead the way to the establishment of a more amicable relationship between capital and labor. For "if society remain indifferent it must expect that organizations will attempt to right...wrongs, by ways violent and destructive of the innocent and guilty alike. It is human nature, it is the lesson of history, that real wrongs, unredressed, grow into preposterous demands."[124]

Most significant of all, in the final analysis, was Warner's effort to be more than a mere theorist. The opinions summarized here were voiced publicly by him either in the magazines for which he wrote or before the societies of which he was a member. As President of the American

---

123. Ibid., XIV., 360. 124. Ibid., XIV., 361.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Social Science Association, he prepared his essay on the subject of the proper education for the negroes of the country. His theories as to "Some Causes of the Prevailing Discontent" were first outlined to the students of Hamilton College in 1887, and were included with other similar expressions of opinion in a printed volume in 1902. But his special and most active interest lay in prison reform. A strong advocate of the indeterminate sentence--the length and duration of all prison terms to be based directly upon the prisoner's conduct--, he wrote numerous articles in support of it during his lifetime and was an active member of the Connecticut Commission on Prisons, of the National Prison Association, and the New York Association for Prison Reform. He was Vice-president of the last-named group.[125] These affiliations gave him the opportunity to keep his views on the practical handling of criminals before the public, and he became an important figure in the movement for much-needed prison reform.

This, then, is the record of another of those perjured literary men of the Gilded Age. Men like Charles Dudley Warner and William Dean Howells--Brooks would have us believe, although he did not mention either--were victims of

> ...a sort of unconscious conspiracy [which] actuated all America against the creative life.... The cultural domination of this emasculated New England played into the hands of the bussiness regime..l. With the corruption, the vulgarity, the vapidity of the society of their age these men were completely disillusioned; but motives of self-preservation...restrained them from impairing, by strong assertions of individual judgment, "the consistency of feeling upon which the pioneers rightly placed such a high value."[126]

---

125. Ibid., XV., xxxiii.

126. Brooks, op. cit., pp.95-96.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Despite his opinions and theories, Warner, too, supposedly sold out to the "freebooters of capitalism," and he and Howells and the rest of the literary group encouraged Twain to emulate them. The evidence sketched above explodes these psychological inferences, and reveals in two of the most important literary figures of the New England group a very vital interest in the nature and direction of America's progress; it refutes the bland accusation of Hicks and Brooks that the literary men of the day had capitulated before the advance of capitalistic industrialism.

Detailed as this summary of Howells's and Warner's social and political criticism is, it is not so much intended to reveal the full content of the men's work as to suggest the positive inspirational help their example could have afforded to Twain. It is not my primary concern to prove that what has been said of the important writers of the Gilded Age by certain critics is inaccurate and misleading, but to demonstrate that there is no factual basis for inferring that Mark Twain was kept from becoming a great social satirist by his supposedly complacent friends. Both Howells and Warner, Twain's intimates, exceeded him in the significance, depth, and grasp of their political and social thinking. Neither repressed his opinions for fear of offending the Robber Barons of their day. Limited as their views may have been, they could have broadened Twain's perspective. He was not the victim of his loyalty to them; his social and political thought was the natural expression of his early environment and of his own nature. To accept this point of view is to slough off the beautiful hypotheses of those biographers who, as Oscar Campbell described them, "cannot help wishing that Mark Twain had been postponed, and that Theodore Dreiser

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and John Dos Passos had been put in his place."[127] It is to know and understand Twain's social and political criticism for what it was--the average man's attitude toward social and political problems. It is to see the complete man and to stop wishful theorizing on the reasons for his failure to be something else.

The assertion that Twain's nature--in other words, his peculiar mental limitations and highly individualized interests--was primarily responsible for his mediocre satire is further supported by what is revealed of that nature in his reading habits. An examination of his tastes in books and of the information he gleaned from them--which is the purpose in the following section--serves to characterize more fully his intellectual equipment and interests. A study of Mark Twain as a reader throws considerable light on his career as a satirist, not only on the theories he propounded but also on the manner in which he arrived at them.

---

127. "Twain versus Clemens," 1936 Essay Annual, ed. Erich A. Walter, New York, p.164.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The Reader

Only that portion of Twain's reading which is related to his social and political criticism will be discussed in the following pages since numerous studies of his general reading are available. As it has been pointed out elsewhere, the publication of Van Wyck Brook's Ordeal of Mark Twain in 1922 brought the humorist down off the critical shelf and precipitated examinations of his life and work from new points of view. Since 1922 the task of reinterpreting him has become almost a popular pastime among students of American literature, and his reading has been subjected to careful study as one of the focal points of the research. O. H. Moore led the way with his paper "Mark Twain and Don Quixote," based on material furnished by Paine's biography; Moore decided that Mark Twain "drew much of his inspiration for his most American books from European models," and he particularly noted the influence of Don Quixote in The Innocents Abroad, Life on the Mississippi, Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn, and A Connecticut Yankee.[1] In 1924 Henry Pochmann wrote a master's thesis in which he tabulated all the books and authors which it could be inferred the humorist had read. Miss Brashear made use of both these studies, as well as the work of the foreign scholars Friedrich Schonemann and Herbert Mierow, in writing her chapter on Twain's reading in Mark Twain: Son of Missouri. Finally, Edward Wagenknecht, who went over the well-raked field in his biography, was forced to be satisfied with restatements of previous studies and his comments on them. In general, the writers contented themselves either with listing the books Twain mentioned or theorizing as to the authors he might have read.

---

1. P. M. L. A., XXXVII (June, 1922), 325.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

These restricted results do not reflect on the investigators, however; rather they demonstrate pointedly the individuality of Mark Twain. He liked to consider himself a little-read person. Speaking of his assets as a novelist, he said: "I surely have the equipment, a wide culture, and all of it real, none of it artificial, for I don't know anything about books."[2] "There is much to be learned...without going to books...books do not cover the whole domain of esthetic human culture."[3] He read pretty much what he pleased when he pleased, boasting to Kipling: "I never read novels myself, except when the popular persecution forces me to--when people plague me to know what I think of the last book that everyone is reading."[4] Then he explained his taste: "What I like to read about are facts and statistics of any kind. If they are only facts about the raising of radishes, they interest me."[5] Paine testified that he kept a few books--"not more than a dozen"--near him and read them repeatedly, making numerous marginal notes.[6] But Twain's was not the type of mind which consciously or subconsciously soaks up ideas, theories, opinions in reading only to ooze them out in writing unchanged. His nature, his point of view, his particular genius combined to enable him to assimilate completely the material which impressed him in his reading. If and when he used it, his highly individualized treatment altered the original so completely as to

---

2. Letters, II, 543.

3. "The Bee," What Is Man?, and Other Essays, p.284.

4. Wagenknecht, op. cit., p.34.

5. Loc. cit.

6. Biography, II, 1536.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

make relationships questionable. Yet he was far too impressionable not to have been influenced by what he met in literature as well as in life:

> His experience of books as well as of men sank so deep into his sensitive soul that it found expression in subtle ways not analysable either by himself or by others. He himself acknowledged the larger kind of debt in one of his speeches: "There are, however, certain heredities which come down to us which our writings of the present day may be traced to. I, for instance, read the Walpole Letters when I was a boy. I absorbed them, gathered in their grace, wit, and humor, and put them away to be used by-and-by. One does that so unconsciously with things one really likes." 7

A study of Mark Twain's reading is therefore indispensable to a complete understanding of his social and political criticism.

It has been implied in the foregoing discussion that Twain had no organized, comprehensive, or consistent opinions in either field of thought considered here. He was no profound social or political philosopher, no conscientious student of backgrounds and trends in social or political thinking. Generally his opinions represented impressions, conceived spontaneously and dropped at haphazard into whatever writing happened to be his expression of the moment. As such they were expressions of no concise pattern of thought and revealed no definite kinship to whatever literary stimuli might have prompted them. Apparently Twain read with an object in view, interested in confirming or disputing marginally the author's observations. This attitude suggests the existence of preconceived theories; hence, any relationship between his ideas and his reading must necessarily remain conjectural and hypothetical.

---

7. Brashear, Thesis, p.165., quoting "Author's Club," Mark Twain's Speeches, ed. Albert B. Paine, New York, 1923, p.185. This volume is hereinafter referred to as Speeches; footnote for the 1910 edition will include that date in brackets.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Albert Bigelow Paine named several books which Twain read and which should have been of importance in shaping social and political attitudes. There was, for instance, Carlyle's French Revolution, which Twain himself claimed that he had read eight times;[8] yet comparison of the book with his views of the Revolution reveals no definite influence and some rather surprisingly different reactions. There are, of course, many passages in his writings which might have been inspired by Carlyle, but no stronger claim can be made.[9] Twain's dark view of human nature, however, his hatred of the crazy cruelty inherent in it, must have been deepened by his reading of Carlyle's descriptions, such as the one picturing the heartless, brutal massacre of the aristocrats by the mob before the Abbaye Prison. "Fancy the yells of these men," Carlyle wrote, "their faces of sweat and blood; the crueller shrieks of these women...and a fellow-mortal hurled naked into it all!..... The bravest heart may quail at this."[10] Twain

---

8. "My First Lie," The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg and Other Essays, p.167.

9. In the "Czar's Soliloquy" Twain directly acknowledged his indebtedness to Carlyle's Sartor Resartus. After the Czar admitted to himself that his subjects worshiped his clothes and not him, Twain generalized: "As Teufelsdrockh suggested, what would man be--what would any man be--without his clothes?" ("Czar's Soliloquy," North American Review, CLXX, March, 1905, 321).

10. Thomas Carlyle, French Revolution, New York, 1897, III, 28. Twain lists 1871 as the date of his first acquaintance with the French Revolution (Letters, II, 490). It is conceivable, therefore, that Twain's disgust with human error did not develop before 1871; hence his reading of Carlyle's History may have centered his thought on one of the dark spots on the pages of the world's history. There is definite trace of his later pessimistic vein in a comment he included in his notebook while visiting historic scenes in Paris in 1879: "The Reign of Terror," he wrote, "shows that, without distinction or rank, the people were savages. Marquises, dukes, lawyers, blacksmiths, they each figure in due proportion to their crafts" (Biography, I, 644).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

frequently echoed Carlyle's contention that "there are depths in man that go the length of lowest Hell, as there are heights that reach highest Heaven.... Of such stuff are we all made; on such powder-mines of bottomless guilt and criminality,--'if God restrained not,' as is well said,--does the purest of us walk."[11] But Twain also directed his wrath at this restraining God who deliberately put in the individuals the evil potentialities which too often destroyed the possessors of them rather than limit his denunciations, like Carlyle, to the individuals who failed to realize their highest potentialities. His belief in a capricious fate was inconsonant with a belief in a loving God.

Carlyle's concept of man and his possibilities, on the other hand, may in part explain Twain's enthusiastic approval of the Revolution despite the inhuman atrocities committed under its banners. Carlyle charged that one inference should be drawn from the recognition of the depths and heights at once possible in man; "That 'if the Gods of this lower world will sit on their glittering thrones, indolent as Epicurus' gods, with the living Chaos of Ignorance and Hunger weltering uncared-for at their feet, and smooth Parasites preaching, Peace, peace, when there is no peace,' then the dark Chaos, it would seem, will rise."[12] It is some such indignation toward the "gods of the lower world" which probably prompted Twain to forget that evil cannot be justified on the basis of degree and to praise the French holocaust as

> ...the ever memorable and blessed Revolution, which swept a thousand years of such villainy away in one swift tidal wave of blood--one; a settlement of that hoary debt in the proportion of half a

---

11. Ibid., III, 26. 12. Ibid., p.313.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> drop of blood for each hogshead of it that had been pressed by slow tortures out of that people in the weary stretch of ten centuries of wrong and shame and misery the like of which was not to be mated but in hell. There were two "Reigns of Terror," if we would but remember it and consider it; the one wrought murder in hot passion, the other in heartless cold blood; the one lasted mere months, the other had lasted a thousand years...but our shudders are all for the "horrors" of the minor Terror.... Whereas, what is the horror of swift death by the ax compared with lifelong death from hunger, cold, insult, cruelty, and heartbreak?... None of us has been taught to see in its [that older terror's] vastness or pity as it deserves. 13

And yet, in view of this passage, it cannot be held that Twain's attitude was really shaped by Carlyle's. Carlyle neither attempted to justify nor to rationalize the brutality and bloodshed which stained the Revolution. Twain was the fervid democrat whose ingrained hatred of monarchy forced him into a paradoxical humanitarianism. When he praised "the memorable and blessed Revolution" because it swept villainy away in blood, and when he found it possible to accept one Reign of Terror because it supplanted another, he was guilty of an understandable rationalization, which, at the same time, did no credit to his supposedly broad humanity. His opinion represents another of the enigmatic inconsistencies into which his foreshortened perceptions all too frequently betrayed him. Here he is for a moment the practical political philosopher, but it is significant that his attempt to act on the long-range utilitarian theory that the end justifies the means led him to assume a point of view incompatible with his general

---

13. Connecticut Yankee, pp.105-106. He had expressed this opinion in the Mississippi book, where he concludes that Bonaparte and the Revolution, by breaking the power of the church and by destroying royalty and rank, made such benefactions that they "compensate the temporary harm which Bonaparte and the Revolution did, and leave the world in debt to them for these great and permanent services" (Life on the Mississippi, p.375).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

championing of humanity and world brotherhood. To say that Carlyle was responsible for the anomaly is to be guilty of Twain's short-sightedness. In fact, in a letter to Howells he absolved Carlyle of any responsibility for his prejudices:

> When I finished Carlyle's French Revolution in 1871, I was a Girondin; every time I have read it since, I have read it differently--being influenced and changed, little by little, by life and environment (and Taine and Saint Simon); and now I lay the book down once more, and recognize that I am a Sansculotte!--And not a pale, characterless Sansculotte, but a Marat. Carlyle teaches no such gospel: So the change is in me--in my vision of the evidences. 14

The observation may be said to epitomize Twain's relation to his reading--a constant shifting of his vision of the evidence--and to indicate his independence of The French Revolution in the formation of his opinions on the upheavel.

Further examination of the few minor instances in which Twain may be following the general purport of Carlyle's remarks bears out this conclusion. The echo, if any, is so faint as to remain questionable. Carlyle wrote a passage in which he lamented the mess we "poor mortals" make of our "fearful and wonderful Life" by rendering the earth "bitter for each other."[15] Twain frequently voiced a similar complaint against, or condemnation of, the vicious waste engendered by man's blind inhumanity to man, but obviously the thought in Carlyle's charge is too generalized, even commonplace, and in Twain's too vague and characteristic to justify

---

14. Letters, II, 490.

15. Carlyle, op. cit., I, 183.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

a dogmatic conclusion as to influence.[16]

The same condition is true of one of Carlyle's passages treating of a deterministic concept markedly present in Twain's What Is Man? and The Mysterious Stranger:

> Apart from all Transcendentalism, is it not a plain truth of sense, which the duller mind can even consider as a truism, that human things wholly are in continual movement, and action and reaction; working continually forward.... The Beginning holds in it the End, and all that leads thereto.... Thou there canst begin; the Beginning is for thee, and there: but where, and of what sort, and for whom will be the End be? All grows, and seeks and endures its destinies.... Not willingly: ah, no...the golden radiance of youth, would it willingly have tarnished itself into the dimness of old age?--Fearful: how we stand enveloped, deep-sunk, in that Mystery of Time.... Rest not, Continue not, Forward to thy doom! [17]

With the general philosophy of the passage Twain was in agreement, but that is no reason for assuming that his similar concept of a mechanistic universe originated here.[18]

Paine suggests that Twain's apparently unqualified approval of Carlyle's book accounts for the unusually limited number of marginal notes in his copy: "Perhaps," he writes of The French Revolution and Suetonius--also marked with few comments--"they expressed for him too completely and too richly their subject matter to require anything at his hand. Here and there are marked passages and occasional cross-references to related

---

16. See particularly The Mysterious Stranger where he represents the history of civilization and progress in terms of bigger and bloodier wars (P.108ff) where he portrays man as inflicting pain under the inspiration of his mongrel Moral Sense (Pp.50-51).

17. Carlyle, op. cit., II, 103-104.

18. Brashear thinks that he may have received his initial glimpse of the mechanical theory of human life from the first part of Tom Paine's Age of Reason (Mark Twain: Son of Missouri, p.247).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

history and circumstance."[19] This evidence, however, may only serve to strengthen the probability that Carlyle's history had no marked directive function in the formation or expression of Mark Twain's attitude toward the French Revolution; and, on the other hand, the presence of that comment does not necessarily point to the opposite conclusion. Twain usually read with pencil in hand, fiercely differing from or supporting his author profanely or profusely in the limited space of the book margins. Paine remarks of the favorite books which Twain kept accessible: "all, or nearly all, had annotations--spontaneously uttered marginal notes, title prefatories or concluding comments.... It was seldom that he had not had something to say with each fresh reading."[20] When he did not, it was a notable exception; his copy of William Lecky's History of European Morals, on the other hand, illustrates his more characteristic practice.

While spending his summers at Quarry Farm, Twain read Lecky avidly, Paine tells us, "and discussed it in original and unorthodox ways" with Theodore Crane, a brother-in-law of Mrs. Clemens. Not only did he discuss it, but he frequently scribbled pointed comments along the margins, annotations, Paine remarks, "not always quotable in the family circle." But in general he was satisfied to indicate his approval or disapproval of the author's ideas or opinions.[20] For instance, he wrote "sound and true" by way of indorsing those utilitarians whom Lecky described as holding that all our morality was a product of experience: "a desire to obtain happiness and to avoid pain is the only possible motive to action. The reason,

---

19. Biography, II, 1537-1538.

20. Ibid., II, 1536.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and the only reason, why we should...seek the good of others, is that on the whole such a course will bring us the greatest amount of happiness."[21] It was this philosophy which Twain expounded in What Is Man?. He professed to live by it, but he was never known to do so. He was a utilitarian only in theory and in print. In so far as he believed that actions were good or bad only as they tended to increase or diminish the greatest happiness of the greatest number, he was a member of the group described by Lecky. But his alliance was one of spirit, not of practice. In theory he justified the Reign of Terror; in theory he set up little moral precepts, such as his plea for "white lies," on a utilitarian basis; but in practice Mark Twain was the kind, generous, tolerant disciple of the school of the intuitive moralists.

Furthermore, it was to a refutation of utilitarian morality that Lecky devoted the major portion of his introductory chapter, and the fact that Twain expressed his approval of that morality rather than of Lecky's point of view suggests that here again he was merely interested in reflections of his own philosophy. For instance, following a statement of the beliefs of the utilitarian moralists, Lecky made a pertinent observation:

> From such a conception of human nature it is easy to divine what system of morals must flow. No character, feeling, or action is naturally better than others, and as long as men are in a savage condition, morality has no existence. Fortunately, however, we are all dependent for many of our pleasures upon others. Cooperation and organisation are essential to our happiness, and these are impossible without some restraint being placed upon our appetites. Laws are enacted to secure this restraint, and being sustained by rewards and punishments, they make it the interest of the individual to regard that of the community. According to

---

21. William E. H. Lecky, History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne, New York, 1913, I, 5.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Hobbes, the disposition of man is so anarchical, and the importance of restraining it so transcendent, that absolute government alone is good; the commands of the sovereign are supreme, and must therefore constitute the law of morals. 22

To this Twain appended a sophistical rationalization: "He has proceeded from unreasoned selfishness to reasoned selfishness. All our acts, reasoned and unreasoned are selfish."[23] Now nothing could be further from Lecky's purpose; it is obvious to the reader that Lecky was attempting to refute the claims of the utilitarians, and Twain's twisting the meaning of the passage indicates clearly that he had his theory and that he was reading Lecky for the pleasure of testing it against an opposing view. Furthermore, Twain would never have agreed to Hobbes's conclusion, although it follows from the very section he had approved.

It is unfortunate for the purposes of this study that all the marginal comment in Twain's copy of Lecky may not be examined. It would be interesting to see, for instance, whether he caught Lecky's fine point on the necessary negation of truth by utilitarian standards. Lecky called attention to the fact that these standards justify and condone the presence of superstition in life at the cost of truth.

> Superstitions appeal to our hopes as well as to our fears.... They offer certainties when reason can only afford possibilities or probabilities.... We owe more to our illusions than to our knowledge.... The first desire of the heart is to find something on which to lean.... A system of belief may be false, superstitions, and reactionary, and may yet be conducive to human happiness if it furnishes great multitudes of men with what they believe to be a key to the universe. 24

---

22. Ibid., I, 10-11.

23. Biography, I, 512.

24. Lecky, op. cit., I, 51.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

It reasonably followed, Lecky concluded, that the utilitarian could not risk dissolving such pleasing falsehoods because of the suffering that must commonly result from their dissolution. But by so acting the utilitarians renounced the general conviction "that truth should be deemed an end distinct from and superior to utility, and that it is a moral duty to pursue it, whether it leads to pleasure or whether it leads to pain."[25] If Twain read Lecky's deduction without sensing the inconsistency between his own opposition to superstition and his support of utilitarian doctrines --and he wrote nothing revealing any knowledge of Lecky's point--he exposed again what seemed to be his characteristic method of reading: a search for fact already observed and for support of ideas already held.

He probably found in Lecky, on the other hand, in addition to a lengthy description of utilitarian principles, support for some of his minor theories and beliefs. He undoubtedly agreed--in a vague sort of way, perhaps, because he did not think about it--with Lecky's contention that "in order to pity suffering we must realise it, and the intensity of our compassion is usually proportioned to the vividness of our realisation."[26] He might have found ample evidence for the assertion in his own experience, where his active imagination made him realize suffering so strongly that he felt almost a similar torture of mind if not of body. Certainly had he analyzed his deep compassion he would have admitted the plausibility of Lecky's conclusion that

> ...the great majority of uncharitable judgment in the world

---

25. Ibid., I, 52-53.

26. Lecky, op. cit., I, 132.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> may be traced to a definiency of imagination. The chief cause of sectarian animosity, is the incapacity of most men to conceive hostile systems in the light in which they appear to their adherents.... The acquisition of this power of intellectual sympathy is a common accompaniment of a large and cultivated mind, and wherever it exists, it assuages the rancour of controversy. 27

Twain's sympathy, more instinctive than intellectual (which explains his paradoxical views of the French Revolution), sprang from his capacity for imagination.[28] In his notebook he wrote: "There is but one first thing to do when a man is wounded and suffering: relieve him. If we have a curiosity to know his nationality, that is a matter of no consequence, and can wait."[29]

While Twain fell short of Lecky's concept of intellectual sympathy, he saw with Lecky the need for an intellectual virtue. He must have found support for his fight against blind loyalty to institutions in this statement of Lecky's: "By enlarged intellectual culture,...men come at last to pursue truth for its own sake, to esteem it a duty to emancipate themselves from party spirit, prejudices, and passion, and through love of truth to cultivate a judicial spirit in controversy. They aspire to the intellect not of a ... partisan but of a statesman."[30] Some of

---

27. Ibid., I, 134-135.

28. "Mark Twain's social idealism was a thing apart from his pessimistic determinism. It was, rather, a necessary consequence of his temperamental trust in his fellows and his sympathy for their struggles, and, just as fundamentally, of his enthusiasm for the American experiment, social and political. Taking its rise from his emotions rather than his reason...."(Brashear, Thesis, p.184).

29. Notebook, p.344.

30. Lecky, op. cit., I, 139. Cf. below for Twain's criticism of party loyalty as an illogical consistency.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Twain's political blasts, furthermore, have had their inception in Lecky's estimate of political morality: "The moral standard of most men is much lower in political judgments than in private matters in which their own interests are concerned. There is nothing more common than for men who in private life are models of the most scrupulous integrity to justify or excuse the most flagrant acts of political dishonesty and violence."[31] He had read Lecky many times when he wrote Twichell, explaining his opinion of Theodore Roosevelt with words from Leonard Jerome: "'For twenty years I have loved Roosevelt the man and hated Roosevelt the statesman and politician'.... It is plain that where his political self and his party self are concerned he has nothing resembling a conscience; that under those aspirations he is naively indifferent to the restraints of duty and even unaware of them."[32] A long passage in Twain's essay on Christian Science protesting the need for a public as well as private Christian morality apparently elaborates the point made by Lecky.[33]

On the whole, however, Lecky's ideas are neither so new nor so profound as to justify the supposition that Twain may have derived more than various hints from them, hints which he may have made the bases for his own thinking and writing on similar subjects. As late as 1876, Twain wrote Howells of his surprise at finding himself interested in the Haye's election: "I never was before. And I can't seem to get over my repugnance to reading or thinking about politics, yet."[34] Eventually he did become deeply interested in both local and national political campaigns--

---

31. Ibid., I, 151.
32. Letters, II, 766.
33. Christian Science, pp.262-264.
34. Letters, I, 286.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

usually for their perversions of the moral standard he raised--, and although it cannot rightly be asserted that his reading of Lecky's History of European Morals was responsible for that interest, it can plausibly be suggested that such opinions as those noted above may have had their source, at least their background, in the Irishman's work on morality.

Professor Olin Moore, in a study already mentioned, has presented more detailed evidence of Lecky's influence. The two examples of parallels which he prints represent parodies of material in the History. One, too long to quote here, has to do with Twain's version, in Chapter XXI of the Connecticut Yankee, of Lecky's tale of St. Simon Stylites and his "Holy Fountain."[35] The other parody, found in the same book, has as its subjects another loathsome excess of the doughty saint. Twain described St. Simon Stylites, perched on his sixty-foot pillar, bowing his body ceaselessly and rapidly almost to his feet as a way of praying: "I timed him with a stop-watch, and he made twelve hundred and forty-four revolutions in twenty-four minutes and forty-six seconds."[36] Compare this with a sentence of Lecky's: "...ceaselessly and rapidly bending his body in prayer almost to the level of his feet. A spectator attempted to number these rapid motions, but desisted from weariness when he had counted 1,244."[37]

---

35. "Mark Twain and Don Quixote", P. M. L. A., XXXVII (1922), 341. Brashear notes that Pochmann listed "...four passages in Tom Sawyer where the author is obviously indebted to the History of European Morals: Tom Sawyer, pp.117-118 (Lecky, op. cit., II, 108-109); Prince and Pauper, pp.156-164, (II, 90-101); Connecticut Yankee, pp.183-185 (II, 111-112) and 338-362 (II, 90-101)" (Thesis, p.189). They are similar in content to those Moore cited.

36. Connecticut Yankee, p.205.

37. Lecky, op. cit., II, 112.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The example is an effective one with which to terminate this discussion of Twain's reading of Lecky, for by its nature it summarizes the probable influence upon him of History of European Morals. Parallels have been noted; the hypothesis that Twain's political opinions have some connection with Lecky's material has been formulated; but in the end the only tangible, definite use made of Lecky is a factual, humorous one. Paine tells us that Twain "read and digested every word and line" of many histories, that "there were two volumes of Lecky, much worn" on his night table.[38] Twain himself wrote his literary declaration of taste on the back of an old envelope: "I like history, biography, travels, curious facts and strange happenings,and science."[39] Apparently little more than the "curious facts" embedded in the two volumes of Lecky impressed him enough to be retained. As suggested, he may have borrowed more than facts, but there is no evidence to support a stronger conclusion. Evidently his fertile mind supplied enough principles to make Lecky's scholarly points superfluous. Paine decides that he read Lecky because in his pages he "found an echo of his own philosophies."[40] He was thirty-nine years old at the time he and Theodore Crane read and discussed Lecky in "original and unorthodox ways." It is, therefore, logical to infer, the more so in view of Paine's opinion, that his beliefs were already formulated.

Miss Brashear makes this inference and attempts to find the real source of Twain's philosophy in eighteenth-century channels, particularly

&

38. Biography, II, 1538-1539.

39. Ibid., I, 512.

40. Ibid., I, 511.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

those dredged by Tom Paine. She assumes that during his late teens Clemens became interested in the writings of Tom Paine, on the basis of a letter in which he quoted Paine's famous line: "the days that tried men's souls."[41] Twain's letters reveal that he did considerable reading to relieve his homesickness and to occupy his leisure; hence Miss Brashear thinks it possible that he read Paine's American Crisis and even his Common Sense and Rights of Man. On one occasion, in 1907, Albert Paine observed that it "took a brave man before the Civil War to confess that he had read The Age of Reason," Twain replied: "So it did, and yet that seems a mild book now. I read it first when I was a cub pilot, read it with fear and hesitation, but marveling at its fearlessness and wonderful power."[42] The evidence supports the theory, Miss Brashear concludes, that the direction of Clemens's religious and to a lesser extent his political thinking was influenced by his reading in Tom Paine. She does not ride her conclusion too hard, being satisfied to reveal the evidence and the hypothesis. She conscientiously notes that it is hard to understand, and impossible to explain from her point of view, why there is no mention of Paine in Twain's writings.[43] He knew Moncure D. Conway, who edited Paine's writings; yet

---

41. Mark Twain: Son of Missouri, p.162. She suggested that "from the History of European Morals, he would have made the acquaintance of the main lives of eighteenth century thinking" (ibid., p.244). In view of Twain's use of Lecky, it is improbable that he should have been guided by him into new fields of speculation".

42. Ibid., p.245.

43. The italics are Miss Brashear's. There is a minor reference to him in Twain's essay "Is Shakespeare Dead?" Discussing irreverence, Twain wrote: "The Catholic Church says the most irreverent things about matters which are sacred to the Protestants, and the Protestant Church retorts in kind.... Then both of these irreverencers turn upon Thomas Paine and charge him with irreverence" (What Is Man?, pp.369-370).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

he never mentioned Conway's interest in the eighteenth-century radical. It is significant for Miss Brashear, however, that Twain in 1908 added the revolutionary's name among those of statesmen on an incomplete list of the world's "One Hundred Greatest Men."[44]

The evidence Miss Brashear presents resolves itself into much the same type of proof as that advanced in the discussion of the provable influence of Carlyle and Lecky on Twain's social and political philosophy. Mark Twain may or may not have been sufficiently impressed with the books he read to use their ideas. There are parallels but nothing more. Miss Brashear carefully qualifies her deductions. The sentence--"these are the times that try men's souls"--, she admits, "might merely have aroused his imagination when he read...that it was the battle-cry of the American troops crossing the Delaware." There was also just "the chance" that he turned to The American Crisis.[45] When Twain said in a letter that the shout of the democratic masses in Philadelphia was such as to send the "blood from the cheek of the tyrant," Miss Brashear sees a possible connection between the expression and a phrase of Paine's, which would have delighted Twain at any time: "Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered."[46] Similarly, such lines as the following from the Rights of Man may have lived again in the Connecticut Yankee: "Every age and generation must be as free to act for itself in all cases as the age and generations which preceded it. The vanity and presumption of governing beyond the grave is

---

44. Mark Twain: Son of Missouri, p.248.

45. Ibid., pp.162-163.

46. Ibid., p.163.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the most ridiculous and insolent of all tyrannies. Man has no property in man."[47]

Conway points out in his introduction to the Rights of Man that Paine's book was the earliest complete statement of republican principles:

> They were pronounced to be the fundamental principles of the American Republic by Jefferson, Madison, and Jackson.... The belief that every human soul was the child of God, and capable of direct inspiration from the Father of all, without mediator or priestly intervention, or sacramental instrumentality, was fatal to all privilege and rank. The universal Fatherhood implied universal Brotherhood, or human equality. 48

How thoroughly Twain subscribed to Paine's republicanism is evident in his own expressions on equality and monarchy. Particularly in his hatred of the latter political principle does he seem to echo Paine. He frequently writes passages which are similar in substance to the following from the Rights of Man: "the hereditary monarchial system...is a system of mental levelling. It indiscriminately admits every species of character to the same authority.... Kings succeed each other, not as Rationals, but as animals.... It is government through the medium of passions and accidents. ... It occasionally puts children over men, and the conceits of non-age

---

47. Ibid., p.164, quoting the Writings of Thomas Paine, ed. M. D. Conway, New York, 1894, II, 278. In view of the above questioning of Miss Brashear's theories it should be admitted that her carefully documented account of her discussion does justify her qualified conclusion "that Mark Twain profited by his reading, so far as it affected his writing, in four ways: (1) it stimulated in him a writing mood; (2) it brought on either a positive or negative reaction that took form in a story or an essay [The Prince and the Pauper had its inception in Twain's reading of Charlotte M. Younge's The Prince and the Page,]; (3) it furnished him support for a theory [In Defense of Harriet Shelley]; (4) or it supplemented his own narrative ["lifted material in Following the Equator]" (Brashear, Thesis, p.269 and Mark Twain:Son of Missouri, pp.196-224).

48. Writings of Thomas Paine, II, 262.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

over wisdom and experience."[49]

Equal to his hatred of monarchy was Twain's contempt for caste, possibly inspired by Paine's similar distrust of both. There is certainly a parallel between the two men's thought, if not their expression, in a passage of Paine's on aristocracy: "Aristocracy has a tendency to deteriorate the human species.... The artificial NOBLE shrinks into a dwarf before the NOBLE of Nature."[50] Twain held to no doctrine of the Noble Savage, but his antipathy to aristocracy is clearly revealed in The American Claimant, A Connecticut Yankee, and numerous shorter pieces.

But perhaps the strongest directive force exerted by the Rights of Man was in the formation of Twain's unqualified approval of the French Revolution. This may appear at first glance to contradict what has already been said as to the probable influence of Carlyle's history, but it must be remembered that Twain showed more revolutionary bias than did Carlyle. Possibly the enthusiasm was supplied by Tom Paine's impassioned answers to Burke; Twain would seem to be echoing Paine's charges that the English were prejudiced in favor of monarchy when he wrote Howells in regard to the latter's praise of A Connecticut Yankee: "I am glad you approve of what I say about the French Revolution. Few people will. It is odd that even to this day Americans still observe that immortal benefaction through English and other monarchical eyes.... Next to the 4th of July and its results, it was the noblest and the holiest thing and the most

---

49. Ibid., II, 415-416.

50. Ibid., II, 323.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

precious that ever happened in this earth."[51] Likewise in his insistence upon the need for the Revolution, in a passage already quoted, Twain might be said to be following Paine, who wrote:

> It was not against Louis XVIth but against the despotic principles of the Government, that the nation revolted. These principles had not their origin in him, but in the original establishment, many centuries back; and they were become too deeply rooted to be removed, and the Augean stables of parasites and plunderers too abominably filthy to be cleansed by anything short of a complete and universal Revolution. When it becomes necessary to do anything, the whole heart and soul should go into the measure, or not attempt it. [52]

There remains to be considered the claims Miss Brashear makes for Tom Paine's writing, particularly the Age of Reason, as sources for Mark Twain's views on religion. In the summary of Twain's remarks on institutional religion, it will be evident that he feared an influence of external factors in the selection of creeds, and that he repudiated literal and orthodox interpretations of the Bible as vicious and destructive. Granted that most criticisms of these features of religious worship are apt to be related in the broadest sense of the word, there are, nevertheless, several close parallels between Twain's and Paine's expressions of their attitude, which suggest the probability that the Age of Reason did afford direction to the humorist's religious thinking. The fact that he recalled having read the book during the impressionable years of his life as a cub-pilot, when he marveled at "its fearlessness and wonderful power," is strong support for the inference that subconsciously, if not consciously, he assimilated some of the high points of the rationalist's attack on orthodoxy.

---

51. Letters, II, 514.

52. Writings of Thomas Paine, II, 283.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Miss Brashear suggests that from Part I of the Age of Reason, which explains the principles of Newtonian deism, he "might have got his initial glimpse of the mechanical theory of human life, which he finally formulated into a philosophical system."[53] Paine's coarse ridicule of superstition should have delighted Twain, along with the "eloquent passages in favor of a pure morality founded upon natural religion." Moreover, Miss Brashear reasons, even if he had not read Paine before this, "the place that orthodox Christianity had occupied in the thinking of the Clemens family...would have insured that the deistic arguments against Christian proofs...would arouse him either to accept or refute Paine's position."[54] The inference is certainly justified by Twain's characteristic reactions to controversies, but he neither refuted nor affirmed Paine's arguments--publicly. When he reread the book in 1907, the period of his life when his religious opinions were probably closest to Paine's general attitude, his comment was simply that he then found the book tame and Paine apologetic.[55]

That Twain had remembered, however, more of the substance of Paine's diatribes than he admitted, or himself realized, is suggested by those opinions in which he was anticipated by Paine. "I do not believe," Paine wrote, "in the creed professed...by any church that I know of. My own mind is my own church. All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian, or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and

---

53. Mark Twain: Son of Missouri, p.247.

54. Loc. cit.

55. Biography, II, 1445.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

profit."[56] When Twain wrote in the Connecticut Yankee: "an Established Church is only a political machine...an enemy to human liberty, and does no good," he was obviously close to his predecessor in phraseology as well as thought.[57]

The same close parallelism is also revealed in the theories of the two men as to the source of religious beliefs. Paine wrote a friend: "You were educated to believe the Bible; and as the Turks give the same reason for believing the Koran, it is evident that education makes all the difference, and that reason and truth have nothing to do in the case. You believe in the Bible from the accident of birth, and the Turks believe in the Koran from the same accident, and each calls the other infidel."[58] Years later Twain wrote Howells, about a proposed story which "will illustrate a but-little considered fact in human nature; that the religious folly you are born in you will die in, no matter what apparently reasonabler religious folly may seem to have taken its place meanwhile, and abolished and obliterated it."[59]

But it was in their vigorous, scornful ridicule of the traditional concepts of God, perpetrated by the literalist and his interpretation of the Bible, that the two men were closest in thought, if not in wording. Perhaps Twain's disgust with Calvinism as he had known it in Hannibal took shape and found expression in the light of Paine's blazing charges. Twain's

---

56. Writings of Thomas Paine, IV, 22.

57. P.149.

58. Writings of Thomas Paine, IV, 199.

59. Letters, II, 440.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

repeated repudiations of the wilful, malicious God of bloodshed and pain are familiar. They might have sprung from Paine's recital of his childhood rejection of a sermon on the subject of the redemption through the death of the Son of God: "It was making God Almighty act like a passionate man, that killed his son, when he could not revenge himself any other way.... Any system of religion that has anything in it that shocks the mind of a child, cannot be a true system."[60] Twain did not limit religion in so many words, but when he came to construct his personal God, furnishing Him "with some ways and qualities and characteristics which the Present (Bible) One lacks," he used materials similar to Paine's.[61] Particularly is this tnue of his positive concept of God. Paine had written: "The Bible represents God to be a changeable, passionate, vindictive Being; making a world and then drowning it.... But the works of God in the Creation preach to us another doctrine. In that vast volume we see nothing to give us the idea of a changeable, passionate, vindictive God.... Everything in the Creation proclaims that God is unchangeable."[62] And in another place: "It is only in the CREATION that all our ideas and conceptions of a word of God can unite.... This word of God reveals to man all that it is necessary for man to know of God."[63] Mark Twain said of God:

> His real character is written in plain words in His real Bible,

---

60. Writings of Thomas Paine, IV, 65.

61. Notebook, p.301.

62. Writings of Thomas Paine, IV, 197-198.

63. Ibid., IV, 46.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> which is Nature and her history; we read it every day, and we could understand it and trust in it if we would burn the spurious one and dig the remains of our insignificant reasoning faculties out of the grave where that and other man-made Bibles have buried them for 2,000 years and more.... The Book of Nature tells us...that His laws inflict pain and suffering and sorrow, but it does not say that this is done in order that He may get pleasure out of this misery.... The Law of the Distribution of Comfort and Pain shows an entire absence of sentimental justice.... The laws are all hard and fast. 64

But Twain's concept is negative; the Book of Nature does not afford him solace nor encouragement; it merely refutes the silly concepts of God and the irrational justifications of pain and suffering which literalists find in man's Bible. Paine found in nature evidence of the hand of a benevolent Creator; for him, Nature sang a paean of praise of the Almighty. In that sense the two men differ, but the difference is one of application of principle, easily explained by Twain's individuality, and he may have first become actively conscious of this basic principle in the pages of Tom Paine's Age of Reason.

It is the possible influence of Paine that Miss Brashear uses to support her conclusion that Mark Twain's philosophy had its foundation in the more rigid eighteenth-century trends of thought:

> If he could have realized the scope of nineteenth-century speculation, his conclusions concerning man's place in the cosmos would have been a larger and more valuable contribution to human thought.... He was almost wholly preoccupied with the narrow, bitter problem of why men are not supermen. The question of the immortality of the soul found, after all, a rather slight place in his thinking, as well as the implications of the theory of evolution as they concern man's destiny. 65

---

64. Notebook, pp.362-363.

65. Mark Twain: Son of Missouri, p.242. Twain's active interest in making money, in becoming a big publisher, in sponsoring numerous inventions indicates, on the contrary, an attempt to keep step with "developing physical economy." H. H. Waggoner claims, moreover,
(cont'd p.150)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The nineteenth-century was intent upon a developing physical economy, which, Miss Brashear points out, "took little hold upon his practical thinking"; and she goes on to affirm that Twain's interest was in man's position in the world "as an ethical component of society" rather than in evangelism and transcendental speculative philosophy detached from man's use and want.[66] From his mother and father he inherited a keen interest in mankind, which led him to seek out the company of people and to read history and biography avidly. "If his conclusion was that whatever is, is not right, it was because his concentration upon the humor point of view made the general human situation appear to him intolerable. This bias determined both the materials he chose and his treatment of his materials. He was one of the apologists for humanity, 'Member at Large for the Human Race,' he called himself."[67]

Granting that Mark Twain's preoccupation with man "as an ethical component of society" may have originated in eighteenth-century philosophy Miss Brashear was nevertheless on thin ice, as she admitted when she went to eighteenth-century philosophers for the source of what Twain

---

65. (cont'd) that Twain's views stand "in a general way, for the implications, and, in part, for the definite assertions of a whole movement in scientific history" during the nineteenth century. He finds the evidence against Miss Brashear's theory: "We know that he read the science of his own day, and that he interpreted it as best he could. It seems true...that he was not touched by the 'speculative philosophy' of his day; but there was an increasingly wide divergence between speculative philosophy and physical science in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Like many other men of his day, he did not go to the professional philosopher for his philosophy; he developed it directly, from what he considered 'facts'" (American Literature, VIII January, 1937 ,368-369).

66. Mark Twain: Son of Missouri, p.227.

67. Loc. cit.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

considered a unique and individual system of thought. Her case for the influence of Thomas Paine has been reviewed. Since her claims for other philosophers of the century--Voltaire, Hume, and Newton--hinge somewhat upon the strength of Twain's use of Paine, Miss Brashear sensibly limited her theory to a suggestion that the main lines of Twain's thought seemed "to follow the doctrines" of these men. As it has been repeatedly stressed in this analysis, however, Twain's independence and indifference to anything but factual material in his reading should discourage us from making definite claims for his sources. It would seem then that Twain's indebtedness to Hobbes, Hume, Newton, or Voltaire is highly conjectural. His character, his normal interests, and his general attitude toward profundities in any sphere speak strongly against his wading through the Leviathan and the Essay Concerning Human Understanding only to emerge with the philosophical pill of which he was so proud, and which would merit the opinion of a trained philosopher, like William James, that Twain was a "dear little genius."[68] His indifference to Lecky's lengthy examinations of moral philosophers in which he was interested throws additional weight against the hypothesis that he knew the English philosophers well enough to construct his theories under their influence. They may only have reached him second hand through Lecky, a nineteenth-century thinker; for they were discussed in the opening chapter of his History of Morals, and their direct statements are frequently quoted at some length in the

---

68. Ibid., p.242 note.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

numerous footnotes appended to his work.[69]

The question of the relationship of Twain's reading to social and political criticism thus resolves itself into a collection of ephemeral hypotheses. Just as Twain remained an individual and independent in his thinking despite his close association with Howells and Warner, so, too, he was apparently impervious to the deeper and broader aspects of his reading. What he sought was largely material of human interest: the great and curious events of history, the unique and picturesque facets of human nature. In the final analysis, his political and social opinions were his own, derived from the union of his particular point of view with his personality and not from his reading in philosophical works.

---

69. Miss Brashear is authority for the statement based upon the catalogue for the sale of his books, that "there was almost nothing significant in philosophy in the humorist's library...and Lecky was the only philosophical writing among his 'classics'.... The introductory discussion of the bases of natural-morality in the History of European Morals contributed--perhaps by forcing upon his temperamental taste a self-criticism--to the moralistic bias that became more and more apparent in Mark Twain's writings as he grew older.... Mark Twain's reading after he reached maturity shows that what he sought was human interest material. Science, philosophy, and religion, on their abstract side, received a comparatively slight part of his time.... 'His knowledge of history was chiefly a knowledge of picturesque narrative history, of chronicles of great and curious events, of accounts of hazardous undertakings, of descriptions of strange peoples'" (Thesis, pp.303-305).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

III

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL IDEAS

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL IDEAS

1.

Morality

"I am a moralist in disguise."[1]

In his copy of Thackeray's essay on Swift, Twain marked the plea for the recognition of the innate seriousness of the true humorist:

> Harlequin without his mask is known to present a very sober countenance, and was himself...a man full of cares and perplexities like the rest of us, whose Self must always be serious to him, under whatever mask or disguise or uniform he presents it to the public.... The humorous writer professes to awaken and direct your love, your pity, your kindness--your scorn for untruth, pretension, imposture--your tenderness for the weak, the poor, the oppressed, the unhappy.... He comments on all the ordinary actions and passions of life almost. He takes upon himself to be the week-day preacher. [2]

Whether or not Twain was in agreement with Thackeray's definition, it is, as Professor Henderson points out, "apt enough to have been made with Mark Twain in mind."[3] Certainly such a conception of the character and function of the humorist is fundamental to an understanding of Twain's observations on matters social and political; for he was basically a moralist--"a week-day preacher"--scorning the hypocrisy, cruelty, and wrongheadedness of man. It is because his moral attitude has broad social implications, representing for him a potent force for either good or evil in society, that it should be considered an integral part of his social and political opinions. The fact that he was usually Harlequin should not be permitted to obscure the truths his jesting conveyed. He believed that no abuse could withstand ridicule, and his instinct for humor convinced him that laughter was the most powerful type of ridicule. Consciously or unconsciously he expressed

---

1. Letters, II, 719.
2. Coley B. Taylor, Mark Twain's Margins on Thackeray's "Swift", New York, 1935, pp.30-31.
3. Mark Twain, p.179.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

his doctrine of laughter in The Mysterious Stranger:

> This multitude see the comic side of a thousand low-grade and trivial things--broad incongruitus mainly.... The ten thousand high-grade comicalities which exist in the world are sealed from their dull vision. Will a day come when the race will detect the funniness of these juvenilities and laugh at them--and by laughing at them destroy them? For your race, in its poverty, has unquestionably one really effective weapon--laughter. Power, money, persuasion, supplication, persecution--these can lift at a colossal humbug...weaken it a little, century by century; but only laughter can blow it to rags and atoms at a blast. Against the assault of laughter nothing can stand. 4

Twain devoted his life to the task of opening the eyes of the multitude to the high-grade comicalities. His success was not as complete as one might have wished, and the reason for his mediocre attainment lies largely in his inability to distinguish between the trivial and the significant comicalities. He threw out his opinions much in the manner of his witticisms: striking, original, aphoristic statements, which betray the reader into hearty support until the shallowness and discrepancy of some of them become apparent. The thought of the moment too often became the expression of the hour with Mark Twain; consequently this summary of his criticism will be replete with inconsistencies. He had no carefully formulated theory of society or politics, and any study of his views, just as any study of his life, must accept the contradictions as characteristic of the man.

The moral character of Twain's writing, however, made such a deep impression on his contemporaries that they either missed or ignored the paradoxical character of his opinions. It is significant that the advertisement for his first published volume, the Jumping Frog book, should accept his recognition as a moralist rather than as a humorist, and should

---

4. New York, 1922, pp.131-132.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

observe the distinction in the Preface:

> By his story of the Frog he scaled the heights of popularity at a single jump and won for himself the sobriquet of the Wild Humorist of the Pacific Slope. He is also known to fame as The Moralist of the Main; and it is not unlikely that as such he will go down to posterity. It is in his secondary character, as humorist, however, rather than in the primal one of moralist, that I aim to present him in the present volume.... It was necessary to snatch threads of humor wherever they could be found--very often detaching them from serious articles and moral essays with which they were woven and entangled. 5

This estimate of his double function as a writer persisted, although the emphasis gradually shifted to his achievements as a humorist. When the reaction among his readers went so far that they began to forget the serious undertones, Howells (in his reviews) began to stress the important truths hidden in Twain's humor. He wrote the following comment on Sketches, New and Old in the Atlantic Monthly for December, 1875:

> There is another quality [in addition to the characteristic humorous traits of Twain] 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. It came to Dickens...to Thackeray.... We shall be disappointed if in Mr. Clemens's case it finds only some desultory expression, like "Lionizing Murders" and "A New Crime," though there could not be more effective irony than these sketches so far as they go. 6

---

5. Biography, II, 1605.

6. My Mark Twain, p.121.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Twain and his wife were particularly pleased with Howells's recognition. "She is grateful to you," Twain wrote, "for being bold enough to utter a truth which she fully believes all competent people know, but which none has heretofore been brave enough to utter. You see, the thing that gravels her is that I am so persistently glorified as a mere buffoon, as if that entirely covered my case--which she denies with venom."[7] Her conviction, moreover, only confirmed his own. In 1868 a letter he had sent Orion from Washington had stated his determination to write as he pleased once he had married. Cable testified that after one apparently successful lecture Twain had exclaimed: "I am demeaning myself, I am allowing myself to be a mere buffoon.... I can't endure it any longer."[8] He thought that his higher purpose was responsible for his success. He explained to Archibald Henderson the reasons for the broadening and deepening of his humor after the Innocents Abroad and Roughing It had been hailed as purely funny books:

> I succeeded in the long run, where Shillaber, Doesticks, and Billings failed, because they never had an ideal higher than that of merely being funny. The first great lesson of my life was the discovery that I had to live down my past. When I first began to lecture, and in my earlier writings, my sole idea was to make comic capital out of everything I saw and heard. My object was not to tell the truth, but to make people laugh. I treated my readers as unfairly as I treated everybody else--eager to betray them at the end with some monstrous absurdity or some extravagant anti-climax. [9]

---

7. Letters, I, 263-264.

8. Biography, I, 786.

9. Henderson, op. cit., p.99. To Henderson he also admitted, it should be remembered, Mrs. Clemens's great influence in deepening his humor.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

It was the higher ideal which probably accounted for the increase of satire in The Gilded Age. Although he did not always succeed in his determination to treat his audience fairly, he continued to maintain his essential seriousness. In 1899 he refused to edit a magazine of humor for McClure on the grounds that to do so would be an incongruity and out of character. "Of the twenty-three books which I have written," he pointed out, "eighteen do not deal in humor as their chiefest feature, but are half & half admixtures of fun & seriousness."[10]

The proportion of fun and fact were not, however, either as equal or as obvious as he implied; consequently it was necessary for Howells to continue to remind readers of his friend's deeper meanings. Even that patient critic despaired of the task at times, and wrote in one essay that "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." Nevertheless, "I warn the reader that if he leaves out of the account and indignant sense of right and wrong, a scorn of all affectation and pretence, an ardent hate of meanness and injustice, he will come in definitely short of knowing Mark Twain."[11]

Still it was not until the turn of the century, after Twain had written all of his greatest books and had become directly critical of

---

10. Biography, II, 1100.

11. My Mark Twain, p.141. In criticizing The Prince and the Pauper R. W. Gilder said: "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" (Century Magazine, New Series, I [March, 1882], 784).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

contemporary matters, that he was again widely acclaimed as a moralist. An editorial in the Louisville Courier-Journal commented on his conduct following his return from Europe:

> A remarkable transformation, or rather a development, has taken place in Mark Twain. The genial humorist of the earlier day is now a reformer of the vigorous kind, a sort of knight errant who does not hesitate to break a lance with either Church or State if he thinks them interposing on that broad highway over which he believes not a part but the whole of mankind has the privilege of passing. 12

The cycle had been completed: the Moralist of the Main was once more recognized.[13] The subjects of his attacks had changed and his methods had acquired a deeper tone, but there remained a definite, though vague, emotional connection between the strictures of 1864 and of 1904. The real difference was that the American people were by the latter date quite willing to accept him in any of his phases, "fully realizing that whatever his philosophy or doctrine it would have somewhat of the humorous form, and whatever his humor, there would somewhere be wisdom in it."[14] They were ready to join in praise of his satire and his humor. The Nation paid him a special tribute for his fight against imperialism. His refusal to fall down and worship Roosevelt, and his sympathy for the Boxers--especially praisworthy in view of the reluctance of men of letters to risk angering the public--put him, the editors declared, "as much morally above the mob

---

12. Letters, II, 703.

13. Introducing Twain to members of London's Pilgrims Club in 1907, Augustine Birrell said that forty years after he had first been referred to as both humorist and moralist Twain was "still the humorist, still the moralist. His humor enlivens and enlightens his morality, and his morality is all the better for his humor" (Speeches, p.335).

14. Biography, II, 1119.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

of literary time-servers as his writings place him artistically."[15]

The tendency to emphasize Twain's serious criticism culminated in Henderson's acceptance of the humorist as philosopher, moralist, and sociologist. Although Paine's study admits these aspects of Twain, Henderson's biography, which was published in the same year as Paine's, may be considered the first to stress their importance, since it devoted a section to a discussion of them. "Beneath that humour," Henderson wrote, "underlying it and informing it, is a fund of human concern, a wealth of seriousness and pathos, and a universality of interests which argue real power and greatness. These qualities...reveal Mark Twain as serious enough to be regarded as a real moralist and philosopher, humane enough to be regarded as, in spirit, a true sociologist and reformer."[16]

Now most critics have readily accepted Twain as a moralist, regardless of whether or not they agreed with Henderson that he was also a sociologist. The question involves interpretation rather than reconciliation of conflicting points of view: do Twain's moral pronouncements have social significance? His morality thus becomes a natural starting point for a summary of his social and political criticism. If he was, in the final analysis, a sociologist, his opinions on moral problems constituted

---

15. "Mark Twain, American Citizen," Nation, LXXI (November 29, 1900), 420. His opinions were considered radical by the upperclass Easterners of this period. Twichell urged him to accept Yale's proffered LL.D., arguing that in Twain's case it would be the highest public compliment. "For it will be tendered you," Twichell pointed out, "by a corporation of gentlemen, the majority of whom do not at all agree with the views on important questions which you have lately promulgated in speech and in writing, and with which you are identified to the public mind" (Biography, II, 1143).

16. Op. cit., pp.179-180.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

a basic, integral part of his sociology. If he was on the other hand never more than a moralist, then those opinions were even more important in themselves.

One should not expect to find Twain's thoughts couched in organized, philosophically expressed principles of conduct. In the first place, his criticism was so largely negative that his positive beliefs must usually be inferred; his own moral precepts were implied rather than stated in his attacks on conventional morality. Secondly, his attitudes frequently conflicted because they usually expressed the irreconcilable facets of temperament in which they originated. This last point is vital to an understanding of Twain's morality. It was of the heart, not of the mind; it was emotional rather than rational; it was chivalrous rather than ethical. His sympathies and loyalties therefore frequently determined his ideas.

This tendency to emotionalize frequently resulted in the triumph of sentiment over reason and logic. Paine warns that sympathy could change his mind at any time. "He stood for the right, but, above all, for justice. He stood for the wronged, regardless of all other things."[17] Admirable as this eagerness to champion the under-dog was from a sentimental point of view, it tended to scatter Twain's effort over trivial as well as important wrongs. Not only did his sympathy involve him in support of too many causes of no significance; it also precipitated shifts in attitude, as Paine suggests. In later life, for example, he regretted his old slurs on Samuel Tilden, because his feeling toward him had altered. When no such alteration

---

17. Biography, I, 582.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

occurred, however, he was apt to persist in his moral judgment. He could not understand the personalities of Shelley and Byron; hence their conduct disgusted him, and he wrote a withering, ironical attack on the Life of Shelley in which Dowden had asserted that Harriet Shelley had put a stain on her husband's honor.[18] He was so irked by Swift's treatment of Stella and Vanessa that he concluded that the Dean was "void of every tender grace, every kindly humanizing element," and a good illustration of "what a bare glittering iceberg is mere intellectual greatness."[19]

Twain pressed his emotional awareness of suffering so vigorously on occasions that the reader suspects him of deriving an almost sadistic satisfaction from the vicarious experience of pain. When he visited the Ducal Palace and the Bridge of Sighs in Venice, he wrote detailed, gory accounts of the torture apparatus and the exquisite agonies inflicted upon the victims.[20] He repeatedly condemned the author of one travel book for his cruelty to the beggars who stole from him.[21] By the time he wrote Tom Sawyer Abroad he was ready to imply that any such sensitivity as his to the woes of humanity imposed a burden. The wonderful sense of peace and relaxation which settled upon Huck Finn as he floated above the earth suggests Twain's consciousness of the price he paid for his broad sympathy:

> Land, I warn't in no hurry to get out and buck at civilization

---

18. "In Defence of Harriet Shelley," Literary Essays, pp.1-60.

19. Taylor, op. cit., p.55.

20. Innocents Abroad, I, 224-228. In his burlesque review of a typical Roman holiday at the Coliseum he emphasized the suffering of the parents and relatives of the contestants (Ibid., I, 293-294).

21. Ibid., II, 269-271.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> again. Now, one of the worst things about civilization is, that anybody that gits a letter with trouble in it comes and tells you all about it and makes you feel bad, and the newspapers fetches you the troubles of everybody all over the world, and keeps you downhearted and dismal 'most all the time, and it's such a heavy load for a person. 22

Perhaps Huck's remark reflected only the mood of the moment in his creator; nevertheless, it carried more than a mere hint of Twain's realization of the cares his sensitivity heaped upon him. It placed him with those who have always taken upon themselves the troubles of civilization, pouring out their tenderest feelings in behalf of humanity, yet reviling their susceptibilities for the weight of care they bring. Peace of mind is not the reward of the Swifts and Twains.

Emotion is, however, a fickle mistress, and she occasionally deserted Twain. During such periods he made statements incompatible with his deep humanitarian impulses. In the Innocents Abroad, for example he described the wretched cripples in Constantinople in a manner bordering on caricature: "A beggar has to have exceedingly good points to make a living in Constantinople," he wrote. "It would pay him to get a piece of his head taken off, and cultivate a wen like a carpet-sack." 23 Similarly the old mining-camp weakness for extravagant burlesque trapped him into writing a humorous description, in the style of a commercial report in an

---

22. P.58. In The American Claimant Barrow explained to a young Englishman why fellow lodgers now hated a once-popular member of their group: "'They do turn against Brady, now that he's unfortunate... but it isn't because of any lack in Brady.... They know they ought to help him and they're too stingy to do it, and...they hate Brady because he makes them ashamed of themselves'" (p.109).

23. II, 70.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

American newspaper, of the private sale of Circassian and Georgian girls.[24] These inconsistencies in point of view could be excused as being natural to an immature Western humorist--a composite roughneck, reporter and funny man; they continued to appear sporadically in his thinking.

The most conspicuous paradox was his attempt to justify the righteousness of violence as a means of overthrowing unjust or tyrannical governments. So sympathetic was he to the cause of oppressed peoples that he praised the French Revolution, urged a military uprising for Russia, and denounced the Russo-Japanese peace treaty on the basis of a theory of compensations which held that "from every impulse whether good or evil, flow two streams; the one carries health, the other carries poison."[25] His humane sensitivity to suffering was at once the source of both his humanitarianism and the contradictions apparent in it.

His emotional approach to morality conditioned his attitude toward conventional moral practices and precepts. It has been demonstrated elsewhere that Twain's environment up to the time that he settled permanently in the East was conducive to the development of a deep and implacable hatred of pretence, sham, and imposture in any of their innumerable manifestations. Exposure while young to the repulsive aspects of religion, coupled with his eager acceptance of the freedom of the River and of the mining camps, had culminated in a sharp bitterness toward traditional

---

24. Ibid., II, 77-78.

25. "The Dervish and the Offensive Stranger," Europe and Elsewhere, p.310. "The French Revolution brought desolation to the hearts and homes of five million families and drenched the country with blood.... But every great and precious liberty enjoyed by the nations of continental Europe today are the gift of that Revolution" (Ibid., pp.312-313).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

moral precepts. His scorn for the Sunday-School-book concept of behavior was vented as early as 1865 in two short tales: "The Story of the Good Little Boy Who Did Not Prosper" and "The Story of the Bad Little Boy". The Puckish quality which endears Tom Sawyer's mental processes to readers is evident in Twain's argument that the Sunday-School attitude is fallacious and harmful because unrealistic. In life the good little boys miss all the fun and have the misfortunes, while the bad boys have the great pleasure of doing prohibited things, for which they are never punished. The bad boy of the story becomes "the infernalest wickedest scoundrel in his native village, is universally respected, and belongs to the legislature."[26]

It was when such moral prudery exacted a toll of human suffering that Twain lost his temper. He had only contempt for any moral principle of conduct which sacrificed humanity in its application. "There are times," he wrote, "when to keep the letter of a sacred law whose spirit is righteous, becomes a sin," and his attitude controlled his moral creed.[27] Out of this

---

26. Sketches New and Old, p.48. In "Edward Mills and George Benton," written about 1880, Twain ridiculed this stupid moral preachment; but this time men instead of boys were used to demonstrate its unreality. Edward Mills was honest, conscientious, industrious; George Benton, the opposite. The latter got all the attention of people determined to reform him; he enjoyed all forbidden delights; he killed Edward, who foolishly attempted to keep him from robbing a bank, but the sentimental public lavished aympathy on him while Edward's widow and children starved (The $30,000 Bequest and Other Stories, pp.209-218).

27. Innocents Abroad, II, 171. The observation was prompted by the determination of the three pious members of Twain's party not to travel on Sunday, although the resolution worked a heavy hardship on the tired horses and men. The others pointed out that Christ would never have sanctioned such conduct, but to no avail. "Nothing could move the pilgrims. They must press on. Men might die, horses might die, but they must enter upon holy soil next week, with no Sabbath-breaking stain upon them. Thus they were willing to commit a sin against the spirit of religious law, in order that they might preserve the

(Cont'd p.165)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

humanitarian concept evolved his theory of falsehoods and their function in society. Conscious of the frequently brutal facets of truthfulness, he urged the telling of "white lies" as a practical means of curtailing some of the unpleasantness in life:

> An injurious truth has no merit over an injurious lie. Neither should ever be uttered. The man who speaks an injurious truth, lest his soul be not saved if he do otherwise, should reflect that that sort of a soul is not strictly worth saving. The man who tells a lie to help a poor devil out of trouble is one of whom the angels doubtless say, "Lo, here is an heroic soul who casts his own welfare into jeopardy to succor his neighbor's...". Lying is universal--we <u>all</u> do it; we all <u>must</u> do it. Therefore, the wise thing is for us diligently to train ourselves to lie thoughtfully, judiciously; to lie with a good object, and not an evil one;... for others' advantage, and not our own; to lie healingly, charitably, humanely, not cruelly, hurtfully, maliciously. 28

The vitally important qualification was that the lie must only be told to benefit another. "Lies told to injure a person, and lies told to

---

27. (cont'd) letter of it" (<u>Loc. cit.</u>). Twain always hated this type of piety. It was responsible for his sarcastic praise of the Toronto clergy, who kept the street cars from running on Sundays, although the working people had to walk long distances to work on the holy day (<u>Notebook</u>, p.245).

28. "On the Decay of the Art of Lying," <u>Tom Sawyer Abroad</u>, pp.364-367. The pathetic little story "Was It Heaven? or Hell?"--which Paine considered Twain's greatest fictional sermon, excepting "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" (<u>Biography</u>, II, 1177),--supports Twain's theory. In the tale, two pious, old-maid sisters, whose belief in righteousness tolerates no lying, are confronted with the problem of keeping a very sick mother and an equally sick daughter unaware of each other's illness. The practical Christian upbraids them for their indecision: "You are like all the rest of the moral moles; you lie from morning till night, but because you don't do it with your mouths, but with your lying eyes,...inflections, ...deceptively misplaced emphasis,...you turn up your complacent noses and parade before God and the world as saintly and unsmirched Truth-Speakers." The old ladies' capitulation is complete; for, when the angel of the Lord appears before them, they refuse to repent even to escape the threatened Hell, because, they say, "We know that if we were in those hard straits again our hearts would fail again, and we should sin as before" (<u>The $30,000 Bequest</u>, pp.79,97).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

profit yourself are not justifiable, but lies told to help another person, and lies told in the public interest...that is quite another matter."[29] He was particularly critical of the English in this respect and enjoyed twitting them about their superficial morality. "They won't tell a spoken lie," he charged, "nothing can persuade them. Except in a large moral interest, like politics or religion."[30]

Twain's little theory, which he had advanced at first almost facetiously as a means of mitigating the unpleasantness of brutal truth-telling, assumed social implications as he developed it. He broadened it to include not just those "white lies" told in the interest of individuals but the great national hypocrisies, which he termed "lies of silent assertion." These were, he charged, the most iniquitous of all forms of falsehood and certainly the most harmful inasmuch as they encouraged and sustained the despotisms, slaveries, shams, injustices, and aggregate stupidities of the world.

---

29. "Traveling with a Reformer," Literary Essays, p.81.

30. "My First Lie, and How I Got Out of It," The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg, p.163. A passage in the Notebook elaborated on this remark and, at the same time, revealed Twain's singularly realistic attitude for the Victorian period. "By all accounts," he wrote, "England is the home of pious cant; and cant of a most harmful sort. Gen. Sir William----told me that more than half the hospital contents all over India is syphilis.... These fine hearty young fellows come out here to defend England and England makes no provision for their natural passion--infamously betrays them to their destruction, knowing her treachery, but afraid to go in the face of cant. Then those 70,000 young men go home and marry fresh young English girls and transmit a heritage of disease to their children and grandchildren. Clean women subject to rigid inspection ought to be kept for these soldiers" (P.280).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> Almost all lies are acts, and speech has no part in them.... For instance: It would not be possible for a humane and intelligent person to invent a rational excuse for slavery; yet...in the early days of the emancipation agitation in the North, the agitators got but small help or countenance from any one. Argue and plead and pray as they might, they could not break the universal stillness that reigned, from pulpit and press all the way down to the bottom of society--the clammy stillness created and maintained by the lie of silent assertion--the silent assertion that there wasn't anything going on in which humane and intelligent people were interested. 31

France was a party to a similar national falsehood when it smothered opposition to the Dreyfus case by insisting that "no wrong was being done to a persecuted and unoffending man." A like smother was over England when half of the population pretended ignorance of Chamberlain's efforts to manufacture a war in South Africa. 32

> The universal conspiracy of the silent-assertion lie is hard at work always and everywhere, and always in the interests of a stupidity or a sham, never...of a thing fine or respectable.... For ages and ages it has mutely labored in the interest of despotisms and aristocracies and chattel slaveries, and military slaveries, and religious slaveries and has kept them alive... and will go on keeping them alive until the silent-assertion lie retires from business--the silent assertion that nothing is going on which fair and intelligent men are aware of and are engaged by their duty to try to stop.
>
> What I am arriving at is this: When whole races and peoples conspire to propagate gigantic mute lies in the interest of tyrannies and shams, why should we care anything about the trifling lies told by individuals? Why should we try to make it appear that abstention from lying is a virtue?.... The spoken lie is of no consequence, and it is not worth while to go around fussing about it.... The silent colossal National Lie that is the support and confederate of all the tyrannies and shams and inequalities and unfairnesses that afflict the peoples--that is the one to throw bricks and sermons at. 33

---

31. "My First Lie, and How I Got Out of It," op. cit., pp.160-161.

32. Ibid., p.161.

33. Ibid., pp.162 and 169.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Thus Twain's plea for a morality based upon emotion rather than upon abstract truth came to have broad social connections. As such, it affords an excellent example of the relation of his moral point of view to his social opinions. He was opposed to a rigorous respect for truth, which sacrificed more than was gained by its exercise. He was intolerant of what he considered petty moral concepts, which served to camouflage those of vital significance and to further the selfish objectives and peace of mind of the righteous. He was interested in a morality directed by the heart far more than by the head, a morality which was militant in matters of great moment and tolerant in those pertaining to natural human failing.

In addition to nurturing such hypocrisies as the lies of silent assertion, a complacent, prudish morality, Twain argued, encouraged an erroneous and correspondingly dangerous understanding of temptations; this, in turn, led to the imposition of prohibitions. "The weakest of all weak things," he said in The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg, "is a virtue which has not been tested in the fire," and the story was the incarnation of that belief.[34] The so-called Nineteen Incorruptibles of Hadleyburg, the village so famous for its record of honesty, made the mistake of trying to avoid all temptations instead of determining to eradicate evil desires themselves. The result was that their "artificial honesty" crumbled before a temptation they were forced to face. The speech of one of the disgruntled villagers who brought about the catastrophe revealed the flaw:

> It's been one everlasting training and training and training in honesty--honesty shielded from the very cradle, against every possible temptation, and so it's artificial honesty, and weak

---

34. Ibid., pp.52-53.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> as water when temptation comes.... It is my belief that this town's honesty is as rotten as mine is.... It is a mean town, a hard, stingy town, and hasn't a virtue in the world but this honesty it is so celebrated for and so conceited about; and so help me, I do believe that if ever the day comes that its honesty falls under great temptation, its grand reputation will go to ruin like a house of cards. 35

The account of how the town was toppled from its peak of integrity by the ingenious temptation devised by this victim of its haughty righteousness comprises one of the author's best stories. The "artificial honesty" is always apparent in the successful efforts of the villagers to salve their consciences when they have been guilty of questionable acts.[36] One couple who committed the crime of silent assertion (they permitt an innocent man, whom they might have saved, to be accused of an unnamed wrong) are relieved of any sense of shame or feeling of guilt when they learn that he does not suspect their betrayal of him. The wife exclaims: "Oh,...I am glad of that ! As long as he doesn't know that you could have saved him, he--he--well, that makes it a great deal better."[37] Later, these two fall with their incorruptible neighbors before temptation, victims of their shallow, hypocritical, convenient rectitude.

The story carries Twain's views convincingly. He questioned the

---

35. Ibid., pp.15-16.

36. In this respect Twain revealed an understanding of the power of conscience. He traced its workings in the minds of an old couple who tried to live a lie. Praise of their honesty tortured them with remorse; fear of exposure preyed on their minds; ultimately they worried themselves into a delirium in which they confessed their transgressions and died. The husband's last words summed up the reasons for his failure: "I was clean--artificially--like the rest; and like the rest I fell when temptation came" (ibid., p.68).

37. Ibid., p.9.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

moral integrity of the ascetic. He implied that one should not rely upon a morality nurtured and practiced only in propitious circumstances, but should seek out temptations and "by opposing end them." He urged the pious, smug "moralists to revise their prayer--as the Hadleyburgers had reworded their motto--to request that they be led into temptation, rather than away from it, in order that they might make their moral fiber strong through use instead of rotten through inactivity. He was but reaffirming the creed of a greater moralist, who had written almost three-hundred years before: "I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and seeks her adversary but slinks out of the race, where the immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat."

Twain's insistence on an aggressive virtue assumed social import when he made it the basis of his attack on prohibitions of any kind. Both by temperament and training he was inclined to resist the imposition of restrictions upon his independence. His resistance, however, had a broader objective than mere personal freedom. He considered fallacious and ineffective the theory of control through repression, and it was largely in the interest of substituting what he believed a sounder principle that he advanced his opinions. For him the important move was to stamp out desire rather than to attempt to restrict it. "To conquer not the habit but the inclination--the desire," he wrote, is "the perfect way and the only true way.... How I do hate those enemies of the human race who go around enslaving God's free people with pledges--to quit drinking instead

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

of to quit wanting to drink."[38] In one book he told of meeting a bright, wealthy young Canadian, who might have had a distinguished career if he could have overcome his appetite for liquor. Since he had frequently taken the pledge not to drink, Twain thought him a good example of the stupidity of that system. It was wrong in two ways: first, it did not strike at the root of the trouble, which was not the drinking, but the desire to drink; secondly, a pledge was a constant reminderer that one was not a free man. Regarding the first weakness, which was the more important, Twain said that the drinking itself and the desire to drink were very different things:

> The one merely requires will...the other merely requires watchfulness--and for no long time. The desire of course precedes the act, and should have one's first attention; it can do but little good to refuse the act over and over again, always leaving the desire unmolested, unconquered; the desire will continue to assert itself, and will be almost sure to win in the long run. When the desire intrudes it should be at once banished out of the mind.... A desire constantly repulsed for a fortnight should die; then. That should cure the drinking-habit. [39]

In view of this theory, it was natural that Twain should ridicule definite prohibitions. He had an additional reason, however, for questioning their value: he pointed out that to prohibit anything forcibly is to create a desire for it. "Adam was but human," he wrote. "He did not want

---

38. Letters, II, 459. Sometimes his antipathy for restrictions was expressed in humorous rationalizations of the principle involved. The Autobiography is the source of one: "It seems a pity," he wrote, "that the world should throw away so many good things merely because they are unwholesome. I doubt if God has given us any refreshment which, taken in moderation, is unwholesome, except microbes. Yet there are people who strictly deprive themselves of each and every eatable, drinkable, and smokable which has in any way acquired a shady reputation. They pay this price for health. And health is all they get for it. How strange it is! It is like paying out your whole fortune for a cow that has gone dry" (Autobiography, I, 98).

39. Following the Equator, I, 6.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the apple for the apple's sake, he wanted it only because it was forbidden. The mistake was in not forbidding the serpent; then he would have eaten the serpent."[40] Tom Sawyer unwittingly used the principle in getting the fence whitewashed. "He had discovered a great law of human action....that in order to make a man or boy covet a thing, it is only necessary to make the thing difficult to attain."[41]

Failure to recognize this principle was evident in various laws which could not be enforced effectively. The liquor laws were, of course, the most conspicuous example, and Twain denounced them publicly as inept because of their clash with human nature. Not only were they useless, they were also harmful.

> The manner in which these absurd liquor laws are broken breeds contempt for law in general.... These laws give rise to smuggling, and informing and perjury.... In the States and Canada they are often repealed on the very first opportunity.... Why don't the temperance agitators remember Edmund Burke's words? Lawful indulgence is the only check on illicit gratification. Abolishing matrimony would not stamp out fornication. Well, what marriage is to morality a properly conducted licensed liquor traffic is to sobriety. In either case a certain human propensity is regulated so as to be a blessing; while left to itself, or subjected to repressive efforts, it would be a curse. 42

Naturally Twain satirized temperance societies and the fanatics

---

40. "Pudd'nhead Wilson's Calendar," Pudd'nhead Wilson and Those Extraordinary Twins, p.8.

41. Adventures of Tom Sawyer, pp.18-19. He explained the success of Mrs. Eddy's expensive training school for Christian Scientists with the same theory. She capitalized on the human being's innate desire for something difficult to get (Christian Science, p.130ff).

42. Notebook, p.258, reprints these remarks which constituted an interview with a reporter of the Licensing Guardian of New South Wales.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

who led them. The couple in the $30,000 Bequest celebrated their imagined success in the stock-market with an imaginary champagne dinner, but they were self-conscious in their forced gaiety. "At bottom both were troubled and ashamed, for he was a high-up Son of Temperance, and at funerals wore an apron which no dog could look upon and retain his reason and his opinion; and she was a W. C. T. U., with all that that implies of boiler-iron virtue and unendurable holiness."[43] He insinuated in a letter written in 1878 to his mother and sister that members of such organizations were bowing to the tyranny of public opinion rather than to the principle itself, and he warned Pamela against joining with the villagers to make a coward of her son; "After Sam shall have voyaged to Europe by himself, and rubbed against the world...do you think he will hesitate to escort a guest into any whiskey-mill in Fredonia when he himself has no sinful business to transact there? No, he will smile at the idea. If he avoids this courtesy now from principle, of course I find no fault with it at all--only if he thinks it is principle he may be mistaken."[44] Twain praised Hartford for its broadness on this score, citing how the clergy and parishoners defended the right of a prominent minister to drink beer publicly because he "had not only done an innocent thing, but had done it in an open, manly way." Twain added that "this dangerous latitude comes of the fact that we never have any temperance 'rot' going on in Hartford."[44] There was in human nature an innate resentment of imposed prohibitions. There could be freedom without license. Common sense argued for temperance rather

---

43. The $30,000 Bequest and Other Stories, p.26.

44. Letters, I, 326.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

than denial. "Temperate temperance is best," Twain decided, and then elaborated somewhat redundantly: "Intemperate temperance injures the cause of temperance, while temperate temperance helps it in its fight against intemperate intemperance. Fanatics will never learn that, though it be written in letters of gold across the sky."[45]

One wonders if Twain would have consistently supported his temperance doctrine in the post-war hysteria of 1919 and in the midst of the increasing clamor for censorship of the radio, cinema, and stage. He neglected it himself after 1900 in the interest of more important reforms. The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg had marked him distinctly as a moralist; and after its publication in 1899, he incorporated his moral point of view with specific criticism of such evils as American imperialism and Russian and Belgian barbarism. "He told me," Henderson reports, "that he never intended to speak in public again in behalf of movements, humanitarian and uplifting, which gave promise of effecting civic betterment and social improvement."[46]

With his increasing awareness of the stupidity and brutality of man, however, there developed a natural discouragement which finally led him to renounce his faith in morality and his own function as a reformer. In one of his somber moods after reading a lecture of George Bernard Shaw's

---

45. Notebook, p.310. He was fond of reflecting, apparently in as facetious a mood as that of the quotation, that "the earliest pioneer of civilization is...always whiskey.... 'Westward the Jug of Empire takes its way.' This great van-leader arrived upon the ground which St. Paul now occupies, in June, 1837. Yes, at that date, Pierre Parrant, a Canadian, built the first cabin, uncorked his jug, and began to sell whisky to the Indians. The result is before us". (Life on the Mississippi, pp.490-491).

46. Op. cit., p.194.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

on religion, he remarked to Paine that there was no such thing as morality: "It is not immoral for one nation to seize another nation by force of arms, or for one man to seize another man's property or life if he is strong enough and wants to take it. It is not immoral to create the human species —with or without ceremony; nature intended exactly these things."[47] He told J. Howard Moore that he had always been puzzled by the retrogression of morals in man's history. Although man had improved the mentality he had inherited from his reptilian ancestors a thousand fold, he had gone backward in the matter of morals until wholly destitute of any but artificial substitutes--"created and preserved by the forced suppression of natural and hellish instincts."[48]

Twain's disillusionment and seeming abandonment of his moral principles is understandable in view of the world's condition around the turn of the century. All evidence pointed to the retreat of the moral sense before the advance of materialism, and none felt the loss more sharply than Twain. To Twichell he wrote, decrying the dishonesty of any man's conduct when measured by that man's own standard, and denying the progress of righteousness:

> When a person is disloyal to any confessed duty, he is plainly and simply dishonest.... The 19th century made progress...in materialities.... That there is more righteousness in the world

---

47. Biography, II, 1335. A paragraph said to have been deleted from the Pudd'nhead Wilson book had expressed a similar conclusion: "There is a Moral Sense, & there is an Immoral Sense. History shows us that the Moral Sense enables us to perceive morality & how to avoid it, and the Immoral Sense enables us to perceive Immorality & how to enjoy it" ("Pudd'nhead Wilson's New Calendar," 1601, New York, 1933, Frontispiece).

48. Letters, II, 805.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> because of them than there was before, is hardly demonstrable.... In Europe and America there is a vast change (due to them) in ideals.... Money is the supreme ideal.... Money-lust has always existed, but not in the history of the world was it ever a craze, a madness, until your time and mine. This lust has rotted these nations; it has made them hard, sordid, ungentle, dishonest, oppressive.
>
> Did England rise against the infamy of the Boer War? No--rose in favor of it. Did America rise against the infamy of the Philippine War? No--rose in favor of it.... Has the Kingdom of God advanced in Russia since the beginning of time?
>
> Or in Europe and America, considering the vast backward step of the money-lust?.... If there has been any progress toward righteousness since the early days of Creation--which...I am obliged to doubt--I think we must confine it to ten per cent of the populations of Christendom. 49

The record was enough to discourage a tired old man and to create periods of gloom in which he wrote in this bitter vein.

That Twain's reactions were largely emotional, however, is apparent in the contradiction of his remarks during these last years. "I am not here to do good," he wrote Elinor Glyn in 1908, "at least not to do it intentionally."[50] Yet two years later he confessed to Elizabeth Wallace that, if he could start over again, he would certainly be a reformer. "There would be an increasing interest in it that would pay handsomely for all the hostilities I should raise,"[51] he pointed out. It was in his nature to know the heights and depths of a man's possible spiritual kinship with life. It was the price he paid for his sensitivity.

---

49. Ibid., II, 768-770.

50. Ibid., II, 810.

51. Mark Twain and the Happy Isle, Chicago, 1913, p.138.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Religion

"If Christ were here now, there is one thing
he would not be--a Christian." 1

Like Twain's moral theories his attitude toward religion and the Church is an integral part of his social and political criticism. The foregoing sketch of his life revealed that religion was a constant, although usually passive, factor in his environment. Never pious in the accepted sense of the term, he was, notwithstanding, deeply interested in the relationship of institutionalized religion to man and society. Religion he transposed, as he did morality, into purely humanitarian terms. His God was not the Omnipotent One of the Bible as construed by the literalist, for He permitted, even caused, man to suffer. Twain's church was no one of the various traditional organizations of the world, for they were obstructors of progress. His religion was founded upon no conventional creeds, because he saw no virtue in them. He pleaded for a faith which, like a constructive morality, would inspire people to create a better world in which to live.

Twain's apparent heterdoxy was the natural outgrowth of his conviction that orthodoxy had retarded the advance of civilization at every opportunity. The teachings of Scripture, it seemed to him, had been interpreted with no concern for the welfare of those who should have been helped. He likened the Bible to a drug-store whose contents had remained the same while medical practice had changed. For eighteen centuries the patient had been kept religion-sick with baleful and debilitating poisons;

---

1. Notebook, p.328.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

then, in English-speaking countries, he had forced the physician to relinquish his doses of Hell and Damnation for those of Christ's love, and mercy, and comfort, and charity, and compassion. These potions had been in the store all the time; the doctors, not the pharmacy, had been at fault. The literal interpreters, not the Bible, had been responsible for the superficial religious concept imposed on man. Twain foresaw a day when the moral physician would be a quack to the "every-man-his-own-ecclesiastical-doctor" of the future.[2]

Man as an individual suffered from a literal faith in the Bible; society in turn suffered from the restraints the Church imposed under the dictates of this literalness and its innate conservatism. Twain, during a visit to London, jotted in his notebook that "the Church here rests under the usual charge--an obstructor and fighter of progress; until progress arrives, then she takes the credit."[3] The Church had always lagged, it seemed to him, had always condemned progress, mental or spiritual, as heresy. Philosophy, science, humanity had had to advance in the face of frenzied opposition by the Church--and by "Church" Twain meant any form of institutional religion. The Roman Catholics had kept slaves long after other Christians had freed theirs; the pulpit had been the last to yield to slavery sentiment in America. Parsons and priests had clung to their witch texts long after the laity had abandoned the beliefs in shame and remorse.[4] Bruno had died at the stake, and Darwin had become an object of

---

2. Europe and Elsewhere, p.389.

3. Notebook, p.313.

4. Europe and Elsewhere, pp.389-392.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

scorn and abuse. History made it appear that "whatever it [the Church] opposes prospers--like anti-slavery and evolution."[5] Twain thought it significant, moreover, that man in his constant revision of his beliefs had never obliterated a good or useful text; whereas the Church had repeatedly smothered them in dogma and misinterpretation. If the good work of revision continued, Twain concluded, man's religious practice might "attain some semblance of human decency."[6] Society's problem meanwhile was to take care that the Church did not become so powerful that it could force its reactionary views upon the people.

Twain's fear of powerful religious institutions stemmed directly from his knowledge of the bad influence the Catholic Church had wielded during early English history. A Connecticut Yankee contains his principal accusations against the organization; yet it is apparent that the author intended his objections to be applicable in any period. The Yankee becomes a transparent screen for his creator when he says: "It being my conviction that any Established Church is an established crime...I had no scruples, but was willing to assail it in any way or with any weapon that promised to hurt it."[7] To Twain the Church represented only a political machine created by minorities, like any powerful, rich organization, for the purpose of gaining the objectives of a small group. It was the history of any concentrated power that it inevitably passed into selfish hands, which used it ruthlessly with no regard for human liberty and

---

5. Notebook, p.313.

6. Europe and Elsewhere, p.393.

7. P.128.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

thought.[8] It had happened repeatedly during the existence of the Established Church; it threatened to take place in America; it was the thing to be feared in the centering of power and wealth in any such religious organization as the Christian Science "Trust". To permit that to happen was again to invite and encourage blind, ruthless control by minorities. By the time Twain came to write The Mysterious Stranger, about 1898, he had concluded that America had made such a mistake. His comment, in the words of Satan, carried his hatred of conditions which he considered undemocratic:

> I know your race. It is made up of sheep. It is governed by minorities, seldom or never by majorities. It suppresses its feelings and its beliefs and follows the handful that makes the most noise.... The vast majority of the race...are secretly kind-hearted and shrink from inflicting pain, but in the presence of the aggressive and pitiless minority they don't dare to assert themselves.... Monarchies, aristocracies, and religions are all based upon that large defect in your race. [9]

If Americans continued to sacrifice their freedom to the pressure groups,

---

8. Ibid., p.77.

9. Pp.117-118. "Before the day of the Church's supremacy in the world, men were men...and had a man's pride and spirit and independence; and what of greatness and position a person got, he got mainly by achievement, not by birth. But then the Church came to the front. ... She invented 'divine right of things' and propped it all around...with the Beatitudes.... She introduced heritable ranks and aristocracies and taught all the Christian populations of the world to bow down to them and worship them. Even down to my birth-century [the nineteenth century] that poison was still in the blood of Christendom, and the best of English commoners was still content to see his inferiors impudently continuing to hold a number of positions...to which the grotesque laws of his country did not allow him to aspire.... He was even able to persuade himself that he was proud of it" (Connecticut Yankee, p.65). In writing of the founding of Kamehameha's empire in Honolulu Twain said: "He destroyed his Established Church, and his kingdom is a republic today, in consequence of that act" (Following the Equator, I, 32).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

they would eventually lose their very independence. The prediction of the Yankee would be realized. "I asked them [England's freemen] if they supposed a nation of people ever existed, who, with a single vote in every man's hand, would elect that a single family and its descendants should reign over it forever.... They all...said...it hadn't ever occurred to them that a nation could be so situated that every man could have a say in the government. I said I had seen one--and that it would last until it had an Established Church."[10]

The Yankee admits that religion is necessary, but he proposes to limit its threat to the State by encouraging sectarianism, "so that they [the sects] will police each other, as had been the case in the United States.... Concentration of power in a political machine is bad; and an Established Church is only a political machine; it was invented for that; it is nursed, cradled, preserved for that; it is an enemy to human liberty, and does no good which it could not better do in a split-up and scattered condition."[11] Compulsory unification, moreover, affronts a law of human nature, Yankee Twain charges, for "spiritual wants and instincts are as various in the human family as are physical appetites, complexions, and features, and a man is only at his best, morally, when he is equipped with the religious garment" which fits his individual proportions.[12] Sectarianism, therefore, becomes a social and personal necessity, which requires a strong religious indifference to support it. "'So much blood

---

10. Connecticut Yankee, p.106.

11. Ibid., pp.148-149.

12. Ibid., p.77.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

has been shed by the Church because of an omission from the Gospel: "Ye shall be <u>indifferent</u> as to what your neighbor's religion is." Not merely tolerant of it.... Divinity is claimed for many religions; but no religion is great enough or divine enough to add that new law to its code.'"[13] Twain's deduction denied the probability that society and man would benefit from a united Church or that the increased benefits justified risking the concentration of power and money. Lack of a true historical perspective in this case handicapped him. A highly unified religion to his mind could mean only a repetition of life under the Established Church of the past, and no possibility of bettering man's existence through unification of faith could compensate for running the risk of restoring that evil. His Yankee says: "I was afraid of a united Church; it makes a mighty power, the mightiest conceivable, and then when it by and by gets into selfish hands, as it is always bound to do, it means death to human liberty and paralysis to human thought."[14]

It was this fear of the potential despotism of any highly centralized religious organization that moved Twain to write his long essay on Mary Baker Eddy and her Christian Science Cult. Always interested in faith-healing himself, he admitted the possibilities of the principle, but he denounced what he considered the force for evil inherent in the structure of the Science Church.[15] Charging that "vast concentrations of

---

13. <u>Biography</u>, II, 1537. 14. <u>Connecticut Yankee</u>, p.77.

15. Howells wrote of Mark: "An interesting phase of his psychology in this business was not only his admiration for the masterly policy of the Christian Science hierarchy, but his willingness to allow the miracles of its healers to be tried on his friends and family, if they wished it. He had a tender heart for the whole generation

(cont'd. p.182)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

irresponsible power have never in any age been used mercifully," he warned that "there is nothing to suggest that the Christian Science Papacy is going to spend money on novelties."[16] He bitterly criticized the system of ecclesiastical government, which allowed Mrs. Eddy and her secret "Trust" --as he labeled the board of directors--control of a huge income. "It was out of powers approaching Mrs. Eddy's--though not equalling them--that the Inquisition and the devastations of the Interdict grew. She will transmit hers. The man born two centuries from now will think he has arrived in hell; and all in good time he will think he knows it."[17] He had no respect for Mrs. Eddy's intellect; he seriously questioned her motives; he accused her of stealing the idea; but he did admit her sagacity in hitching that idea to a religion--"the surest of all ways to secure friends for it"--and he had only unstinted admiration for her business acumen.[18]

With the principle itself, as has been suggested, Twain agreed.

---

15. (cont'd.) of empirics.... He was recurrently, but not insistently, desirous that you should try their strange magics when you were going to try the familiar medicines" (My Mark Twain, p.84). Susy Clemens recorded her father's interest in the "mind-cure" theory: "'The "mind-cure" does seem to be working wonderfully. Papa, who has been using glasses now for more than a year, has laid them off entirely'" (Biography, II, 842). Much later when Susy began to fail in health, she renewed her old interest in mental science, "Always with the approval of her parents" (ibid., II, 1022).

16. Christian Science, p.154.

17. Loc. cit.

18. Letters, II, 833. "Its healing principle...possesses the same force now that it possessed a million years before.... Mrs. Eddy... organized that force...hitched it to...a religion.... It was a tramp stealing a ride on the lightning express. Ah, how did that ignorant village-born peasant woman know the human being so well? She has no more intellect than a tadpole--until it comes to business--then she is a marvel!" (loc. cit).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Stripped of its dangerous political power, Christian Science would be a boon to struggling humanity: "This new Christianity frees its possessor's life from frets, fears, vexations, bitterness, and all sorts of imagination-propagated maladies and pains, and fills his world with sunshine and his heart with gladness. If Christian Science, with this stupendous equipment--and final salvation added--cannot win half the Christian globe, I must be badly mistaken in the makeup of the human race."[19] Twain saw the orthodox Christian worried, harassed, afraid of himself and his propensities; and he anticipated the welcome such a tormented soul would accord a doctrine which promised to heal the spirit as well as the body. "Personally, I have not known a Scientist," he wrote, "who did not seem serene, contented, unharassed.... Buoyant spirits, comfort of mind, freedom from care--these happinesses we all have, at intervals; but in the spade between, dear me, the black hours! They have put a curse upon the life of every human being...unless it might be those Scientists."[20] Other panaceas,--the "isms," Swedenborgianism, Spiritualism, Bellamy's "Nationalism"--appeal only to the few: the "educated people, sensitively organized, with superior mental endowments, who seek lofty planes of thought and find their contentment there."[21] The attraction of Christian Science, on the other hand,

---

19. Christian Science, p.61.

20. Ibid., p.195.

21. Ibid., pp.39-40. Spiritualism interested Twain from the time of his first experiences with it as a reporter in San Francisco. Franklin Walker reprints seven articles Twain wrote concerning the fad. In them, as Walker notes, "He neither scoffed nor believed, but he was quick to point out that he found no more fanaticism among members of this 'wild cat religion' than he had seen among earnest Presbyterians" (Walker, op. cit., p.120). Cf. also pp.120-137 for (cont'd.p184).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

is as unlimited, as universal, as is the attraction of Christianity itself. Its great offer is to rid the Race of pain and disease. "Its clientage is the Human Race."[22]

Twain believed, furthermore, that Science could to a very large measure make good on its offer. He reasoned that almost four-fifths of the pain and disease in the world was created by the imaginations of the sufferers, and then kept alive by those same imaginations; hence "any formula that would divert the mind from unwholesome channels and force it into healthy ones would answer every purpose with some people."[23] He predicted, therefore, that the tremendous appeal of the faith would win so many converts that Christian Science would become more formidable in its control of the minds of men than the Roman Church.[24]

> In America in 1920 the Christian Scientists will be a political force, in 1930 politically formidable, and in 1940 the governing power in the Republic—to remain that, permanently. And I think it a reasonable guess that the Trust...will then be the most insolent and unscrupulous and tyrannical politico-religious master that has dominated a people since the palmy days of the Inquisition. And a stronger master than the strongest of bygone times, because this one will have a financial strength not dreamed of by any predecessor.... And, after a generation or two, he will probably divide Christendom with the Catholic Church. 25

---

21. (cont'd.) reprints. Katy Leary told how angry Twain became with a London palmist who frightened him by predicting he would soon be a widower. Mrs. Clemens visited the seer only to learn that she would soon be a widow (Mary Lawton, A Lifetime with Mark Twain, New York, 1925, p.182).

22. Christian Science, p.40.

23. Ibid., pp.40 and 43.

24. Howells, My Mark Twain, p.84.

25. Christian Science, pp.53-54.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

This prophecy attests dramatically to Twain's great concern for the continued freedom of American life.

From the alarmist's point of view, then, faith-healing--or any religion with a strong appeal to the emotions--becomes socially important only when a sect can muster enough adherents and money to exercise political influence. The danger is that the rapid expansion of such groups may be noticed too late to check or to control them effectively. Twain's recognition of this threat to human welfare motivated his criticism of the Science Trust and inspired his ironically-worded challenge to Christianity:

> Is it time for regular Christianity to get alarmed? Or shall regular Christianity smile a smile and turn over and take another nap...do the old way...the historical way--lock the stable door after the horse is gone? Just as Protestantism has smiled and nodded this long time (while the alert and diligent Catholic was slipping in and capturing the public schools), and is now beginning to hunt around for the key when it is too late? 26

Twain denounced the Church for its destructive conservatism and political connections, for its bigotry and intolerance, but he did not stop there. He traced the blame for these evils back to the representatives of the Church, the priests and bishops and pastors and Mary Baker Eddys, who determined its policies and who were responsible for the bigotry,

---

26. Ibid., p.70. Twain's references to Catholicism, just as those to Christian Science, indicated a two-fold attitude rather than whole-hearted disapproval: he denounced in both their potential political significance; he recognized in both their potential humanitarian values. When Jean went to a convent during a period of illness he wrote Mrs. Clemens: "I am very, very glad Jean is in a convent. I was astonished at myself that I had never thought of a convent. And away deep down in my heart I feel that if they make a good strong unshakable Catholic of her I shan't be the least bit sorry. It is doubtless the most peace-giving and restful of all the religions. If I had it I would not trade it for anything in the earth. If I ever change my religion I shall change to that" (Clara Clemens, My Father: Mark Twain, p.100).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

intolerance, materialism, and conservatism which made it a burden on society rather than a blessing.

Back as early as 1865, when he was still the unreconstructed moralist, he pointedly attacked various gentlemen of the cloth for their zealous interest in cash instead of converts. He depicted himself as having offered three prominent Eastern ministers--Rev. Bishop Hawks, of New York; Rev. Phillips Brooks, of Philadelphia; and Rev. Dr. Cummings of Chicago--a charge in San Francisco. All three declined, however, because they were making more money in their pastorates, and because their respective investments in the cotton, petroleum, and grain markets required their constant close attention.[27] Later, while contributing to the Galaxy, it will be recalled, Twain took the Rev. T. De Witt Talmage to task for closing his church to odoriferous laborers. "Can it be possible," Twain wrote, "that in a handful of centuries the Christian character has fallen away from an imposing heroism that scorned even the stake, the cross, and the axe, to a poor little effeminacy that withers and wilts under an unsavory smell?"[28] A Rev. Mr. Sabine, who declined to hold a church burial service for an old actor, "came in for the most caustic as well as the most artistic stricture of the entire [Galaxy] series."[29] Twain had no toleration for snobbery of any kind, least of all for religious snobbery, and he did not mince words in his denunciation of ministers who profaned the faith

---

27. John Howell, Sketches of the Sixties, pp.176-179.

28. "About Smells" Curious Republic of Gondour, pp.28-29.

29. Biography, I, 406; cf. ibid., II, 1624-1627 for the article. In it Twain cites Shakespeare's King Lear and Othello as examples of moral-teaching dramas.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

they professed by their hypocrisy, dogmatism, and self-righteousness. Even his friend Twichell received his share of criticism for his tact in the pulpit.[30] For the cloth itself he had great praise, ranking it second only to the medical profession in the service of humanity: "Next [to medical practice] comes the pulpit, which solaces mental distress; soothes the sorrows of the soul. These two are the great professions, the noble professions. The gap between them and the next is wide--an abyss."[31] It was an effeminate, compromising attitude on the part of the clergy which had helped drain the life's blood from Christianity. Militant leaders strong in their convictions were necessary to a constructive, progressive, virile Christianity.

The representatives of Christianity who drew Twain's sharpest satire, however, were the missionaries. He first became interested in them when he visited the Sandwich Islands in 1866, as roving correspondent for the Sacramento Union. In his letters to the paper describing the inhabitants of the Islands and their government, he cited the importance of the missionaries in the development of a civilization there. A Mr. Staley, who had been made Lord Bishop of Honolulu by the English Bishop of Oxford "and shipped over [to the Islands] with a fully equipped 'Established Church' in his pocket," had charged that the natives were "morally and

---

30. Letters, II, 705. He was provoked with Twichell for not preaching against public support of the Philippine War: "Joe, if you teach your people--as you teach me--to hide their opinions when they believe the flag is being abused and dishonored, lest the utterance do them and a publisher a damage, how do you answer for it to your conscience? You are sorry for me;.... I am willing to be a little sorry for you" (loc. cit.).

31. Notebook, p.252.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

religiously in a worse condition today than they were before the American missionaries came." Twain's patriotism would not let him ignore an English slur: "Our missionaries are our missionaries," he answered, "and even if they were our devils I would not want any English prelate to slander them." He then described the barbarous and licentious funeral customs of the natives before the missionaries came. The facts were stronger than argument he concluded.[32] It was not until he wrote Roughing It that he became more explicit:

> The missionaries have clothed them [the natives], educated them, broken up the tyrannous authority of their chiefs, and given them freedom and the right to enjoy whatever their hands and brains produce, with equal laws for all, and punishment for all alike who transgress them.... The frankest compliment I can pay them...is simply to point to the condition of the Sandwich Islanders of Captain Cook's time and their condition today. Their work speaks for itself. [33]

The pride in America which largely motivated the reply to Bishop Staley permeated Twain's estimate of the missionaries at this early period. His praise was not unqualified, but he censured them privately in the pages of his notebooks. In Honolulu he blamed the missionaries for the stupid laws: "It is not lawful to hire out a horse or vehicle on Sunday--all such preparations must be made the day before. This and the liquor law show where Hawaii's system of laws originated (with missionaries)... and how powerful a supremacy these people have gained by their 46 years of breeding and training voters."[34] He felt that "the missionary (I should

---

32. Sacramento Union, July 21, 1866, reprinted in Letters from the Sandwich Islands, pp.96-107.

33. II, 187-188.

34. Notebook, p.13.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

say preacher) feature of insincerity and hypocrisy makes the atmosphere of the place."[35] The constructive benefits, however, more than balanced these drawbacks, particularly when weighed against the contributions of the English and French. Here Twain's patriotism rose and he jotted in his notebook: "The King ought to be grateful to the missionaries because during all the years that the English and French were making trouble and creating complications and trying to get an excuse to seize the islands the wise councils of these men saved Kamehamehas II, III, and perhaps V from making any false step."[36] In his first lecture on the Sandwich Islands he took this favorable view and gave full credit to the missionaries for educating, half-civilizing, and half-Christianizing the Kanaka savages.[37]

This appreciative attitude toward the missionary was held by Twain until the end of the century, when his travels in the Orient and the imperialistic wars of the period exposed to his eyes the duplicity practiced in foreign territories under the banner of Christianity. He saw his own country's war with Spain, which he first praised as the most righteous one ever fought, turn into an open steal of rich territories. He saw England exploiting the Boers and Boxers; he read of Leopold's depredations

---

35. Ibid., p.23. "More missionaries and more row made about saving these 60,000 people than would take to convert hell itself" (Ibid., p.21). "Board of Foreign Missions: 'We have saved a Turk's soul.'
'What did it cost?'
'$2,000,000.'
'Is it worth that?'" (ibid., p.166).

36. Ibid., p.20. "Americans have given religious freedom, education, written language and Bible--England and France have given insults" (ibid., p.21).

37. "The Sandwich Islands," Speeches, p.18.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

in the Congo. He realized that the missionary had become the tool of the imperialists, and he was revolted by this mockery. In 1901 he poured out his white-hot emotions in a scorching article addressed "To the Person Sitting in Darkness." The storm which had been gathering for some time in him broke with all the fury and sting of which he was possessed.[38] Twain opened his philippic with two quotations from the New York Sun: one described the terrible conditions in New York's notorious unpoliced, unmissionaried East Side, "where naked women dance by night in the streets... where children that have adult diseases are the chief patrons of the hospitals"; the other revealed Missionary Ament's success in collecting indemnities for damages done by the Boxers: "Everywhere he went he compelled the Chinese to pay."[39] Making no comment on the horrible conditions in New York, Twain let the description itself carry that most effective argument against the missionary principle of saving foreigners while natives perished; but of Mr. Ament's methods he had much to say, applauding his actions, adding approvingly a hypothetical explanation: "What we want of our missionaries out there is, not that they shall merely

---

38. On New Year's Eve, 1900-1901, he had written as a "Greeting from the Nineteenth to the Twentieth Century": "I bring you the stately nation named Christendom, returning, bedraggled, besmirched, and dishonored, from pirate raids in Kiao-Chau, Manchuria, South Africa, and the Philippines, with her soul full of meanness, her pocket full of boodle, and her mouth full of pious hypocrisies" (Europe and Elsewhere, xxxiv). In the "United States of Lyncherdom" article written in 1901 but not published, he had ridiculed the entire missionary project in China: "With 1,511 of them missionaries out there converting two Chinamen apiece per annum against an uphill birthrate of 33,000 pagans per day, it will take upward of a million years to make the conversions balance the output" (Europe and Elsewhere, p.247). He also cited Dr. Morrison's missionary records as the source of his figures (Loc. cit.).

39. Europe and Elsewhere, pp.250-251.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

represent in their acts and persons the grace and gentleness and charity and loving-kindness of our religion, but that they shall also represent the American spirit."[40] What matter if Chinese women and children had to starve in order to raise the blood money, which Mr. Ament asserted would be "used for the propagation of the Gospel"? Had not Mr. Ament criticized the Americans for their soft hand, which had proved so much less productive than the mailed fist of the Germans? He understood the situation. He was the right man to see that the Chinaman took no advantage of American softness.

Twain had a deeper purpose, moreover, than to hold Ament's conduct up for ridicule. He charged that the entire missionary movement was only a screen for imperialism. Nor did he offer merely his opinion as evidence; he quoted the New York Tribune's Tokyo correspondent:

> It is now felt as essential that the Western Powers take cognizance of the sentiment here, that religious invasions of the Oriental countries by powerful Western organizations are tantamount to filibustering expeditions, and should not only be discountenanced, but that stern measures should be adopted for their suppression. The feeling here is that the missionary organizations constitute a constant menace to peaceful international relations. 41

The Ament indemnity demands afforded a good example of what the Orient resented in the crusading Christian. Twain wondered if the McKinleys, Chamberlains, and Kaisers had not spoiled the game of extending

---

40. Ibid., p.252.

41. Ibid., p.255.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

"the Blessings-of-Civilization Trust" by their ruthless, open tactics.[42] Apparently the heathen had suddenly suspected that there were two kinds of civilization--one for home, characterized by true Christian virtues, and one for the foreigner, made up of struggle and strife, faked wars, and indemnities. The heathen was bewildered and troubled and resentful. And why not be bewildered, Twain asked. How can he understand the British brutalities against the Boxers, the same British who upbraided the Boers for their inhumanities? the Germans who demand territory, money, churches as compensation for two murdered missionaries? Russia's seizure of Port Arthur and, finally, America's usurpation of the Philippines after the bloodiest of one-sided wars? Why should one want any civilization at such prices, particularly since it does not appear to be better than one's own? Why should any heathen want a religion which not only tolerated such things but sponsored them?[43] It seemed to Twain that the people sitting in

---

42. "The Blessings-of-Civilization Trust, wisely and cautiously administered, is a Daisy. There is more money in it, more territory, more sovereignty...than there is in any other game that is played. But Christendom has been playing it badly of late years.... We all know that the Business is being ruined.... This is bad for the Game" (ibid., pp.256-257). Twain then suggested that the United States present the facts in its betrayal of the Philippine patriots, its land-grabbing, and its bloody war methods. By doing so, instead of denying the crimes, as Chamberlain and the Kaiser attempted, the United States would surprise the Person Sitting in Darkness into swallowing the explanation whole. Then "we can resume business at the old stand" (ibid., pp.262-272).

43. King Leopold, according to Twain, denounced as prejudiced those missionaries who accused him of wiping a nation of friendly natives out of existence in the Congo by every form of murder for his own profit. He protested that his accusers "never say...that I have labored in the cause of religion at the same time and all the time, and have sent missionaries there (of a 'convenient stripe,' as they phrase it) to teach them the error of their ways and bring them to Him who is all mercy and love" (King Leopold's Soliloquy; A Defense of His Congo Rule, Boston, 1905, p.9).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

darkness would be only too glad to stay there if the light was to be so painful.

"To the Person Sitting in Darkness" was a masterful, stirring article, written as only Twain could write once he took the bit in his teeth. His little private storm stirred up a veritable cyclone. Paine wrote that every paper in England and America commented on it editorially, according to their convictions.[44] Twain reveled in the clamor. The American Missionary Board made the stupid mistake of protesting that Ament had collected less indemnity than claimed. Twain seized the opening gleefully, and addressed a second article to his missionary critics. He placed the Board in the awkward, not to mention un-Christian, position of justifying the morality of Ament's actions on the ground that he had not collected an indemnity thirteen times as great as it should have been, as reported, but had demanded only one and a third times the correct amount.[45] The rout was complete.

The battle resulted in a great personal triumph for Twain, and at the same time it must have instigated a general interest in missions with a view to cleaning them up. Only the more orthodox periodicals protested vehemently. Paine noted that "a vast following of liberal-minded readers, both in and out of the Church" upheld him.[46] Sir Hiram Maxim wrote; "What you have done is of very great value to the civilization of the world. There is no man living whose words carry greater weight...as

---

44. Biography, II, 1129.

45. Ibid., II, 1130.

46. Europe and Elsewhere, p.xxxiv.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

no one's writings are so eagerly sought after by all classes."[47] And Edward S. Martin said: "How gratifying it is to feel that we have a man among us who understands the rarity of plain truth, and who delights to utter it, and has the gift of doing so without cant."[48] The attention Twain's criticism of missionaries received suggests the importance his other social views might have had in the molding of public opinion if he had selected significant events and had discussed them with equal sincerity and spirit.

It may be protested that Twain's criticism of the Church, the clergy, the laymen, the missionaries evolved from a temporal rather than a spiritual emphasis, that he ignored the good done by Christians despite their failings and shortcomings. He had eyes only for the Church's threat to the State, the clergy's financial interests, the missionaries's bad judgment. He seemed to forget that there were humble, self-sacrificing men and women devoting their lives to the Christian ideal. In other words, he was again guilty of prejudice, one-sidedness.

To point to that observation, on the other hand, as evidence of Twain's atheism, to declare him a skeptic and an iconoclast on the strength of it, is to misunderstand the essence of his revolt. It is to ignore the thing for which Twain was fighting in Christianity, politics, and morality--realism. As he saw it, the one way to build up a strong, constructive religion was to tear from it all the camouflage of self-deception, hollow egotism, and hypocrisy. Man should strip Christianity of the muck and

---

47. Biography, II, 1134.

48. Europe and Elsewhere, p.xxxiv.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

ornamentation of the ages down to the bare, sound principles of Jesus Christ, and rebuild thereon a sincere, courageous, vital religion which helped, rather than fettered, man and society, which spread a warm, compassionate faith to those sitting in darkness. Twain was too direct, too much the realist, to subscribe to any but an aggressive reconstruction. The longer Christians persuaded themselves that they were furthering the doctrines of Christ in their compromising morality, their temporizing Church, and their grasping missionaries, the longer the road back for them. It was this emphasis on the need for tangible evidence of the value of religion that contributed to his failure to appreciate the deeper aspects of worship and faith.[49]

The significance of Twain's point of view is apparent in his striking reversal of what were generally considered to be religious values. A realistic, dynamic Christianity for him meant one which could create public Christians, people willing and eager to act in society on the private principles they professed. Religion had nurtured hypocrites, not true Christians. The traditional practice encouraged personal morality, ignored public:

> The American Christian is a straight and clean and honest man, and in his private commerce with his fellows can be trusted to stand faithfully by the principles of honor and honesty imposed

---

49. In his first statement concerning the content of the long-suppressed Twain material, De Voto warns that Twain's preoccupation with the problem of evil and "the damned human race's belief in the Christian Gods, as its own crowning stupidity and cruelty" is so evident in the unpublished papers that it "must now be regarded as more important in the published work than there was reason to suppose" (Saturday Review of Literature, XIX [December 10, 1938], p.15)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> upon him by his religion. But the moment he comes forward to exercise a public trust he can be confidently counted upon to betray that trust in nine cases out of ten, if "party loyalty" shall require it.... His Christianity is of no use to him and has no influence upon him when he is acting in a public capacity. 50

Even the average voter was guilty of similar un-Christian conduct in helping to elect crooks to political offices and in trying to evade taxes. "Every year...he helps put corrupt men in office, whereas if he would but ...carry his Christian private morals to the polls, he could promptly purify the public service and make the possession of office a high and honorable distinction."[51] The cause of world peace, furthermore, was victimized by this duality, for a warped morality bred a patriotism which was irreconcilable with any practical concept of world brotherhood.[52] So

---

50. Christian Science, pp.262-263. "Our Congresses consist of Christians. In their private life they are true to every obligation of honor; yet in every session they violate them all, and do it without shame; because honor to party is above honor to themselves.... There are Christian Private Morals, but there are no Christian Public Morals" (loc. cit.).

51. Speeches, p.277. "Once a year he...hires a ferry-boat and piles up his bonds in a warehouse in New Jersey for three days, and gets out his Christian public morals and goes to the tax office and...swears he wishes he may never--never if he's got a cent in the world, so help him" (loc. cit.).

52. "A man...can't legally be a Christian and a patriot--except in the usual way: one of the two with the mouth, the other with the heart. The spirit of Christianity proclaims the brotherhood of the race... --the Christian must forgive his brother man all crimes he can imagine and commit.... That is the spirit and the law of Christianity. Well, patriotism has its law.... It commands that the brother over the border shall be sharply watched and brought to book everytime he does us a hurt or offends us with an insult.... The spirit of patriotism is the spirit of the dog and the wolf.... The spirit of patriotism being in its nature jealous and selfish, is just in man's line,...he can live up to all its requirements to the letter; but the spirit of Christianity is not in its entirety possible to him" (Notebook, pp.332-333).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

much depended upon the development of a constructive, humanitarian religion that the Church had to accept the challenge if it were to become an important institution in modern society.

Twain urged the Church, as a major step toward acquiring social significance, to emphasize Christian ethic instead of traditional theology. Preoccupation with the latter had blinded the righteous to their real task and had contributed to a spreading loss of faith in the Church as a force in the world. He accused an impotent Christianity of permitting King Leopold to prosper, and he depicted Leopold as foreseeing Christendom's stereotyped protest after his hirelings crucified sixty women: "'Profanation of the sacred emblem!' That is what Christendom will shout.... It can hear me charged with half a million murders a year for twenty years and keep its composure, but to profane the Symbol is quite another matter. It will regard this as serious."[53] It was this trifling with the superficial ramifications of any religion while the world drifted toward self-destruction that disgusted Twain with conventional faiths. Realism was the essence of his precepts and principles for a new religion, "having for its base God and Man as they are, and not as the elaborately masked and disguised artificialities they are represented to be in most philosophies and in all religions."[54] Therein is expressed the key to his religious philosophy. He was never the atheist some thought him.

---

53. King Leopold's Soliloquy, p.33.

54. Notebook, p.376.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

He merely wanted some faith to avail itself of a great opportunity to make a real contribution to civilization.[55]

---

55. He closed his article on Christian Science by offering that sect a challenge which suggests his concern for the objective rather than the means: "Can Christian Science persuade the nation... to throw away their public morals and use none but their private ones henceforth in all their activities?.... There is the field--a grand one...a sublime one, and absolutely unoccupied.... Make the effort, Christian Science; it is a most noble cause, and it might succeed" (Christian Science, p.264).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Philosophy and Science

> "Whatsoever a man is, is due to his make, and to the influences brought to bear upon it by his heredities, his habitat, his associations." [1]

Twain's views on religion were related to his philosophy as expressed in his gospel, What Is Man?, and in the sketches, The Turning Point of My Life and The Mysterious Stranger. His association with MacFarlane, his interest in Darwin's theory, his reading in Lecky, his consciousness of the struggle for existence in the world, his interpretation of what appeared to be coincidence in his own life--all culminated in the idea of mechanistic determinism, which he thought was original and startling but which in reality was only a fresh statement of an old point of view. He summarized his theory for his biographer in 1906:

> When the first living atom found itself afloat on the great Laurentian sea the first act of that first atom led to the second act of that first atom, and so on down through the succeeding ages of all life, until, if the steps could be traced, it would be shown that the first act of that first atom has led inevitably to the act of my standing here. [2]

Man, therefore, is merely an intricate machine, a machine controlled by this inexorable sequence of cause and effect. "Nothing can change the order of its life after the first event has determined it...because each act unfailingly begets an act, that act begets another, and so on to the end.... No man ever does drop a link.... If he made up his mind to try, that project would itself be an unavoidable link." [3] God does not foreordain man's career;

---

1. What Is Man? and Other Essays, p.5.

2. Biography, I, 397. "Necessarily the scene of the real turning-point of my life (and of yours) was the Garden of Eden. It was there that the first link was forged of the chain" ("Turning Point of My Life," What Is Man?, p.139).

3. The Mysterious Stranger, pp.81-83.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

man's circumstances and temperament order it. They are interdependent. Circumstance is powerful, but it cannot work alone; it must have its partner, temperament, which is born in man and which is quite independent of the will. It can be modified, but only temporarily; it resumes its natural state when the stress is relieved.[4] Man is the helpless engine of these forces: "Whatsoever a man is, is due to his make, and to the influences brought to bear upon it by his heredities, his habitat, his associations. He is moved, directed, COMMANDED, by exterior influences--solely. He originates nothing, not even a thought."[5] This "make" is the master detail, the basis of the character; it is the indestructible framework upon which the character is constructed, whose shape it must take and keep throughout life. It is the person's nature, which combines with the influences to determine that person's career.[6] Before the combination will is helpless.

---

4. What Is Man?, pp.133-134. De Voto in sketching the nature of the suppressed Mark Twain material, indicated that "the determinism of human behavior by unalterable laws of temperament" is one of his ideas which is elaborated in the unpublished papers ("The Mark Twain Papers," Saturday Review of Literature, XIX [December 10, 1938], 15).

5. What Is Man?, p.5. Shakespeare offers a good example. He created nothing. "He was a machine, and machines do not create.... The threads and the colors came into him from the outside; outside influences, suggestions, experiences,...framed the patterns in his mind and started up its complex and admirable machinery, and it automatically turned out that pictured and gorgeous fabric" (ibid., p.8).

6. "The basis or moral skeleton of the man was inborn disposition--a thing which is as permanent as rock, and never undergoes any actual and genuine change between cradle and grave...The moral fleshbulk (that is to say, Character) was built and shaped around the skeleton by training, association and circumstances. Given a crooked-disposition skeleton, no power nor influence in the earth can mold a permanently shapely form around it" ("In Defense of General Funston," North American Review, CLXXIV [1902], 613).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

It follows logically, therefore, that man is not responsible for his conduct: "Whatever the machine does----so-called crimes and infamies included----is the personal act of its Maker, and He, solely, is responsible."[7] Whatever the machine does, furthermore, is motivated by selfishness: "From his cradle to his grave a man never does a single thing which has any FIRST and FOREMOST object but---to secure peace of mind, spiritual comfort for HIMSELF."[8] This does not mean, however that man does only what he prefers to do. Although peace of mind is his object, he is forced sometimes to attempt painful tasks, such as fighting wars, because he dreads the disapproval of his neighbors and of the public more than pain and because his spirit will be more comfortable on the battleffeld than it would be at home. "He will always do the thing which will bring him the most mental comfort--for that is the sole law of his life."[9] The selfish motive, moreover, does not always result in harmful behavior. A man's only obligation, his only duty, is to please himself, to content his conscience. "If he can

---

7. Letters, II, 764. Twain ridiculed the inconsistency of the German Emperor in declaring, after he had imprisoned the murderer, that the assassination of the Austrian Empress had been ordained from above. Twain wrote: "If a man is a free agent, this prisoner is responsible for what he has done; but if a man is not a free agent, if the deed was ordained from above, there is no rational way of making this prisoner even partially responsible for it" (ibid., II, 668).

8. What Is Man?, p.15.

9. Ibid., p.16. Twain's recognition of the power of public opinion is particularly interesting in the light of his own deference to it. "In the matter of slavish imitation," he wrote in the Autobiography, "man is the monkey's superior all the time. The average man is destitute of independence of opinion. He is not interested in contriving an opinion of his own, by study and reflection, but is only anxious to find out what his neighbor's opinion is and slavishly adopt it" (II, 68-69).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

most satisfyingly perform this sole and only duty by helping his neighbor, he will do it; if he can most satisfyingly perform it by swindling his neighbor, he will do that."[10] To sum up then:

> Man is a machine, made up of many mechanisms, the moral and mental ones acting automatically in accordance with the impulses of an interior Master who is built out of born-temperament and an accumulation of multitudinous outside influences and trainings; a machine whose one function is to secure the spiritual contentment of the Master, be his desires good or be they evil; a machine whose Will is absolute and must be obeyed, and always is obeyed. [11]

It is at this point in his thesis that Twain, as Wagenknecht noted, was led into a paradoxical undertaking by his innate moral sense. Obviously morality had no place in his mechanistic philosophy; yet he was too thoroughly the moralist not to attempt to give it such a place. He underscored the function of circumstance and training as a means to that end. Since man's actions are motivated by his duty to content his conscience and since his conscience may be modified, man has only to train his ideals diligently toward a summit where he will find his chiefest pleasure in conduct which, while contenting him, will be sure to confer benefits upon his neighbor and his community.[12] A soldier's ideal requires bravery in the face of death; a coward's ideal necessitates no such behavior. The difficulty is that this moral justification of reasoned selfishness is

---

10. What Is Man?, p.20.

11. Ibid., p.98.

12. Ibid., pp.54-55. "My conscience is a part of me. It is a mere machine, like my heart--but moral, not physical; and being moral is teachable, its action modifiable. It is merely a thing; the creature of training" (Notebook, p.348).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

incompatible with absolute determinism. "Once admitting the postulate, that existence is merely a sequence of cause and effect beginning with the primal atom, and we have a theory that must stand or fall as a whole. We cannot say that man is a creature of circumstance and then leave him free to select his circumstance, even in the minutest fractional degree."[13]

Apparently Twain did not see the fundamental inconsistency, for he stressed the significance of training and environment until they practically nullified the importance of the deterministic sequence of events in life.

> From the cradle to the grave, during all his waking hours, the human being is under training. In the first rank of his trainers stands association. It is his human environment which influences his mind and his feelings, furnishes him his ideals, and sets him on his road and keeps him in it.... By the law of his nature he takes the color of his place of resort. The influences about him create his preferences, his aversions, his politics, his tastes, his morals, his religion. He creates none of these things for himself. He thinks he does. 14

It is this new emphasis that gives Twain's philosophy social and political import. Determinism in itself is irreconcilable with sociological drives, for it denies man the possibility of improving himself and his world by his own effort. When training, environment, and heredity are represented, on the other hand, as elements which man may control with a view to his own improvement, they become potential social forces of considerable power. The way Twain would use them to improve society has sociological value.

---

13. Biography, II, 1322.

14. What Is Man?, p.43. An example in the sphere of religion will illustrate all: "It is not the ability to reason that makes the Presbyterian, or the Baptist, etc.... It is environment.... A Presbyterian family does not produce Catholic families.... It produces its own kind; and not by intellectual processes, but by association" (Christian Science, p.69).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Once he had unconsciously freed himself in this way of the limitations of a deterministic philosophy, Twain stressed this relationship of environment to man's welfare. "It is the atmosphere we are reared in," he wrote,"that determines how our inclinations and aspirations shall tend."[15] In Pudd'nhead Wilson he depicted the plight of a boy who had been declared white and the heir to a fortune after having lived until that time with the negroes: "His gait, his attitudes, his gestures, his bearing, his laugh--all were vulgar and uncouth; his manners were the manners of a slave. Money and fine clothes could not mend these defects or cover them up;; they only made them the more glaring and the more pathetic."[16] Environment may even shape genius:

> We should expect Edison's surroundings and atmosphere to have the largest share in discovering him to himself and to the world; and we should expect him to live and die undiscovered in a land where an inventor could find no comradeship, no sympathy.... Broadly speaking, genius is not born with sight, but blind; and it is not itself that opens its eyes, but the subtle influences of a myriad of stimulating exterior circumstances. [17]

Finally, "as regards his health--and the rest of the things--the average man is what his environment...made him."[18]

---

15. What Is Man?, p.353. The statement was used to support the argument for Bacon against Shakespeare as author of the plays. Bacon had the environment which would have contributed the learning the playwright had.

16. P.202.

17. "Saint Joan of Arc," Literary Essays, p.377. There are exceptions, as Twain immediately added. Joan of Arc, for example, stood alone because "in the things wherein she was great she was so without shade or suggestion of help from preparatory teaching, practice, environment" (ibid., p.379). Later he added Zola to the list of exceptions: "It takes five centuries to breed a Joan of Arc and a Zola" (Notebook, p.342).

18. "At the Appetite Cure," Literary Essays, p.356.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

By according such powers to environmental factors Twain implied that man could enhance his possibilities of development by choosing favorable surroundings. He not only implied this exercise of judgment, but he went so far as to make a working principle of it. What he called man's "chameleonship" was really an asset, since man had only to change his habitat, his associations, to bring better influences to bear on him. Apparently Twain was conscious of fathering a paradox; and he made a weak attempt to reconcile this idea with his deterministic philosophy by insisting that man's impulse to change his environment had to come from the outside. The interpolation becomes significant here, not because it failed to do the impossible and dispel the conflict, but because it suggested a scheme of procedure in social reconstruction. If the initial impulse had to originate outside the person, then society, Twain argued, should be the conscious source of it, should lay traps for people, "traps baited with Initiatory Impulses toward high ideals." It was what the propagandist and the missionary did. It was what governments ought to do.[19] If, for example, governments would act on this precept in dealing with criminals, they would have far greater success than under the present system. Unlike the practice of segregation followed today in handling contagious diseases, "they put the beginners in with the confirmed criminals. This would be well if man were naturally inclined to good, but he isn't, and so association makes the beginners worse than they were when they went into captivity."[20] Governments should revise their methods in controlling the lawless and, in a broader sense, should assist man in his search for a congenial, stimulating

---

19. What Is Man?, p.47. 20. Ibid. p.47.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

environment.

Society should not, on the other hand, be content simply to aid in changing surroundings; after providing the proper associations it should actively encourage its members to train their ideals ever upward. It should assume some of the moral responsibility for people's conduct and direct them toward worthy objectives. Training represented a powerful instrument for the production of good or evil. There was nothing it could not do. "It can turn bad morals to good, good morals to bad; it can destroy principles, it can recreate them; it can debase angels to men and lift men to angelship. And it can do any of these miracles in a year--even in six months."[21] Man's opinions, his patriotism, his religion, his morality, his conscience--all were shaped under the pressure of training, which knew only the restrictions of temperament, already outlined as in the discussion of determinism. The proper training created the proper attitudes; the improper, the dangerous ones. "A man can seldom...fight a winning fight against his training."[22] Society was partly responsible, therefore, for religious intolerance, moral bigotry, perverted points of view. Shallow, misguided patriotism, for instance, was attributable to society's failure to provide the right kind of training. The badly manufactured patriot, Twain charged, favored the Spanish-American War, because he was helpless before a training which had discouraged independent thinking and reliance upon his reason. It was a dictated patriotism, he added, which moved people, although they had at first opposed the Mexican War, to fight when

---

21. "As Regards Patriotism," Europe and Elsewhere, p.303.

22. Ibid., p.302.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

they thought the majority favored it. Why not train people to form their own concepts of patriotism? Why should society neglect to encourage its citizens "to labor it out in their own heads and hearts and in the privacy and independence of their own premises...to stop taking it by command?"[23] Why, then--to follow the line of reasoning--should not there be a similar concern for opinions in general? People got their ideas and inclinations from outside; they imitated; they mistook fashions for standards. Why not teach them to think for themselves, to free themselves from false loyalties, traditions, to exercise their judgment unhampered?[24] Why not train them?

> Training is everything; training is all there is to a person. We speak of nature; it is folly; there is no such thing as nature; what we call by that misleading name is merely heredity and training. We have no thoughts of our own, no opinions of our own; and they are transmitted to us, trained into us.[25]

Training thus represented a social force which society neglected to its own doom.

As the quotation indicates, Twain considered heredity a supplementary aspect of training. Just as training and environment were overlapping factors in development, so too, for him, heredity frequently represented a function or result of training or association rather than a static quality not susceptible of control. An observation relative to Joan of

A

23. Ibid., p.303.

24. Twain's plea to the schools was that they teach students to think. His denunciation of superstition and politics, as of religion, was based upon their demand for a blind loyalty among their converts.

25. Connecticut Yankee, p.150.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Arc's childhood, especially her playmates, reveals his interpretation of these terms:

> These were all good children...not bright...but good-hearted... and obedient to their parents and the priest; and as they grew up they became properly stocked with narrowness and prejudices got at second hand from their elders, and adopted without reserve; and without examination also--which goes without saying. Their religion was inherited, their politics the same. 26

It need hardly be argued that no one consciously weighs and evaluates an inherited trait in the strict sense of the word and that there is little apparent difference between acquiring prejudices through one's surroundings and instructions and through what Twain considered heredity. Here again the confusion arises from his use of terms which carry contradictory connotations. The seemingly conflicting implications in his discussion are reconciled, however, if it is understood that Twain was not speaking of "heredity" in the now familiar eugenic meaning. Hence, when he wrote that the good little children of Domremy "inherited" their religion and their politics, he did not mean that they had acquired these attributes via the blood stream or the genes but that they had absorbed them from their surroundings and teachings.[27] Heredity thus represented for him an effect

---

26. Joan of Arc, I, 6.

27. One passage in A Connecticut Yankee reads like a refutation of this statement. The nature of the "inherited" qualities, however, makes their transmission impossible in an eugenic sense. In this sketch King Authur, disguised as one of the peasants and now sympathetic toward them, is depicted as feeling he should report the escape of three serfs from a manor dungeon. The Yankee's explanation, which recalls Huck Finn's battle with his conscience over helping a negro to run away, recognizes the power of inherited training: "He was born so, educated so, his veins were full of ancestral blood that was rotten with this sort of unconscious brutality, brought down by inheritance from a long procession of hearts that had each done its share toward poisoning the stream" (p.291).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

of instruction and environment rather than a third--and uncontrollable--influence.

Further evidence for this conclusion is evident in most of the passages in which the term "heredity" is mentioned. One much-quoted remark reads: "We are nothing but echoes. We have no thoughts of our own, no opinions of our own, we are but a compost heap made up of the decayed heredities, moral and physical."[28] With it goes a longer development of the contention that we do not create any of our traits but inherit all of them. "Man is the last expression, and combines every attribute of the animal tribes that preceded him."[29] We are

> the tail end of a tapeworm eternity of ancestors extending in linked procession back and back and back--to our source in the monkeys, with this so-called individuality of ours a decayed and rancid mush of inherited instincts and teachings derived, atom by atom, stench by stench, from the entire line of that sorry column, and not so much new and original matter in it as you could balance on a needle point and examine under a microscope.[30]

When read in the light of modern usage, these words have an almost paradoxical meaning. Yet when Twain disclosed what he considered the sorry residue of existence, it is apparent that environment and training were the real factors responsible for it. Take, for example, the following comment of the Yankee on the psychology of aristocracies:

> Inherited ideas are a curious thing.... I had mine, the king and his people had theirs. In both cases they flowed in ruts worn deep by time and habit, and the man who should have proposed to divert them by reason and argument would have had a long contract on his hands. For instance, those people had inherited the

---

28. Notebook, p.312.

29. Biography, II, 1296.

30. Autobiography, II, 9.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> idea that all men without title and a long pedigree, whether they had great natural gifts and acquirements or hadn't, were creatures of no more consideration than so many animals, bugs, insects; whereas I had inherited the idea that human daws who can consent to masquerade in the peacock shams of inherited dignities and unearned titles, are of no good but to be laughed at. 31

It is apparent then that Twain used the term "heredity" to mean the transference of habits of thought and conduct from generation to generation through education and propinquity rather than through the blood stream. The distinction is an important one from a sociological standpoint, for it admits the opportunity of directing that heritage. Misguided patriotism could be straightened out, even done away with, through the exercise of proper training. Aristocracy, religion, politics,--"the compost heap of decayed heredities"--all were subject, in the same manner as patriotism, to the guidance of exterior forces. Training rather than breeding was the corrective power society needed to control. The danger, Twain warned, was in neglecting to exert the proper pressure to the right end:

> When even the brightest mind in our world has been trained up from childhood in a superstition of any kind, it will never be possible for that mind, in its maturity, to examine sincerely, dispassionately, and conscientiously any evidence or any circumstance which shall seem to cast a doubt upon the validity of that superstition.... We always get at second hand our notions about systems of government; and high tariff and low tariff; and prohibition and anti-prohibition; and the holiness of peace and the glories of war; and codes of honor and codes of morals;...and our preferences in the matter of religious and political parties.... We reason none of them out for ourselves.... It is the way we are all made, and we can't help it, we can't change it. And whenever we have been furnished a fetish, and have been taught to believe in it, and love it, and worship it, and refrain from examining it, there is no evidence, howsoever clear and strong, that can persuade us to withdraw from it our loyalty and our devotion. In morals, conduct, and beliefs we take the color of our environment

---

31. Connecticut Yankee, pp.63-64.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> and associations, and it is a color that can safely be guaranteed to wash. 32

Sociologically his warning was important. Environment and training were powerful agents for good or evil, were forces which society neglected to its own doom, forces which could be organized through intelligent direction of them to the building of a better world. Twain urged that they be used. A realistic appreciation of their potentiality was necessary as the first step in moving through the debris of civilization to Truth. The accumulation of the centuries--traditions, customs, prejudices--fettered people politically, morally, and spiritually. "There are some that never know how to change. Circumstances may change, but those people are never able to see that <u>they</u> have got to change too, to meet those circumstances. All that they know is the one beaten track that their fathers and grandfathers have followed and that they themselves have followed in their turn."[33] Yet society should utilize this natural inclination toward conservatism, guiding it toward productive channels through conscious manipulation of environment and training. "Habit is habit, and not to be flung out of the window by any man, but coaxed downstairs a step at a time."[34] Society should assume the task of coaxing its members to substitute good traditions for bad, progressive customs for reactionary ones, and an open, analytical mind for prejudices. After all, it should be as easy to think constructively as destructively. Only direction and incentive were needed, and the

---

32. <u>What Is Man?</u>, pp.364-365.

33. <u>Joan of Arc</u>, I, 296. When the revolutionist Maxim Gorky and his mistress were evicted from a New York hotel, Twain wrote: "Laws can be evaded and punishment escaped, but an openly transgressed custom brings sure punishment" (<u>Biography</u>, II, 1285).

34. <u>Joan of Arc</u>, I, 62.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

means for supplying them were at hand.

The foregoing summary represents Twain's closest approach to a philosophy of life. There remains, however, a sketchy, miscellaneous assortment of semi-philosophical ideas, which are vaguely related to the general body of his social thought. They represent opinions and reactions which are not subject to classification, which are not great truths, or integral parts of his writing--they are usually appended indiscriminately throughout his work--, but they do have a certain social interest and connotation.

Most important of these minor philosophical precepts was his recognition of a direct relationship between tolerance and reverence. His concept was important because it was the basis of several phases of his social criticism; his denunciation of religious intolerance, of race prejudice, of political loyalties, of a servile press. He did not always succeed in stating his idea accurately or consistently, but his failure was attributable more to inexact terminology than to false reasoning. When he urged the American press, for example, to cultivate an attitude of "irreverence" toward the things which enslaved men, he apparently used the word as a synonym for "challenge" or "questioning" rather than as the opposite of "reverence," although his contrast of the two in the same passage seems to belie this interpretation. Irreverence, in the sense of challenge, was needed as a weapon against harmful traditions and superstitions, such as those which made possible monarchies and ecclesiastical slaveries.

> Think of the innumerable slaveries imposed by misplaced reverence!.... If you can get a man to reverence your ideals, he's your slave.... In all the ages the peoples of Europe

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> have been diligently taught to avoid reasoning about the shams of monarchy and nobility...been taught to reverence them.... The sham and swindle of all this is apparent the moment one reflects that he is himself the only legitimately qualified judge of what is entitled to reverence and what is not.... So long as I reverence my own ideals my whole duty is done, and I commit no profanation if I laugh at theirs. 35

Twain was irreverent when he criticized the English system of government and Christian Science, but he was not intolerant. "Irreverence" to him meant a skeptical approach to "the compost heap of decayed heredities" which might curtail freedom; "reverence," on the other hand, represented the respect for a contrary estimate of their worth. He summed up the distinction in what he said of the attitude which should be taken toward a man of differing beliefs; "You can't revere his gods or his politics... but you could respect his belief in them..and him, too." [36] In other words, Twain felt free--almost obligated--to question the other person's creed, but he also respected the right of that other person to believe in that creed.

> I was never consciously and purposely irreverent in my life, yet one person or another is always charging me with a lack of reverence. Reverence for what--for whom? Who is to decide what ought to command my reverence--my neighbor or I? I think I ought to do the electing myself. The Mohammedan reveres Mohammed--it is his privilege; the Christian doesn't--apparently that is his privilege.... They haven't any right to complain of the other, yet they do complain of each other, and that is where the unfairness comes in. Each says that the other is irreverent, and both are mistaken, for manifestly you can't have reverence for a thing that doesn't command it. 37

He elaborated the idea in his chapter on Irreverence in "Is Shakespeare Dead?" There he protested that the Stratfordolaters, as he named the

---

35. American Claimant, pp.81-82.

36. Following the Equator, II, 193.

37. Biography, II, 1313.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

worshipers of Shakespeare, should not try to claim the privilege of reverence for their cause, since there were too many people benefiting from that privilege already. Then he added ironically:

> If you go on widening and spreading and inflating the privilege, it will presently come to be conceded that each man's sacred things are the only ones, and the rest of the human race will have to be humbly reverent toward them or suffer for it.... When it happens, the word Irreverence will be regarded as the most meaningless, and foolish,...and dictatorial word in the language. 38

Actually Twain was none too confident that the day would come when the world would be filled with the true spirit of reverence, which in turn would be the source and foundation of the sadly needed tolerance. In the first place, it was too difficult to attain:

> Reverence for one's own sacred things--parents, religion, flag, laws, and respect for one's own beliefs--these are feelings which we cannot even help. They come natural [sic] to us.... But the reverence which is difficult, and which has personal merit in it, is the respect which you pay, without compulsion, to the political or religious attitude of a man whose beliefs are not yours. 39

Secondly, since it is so hard to practice, only the few try, and the rest fall back into judicial roles, labeling those who differ from them cranks and lunatics, because they can no longer burn them. Worse still, the smug shirkers shout cant phrases about other people's irreverence, thereby intimating their own possession of it. In reality, Twain decided,

> none of us are reverent--in a meritorious way.... There is probably not a person whose reverence rises higher than respect for his own sacred things.... To speak plainly, we despise all reverences and all objects of reverence which are outside the pale of our own list of sacred things. And yet, with strange inconsistency, we are shocked when other people despise and defile the things which are holy to us. 40

---

38. What Is Man?, p.369.
39. Following the Equator, II, 192-193.
40. Ibid., II, 193.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

People needed to realize their limitations in this sphere and to make a sincere effort to broaden themselves, for on their endeavor rested the possibility of the universal spirit of toleration of which the world stood in such dire need.

The remainder of his philosophic jottings are of less import and merit inclusion here more as reflections of Twain's mental processes than as theories of intrinsic worth. There was, for example, his conclusion prompted by his seeing the old German morality play--The Master of Palmyra--that civilization had failed to check the "natural" man. The play, in which the pagans first persecute the Christians and then when Christianized turn on the pagans,

> ...stands as an unworded suggestion that civilization, even when Christianized, was not able wholly to subdue the natural man in that old day--just as in our day, the spectacle of a shipwrecked French crew clubbing women and children who tried to climb into the life-boats suggests that civilization has not succeeded in entirely obliterating the natural man even yet. Common sailors! A year ago, in Paris, at a fire, the aristocracy of the same nation clubbed girls and women out of the way to save themselves. Civilization tested at top and bottom both. 41

The natural man thus thwarts the development of civilization.

He fell into one of his numerous contradictions, on the other hand, by arguing that civilization invents its indecencies by making the natural man conscious of them. From that moment during his first visit to the Sandwich Islands when he saw nude women bathing, he was a nudist of the milder type. Journeying through Egypt he noted that "an hour's acquaintance with this cheerful custom reconciled the pilgrims [his name for the ministers in the party] to it."[42] Entries in the notebooks kept during his

---

41. "About Play Acting," The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg, p.220.
42. Innocents Abroad, II, 371.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

trip around the world many years later reveal that his antipathy for clothes had assumed a moral tinge: "Each race determines for itself what indecencies are," he decided. "Nature knows no indecencies; man invents them."[43] He recalled that the Japanese, since they held the human body worthy of respect as the creation of the gods, considered the white people who objected to the public bathing of both sexes to be possessed of dirty minds.[44] He came to admire the Oriental's lack of modesty as a healthy attribute. "The man who is ostentatious of his modesty," he wrote, "is twin to the statue that wears a fig-leaf."[45] He charged that his reliable scapegoat, the missionary, was responsible for this perversion of the natural man: "The first thing a missionary teaches a savage is indecency. He makes him put clothes on. He is as innocent and clean-minded up to that time as were our first parents when they walked naked before the Lord and were not ashamed." "Modesty antedates clothes and will be resumed when clothes are no more."[46] Eventually his concern evolved even philosophical implications, as he adopted Carlyle's clothes-metaphor to explain monarchy.

Another of these miscellaneous philosophical ideas was the psychological basis for murder which Twain developed in discussing the famous bands of marauding killers, known as Thugees, who terrorized India until 1850. They had their origin, Twain thought, in traits of the human

---

43. Notebook, p.288.

44. Loc. cit.

45. Following the Equator, II, 153.

46. Notebook, p.325 and Biography, II, 1513.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

race at large: in the joy of killing, and in seeing killing done. Civilization, he argued, had merely restrained the impulse in most men. History and certain contemporary phenomena revealed its presence in other civilizations as well as the present one. Those who enjoyed the slaughter in the Roman arena, the burning of doubtful Christians, the bullfights in Spain, the sport of killing dumb animals, all were Thugs. Still, Twain conceded, in his most ironic vein, "it is progress; we no longer take pleasure in slaughtering or burning helpless men. We have reached a little altitude where we may look down upon the Indian Thugs with a complacent shudder; and we may even hope for a day...when our posterity will look down upon us in the same way."[47]

His interest in the problem of evil led to a philosophical idea closely related to that justification of present evil as a means of achieving ultimate good which, as we have seen, appeared in his praise of the French Revolution. He held that there were no good or evil deeds as such, but only good and bad impulses. From every impulse flowed two streams of consequences; the one carrying health, the other poison. That is to say, "half the results of a good intention are evil; half the results of an evil intention are good."[48] The French Revolution brought desolation to five million families, "but every great and precious liberty enjoyed by the nations of continental Europe to-day are [sic] the gift of that Revolution."[49] Out of good comes evil; out of evil, good. It is the old

---

47. Following the Equator, II, 113.

48. "The Dervish and the Offensive Stranger," Europe and Elsewhere, p.310.

49. Ibid., pp.312-313.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

doctrine of compensation.

Twain applied the doctrine to money in an allegorical little story about an Esquimau maiden whose life was ruined when her father got rich. He implied in his record of the deterioration of the girl's father that wealth hardens a man's heart and coarsens his character. The irony was that the opinions of the rich man were enhanced by his money in the eyes of society, although they were the same silly ideas formerly ignored by the same society. "He has lowered the tone of all our tribe," the girl told the narrator. "Once they were a frank and manly race, now they are measly hypocrites, and sodden with servility. In my heart of hearts I hate all the ways of millionaires!"[50] In view of Twain's admiration for Mr. Rogers, Andrew Carnegie, and other Robber Barons, he was hardly voicing his own unqualified opinion in his heroine's lament. This point of view, nevertheless, he depicted in the $30,000 Bequest and The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg, where he traced the tyranny and deterioration of those who fell slaves to wealth. The former story ended on a moral note: "Vast wealth, acquired by sudden and unwholesome means, is a snare."[51] For it, people threw away their simple and happy lives, only to discover that its pleasures were feverish and transient. This distrust is probably representative of Twain's personal opinion, since money did not shield him from the blows life gave him through the deaths of his loved ones.

The remaining philosophical comments are truly fragmentary. There was his quite natural belief that brain and spirit were more important than

---

50. "Esquiman Maiden's Romance," The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg, p.149.

51. P.46.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

brawn;[52] his doctrine of work;[53] his observation that a little knowledge was apt to breed intolerance;[54] and his rebellion against standardization.[55] They were natural expressions of his sense of independence and the naivete of his mind. He was not interested in going deeper, perhaps because he accepted a simple truism: "There is no way of accounting for people. You have to take them as they are."[56] Therein lies the key to the man's fundamental humanity, his tolerance, his morality, his religion. He appreciated too fully the complexity of his own nature to have the temerity to label another man's. Realizing that he did not know himself, he accepted the impossibility of knowing the twists and quirks of another's hidden self. Such knowledge was not necessary; he would start with the reality, with people as they were, and suggest the means of improvement possible within the limitations and variations of human nature.

---

52. In describing the experiences of a crew adrift in an open boat for forty-three days, he pointed out that "usually merely a part of a boat's company survive-officers, mainly, and other educated and tenderly reared men, unused to hardships and heavy labor: the untrained, roughly reared hard workers succumb" ("My Literary Debut," The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg, p.101).

53. "There's many a way to win in this world, but none of them is worth much without good hard work back of it" (Joan of Arc, I, 302-303).

54. "When we know a thing we have only scorn for other people who don't happen to know it" (Joan of Arc, I, 275).

55. "In this world one must be like everybody else if he doesn't want to provoke scorn or envy or jealousy" ("A Detective Story," The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg, p.291). This view was no warrant for unbridled freedom. Freedom became licence when its exercise hurt others. Twain made himself clear on this point by condemning Dowden for his attempt to absolve Shelley of moral responsibility for his conduct on the ground that Shelley did not think his actions wrong (cf. "In Defense of Harriet Shelley," Literary Essays, pp.1-60).

56. Joan of Arc, I, 222.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Twain did not, on the other hand, restrict his speculations to philosophical questions. His willingness to try his hand at everything which piqued his interest was an underlying characteristic which is further illustrated by his ramblings in the sciences. In a superficial sense, all knowledge was his province, and his acquisitive mind ranged freely and naively in the general fields of scientific investigation, as it had in more philosophical realms. H. H. Waggoner concludes, in his article, "Science in the Thought of Mark Twain," that Twain's scattered references disclosed "a knowledge of science that, while not profound or in any sense rigorously accurate, was nevertheless inspired by enthusiastic interest, and was, for the average layman of the day, comparatively comprehensive."[57] It has been suggested above that his acquaintance with the theory of organic evolution afforded a background for his determinism.[58] He had, in addition, a keen interest in geology, astronomy, psychology, medicine, and mechanics. His understanding of these sciences, with the exception of the last two, was apt to be more poetic than practical. Geology fascinated him with its record of the passage of ages, a record which dwarfed man's little existence.[59] Paine reports that "he talked astronomy a great deal--marvel astronomy.... He was always thrown into a sort of ecstasy by

---

57. American Literature, VIII (January, 1937), 359.

58. Waggoner considers his philosophically sound knowledge of the main outline of anthropology, "one of the principal bulwarks of his deterministic philosophy" (loc. cit.).

59. In addition to Waggoner's references (Letters, pp.383 and 827; Biography, pp.436 and 1162; W. D. Howells, My Mark Twain, p.98) see poetical passage in Tom Sawyer, pp.268-269.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the unthinkable distances of space."[60] Although psychology was hardly a science in his day, as Waggoner points out, Twain's speculations on the theory of dual personality, the meaning of dreams, and the practical application of mental telepathy suggest his approach to the subject.[61] His curiosity about this last phenomenon prompted, in addition to numerous scattered comments, two essays on mental telegraphy and a prediction that "some day people will be able to call each other up from any part of the world and talk by mental telegraph."[62]

In the medical and mechanical sciences, on the other hand, Twain's interest, which was of a less speculative nature, was determined largely by his emotions. His opinion of the profession of medicine fluctuated violently. A doctor afforded him relief by lancing a painful carbuncle, and he wrote in his notebook: "It is the loftiest of all human vocations--medicine and surgery."[63] Five years later, in his enthusiasm over the miracles wrought by osteopathy, he wrote: "Now I have neither reverence nor respect for the physician's trade, and scarcely any for the surgeon's, I am convinced that of all quackeries, the physician's is the grotesquest and the silliest."[64] Later, when the clamor over vivisection arose, he even lost

---

60. Biography, II, 1509. Cf. American Literature, VIII (January, 1937), 362-363, for additional references.

61. American Literature, VIII (January, 1937), 361.

62. Letters, II, 664. "This age...has one important contract on its hands yet--the invention of...a method whereby the communicating of mind with mind may be brought under command and reduced to certainty and system" ("Mental Telegraphy," Literary Essays, p.128).

63. Notebook, p.251.

64. Letters, II, 691.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

his slight admiration for surgeons. Wholly misinterpreting the use made of specimens in medical research, he let his sympathy for the animals blot out any recognition of the ultimate benefit to humanity. He ignored the fact that this was truly a case in which the end justified the means, and at no cost in terms of human suffering, an apology that could not be given for the French Revolution and the Boer War, which he had condoned on that realistic principle. In the pathetic, moving, sentimental "Dog's Tale" he depicted the vivisectionalists as wilfully cruel, malicious brutes.[65] In one of his last public speeches, on the other hand, he said he considered the graduate medical school one of the greatest institutions in the country.[66]

Twain's seeming antipathy for doctors and surgeons did not, however, apply to the quack practitioners. His faith in mind-cures has been noted. He was as readily victimized by other cure-alls, medical and mechanical: "plasmon," a form of concentrated food, claimed his enthusiasm for a time; "Kellgren's treatment," a Swedish variant for osteopathy, was during another period considered a remedy for the world's ills. Quick to try unique methods of doing anything, he was equally quick to urge their blessings upon others. When Kellgren's treatment helped Jean and Mrs. Clemens, Twain was ready to discard "the physician's grotesque system--the emptying of miscellaneous and harmful drugs into a person's stomach

---

65. The $30,000 Bequest and Other Stories, pp.48-65. Upon reading the story, Mrs. Minnie Maddern Fisk requested a similar protest against the sacrificing of horses in the bull-rings. He then wrote "A Horse's Tale."

66. "Dr. Mark Twain, Farmeopath," Speeches [1910] p.334.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

to remove ailments which in many cases the drugs could not reach at all."[67] To Twichell he predicted that "ten year's hence no sane man will call a doctor.... The educated physician will himself be an osteopath."[68] To the State he objected that it had no right to drive out osteopathy. It gave a patient unlimited spiritual liberty when his soul was sick; it was not logical that it should deny him the medical aid he desired.[69] Twain then fell into his customary contradiction by upbraiding the State for permitting doctors to practice their "insane system," and for protecting the patent-medicine racket.[70]

It was in the mechanical field of science, however, that Twain's interest and emotion led him farthest astray. Some of his prognostications are made particularly interesting by their realization today, although he voiced them almost facetiously, as in his remarks on the future of mental telegraphy. He was close to the truth, for instance, with his guess that science would develop television and radio newspapers: "Neither printed

---

67. Letters, II, 691. Although three doctors attended Mrs. Clemens during her several illnesses in September, 1902, Clemens also summoned an osteopath. His notebook entry indirectly reveals his faith in the treatment, because it hurt him deeply to see her suffer: "Helmer...gave Livy a severe treatment--left her sore and lame, and she slept but little, that night" (Notebook, p.377).

68. Biography, II, 1087.

69. "Osteopathy," Speeches, pp.232-233.

70. Letters, II, 691. Three years after he attacked physicians as racketeers, he conceded that there was a place for most practitioners and that specialization should be encouraged: "No art of healing is the best for all ills. I should distribute the ailments around: surgery cases to the surgeons...nervous prostration to the Christian Scientist; most ills to the allopath and the homeopath" (ibid., II, 733-734).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

newspapers nor books left--except as curiosities. Salacious daily news furnished in a whisper to any that want it.... Portraits and pictures transferred by light accompany everything."[71] In a playful note to Mrs. Clemens in 1874, he predicted the coming of airplanes, telephones, and silent communication through the placing of hands on a speaker's forehead.[72] In a fanciful sketch he envisaged the use of radium as the sole source of energy in the world. Harnessed, it would produce light, electricity, and heat. All that was necessary was for Madame Curie to discover a method for isolating it from bismuth.[73] Not satisfied with prognostication, he squandered ten years and $190,000 in trying to perfect the type-setter; he wasted some $40,000 more in financing a steam-generator, a steam pulley, marine telegraphy, and a "chalk-plate" engraving process.[74] The only inventor to whom he ever refused money was Graham Bell!

Twain's career and record as an amateur scientist, then, cannot be said to possess social significance, except in the emphasis placed on the function of environment and training. His attitude toward science, his open, eager, questioning, on the other hand, is important as a revelation of the man and as a foundation for his thinking. His receptivity to ideas cannot be over-emphasized. It was behind his eternal cry for realistic

---

71. Notebook, p.193.

72. Biography, II, 1633-1634.

73. "Sold to Satan," Europe and Elsewhere, p.332.

74. He himself invented a spiral hatpin, a calendar watch-fob, a waistcoat to replace suspenders, a shirt requiring no studs, a method of making dies for stamping book-covers, a postal-check to supplant the money order, and a self-pasting scrap-book.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

points of view. He considered a willingness to learn second only to the desire, and he thought that willingness responsible for the remarkable progress achieved by the Industrial Revolution:

> If I were required to guess offhand...the bottom cause of the amazing material and intellectual advancement of the last fifty years, I should guess that it was the modern-born and previously non-existent disposition on the part of men to believe that a new idea can have value.... We are not privileged to doubt that for the past twenty or thirty centuries every conspicuous civilization in the world has produced intellects able to invent and create the things which make our day a wonder;.... The reason they did not do it was that the public reverence for old ideas and hostility to new ones always stood in their way.... By contrast, our day is indifferent to old ideas, and even considers that their age makes their value questionable.... This disposition was born to us,...was not possessed by any other century before us,...and is doubtless the bottom reason why we are a race of lightning-shod Mercuries, and proud of it--instead of being, like our ancestors, a race of plodding crabs and proud of that. 75

Mark Twain had the spirit of the true scientist if not the technique. He appreciated the good science could do toward building a new and better world, and he tried to contribute to the process by attacking the barriers of reaction and conservatism ever constructed to close the mind to new ideas.

It is, then, as moralist, agnostic, philosopher, and scientist--using the words in the broadest possible sense--that Twain lived in the world and commented on the features of it which amused and disgusted him; and these moral and philosophical ideas underlie his social and political commentary.

---

75. "A Majestic Literary Fossil," Literary Essays, pp.329-330. "I cannot help feeling rather inordinately proud of America for the gay and hearty way in which she takes hold of any new thing that comes along and gives it a first rate trial" (Letters, II, 690).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Imperialism

> "A nation is only an individual multiplied. It makes plans and Circumstance comes and upsets them--or enlarges them. Some patriots throw the tea overboard." 1

Mark Twain probably traveled more extensively than any other prominent man of letters of his generation. His record of his first foreign tour through the Mediterranean countries introduced a new technique of writing travel literature and gave him the fame he never lost. Two long volumes and numerous sketches described his subsequent wanderings through Central Europe, Africa, Asia, and Australia; his brief residence in Germany, Italy, and England. These migrations brought him close to foreign peoples and their governments, and his writing revealed his observations of both.

In his notebook Twain jotted down an impression of the aggregate character of several nationalities: "the English, the arrogant nation. The Americans the material nation, the Germans, the patient nation, the Russians the unclassifiable nation, the French the volatile nation..." 2 The classification represented an impulsive reaction rather than a reasoned conclusion, but in that fact it serves as a keynote to the general trend and content of this particular body of criticism. The emotionalism perverting his thinking on other subjects is equally apparent in what he had to say about foreign governments. Here, too, his comment was usually prompted by his intense disapproval of a situation instead of by the results of a thorough or deep study.

At the core of his indictment of most governments was Twain's

---

1. "Turning Point of My Life," What Is Man?, p.138.

2. Notebook, p.185.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

hatred of imperialism.) As it inspired his attacks on missionaries, so, too, it directed his criticism of the policies of England, France, Germany, Russia, Belgium, and the United States:

> Robbery by European nations of each other's territories has never been a sin, is not a sin today. To the several cabinets the the several political establishments of the world are clothes-lines; and a large part of the official duty of these cabinets is to keep an eye on each other's wash and grab what they can of it as opportunity offers. All the territorial possessions of all the political establishments in the earth--including America, of course--consist of pilferings from other people's wash.... In fact, in our day, land-robbery, claim-jumping; is become a European governmental frenzy. 3

England had systemmatically robbed India for a hundred and fifty years; Muscovite savages built a nation out of their stealing; "Africa has been as cooly divided up and portioned out among the gang as if they had bought it and paid for it."[4] In the long run this conquest of savage lands by Christian governments would prove beneficial, Twain thought; and in support of his opinion he pointed to the improvement of the Indian's life after the country was brought under British control. With the contemporary administration of stolen territories and with the exploitation of the people, nevertheless, he was indignant; and his condemnation of these specific practices was in keeping with his general view of imperialism.

The colonial program of England provoked the most, although not the severest, comment from Twain. Operations in the Transvaal particularly incensed him. It seemed to him that Britain was betraying the Boers

---

3. Following the Equator, II, 298-299.

4. Ibid., p.300.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

by supporting Cecil Rhodes. He considered the diamond tycoon a black-hearted slave-driver, personally responsible in Rhodesia for a brand of human slavery many times worse than that American one which was supposed to have deeply pained the English. So carried away was Twain by the plight of the Boers that he described their civilization as the highest yet attained.[5] When the war broke out, however, his admiration did not lead him to public sympathy with Britain's enemy. He considered England guilty of murder, but he did not speak out.[6] His reasoning in this instance is interesting and revelatory:

> Privately speaking, this is a sordid and criminal war, and in every way shameful and excuseless. Every day I write (in my head) bitter magazine articles about it, but I have to stop with that. For England must not fall; it would mean an inundation of Russian and German political degradations which would envelop the globe and steep it in a sort of Middle-Age night and slavery which would last until Christ comes again. Even wrong--and she is wrong--England must be upheld. He is an enemy of the human race who shall speak against her now. [7]

---

5. "Happiness, food, shelter, clothing, wholesale labor, modest and rational ambitions, honesty, kindliness,...love of freedom and limitless courage to fight for it, composure...patience...contentment with a humble and peaceful life void of insane excitements—if there is a higher and better form of civilization than this, I am not aware of it.... I suppose we have the habit of imagining that a lot of artistic, intellectual and other artificialities must be added, or it isn't complete. We and the English have these latter; but as we lack the great bulk of these others, I think the Boer civilization is best.... My idea of our civilization is that it is a shabby poor thing and full of cruelties, vanities, arrogancies, meannesses, and hypocrisies" (Letters, II, 695).

6. "Some man had to be the first to fall," he wrote in his notebook when the British ultimatum to the Boers expired. "Be he Boer or be he Briton, it is murder, & England committed it by the hand of Chamberlain & the Cabinet, the lackeys of Cecil Rhodes & his Forty Thieves, the South Africa Company" (Biography, II, 1095). "I think that England sinned when she got herself into a war in South Africa which she could have avoided" (Speeches, [1910], p.128).

7. Letters, II, 693.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Apparently Twain sensed the German and Russian threat to the world despite his incomplete knowledge of political trends. Later he was to predict the World War; but it is more remarkable that at this early date (1897) he should feel America's dependence upon Great Britain. In another letter to Howells he wrote of his chagrin over Britain's weak attitude toward the muddle between Greece, Turkey, and Crete:

> This has been a bitter year for English pride, and I don't like to see England humbled--that is, not too much. We are sprung from her loins, and it hurts me. I am for republics, and she is the only comrade we've got, in that. We can't count France, and there is hardly enough of Switzerland to count. Beneath the governing crust England is sound-hearted--and sincere, too, and nearly straight. [8]

His belief in the need for a strong Anglo-American coalition persisted, and by 1908 he was "proud and pleased to see this growing affection and respect between the two countries," while his sincere hope was that authors of both countries would leave to posterity "a friendship between England and America that will count for much.... 'Since England and America may be joined together in Kipling, may they not be severed in "Twain".'" [9]

In contrast to his criticism of Britain's moves in South Africa was Twain's approval of English rule for India. As noted above, India was one of the backward countries which he thought had benefited through the change from Mohammedan to Christian rulers. Formerly a Hindu prince's

---

8. Ibid., II, 643.

9. "Booksellers," Speeches, p.377. He was fond of the English, too, quite aside from political considerations. They had been the first to accept him as of the first rank in the literary world; they had treated him so well on his visit in 1872 that he could not write the satire about them which he planned. (The notes he made for the proposed book will perhaps be published by De Voto along with the other suppressed material.) They also had affection for him, which he considered "the final and most precious reward that any man can win" ("Books, Authors, and Hats," ibid., p.343).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

subjects could only be grateful to him for not slaughtering too many of them, for not rendering them destitute by sudden and arbitrary tax levies, and for not betraying them to the professional bands of murderers. Under English supervision these princely industries had been eradicated. Subjects now thanked their Indian princes for the factories, schools, and hospitals which they had established.

When one considers what India was under her Hindu and Mohammedan rulers, and what she is now; when he remembers the miseries of her millions then and the protections and humanities which they enjoy now, he must concede that the most fortunate thing that has ever befallen that empire was the establishment of British supremacy there.[10] The English, in his opinion, deserved commendation for the ease with which they governed India's myriads. Their tact, administrative ability, and sense of justice made possible their success.

The coming of the English had not, however, put an end to all the miseries of India's millions. The appalling poverty of the people staggered Twain. He described the wage scale ironically, because the figures were too fantastic to be grasped on his first consideration of them. Fascinated by the comparisons possible, he estimated that a native house-servant's monthly income was the equivalent of $1.90 in United States money; a farm-hand's, about $1.08. Even then the farm-hand was prosperous in view of the fact that at one time he received only half a rupee per month, which

---

10. Following the Equator, II, 301. Despite his enthusiasm for democracy, he thought it unwise for Australia to withdraw from the British Empire. They governed themselves wholly; their commerce was unoppressed. If America's case had been similar, Twain guessed, "we should not have gone out when we did" (ibid., II, 6).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

was nearly $2.90 a year. Twain challenged his readers to "think of the above facts; and consider what an incredible aggregate of poverty they place before you."[11]

In the final analysis, however, it was not her poverty which made India a secondary power, but the disorganization fostered by her caste system and warring states. Having been given the first civilization, the first accumulation of material wealth, a host of deep thinkers, she should have kept her leadership and become the mistress of the world instead of the vassal of an alien master. "But, in truth, there was never any possibility of such supremacy for her.... Where there are eighty nations and several hundred governments,...unity of purpose and policy are impossible." Add to these factors a caste system which destroys any growth of patriotism by dividing the people into hostile groups, and it is easy to see that from such unfortunate conditions no leadership could ever come.[12] India was the victim of her own makeup rather than of outside influences. Under the circumstances it was probably fortunate for her that she was subject to Great Britain; otherwise she would become the hunting ground of all the land-pirates of the world.

Twain's criticism of the policies of other nations is slighter

---

11. Ibid., II, 27-28. The one pleasing aspect of the labor situation for Twain was the absence of women workers. He had seen women of seventy and eighty years toiling in Bavarian grain fields, pushing beer trucks in Munich, pulling sleds beside dogs in Austria--while the young male drivers walked alongside--, and washing clothes in driving rains in France; his discovery that such was not the case in India evoked from him the hope that "we shall secrete from it some of our high-civilization ways, and...borrow some of its pagan ways to enrich our high system with" (ibid., II, 206-207).

12. Ibid., II, 73.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

in bulk but harsher in tone. Disliking the French people, he naturally disapproved of their technique as colonizers, although there was ample basis for disapproval from the most objective point of view. In the notebooks kept during his first visit to the Sandwich Islands he referred disparagingly to the efforts of France to gain control of them.[13] Arriving at Mauritius on his trip around the world, he added a terse note to his description of the landscape: "Island under French control--which means a community which depends upon quarantines, not sanitation, for its health."[14] Once when he grew heatedly indignant over the treatment accorded savages in all parts of the world by the white squatters who considered themselves civilized, he quoted a London journal:

> To learn what France is doing to spread the blessings of civilization in her distant dependencies we may turn with advantage to New Caledonia. With a view to attracting free settlers...the Governor forcibly expropriated the Kanaka cultivators from the best of their plantations, with a derisory compensation.... Such immigrants as could be induced to cross the seas thus found themselves in possession of thousands of coffee, cocoa, banana, and bread-fruit trees, the raising of which had cost the wretched natives years of toil, whilst the latter had a few five-franc pieces to spend in the liquor stores. 15

The system, Twain added, represented a combination of "robbery, humiliation, slow and slow/murder, through poverty and the white man's whisky."[16]

---

13. Notebook, pp.16, 20 and 21.

14. Following the Equator, II, 291.

15. Ibid., I, 191.

16. Loc. cit. "How beautiful and solemn is the thought that the earliest pioneer of civilization...is...always whisky!.... Look history over; you will see. The missionary comes after the whisky;... next comes the poor immigrant;...next, the trader" (Life on the Mississippi, p.490).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

It is indicative of Twain's sense of fairness, on the other hand, that he did not permit his prejudice to blind him to the commendable features of the French government. When, in a controversy with Paul Bourget, the Frenchman failed to point out what France could teach the United States about government, Twain reminded him that France could show how to equalize and collect taxes and how to elect a President" without throwing the country into earthquakew and convulsions that cripple and embarrass business, stir up party hatred in the hearts of men, and make peaceful people wish the term extended to thirty years."[17]

If Twain's aversion for the French was a fault, he offset it to some degree by his attitude toward another people. Among his earliest printed sketches was one condemning the persecution of the Chinese immigrants in San Francisco.[18] The Boxer Rebellion spread his interest to the entire race. In agreement with his opposition to imperialism, he urged a "Closed Door" in the East and suggested that Germany, France, and the other nations involved in China withdraw their troops as Russia had done. "Why should not China be free from the foreigners, who are only making trouble on her soil?" he asked. "We do not allow Chinamen to come here, and I say in all seriousness that it would be a graceful thing to let China decide who shall go there. China never wanted foreigners any more than foreigners wanted Chinamen, and on this question I am with the Boxers every time."[19] He did not mean, however, that he favored unrestricted immigration

---

17. "A Little Note to M. Paul Bourget," Literary Essays, p.178.

18. "Disgraceful Persecution of a Boy," Sketches New and Old, pp.126-131.

19. "Public Education Association," Speeches, p.212.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

of Chinese: "The Boxer believes in driving us out of his country. I am a Boxer, too, for I believe in driving him out of our country."[20] He considered the Yellow Terror, moreover, as threatening the world with reprisals for the manner in which China had been exploited, and he was particularly glad that his government had had no hand in provoking the rebellion.[21]

In the case of Russia Twain had an active sympathy for the plight of the people and an intense hatred of the Czarist regime. His strong distaste for rule by even the most liberal of autocracies grew into an almost violent opposition when the exercise of that right meant oppression. Horrified by the stories of the suffering of masses of Russian political prisoners exiled to Siberia, Twain wrote a letter in 1890, at the request of the editor of Free Russia, in which he urged the "liberation parties" to kill the Czar and to organize a republic. To do otherwise, he argued, was to invite failure, for never in the history of the world had a despotism been modified. The entire system had to be obliterated, not just altered...America had gained her glorious freedom at the price of blood; England had bought her liberation from tyrannical despots in the same way. "When we consider that not even the most responsible English monarch ever yielded back a stolen public right until it was wrenched from them [sic] by violence, is it rational to suppose that gentler methods can win privileges in Russia?"[22] The proper way would be to demolish the throne by revolution; but since rebellion could not be organized in Russia, the

---

20. Loc. cit.

21. "Welcome Home," ibid., p.200.

22. Letters, II, 537.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Czar should be destroyed and the throne kept open until a republic could be established. Certainly compromise would be disastrous.

The letter was never mailed, perhaps because it seemed too openly revolutionary at that early period.[23] But a massacre of Jews in Moscow, about fifteen years later, renewed all the old animosity against barbaric Russia, and this time Twain's feelings were printed as "The Czar's Soliloquy." He again called for revolution, and even went so far as to blame the moralists for their opposition to the use of force in any reform. He pictured the Czar as incredulous at the world's insistence that the moral axioms which had vogue and acceptance in civilized countries should be applied to him and his system:

> In Russia such laws as exist make an exception.... We [the Romanoffs] have done as we pleased for centuries. Our common trade has been crime, our common pastime murder, our common beverage blood.... Yet the pious moralist says it is a crime to assassinate us.... Ah! What could our Family do without the moralist?.... Today he is our only friend. Whenever there has been dark talk of assassination, he has come forward and saved us with his impressive maxim, "Forbear; nothing politically valuable was ever achieved by violence." ...There is no Romanoff of learning and experience but would reverse the maxim. [24]

Twain's anger was further intensified by the terms of settlement of the Russo-Japanese war five months later. He told the newspapers that Russia had been on the road to emancipation from an insane and intolerable slavery until she permitted the war to end before the Czar was crushed. "One more battle would have abolished the waiting chains of billions upon billions of unborn Russians." Now the Czar would "withdraw the small

---

23. Ibid., II, 534.

24. North American Review, CLXXX (March, 1905), 323-324.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

humanities that have been forced from him, and resume his medieval barbarisms with a relieved spirit.... This peace," Twain concluded, "is entitled to rank as the most conspicuous disaster in political history."[25] Paine reports that these opinions were given wide newspaper circulation and were productive of many letters of approval, among them one of complete agreement from Charles Francis Adams.[26]

In view of Twain's attitude toward the treaty of peace it is interesting to compare with the original draft of the words in which he declined an invitation to dine with Russian officials the later and more formal version, and to note the underlying irony of the latter. The original read:

> I am still a cripple, otherwise I should be more than glad of this opportunity to meet those illustrious magicians who with the pen have annulled, obliterated, & abolished every high achievement of the Japanese sword and turned the tragedy of a tremendous war into a gay & blithesome comedy. If I may, let me in all respect and honor salute them as my fellow-humorists, I taking third place, as becomes one who was not born to modesty, but by diligence & hard work is acquiring it. [27]

The telegram which he actually sent, and which the Russians asked permission to publish, and announced their intentions of showing to the Czar, was more reserved in its irony:

> I should be more than glad...to meet the illustrious magicians who came here equipped with nothing but a pen, & with it have divided the honors of the war with the sword. It is fair to presume that in thirty centuries history will not get done in admiring these men who attempted what the world regarded as the impossible & achieved it. [28]

Twain was still smarting over the setback to Russian emancipation

---

25. Biography, II, 1243.
26. Ibid., II, 1244.
27. Ibid., II, 1244.
28. Ibid., II, 1243.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

when Gorky and Tchaikowski came to America in the spring of 1906 to stimulate interest in the revolution. Although he thought the revolutionists would fail to get much material support since "an American's enthusiasm in such matters stopped well above his pocket," Twain, nevertheless, promised to give his sympathy and aid to their mission. Accordingly he introduced Gorky at a dinner, and he wrote a letter to be read by Tchaikowski at a mass meeting in the Grand Central Palace. This letter left no doubt as to Mark Twain's hatred of Russian imperialism under the Czar:

> My sympathies are with the Russian revolution, of course.... I hope it will succeed.... Government by falsified promises, by lies, by treachery, and by the butcher-knife, for the aggrandizement of a single family of drones and its idle and vicious kin has been borne quite long enough in Russia.... And it is to be hoped that the roused nation, now rising in its strength, will presently put an end to it and set up the republic in its place. Some of us...may live to see the blessed day when tsars and grand dukes will be as scarce there as I trust they are in heaven. 29

But his active participation in the revolutionary cause ended with an unfortunate incident which showered him and Howells with much unwanted publicity. They had both agreed to figure prominently in a literary dinner honoring Gorky; indeed, the papers were carrying cartoons depicting them as upsetting the Czar's throne, when Gorky's bad judgment ruined everything. Failing to take into account any possible differences between American and Russian moral conventions, he had brought with him, as his wife, a Russian actress; they were evicted from a procession of hotels. Twain and Howells were greatly distrubed by the publicity attending the affair, the plans for the dinner were dropped, and the Russian revolution lost caste in American eyes. Whether or not Twain refused further support

---

29. Ibid., II, 1283.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

to it because of his moral scruples, his fear of public censure, or his conviction that a fatal mistake had been made must remain a matter for conjecture. His comments at the time point to the last. He remarked to Paine that "American public opinion is a delicate fabric. It shrivels like the webs of morning at the lightest touch"; then he wrote in his memorandum:

> Laws can be evaded and punishment escaped, but an openly transgressed custom brings sure punishment.... Certainly, then, there can be but one wise thing for a visiting stranger to do--find out what the country's customs are and refrain from offending against them.
>
> The efforts which have been made in Gorky's justification are entitled to all respect because of the magnanimity of the motive back of them, but I think that the ink was wasted. Custom is custom;....facts, reasonings, arguments have no more effect upon it than the idle winds have upon Gibraltar. 30

Apparently he decided against wasting any more effort in supporting a cause which in his opinion was already lost.

One other instance of Twain's public denunciation of imperialism was his article on Belgium's exploitation of the Congo. The hearty and widespread response to his remarks on Russia had moved him to attack the fiendish atrocities committed on the Congo natives. King Leopold's Soliloquy recorded the reflections of the sovereign who was reported to have maimed and murdered fifteen millions of his African subjects in his greed for all the riches of the Congo rubber-fields. Somewhat after the fashion of the Czar, Leopold wonders why the world should be incensed over his disciplining of blacks through zealous use of knives on their bodies. He

---

30. Ibid., II, 1285. He remarked to Dan Beard: "Gorky made an awful mistake, Dan. He might as well have come over here in his shirt-tail" (ibid., II, 1285, footnote 1).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

congratulates himself for having tricked the blind Americans into granting him the wardenship of the Congo Free State, "the only democracy in history that has lent its power and influence to the establishing of an absolute monarchy!"[31] Since the other nations also permitted the grant, Leopold feels secure, because "neither nations nor governments can afford to confess a blunder."[32] Regarded as unsuitable for magazine publication--a commentary in itself on magazines of the period--the diatribe was given to the Congo Reform Association and issued as a pamphlet with actual photographs of mutilated blacks serving for illustrations. Various reform movements were undertaken as a result, and Twain energetically supported them with voice and pen until the repeated failures wore him out. "I am heart and soul in any movement that will rescue the Congo and hang Leopold, but I cannot write any more," As a final paragraph on the subject he proposed an epitaph for Leopold:

> Here under this gilded tomb lies rotting the body of one the smell of whose name will still offend the nostrils of men ages upon ages after all the Caesars and Washingtons & Napoleons shall have ceased to be praised or blamed & been forgotten--Leopold of Belgium. 33

Twain's remarks on imperialism were not confined, however, to foreign nations. His own government's conquest of Cuba and the Philippines put it in a class with the rest. In his article "To the Person Sitting in Darkness," he accused America of adopting the European game of land-grabbing, and he suggested that the country make an ironic confession, in order

---

31. King Leopold's Soliloquy, p.14.

32. Ibid., p.13.

33. Biography, II, 1231.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

to throw the heathen off-guard:

> We have been treacherous; but that was only in order that real good might come out of apparent evil. True, we have crushed a deceived and confiding people...a just and intelligent and well-ordered republic.... We have invited our clean young men to shoulder a discredited musket and do bandits' work under a flag which bandits have been accustomed to fear, not to follow; we have debauched America's honor and blackened her face before the world; but each detail was for the best.... The Head of every State and Sovereignty in Christendom and 90 per cent of every legislative body in Christendom, including our Congress and our fifty state legislatures, are members not only of the Church, but also of the Blessings-of-Civilization Trust. This world-girdling accumulation of trained morals, high principles, and justice cannot do an unright thing. 34

The quotation represents the culmination of a shift in Twain from support of colonial conquests to audible opposition toward such moves. The early phase was marked by the suggestion that the United States should annex the Sandwich Islands. In his first public lecture, delivered October 2, 1866, he urged that they be stocked with Americans, who could in turn "supply a third of the civilized world with sugar--and with the silkiest, longest-stapled cotton this side of the Sea Islands, and the very best quality of rice." Adopting the reasoning of the true imperialist he added: "The property has got to fall to some heir, and why not the United States?" 35 By 1873, however, he had seen enough of his country to make him doubt the benefits it could confer upon supposed savages. Now he spoke of annexation ironically, specifying in the New York Tribune the blessings which could be granted to the Islanders, such as "leather-headed juries, the insanity

---

34. Europe and Elsewhere, p.270.

35. Biography, II, 1601. In his newspaper letters from the Islands he deplored America's small stock in the riches. He advised California to establish a steamer line in order to fill the section with Americans and regain the country's lost foothold (Letters from the Sandwich Islands, p.9).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

law and the Tweed Ring."[36]

This new attitude had seemingly found expression first in regard to Cuba, of which he wrote disparagingly in his Buffalo Express in 1869: "I do not love the Cuban patriot or the Cuban oppressor either, and I never want to see our government 'recognize' anything of theirs but their respective corpses."[37] The early attitude was superseded in time, however, by his enthusiasm for the principles upon which the United States supposedly based her intervention in Cuba in 1898. He was in Austria when the Spanish-American War began, and he may have been prompted to his vigorous defense of his country's cause by the general sympathy felt by Europeans for Spain. At any rate, he wrote Twichell that the war was the most worthwhile one in history, since it was being fought for another's freedom, and he therefore hotly defended the United States against a charge of meddling in Cuba for gain.[38]

Only when he began to suspect that his country fully intended to annex the Philippines did his indignation begin to mount. He wrote Twichell: "Apparently we are not proposing to set the Filipinos free and give their islands to them; and apparently we are not proposing to hang the priests and confiscate their property. If these things are so, the war out there has no interest for me."[39] As the intentions of the United States became

---

36. Biography, I, 474.

37. Merle Johnson, A Bibliography of the Works of Mark Twain, p.169.

38. Letters, II, 663; "A Word of Encouragement for Our Blushing Exiles," Europe and Elsewhere, pp.221-224.

39. Letters, II, 694.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

more evident, he grew more depressed. "When the United States sent word to Spain that the Cuban atrocities must end she occupied the highest moral position ever taken by a nation since the Almight made the earth. But when she snatched the Philippines she stained the flag."[40] For a while he continued to believe in the integrity of his country in relation to Cuba, and the speeches made during 1900 which touched on the situation contained praise of the just war which set Cuba free and to censure the deplorable seizure of the Philippines: "We started out to set those poor Filipinos free, too, and why, why, why that most righteous purpose of ours has apparently miscarried I suppose I never shall know."[41] Soon, however, he was wondering if it would be very long before the government slipped out of the congressional obligation to Cuba. "It is a rich country, and many of us are already beginning to see that the contract was a sentimental mistake."[42]

Disillusioned and embittered by his country's membership in the Blessings-of-Civilization Trust, he cast about for an incident upon which to vent his anger, and he found it in the circumstances surrounding the capture of the rebel Filipino leader, Aguinaldo, by General Funston. The deception Funston practiced was in Twain's opinion a flagrant violation of

---

40. Biography, II, 1064. In a public introduction of Winston Churchill to a New York audience in 1900 Twain said that England and America were "kin in sin," the one guilty of a sinful and unnecessary war in South Africa, the other in the Philippines (China and the Philippines," Speeches [1910], 129).

41. "Welcome Home," Speeches, p.200. He would not vote for McKinley because he sent boys as volunteers out into the Philippines to get shot down under a polluted flag ("Municiple Corruption," ibid., p.221).

42. "To the Person Sitting in Darkness," Europe and Elsewhere, p.281.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the old code of hospitality, and he used the affair as the center of his general condemnation of the Philippine policy. His ironical defense of the General assumed serious proportions when he insisted that the black aspects of his achievement be exposed lest his particular breed of patriotism should supersede Washington's with the youth of America, as it had already done with the army officers who had been guilty of torturing Filipinos and in some instances their own men. Yet even in this caustic article Twain clung to his hope that the "golden patriotism," as he called it, of Washington would replace the foreign-born and foreign-bred brand which made imperialism possible. And he thought he saw support for his hope in the people's increasing doubts concerning the treatment the government gave the Filipinos:

> Conviction will follow doubt. The nation will speak...and in that day we shall right such unfairnesses as we have done. We shall let go...of the sceptered land-thieves of Europe, and be what we were before, a real World Power,...by right of the only... hands guiltless of the sordid plunder of any helpless people's stolen liberties. 43

The general tone and content of his criticism of imperialism indicates that he was no political scientist. "For all his indignation, he does not perceive the connection between imperialism, militarism, and the economic system."[44] It should be noted in defense of his failure that few of the so-called political scientists of his day perceived the

---

43. "In Defense of General Funston," North American Review, CLXXIV (May, 1902), 615-616. Paine says that he wrote much more on the subject. Perhaps De Voto will see fit to publish some of it, although it will undoubtedly only amplify the opinions recorded here.

44. Wagenknecht, op. cit., p.259.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

connection either. His understanding of such problems was, nevertheless, superficial; his reactions were those of a highly emotional observer. He was too prone to grasp only the more obvious features of political policies and practices and to ignore their future implications. A startling event of his summer in Europe in 1898 was the assassination of the Empress of Austria. His interest was pointedly non-political; it was the dramatic character of the tragedy which impressed him. Four paragraphs of letters to Twichell recount his thrill at "living in the midst of world-history again," his intention of attending the spectacular funeral, and his ridicule of the German Emperor's illogical remark that the ruthless deed was "ordained from above"--a point which was mentioned in the discussion of Twain's determinism.[45] Even when he treated the incident at greater length in a magazine article, he concerned himself mainly with his theory that all men are mad in one way or another and with his reflection on the insanely comic aspect of life which enables a nonentity to shake the world with his acts.[46] The same philosophical considerations figured largely in his reaction to the assassination of President McKinley. The crime simply afforded another illustration of his idea that everyone was subject to fits of temporary insanity.[47]

---

45. Letters, II, 667-668. The phrase "'living in the midst of world history again'" refers to his presence in the Austrian Reichsrath in 1879 when the police arrested the insurgent members. Brooks cited Twain's article on this clash as evidence that: "In all the years of his travelling to and fro through Europe he divined hardly one of the social tendencies that had so spectacular a denouement within four years of his death" (op. cit., pp.188-189).

46. "The Memorable Assassination," What Is Man?, pp.167-175.

47. Letters, II, 713-716.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Obviously his attitude toward significant political happenings was in most instances that of the average observer, and his view was limited to what the average observer could see. An anecdote in Paine's biography serves to represent Twain's point of view. Since he seldom ate lunch, he contented himself with pacing about the dining room and talking until the meal was finished. What he said was secondary and only a means of killing time. "Once, when he had been discussing with great earnestness the Japanese question, he suddenly noticed that luncheon was about ending, and he said: 'Now we'll proceed to more serious matters--it's your--shot.' And he was quite serious, for the green cloth and the rolling balls afforded him a much larger interest."[48]

---

48. Biography, II, 1326.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Patriotism

"The soul and substance of what customarily ranks as patriotism is moral cowardice." [1]

Mark Twain denounced American imperialism and politics, American jurisprudence and the American press; but he was a patriot at heart. No man loved his country and its achievements more than he did; nevertheless, he also saw many of its faults and attempted to reveal them. Frequently the wrongs for which it was responsible drove him to despair. It was during one of these periods of despondency that he appeared unpatriotic to Mrs. James Fields: "He is so unhappy and discontented with our government that he says he is not conscious of the least emotion of patriotism in himself. He is overwhelmed with shame and confusion, and wishes he were not an American. He thinks seriously of going to England to live, for awhile, at least." [2] At the time Twain was experiencing the natural disillusionment of an idealistic young Westerner whose eyes had suddenly been opened to the machinations underlying democratic government. Three years earlier he had recorded his first reactions to the ways and means of the system in The Gilded Age, and he had to suffer some of the effects of his findings. Testimonies of a much later date, however, reveal his resiliency. In a speech of 1893, for example, he confessed his pride in the patriotism of his countrymen: "I have been on the continent of Europe for two and a half years. I have met many Americans there...and it has been very gratifying to me to find that nearly all preserved their Americanism.... I think it is a great thing to say that in two and a half years I met only

---

1. Notebook, p.394.

2. "Bret Harte and Mark Twain in the Seventies," Atlantic Monthly, CXXX (September, 1922), 347.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

one person who had fallen a victim to the shams...of nobilities and of heredities."[3] His patriotism, like his other attitudes, was conditioned by the emotion of the moment, and the seeming inconsistencies were consequently the natural expressions of his nature.

As we might expect, Twain was more of a patriot in the traditional mold during the first few years of his wandering abroad. The "Innocent" thrilled to the sight of the flag flying from the mast of a ship in the Strait of Gibraltar, for to see it <u>then</u> was "to see a vision of home itself and all its idols, and feel a thrill that would stir a very river of sluggish blood!"[4] Odessa "looked just like an American city:... a stirring, business look about the streets and the stores; fast walkers; a familiar <u>new</u> look about the houses and everything."[5] America had all the real advantages for making life pleasanter and easier: "To be condemned to live as the average European family lives would make life a pretty heavy burden to the average American family."[6]

Even at that early period, on the other hand, he was not blind to the more glaring faults in American character. Included in the travel books were the young man who boasted to the English officers that a couple of United States gunboats could blow Gibraltar into the Mediterranean; the upstart who talked loudly and coarsely at a French restaurant; the American who defaced Schiller's monolith with advertisements printed in

---

3. "Lotus Club Dinner," <u>Speeches</u>, p.163.

4. <u>Innocents Abroad</u>, I, 50-51.

5. <u>Ibid</u>., II, 101.

6. <u>A Tramp Abroad</u>, II, 247.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

large blue letters. There were those pilgrims who cruelly overworked the horses they rode in order not to break the Sabbath, and who traveled half around the world to be able to sail on Galilee, only to forfeit their one opportunity rather than pay two napoleons. In Howells's words, "these are all Americans who are painted to peculiar advantage by Mr. Clemens, and who will be easily recognized by such as have had the good fortune to meet them abroad."[7] There was already a background for Twain's later characterization of America as "the Impolite Nation.... We are called the Inventive Nation," he added, "but other nations invent.... Other nations brag.... There are other energetic nations. It is only in uncourteousness, incivility, impoliteness, that we stand alone."[8]

As Twain grew older and traveled more extensively, his interest in and understanding of the meaning, power, and uses of patriotism broadened. He came to see that there were two general types: one characterized by a simple, quiet love of country and pride in its achievements; the other marked by a blind, stolid loyalty to inherited political affiliations and points of view. The first was exemplified in Twain's own references to America; but he charged that the second was used to justify iniquitous political loyalties, jingoistic foreign policies, and warped Americanisms. It was the kind of patriotism which demanded unquestioning

---

7. My Mark Twain, p.109.

8. Notebook, p.298. When the European criticized American manners, however, Twain conjured up a defense by claiming what he called "one little matter of superiority in our manners." An unescorted lady might walk American streets all day without being molested; in London she would be accosted and insulted by men who were considered gentlemen (A Tramp Abroad, II, 208).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

allegiance to one's party, creed, or country. As such, it was practically a religion, trained into the patriot by the throne in absolute monarchies, by the newspapers and politicians in democracies. Such a patriot was held in line by the fear that he might be called "traitor" by some "incoherent six-dollar subeditor" if he should revolt at the beginning of some shabby political move.[9] England and America were guilty of coercion of this kind during their imperialistic wars. "The training of the two nations had been dead against independence in political thought, persistently inhospitable toward patriotism manufactured on a man's own premises...reasoned out in the man's own head."[10]

> We teach the boys to atrophy their independence. We teach them to take their patriotism at second-hand; to shout with the largest crowd without examining into the right or wrong of the matter--exactly as boys under monarchies are taught.... We teach them to regard as traitors...such as do not shout with the crowd, & so here in our democracy we are cheering a thing which of all things is most foreign to it & out of place--the delivery of our political conscience into somebody else's keeping. 11

The procedure was degrading and dangerous. A cultivated patriotism afforded rich soil for the weeds of propaganda, the rank growth of wars and

---

9. "As Regards Patriotism," Europe and Elsewhere, p.301. "There isn't a foot of land in the world which doesn't represent the ousting and re-ousting of a long line of successive 'owners,' who each in turn, as 'patriots,' with proud swelling hearts defended it against the next gang of 'robbers' who came to steal it and did--and became swelling-hearted patriots in their turn" (Notebook, pp.295-296). Twain considered public support of the Philippine War, it should be recalled, an example of this brand of patriotism: "This nation is like all the others that have been spewed upon the earth--ready to shout for any cause that will tickle its vanity or fill its pockets" (Letters, II, 705).

10. "As Regards Patriotism," Europe and Elsewhere, p.302.

11. Biography, II, 1118.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

prejudices which hid beauty in the world. It became the spirit of the dog and wolf, with which no truly Christian spirit could be reconciled. Christianity proclaimed the brotherhood of the race; a perverted patriotism proclaimed the doctrine of watchful isolation. "The moment there is a misunderstanding about a boundary...see patriotism rise, and hear him split the universe with his war-whoop."[12] This bastard self-righteousness had to be purged from the world before there could be any hope for lasting peace and brotherhood.

The national manifestation of this brand of patriotism, furthermore, was responsible for many of the evils within nations. It was exemplified in the illogical consistency of those who put allegiance to political parties above allegiance to the State. "People seem to think," Twain charged, "they are citizens of the Republican Party and that that is patriotism and sufficiently good patriotism."[13] The attitude made it impossible to develop an intelligent electorate and vitiated the democratic process of government. Those people needed the Connecticut Yankee's political philosophy:

> My kind of loyalty was loyalty to one's country, not to its institutions or its office-holders. The country is the real thing...to watch over.... Institutions are extraneous, they are its mere clothing, and clothing can wear out....become ragged.... To be loyal to rags...that is a loyalty of unreason, it is pure animal; it belongs to monarchy, was invented by monarchy.... The citizen who thinks he sees that the commonwealth's political clothes are worn out, and yet holds his peace, and does not agitate for a new suit, is disloyal; he is a traitor. That he may be the only one who thinks he sees this decay, does not excuse him; it is his duty to agitate anyway, and it is the duty

---

12. Notebook, pp.332-333.

13. Ibid., pp.202-203.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

of others to vote him down if they do not see the matter as he does. 14.

On this principle of political independence Twain based his conduct. In fact, the decision to bolt his party in the presidential election of 1884 probably inspired his thinking on the subject. Unable to stomach Blaine's questionable record as senator, Twain turned to Cleveland. His letters at the time reveal his incredulity at the loyalty of honest men to the Republican nominee. Howells's stand in particular distressed him. He pleaded with him to change.

> Somehow I can't seem to rest quiet under the idea of your voting for Blaine. I believed you said something about the country and the party. Certainly allegiance to these is well; but as certainly a man's first duty is to his own conscience and honor--the party of the country comes second to that, and never first. I don't ask you to vote at all--I only urge you to not soil yourself by voting for Blaine. 15

After the election he composed a mock speech in which he censured the deceased partisans for their meek subjection to party and accused them of betraying the people: they "taught them that the only true freedom of thought is to think as the party thinks...that patriotism, duty, citizenship, devotion to country, loyalty to the flag, are all summed up in loyalty to party."[16] After his friends condemned him for supporting Cleveland, this train of thought produced a paper on "Consistency," which he he read before the Hartford Monday Evening Club in 1887. In it he denounced consistency as illogical, since growth was the most rigorous

---

14. Connecticut Yankee, pp.107-108.

15. Letters, II, 445.

16. "A Tribute," Speeches, p.118.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

law of life. Party allegiance as a practice had been borrowed from the monarchial system in order that base politicians could foist baser men on their parties and get them elected by appealing to party loyalty. The Mugwump--the independent--, on the other hand, should find satisfaction and strength in the knowledge that he comes of mighty ancestry:

> In the whole history of the race of men no single great and high and beneficient thing was ever done for the souls and bodies, the hearts and the brains, of the children of this world, but a Mugwump started it and Mugwumps carried it to victory. And their names are the stateliest in history: Washington, Garrison, Galileo, Luther, Christ. Loyalty to petrified opinions never yet broke a chain or freed a human soul in this world--and never will. ...The average man has turned the rights and wrongs of things entirely around, and is proud to be "consistent," unchanging, immovable, fossilized, where it should be his humiliation that he is so. 17

Party loyalty represented a vicious application of the principle of patriotism to the forces opposed to progress. It was Twain's patriotic hope, to use his Yankee's words, "to teach...disloyalty, till they get used to discussing that word loyalty as representing a virtue. This will beget independence, which is loyalty to one's best self and principles, and this is often disloyalty to the general idols and fetishes." 18

It should not be assumed, finally, that Twain's disillusionment in regard to the corrupting uses made of patriotism even by his own

---

17. "Consistency," Speeches, p.130.

18. Notebook, p.199. In "The Czar's Soliloquy" the Czar reflects that his persecutions have started the masses toward a true patriotism. He sees twenty-five million children learning a new lesson from their mothers: "Our patriotism is medieval, outworn, obsolete; the only rational patriotism, is loyalty to the Nation ALL the time, loyalty to the government when it deserves it" (North American Review, CLXXX [March, 1905], 324).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

country shriveled away his personal pride in his country. He reserved for the American the right to criticize America. About 1889 he made a speech "On Foreign Critics" in which he dealt sarcastically with a remark of Sir Lepel Griffin's to the effect that "'there is no country calling itself civilized where one would not rather live than in America, except Russia.'" He blandly pointed out that America was responsible for the little "real" civilization the world enjoys, was, in fact, the only "real" civilization, if that condition was defined as any system free of "human slavery, despotic government, inequality, numerous and brutal punishments for crime, superstition...ignorance...and dirt and poverty."[19] One needed only to study France, Germany, and England before the American Revolution, and he would see that it was America which summoned the French slaves to rise and which invented human liberty.[20]

Twain was equally patriotic in his reply to Paul Bourget's characterization of Americans. His first approach was to deny the possibility of any foreigner's being able to report the essential characteristics of a nation--"Its soul, its life, its speech, its thought." Only the native novelist was qualified to make an expert analysis.[21] Then he pointed out that there was not a single human characteristic which could be labeled "American"--unless it was the national devotion to ice-water!--

---

19. Speeches, p.150.

20. Ibid., pp.152-153.

21. "What Paul Bourget Thinks of Us," Literary Essays, p.152. Matthew Arnold's strictures on America provoked similar caustic replies. Since Twain's answers constitute a defense of American newspapers--although he himself constantly assailed them--they will be considered in the section on the press.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

that whenever the searcher finds what seems to be an "American" peculiarity,[22] he has only to cross a frontier or two and it will have disappeared. The disposition of foreigners to point to love of money as a strictly American trait gave Twain particular annoyance. He insisted that the inclination was broadly human, natural to all nations, and conspicuous in America only because the opportunity to get rich was so much greater there than in Europe.[23] "Some men worship rank, some worship heroes, some worship power, some worship God, and over these ideals they dispute--but they all worship money."[24] Foreigners would do well to leave analyses of America and the Americans to native critics.

Emotional as are many of Twain's utterances on patriotism, among them are some of merit and importance, such as his attack on false loyalties. Most interesting from another point of view is the extent to which he acted on his convictions. He revealed an independence of mind denied him by several critics; and within limits he was also the enlightened patriot.

---

22. Ibid., p.155.

23. Ibid., p.162.

24. Notebook, p.343.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

War

> "Always we had wars...but never a war started for any clean purpose--there is no such war in the history of the race." [1]

Coley B. Taylor was a boy in Redding, Connecticut, in 1908, when Mark Twain came there to live. He remembers how the elders of the town were deeply shocked by some of the opinions of their famous neighbor. That he did not believe in Heaven or Hell was staggering enough, but when he denounced his country's righteous and honorable wars he was talking treason to them. The report was whispered about "that he thought war was infamous, that all our wars were avoidable, and were the results of blundering politicians and foolish or stupid rulers--even the Civil War, and the Spanish-American War." [2] It was said that he uttered these views with great bitterness and anger, qualities which puzzled the natives, who knew him as genial, friendly, and entertaining. [3] Taylor's memoir presents a striking picture of the humorist, confident in the freedom accorded age and reputation, exploding his iconoclastic heresies upon his complacent, conservative, awe-struck neighbors. He had a sense for the dramatic, although not a subtle one, and his manner was frequently influenced by it.

The portrait presents more than the image of an embittered old man, however; it reveals a certain development in that man's attitude--particularly toward war--which had its origin in his reactions to imperialism. The Mark Twain of 1908 denounced war as infamous; whereas

---

1. Mysterious Stranger, p.109.
2. Taylor, op. cit., p.15.
3. Loc. cit.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the Twain of 1898-1905 had tried to believe in the righteousness of force which was directed at the overthrow of tyranny. The history of this growth illumines not only his feelings about war in general but also his personality. They merge to create one more sphere of social and political criticism.

His earliest connections with war, as has been shown elsewhere, were not auspicious. Too young to march with the local contingents in the Mexican War, he contented himself with recording the news from the battlefields as it came over the telegraph.[4] Too indifferent through ignorance of the issues to take an active part in the Civil War, he eagerly accepted Orion's offer of a job in the Nevada Territory. It has already been pointed out in answer to Masters's accusations of cowardice that such conduct was certainly not unusual then. In his own mind Twain never clarified his relation to the Civil War. Judging from his remarks he thought of himself as a Confederate; but he did not hesitate to sympathize with t the North, and Lincoln and Grant were his heroes. In the absence of any definite statement his introduction of Colonel Henry Watterson, at a Lincoln's birthday celebration in 1901, best summarizes his position. After referring to Watterson and himself as rebels, he commented on the incongruity of their being chosen "to come here and bare our heads in reverence and love of that noble soul whom forty years ago we tried with all our hearts and all our strength to defeat and dispossess.... We of the South...no longer regret the result, to-day we are glad that it came

---

4. Biography, I, 78.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

out as it did, but we are not ashamed that we did...our bravest best."[5]

Not until the Spanish-American War was Twain sufficiently aroused to show interest in his country's conflicts. He had dismissed the Franco-Prussian War with a "Burlesque Map of Paris," and a parody of newspaper headlining of the inactivity of the troops, while only the possibility that America might be involved prompted him to refrain from burlesquing the periodic Fenian scares.[6] But, as has been seen, the prospect that the United States should engage in a war to free the Cubans from the autocratic grip of Spain so filled him with ecstasy that he professed to be enjoying the fighting. Here again was his old compromise with violence because of the objective to be reached through its power. Only when the seizure of the Philippines convinced him of his error did he indict his country for the crooked game she was playing.

Twain's inclination to qualify his innate hatred of violence must be understood in order to appreciate the pacifism which grew out of it. His liberalism, as Wagenknecht suggests, beclouded the real issue. "So thoroughly was he committed to the cause of political democracy that it was difficult for him not to feel that violence was righteous if it resulted in overthrowing an unjust or a tyrannical government."[7] The

---

5. "On Lincoln's Birthday," Speeches, pp.228-230.

6. The Choice Humorous Works of Mark Twain, London, 1922, pp.378, 379 and 528-529: "It is harmless fun, this annual masquerading toward the border; but America should not encourage it, for the reason that it may some time or other succeed in embroiling the country in a war with a friendly power [Canada]." Cf. "The European War, in Curious Republic of Gondour, p.119, for the parody.

7. Op. cit., p.260.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

French Revolution, for all its blood, was justified; Russia needed to blow the Czar into eternity; the Japanese attack should have been permitted to continue despite the cost until the Czar was ruined; England, although at fault in her fight with the Boers, had to be triumphant. "All gentle cant and philosophizing to the contrary notwithstanding, no people in the world ever did achieve their freedom by goody-goody talk and moral suasion; it being immutable law that all revolutions that will succeed must begin in blood, whatever may answer afterward."[8] That is not the doctrine of a pacifist; hence Twain cannot be considered one in the accepted sense of the word.

As he watched the questionable workings of the force he approved, however, he apparently came to realize the fallacy of the principle and to hate war for what it really was. The painfully realistic descriptions of the fighting and suffering in Joan of Arc--they reflect an almost deliberate emphasis on the horror and brutality of conflict--may represent a slowly developing distrust of such a terrible instrument of progress as war.[9] In keeping with his mood, he could find it in his heart to doubt the value of even progress itself. Was it more than the history of the development of efficient instruments for killing?

> Cain did his murder with a club; the Hebrews did their murders with javelins and swords; the Greeks and Romans added protective armor and the fine arts of military organization and generalship; the Christian has added guns and gunpowder; a few centuries from now he will have so greatly improved the deadly effectiveness of his weapons of slaughter that all men will confess that without Christian civilization war must have remained a poor and trifling thing to the end of time.... They all did

---

8. Connecticut Yankee, p.171.

9. II, 37 and 67.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> their best--to kill being the chiefest ambition of the human race and the earliest incident in its history--but only the Christian civilization has scored a triumph to be proud of. Two or three centuries from now it will be recognized that all the competent killers are Christians. 10

It was in this spirit that Twain had prepared his "Salutation from the Nineteenth to the Twentieth Century"--quoted above in the discussion of his attitude toward missionaries--and his "Stupendous International Procession." The latter represented a gruesome pageant of the nations of the earth, each carrying its black banner, instruments of torture, and mutilated prisoners.[11] With these bitter sketches belongs his "War Prayer," written about three years later. In it a tall, dark stranger appears before a congregation which is passionately pleading for victory in its country's war. Purporting to be a messenger from God, he voices the implications of their plea: "Help us to tear their soldiers to bloody shreds...to lay waste their humble homes...to wring the hearts of their unoffending widows.... For our sakes who adore Thee, Lord, blast their hopes, blight their lives, protract their bitter pilgrimage.... We ask it, in the spirit of Love."[12] He then demands of the people if they still want their prayer answered.

To Mark Twain, then, war became a repellant and unjustifiable force. "Always we had wars...all over Europe, all over the world.

---

10. Mysterious Stranger, pp.110-111.

11. This is another of the unpublished documents which De Voto may see fit to print. Paine includes sections of it in the Biography, II, 1149-1150.

12. Europe and Elsewhere, p.398. The "War Prayer" is an example of the repressed material upon which Brooks places such emphasis as evidence of Twain's frustration.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

'Sometimes in the private interest of royal families...sometimes to crush a weak nation; but never a war started by the aggressor for any clean purpose--there is no such war in the history of the race.'"[13] Compare Satan's observation with Twain's early statements about the Spanish-American War, and the transition becomes evident.

Twain's awakening had come, however, through a process of disillusionment, and the effect was a continuing discouragement regarding the probability of outlawing violence from the settlement of disputes between nations. During his trip around the world in 1898 he was impressed by the way in which the Australian and Indian papers handled the rumors of England's impending war with the Boers, and he admitted some faith in arbitration.[14] The war itself, however, so thoroughly destroyed his faith in this alternative that he rejected the Czar of Russia's project for world disarmament on the ground that "peace without compulsion would be against nature and not operative."[15] In turn he suggested that the only practical method of gaining even partial peace would be to "get four great powers to agree to reduce their strength 10 per cent a year and thrash the others into doing likewise." He indicated his doubt in his concluding words: "Perpetual peace we cannot have on any terms I suppose; but I hope we can

---

13. Mysterious Stranger, p.109.

14. "They treated the subject argumentatively and with dignity, not with spite and anger. That was a new spirit, too, and not learned of the French and German press.... I heard many public speeches, and they reflected the moderation of the journals.... Arbitration would settle their differences so much better and also so much more definitely [than baffling and retarding wars]" (Following the Equator, I, 148-149).

15. Letters, II, 673.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

gradually reduce the war strength of Europe till we get it down to where it ought to be--20,000 men, properly armed."[16]

Armament races were not, on the other hand, solely responsible for his skepticism relative to peace movements. He saw as great a danger to the ideal in the power of vociferous minorities to shape public opinion. He predicted that almost inevitably they led the sheeplike masses into wars, and his description of the process is remarkable for its versimilitude:

> The loud little handful--as usual--will shout for the war. The pulpit will--warily and cautiously--object at first; the great, big, dull bulk of the nation will...try to make out why there should be a war, and will say, earnestly and indignantly, "It is unjust and dishonorable, and there is no necessity for it." Then the handful will shout louder. A few fair men on the other side will argue and reason against the war with speech and pen, and at first will have a hearing and be applauded.... Those others will outshout them.... Before long you will see this curious thing: the speakers stoned from the platform and free speech strangled by hordes of furious men who in their secret hearts are still at one with those stoned speakers...but do not dare to say so. And now the whole nation...will take up the war-cry...and mob any honest man who ventures to open his mouth. ... Next the statesmen will invent cheap lies, putting the blame upon the nation that is attacked, and every man will be glad of those conscience-soothing falsities, and will diligently study them, and refuse to examine any refutations of them; and thus he will by and by convince himself that the war is just, and will thank God for the better sleep he enjoys after this process of grotesque self-deception. 17

---

16. Ibid., II, 673-674.

17. Mysterious Stranger, pp.119-120. It is certainly ironical that this selection should have been published first in Harper's Monthly of November, 1916, since it was in April of the following year that the United States declared war on Germany. Furthermore, the American citizen passed through almost step by step the process of grotesque reasoning outlined by Twain in the passage written around 1900. The singular indifference of the editorial staff of Harper's to the foreign holocaust as reflected in the selection

(Cont'd p.262)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

In view of Twain's observation of the methods and objectives of the imperialistic wars of his day, and in view of his sceptical estimate of human nature, it is not surprising that he should have become so pessimistic over the prospect of world peace as to astonish the simple patriots of Redding, Connecticut with his opinions. Paine testified that during those last years he predicted the coming of the World War.[18] "'The gospel of peace," he said, "is always making a deal of noise, always rejoicing in its progress but always neglecting to furnish statistics. There are no peaceful nations now. All Christendom is a soldier-camp.'"[19] The outlook was a dismal one, enough in itself to make a man of Twain's sensibilities bitter and depressed. By that time the old man could do no more than cry out against the blundering stupidity which recklessly wasted the glories of the earth. His outcry was often muddled, often inconsistent, but it was impassioned and sincere. The theme alone lent it dignity and significance. Inconsequential as were many of his views on war and peace, his demand for, and effort to attain, a realistic understanding of the causes, effects, and possible remedies of wars represented in its small way a contribution of some social importance.

---

17 (cont'd) of articles for the November issue. The feature was a series of lovely prints depicting "Perfumeries and Prospects of Grasse." Mr. Howells devoted his department to a discussion of the perplexing problem of the proper way to choose a magistrate. No word of the foreign struggle; no views on how to avoid it. The attitude was typical of the nation and explains in part how it slid into war so easily five months later.

18. Wagenknecht, op. cit., p.262: "Mr. Paine assures me Mark Twain did know the War was coming and spoke of it specifically during a walk at Stormfield in 1909."

19. Biography, II, 1467.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Race Prejudice and Sectional Characteristics

"The universal brotherhood of man is our most precious possession--what there is of it." 1

Mark Twain's experiences in the world of men taught him to hate imperialism, false loyalties, and war. They did more, however, and nurtured in him an active tolerance which transcended race, color, and creed. "I am quite sure," he wrote, "that (bar one) I have no race prejudices, and I think I have no color prejudices nor caste prejudices nor creed prejudices. ... All that I care to know is that a man is a human being--that is enough for me; he can't be any worse." 2 The concluding sentence, exclusive of the characteristic cynicism of his last years, carries the key to the nature of his tolerance. His ever-present concern with the welfare of men--found to be the basis of that moral point of view evident in his social thinking--again guided him to an even broader humanity. The essence of his attitude is contained in one principle of action: "There is but one first thing to do when a man is wounded and suffering: relieve him. If we have a curiosity to know his nationality, that is a matter of no

---

1. Notebook, p.347.

2. "Concerning the Jews," Literary Essays, p.264. Paine reasoned that the French represented the one exception. The passage quoted is followed by a slur on French judicial procedure as practiced in the Dreyfus case (Biography, II, 1066). Paine's rationalization is made even more logical by the disparaging tone of most of Twain's references to the French: i.e., their methods of colonization, their morality (cf. "What Paul Bourget Thinks of Us," Literary Essays, pp.148-170), and their blood-thirsty spirit. A passage Paine quoted suggested Twain's extravagent distrust and dislike: "For 1,000 years this savage nation indulged itself in massacre; every now and then a big massacre or a little one. The spirit is peculiar to France--I mean in Christendom--no other state has had it. In this, France has always walked abreast, kept her end up with her brethren, the Turks and the Burmese. Their chief traits--love of glory and massacre" (Biography, I, 644)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

consequence, and can wait."[3] With the exception of his one regrettable bias, Twain came to reflect this humane principle in his acceptance and defence of other races.

The phrase "came to reflect" is used advisedly, for Twain developed his broad tolerance, just as he developed his hatred for war. At eighteen he was as intolerant and nationalistic as most Mid-Westerners of his day. When the Philadelphia printers met with too little success in their efforts to raise money with which to build a statue of Franklin, he wrote indignantly to Orion: "There are so many abominable foreigners here...who hate everything American, that I am very certain as much money for such a purpose could be raised in St. Louis, as in Philadelphia. I was in Franklin's old office this morning...and there was at least one foreigner for every American at work there."[4]

By the time he reached the West the antipathy had been replaced by a singular indifference to the wrongs suffered by aliens in the mining camps and on the Coast. He ignored the pitiful traffic in Chinese girls, which so annoyed Hingston as he visited the boom towns with Artemus Ward.[5] From Honolulu he wrote articles in which he urged Californians to use Chinese labor. "You will not always go on paying $80 and $100 a month

---

3. Notebook, p.344.

4. Letters, I, 29.

5. "The mining towns of California have each their Chinese quarter or suburb.... Whole cargoes of Chinese girls are imported by the Chinese merchants for purposes of prostitution.... The merchants by whom the women are purchased find habitations and dresses for them, appoint clerks to receive and check their earnings, and treat them precisely as though they were a consignment of animals" (Edward P. Hingston, The Genial Showman, London, 1870, II, 207-209).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

for labor which you can hire for $5. The sooner California adopts coolie labor the better it will be for her. It cheapens no labor of men's hands save the hardest and most exhausting drudgery...which all white men abhor and are glad to escape from."[6]

The attitude toward the Chinese was the more remarkable in that it followed a period when, as a reporter in San Francisco, Twain had been so aroused by the pointless and brutal persecution of Chinese by police and citizens that he had written articles which he afterwards claimed his employers would not print for fear of offending subscribers.[7] "A Chinaman had no rights that any man was bound to respect;...no sorrows that any man was bound to pity.... Neither his life nor his liberty was worth the purchase of a penny when a white man needed a scapegoat.... Everybody, individuals, communities, the majesty of the state itself, joined in hating, abusing, and persecuting these humble strangers."[8] These sketches were printed later in his career, along with others, written after he left the Coast, in which he had continued his exposure and indictment of the brutal treatment accorded the Chinese in the land of the free.[9] It has been revealed, furthermore, in the discussions of his

---

6. Sacramento Union, September 26, 1866; reprinted in Ivon Benson's Ph. D. thesis, The Western Development of Mark Twain, University of Southern California, 1937. This particular letter is purposely omitted from the collection published by G. Ezra Dane as Letters from the Sandwich Islands. Cf. op. cit., pp.xi and 71.

7. "Disgraceful Persecution of a Boy," Sketches New and Old, p.130 (footnote).

8. Ibid., p.129.

9. In addition to Sketches New and Old, cf. "Goldsmith's Friend Abroad Again," Curious Republic of Gondour, pp.75-109, and Roughing It, II, Chapter 13, for other articles.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

attitude toward the missionary principle and the imperialistic moves of nations in the Far East that he persisted in his role of self-appointed defender of the oppressed. Several of his remarks have been quoted; one more will serve to summarize his attitude toward China and her people. When the Boxer Rebellion started, he wrote Twichell: "It is all China, now, and my sympathies are with the Chinese. They have been villainously dealt with by the sceptered thieves of Europe, and I hope they will drive all the foreigners out and keep them out for good."[10]

The fact that Twain suddenly came to the defense of Chinamen in San Francisco did not mean, on the other hand, that he was suddenly endowed with a deep and boundless love for all his fellow men. Something akin to that feeling would come only with maturity. Hence it is that there appeared in his early travel books disparaging references to races, nationalities, and creeds, which are at variance with the spirit of the first quotation in this section. The majority of these comments are to be found in Innocents Abroad, a circumstance which supports the contention that they are illustrations of his youth, inexperience, and emotional immaturity. The plight of the poor Syrians, for instance, fired him with hate for the Turks, hate which was intensified by the affrontery of the Turk in effecting a cleanliness superior to that of the Christian. Significantly, his expression of dislike carried a touch of his attitude toward the Chinese at that period: "I never disliked a Chinaman as I do these degraded Turks and Arabs, and when Russia is ready to war with them again, I hope England and France will not find it good breeding or

---

10. Letters, II, 699.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

good judgment to interfere."[11] It is little wonder that he claimed his vanity was hurt by the Turks' refusal to drink after him, for cleanliness was with him almost an obsession. He noted a striking similarity between the American redmen and the people of the East: "They were infested with vermin, and the dirt had caked on them till it amounted to bark."[12] His personal aversion for the Mormons had much the same basis. He was revolted by the typical representative of the sect, a "Destroying Angel...in an unclean shirt and no suspenders...with a horse-laugh and a swagger like a buccaneer...[surrounded by] a lot of slatternly women."[13] He did, on the other hand, appreciate the reason for the Mormons' bitterness toward other sects, and his analysis reveals a sound understanding of the source of general prejudices:

> Let it be remembered that <u>for forty years</u> these creatures have been driven...relentlessly and mobbed...banished to a remote desert, whither they journeyed gaunt with famine and disease...and all because they were simply trying to live and worship God in the way which <u>they</u> believed with all their hearts and souls to be the true one. Let all these things be borne in mind, and then it will not be hard to account for the deathless hatred which the Mormons bear our people and our government. [14]

Therein was implied the need for the philosophical principle upon which Twain's tolerance was constructed: reverence for the other man's creeds, whether or not one could accept the creeds themselves. Had the Mormon

---

11. <u>Innocents Abroad</u>, II, 187.

12. <u>Ibid</u>., II, 199. <u>Cf</u>. also his essay "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses" in <u>Literary Essays</u>, pp.60-77. His main objection to Cooper was that he portrayed the Indian unrealistically.

13. <u>Roughing It</u>, I, 91-92.

14. <u>Ibid</u>., II, Appendix A, p.308.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

been accorded that reference, distrust and hatred would have found no soil in which to flourish. The particular case was almost a study in miniature of most racial differences.

These scattered opinions represented, however, little more than the profundities of youth, and they were lost in time in a much broader and deeper understanding and appreciation of the essential worth of all peoples. The most conspicuous and noteworthy examples of this were Twain's personal acceptance of the negro and his public defense of the Jew. His attitude toward the negro is, of course, particularly interesting because of his Southern ancestry and background, and because of his identification --slight as it was--with the South in the Civil War. It will be seen in the discussion of his views on slavery that, as soon as the issue was no longer obscured, he switched his allegiance to the North without reservation. Although his awakening came after the firing had ceased, he did make a contribution in personally acknowledging the black man as an individual, a step many of the rabid abolitionists could not bring themselves to try after the war was won. Recalling the slaves on John Quarles's farm, he wrote in his Autobiography: "It was on the farm that I got my strong liking for [the] race and my appreciation of certain of its fine qualities. This feeling and this estimate have stood the test of sixty years and more, and have suffered no impairment. The black face is as welcome to me now as it was then."[15] Paine said, it will be recalled, that Twain felt "the white man owed the negro a debt for generations of enforced bondage," and he was consequently so tolerant of them that

---

15. I, 100-101.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Mrs. Clemens urged him to "'consider every man colored until he is proved white.'"[16] What was even more remarkable in that day, his sympathy found tangible expression, and he paid the way of one colored student through a Southern institution and that of another through the Yale Law School.[17] Nor was he satisfied to extend only material aid. One wonders what the general reaction was to the report that Mark Twain had received and entertained the six Jubilee Singers in his home in Lucerne, Switzerland. His own impression was typical of his attitude toward the negro: "Three of the 6 were born in slavery, the others were children of slaves. How charming they were--in spirit, manner, language...carriage, clothes--in every detail that goes to make the real lady and gentleman, and welcome guest.... The party came up to the house and we had a pleasant time."[18]

Mark Twain's defense of the Jew, on the other hand, was more spectacular if less sustained. Stirred to action by the spreading persecutions of the race about 1900, he wrote an intelligent, compact essay in which he analyzed the reasons for anti-Semitism and propounded a solution.[19] Pointing out the commendable qualities of the Jew--his

---

16. Letters,, I, 394.

17. Ibid., I, 395.

18. Ibid., II, 645-646.

19. Paine believed "Concerning the Jews" to be the best presentation of Jewish character and of racial situation written in his day. Twain himself took great pride in it, writing Henry Rogers: "The Jew article is my 'gem of the ocean'.... Neither Jew nor Christian will approve of it, but people who are neigher Jews nor Christian will, for they are in a condition to know the truth when they see it" (Biography, II, 1066).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

industry, his peaceableness, his family life, his self-sufficiency, his benevolence--, Twain dismissed character considerations and with them religious differences as having little bearing on the issue.[20] He refused to believe that fanaticism alone accounted for the world's harsh treatment of the Jew, and he insisted with an unusual keenness of perception that the persecution was dictated by economic pressure: "In Russia, Austria, and Germany nine-tenths of the hostility to the Jew comes from the average Christian's inability to compete successfully with the average Jew in business--in either straight business or the questionable sort."[21] Through the ages, he argued, the Jew has been a ruinous competitor of the Christian because he has always been better at his job. The Christian's only defence has been to take away all the trades from the Jew by statute. Required to live by his wits or die, the Jew became by necessity sharp and shrewd. Survival of the fit made a sharp-witted race. Twain quoted as evidence for this point the speech of a German lawyer in 1898, in which the speaker frankly admitted that he wanted the Jews driven from Berlin because "eighty-five per cent of the successful lawyers of Berlin were Jews, and that about the same percentage of the great and lucrative businesses of all sorts in Germany were in the hands of the Jewish race!"[22] The crucial argument

---

20. He stated flatly that the Golden Rule had no place in the discussion: "It is strictly religious furniture, like an acolyte, or a contribution-plate, or any of those things. It has never been intruded into business; and Jewish persecution is not a religious passion. It is a business passion" ("Concerning the Jews," Literary Essays, p.296).

21. Ibid., p.275.

22. Ibid., p.275.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

for the opposition was significant. The Christians were being pushed to the wall by the Jews, their bread was in peril, and "to human beings this is a much more hate-inspiring thing than is any detail connected with religion."[23] The Jew had to be banished from Berlin soon, or there would be no saving the Christian.

The only protective measure left the Jew, Twain concluded, was organization. He pointed out that with all of his capacities and achievements, the Jew was not politically important in any country. Numerical weakness was no excuse, he argued, since the Irish had managed to grab more than their share of political power while immensely inferior to the Jew in intellect and numbers. His scheme for remedying this situation centered in his "casting vote" theory:

> In England and America put every Jew in the census-book as a Jew.... Get up volunteer regiments composed of Jews solely... so as to remove the reproach that...you feed on a country but don't like to fight for it. Next, in politics, organize your strength...and deliver the casting vote where you can.... And then from America and England you can encourage your race in Austria, France and Germany. 24

He had a sincere admiration for Jews, particularly their intellectual capacity: "They are peculiarly and conspicuously the world's intellectual aristocracy"; "by long odds the most marvelous race the world has produced"--and he deplored the fate they seemed destined to

---

23. Ibid., p.276.

24. Ibid., pp.282-283.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

suffer.[25] For, although he believed that their hard lot could be mitigated through the power of organization and that they might even be permitted to live peaceably among high civilizations, he likewise felt that they would continue to be harried "where a barbarous ignorance and a sort of mere animal civilization prevail." In view of his low estimate of the human race as he knew it, what could his reaction have been if he had lived to see his prediction verified? The sanity of a man of his sensitivity would have been weakened by that awful realization.

For a man capable of appreciating the stupidity and narrowness of racial prejudices, sectional hatreds are equally untenable. This was particularly true of Twain. Rather than waste his energy in the passions of sectionalism, he interested himself in the characteristics of various localities and their possible futures. His analysis of the South was unusually objective for a Southerner. He reasoned that the scarcity of wealth in that region was attributable to the relative lack of opportunity for amassing fortunes as compared to that offered by the West, where in flush times "a cook or any other humble worker stood a very good

---

25. Notebook, p.151; Biography, II, 1065-1066. In discussing the state of Austrian politics in 1897, he said: "It is Christian and Jew by the horns--the advantage with the superior man...being the Jew everytime and in all countries.... What chance would the Christian have in a country where there were 3 Jews to 10 Christians !.... The difference between the brain of the average Christian and that of the average Jew--certainly in Europe--is about the difference between a tadpole's and an Archbishop's" (Letters, II, 647). This represents one more instance of a tolerance which developed with age. As a young scribbler in Cincinnati he had indulged in the typical aspersions cast on the Jews: "Gold dust warnt worth no more'n coal dust, and in course the blasted Jews got to adulterating the fuel. They mixed it up half and half--a ton of coal dust to a ton of ground pepper, and sold it for the genuine article" (Adventures of Thomas Jefferson Snodgrass, ed. Charles Honce, Chicago, 1928, p.39).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

chance to get rich out of a trifle of money risked in a stock deal."[26] Furthermore romanticism of the Walter Scott variety also worked to check the progress of the South: "A curious exemplification of the power of a single book for good or harm is shown in the effects wrought by Don Quixote and those wrought by Ivanhoe. The first swept the world's admiration for the medieval chivalry silliness out of existence; the other restored it. As far as our South is concerned, the good work done by Cervantes is pretty nearly a dead letter, so effectually has Scott's pernicious work undermined it."[27] Twain decided that Scott (by setting "the world in love with dreams and phantoms; with decayed and swinish forms of religion...and degraded systems of government; with the sillinesses and emptinesses, sham grandeurs, sham gauds, and sham chivalries of a brainless and worthless long-vanished society") undid all that Bonaparte and the French Revolution had effected. Moreover, he saw the evil still at work in the South:

> There, the genuine and wholesome civilization of the nineteenth century is curiously confused and commingled with the Walter Scott Middle-Age sham civilization, and so you have practical common sense, progressive ideas, and progressive works, mixed up with the duel, the inflated speech, and the jejune romanticism of an absurd past.... But for the Sir Walter disease...the South would be fully a generation further advanced than it is.... For it was he that created rank and caste down there, and also reverence for rank and

---

26. "What Paul Bourget Thinks of Us," Literary Essays, p.162.

27. Life on the Mississippi, pp.377-378.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

caste, and pride and pleasure in them. 28

No one, of course, believed that Walter Scott alone was responsible for the romanticism of the South, least of all Mark Twain. Scott's brand of medieval romance was, nevertheless, closest to that which flowered there, and Twain saw in it an example which would characterize completely the thing he wished to sketch and which would be familiar to most people. Furthermore, he disliked the Waverly Novels, and he saw an opportunity to sound indirectly his distaste for that particular department of romanticism. Few, excepting rabid Southerners, will deny that Twain put his finger on one of the real sources of Southern backwardness; but, just as he had overlooked the economic background of the War, he also ignored the social and economic factors in Southern life which materially curbed the possible advancement of that section. He saw in the hollow shell of Southern aristocracy all of the sham, hypocrisy, and impotency he had consistently attacked in the English system, and he did not hesitate to charge it with the responsibility for the too-wide divergence between the romantic ideal and reality. He went further than his readers knew, for when Life on the Mississippi was

---

28. Ibid., pp.375-376. Twain thought a plausible argument might be made in support of the "wild proposition" that Scott was responsible for the war. He pointed out that the Southerner of the American Revolution also owned slaves but that he bore no resemblance to his descendant who owned slaves before the Civil War. "The change of character can be traced rather more easily to Sir Walter's influence than to that of any other thing or person." "It was Sir Walter that made every gentleman in the south a major or a colonel, or a general or a judge, before the war; and it was he, also, that made these gentlemen value these bogus decorations.... Sir Walter had so large a hand in making Southern character, as it existed before the war, that he is in great measure responsible for the war" (ibid., p.376).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

going through the presses the publishers decided to omit Chapter 48, because in it Twain had drawn comparisons between North and South which might have had a bad effect on the Southern market. The chapter was devoted to a discussion of the politically "solid" South, which Twain accused of being "solid" because its members were afraid to be otherwise. He cited as evidence of this fear the manner in which the Southerners take the law in their own hands, although they are neither savages nor murderers, and he suggested that they organize as the Northerners had done, with their timid fellows, in support of the law. "The average Southerners do not band themselves together in...high interests, but leave them to look out for themselves unsupported; the results being unpunished murder...and the decay and destruction of independent thought and action in politics."[29] It is regrettable that material considerations should have withheld constructive criticism of the South at a time when it sorely needed it.

As a stimulating contrast to the drifting South, Twain was very proud of the remarkable progress achieved in the Middle West, and he quickly attributed the advances to the simple fact that "the people don't dream; they work."[30]

> From St. Louis northward there are all the enlivening signs of the presence of active, energetic, intelligent, prosperous, practical nineteenth-century populations.... This is an independent race who think for themselves, and who are competent to do it, because they are educated and enlightened; they read, they keep abreast of the best and newest thought; they fortify

---

29. "Mark Twain's Missing Chapter," Caroline Tichnor, Bookman, XXXIX (May, 1914), 308.

30. Life on the Mississippi, p.461.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> every weak place in their land with a school, a college, a library, and a newspaper; and they live under law. 31

He wrote those lines after his visit to the Mississippi Valley in 1882, at a time when the West was beginning to fulfill the great future it had given promise of in Twain's youth. It was natural and pardonable that he should describe the bustling section so enthusiastically. No doubt he was seeing it against the bleak picture he had retained of it among his early impressions. The contrast alone was sufficient to convey an appearance of progress. It was all the more impressive for its reality.

Considering his pertinent comments on conditions in the South and in the Middle West, it is interesting that Twain should ignore New England. Certainly the narrow, hard prejudices of that section, the hybrid aristocracy of Boston, have provided fruitful material for the novelists, satirical and historical, who have followed Twain. Yet he and other writers on the New England of his day seemed bound to a literary code which prohibited their making of their environment more than a backdrop for the action of a novel. Only in this restricted sense does Boston figure in the Silas Lapham of Howells, for example. Twain's only comment on Boston was to report the attitude of a young man who preferred Europe to that city, which was so very narrow and had no life to feed a man's higher nature.[32] But Twain was interested only in his character. "There was something very delicious," he wrote, "about his

---

31. Ibid., pp.461 and 469.

32. A Tramp Abroad, II, 118.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

leaving Boston to her 'narrowness,' unreproved and uninstructed."[33] Boston in this case is merely a means of revealing personality.

Why Twain chose to preserve a sanctimonious silence toward the past, present, and future of New England and all she represented can be answered only with conjecture. The natural inference is the one suggested by Twain's seeming reticence on other important subjects pertinent to his surroundings. He appeared to be so hypnotized by his environment that he was afraid to hint at its faults, burlesque its absurdities, and reveal its superficialities. He and his literary associates must have discussed the history and probable future of New England in culture, politics, and industry. He and they should have been revolted by the practices common in the mills, where women and children labored ten and twelve hours a day for a pittance. It was not until 1874 and 1879 that Massachusetts finally made "the first efficient provision in America for limitation of hours of labor for women and children (ten hours a day)."[34] Where was Twain's humanity, his biting irony? Here was an opportunity for an American Modest Proposal; yet Twain never mentioned the subject. Whether or not his reticence was conscious or merely the result of his singular blindness on occasion must remain a matter for conjecture. In view of his constant sympathy for the weak, it is difficult to believe that some definite external force was responsible for his silence. It is apparent from the examples already cited

---

33. Ibid., II, 120.

34. Willis M. West, American History and Government, New York, 1913, p.718.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and the analysis of his relationship with Howells that he was sometimes totally oblivious to significant contemporary evils. Again the intellectual limitations of the man rather than any moral weakness seem to afford the logical explanation.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

American Institutions

A. Government

> "The country is the real thing.... Institutions are extraneous, they are its mere clothing, and clothing can wear out, become ragged." 1

It has been said that Twain reserved to himself and his fellow citizens the right to criticize American institutions. The use he made of that privilege is revealed most fully and clearly in his comments on government--both national and municipal--on American education, journalism, and law. This commentary constitutes the largest, but at the same time the most topical and superficial part of his social and political opinion. It has to do mainly with contemporary problems and abuses within several fields; hence its significance is largely relative. It depicts, nevertheless, Twain's interest in affairs of government and society, his flair for social criticism of a limited kind, and the reasons for his being considered a sociologist by some, a political satirist by others.

Twain's interest in politics began with his report of the proceedings of the Nevada Constitutional conventions; there he first made the acquaintance, he later wrote, of "the smallest minds and the selfishest souls and the cowardliest hearts that God makes."[2] It was an opinion which he never altered. When he went to Honolulu, he decided, after studying the Hawaiian Legislature, that the mental caliber of its members was up to the low average of such political assemblies, and that its attempts at law-making were as asinine as the average. He concluded

---

1. Connecticut Yankee, p.107.

2. Letters, II, 542.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

then that the reason for the stupidity of most political bodies was the lack of intelligent members:

> Few men of first class ability can afford to let their affairs go to ruin while they fool away their time in Legislatures. ... Few such men care a straw for the small-beer distinction one is able to achieve in such a place. But your chattering, one-horse village lawyer likes it, and your solemn ass from the cow countries, who don't know the Constitution from the Lord's Prayer, enjoys it, and these you will always find in the Assembly; the one gabble, gabble, gabbling threadbare platitudes and "give-me-liberty-or-give-me-death" buncombe,...and the other asleep. 3

His short residence in Washington during 1868, as secretary to Senator Stewart, only deepened Twain's contempt. He found the Capital, he wrote Orion, "the place to get a low opinion of everybody in," and the Congress made up of so many pitiful intellects that there were few of them pleasant enough to visit. He was so disgusted that he refused the offer of a postmastership in San Francisco. It seemed "a falling from grace to him," and he could not understand how "government pap" could be anything but nauseating food for a man.[4] This was the attitude which inspired the passages of ridicule on politicians which were scattered throughout his books. One verse in the Apocryphal New Testament referred prophetically to the general run of Congresses of the United States: "They carry themselves high, and as prudent men; and though they are fools, yet would seem to be teachers."[5] "You can buy now and then a Senator or a Representative; but they do not know it is

---

3. Sacramento Weekly Union, June 23, 1866. Reprinted in Letters from the Sandwich Islands, p.84.

4. Letters, I, 150.

5. Innocents Abroad, II, 274.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

wrong, and so they are not ashamed of it. They are gentle, and confiding and childlike"; "a jay hasn't got any more principle than a Congressman. ... The sacredness of an obligation is a thing which you can't cram into no bluejay's head"; "Congressman is the trivialist distinction for a full-grown man"; "it could probably be shown by facts and figures that there is no distinctly native American criminal class except Congress."[6] During Twain's lifetime he knew intimately numerous congressmen and four Presidents; yet he seldom ignored an opportunity to ridicule the country's servants. In 1909, one year before his death, the apology for his failure to vote for a district attorney read: "I am not a Congress, and I cannot distribute pensions, and I don't know any other legitimate way to buy a vote."[7] When the press mentioned his name as a candidate for Presidency, as it frequently did in his last years, his comment was in the same vein: "No matter how healthy a man's morals may be when he enters the White House, he comes out again with a pot-marked soul."[8]

His interest in politics was not, of course, confined to the character of politicians. He was even more critical of their methods. His association with Stewart put him in a position to appreciate the political jobbery behind the scenes, and he capitalized on his observations in several of the articles he contributed to his column in the Galaxy. One of them, "Facts in the Case of the Great Beef Contract," satirized

---

6. Gilded Age, II, 46; Tramp Abroad, I, 17; Notebook, p.131; Following the Equator, I, 80.

7. "Dinner to Mr. Jerome," Speeches, p.396.

8. Clara Clemens, op. cit., p.238.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the notorious red tape encountered in dealing with the government. The skit depicted the laborious efforts of each generation of the Mackenzie family to collect a debt for beef supplied the government by John Mackenzie. The narrator, a descendant and heir, eventually gave the bill away.[9]

This desultory political criticism culminated in the writing of The Gilded Age,[10] in which Twain fired a more consistent barrage. The background of the novel was the America of the Reconstruction Era, an era characterized not by the reconstruction but the demoralization of a nation. The speculators' spirit permeated the age, and corruption was its handmaiden. National and municipal government were the tools of the Robber Barons. Morals, ethics, even lives, were brushed aside in the mad rush for the gold which brought power. A Massachusetts congressman prepared the way for the Credit Mobilier swindle by offering stock at special prices to other members of Congress. Those who would not buy were given their shares.[11] The American minister to England sold his

---

9. Choice Humorous Works of Mark Twain, pp.427-431.

10. Although Charles Dudley Warner was co-author of the book, Twain wrote practically all of the political satire. For the part of each in the collaboration see E. E. Leisy's study in American Literature, VIII (January, 1937), 445-447.

11. The Credit Mobilier was the holding company which built the Union Pacific railroad at a cost of $94,000,000--a sum just $50,000,000 more than it should have cost. The exposure of this company implicated such leading political figures as future President Garfield, future Vice-President Colfax, Senators and Congressmen Boutwell, Bingham, and Wilson. These men were "given" shares in the company, shares which came to be valued at $260 apiece (Matthew Josephson, The Robber Barons, New York, 1934, 92-93).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

name to a fraudulent mining scheme for $50,000 in stock. James J. Blaine became involved in questionable railroad manipulations, lied repeatedly to save himself before a congressional committee, and lost the Presidency of the United States as a result. Grant's vice-president was implicated in the Credit Mobilier, his private secretary in the Whiskey Ring, his brother-in-law in Gould's famous attempt to corner gold, and his secretary of war in a deal for the sale of his office.[12] Meanwhile the Tweed Ring was robbing New York city of approximately twenty million dollars, and counterparts throughout the country were striving to emulate it.

The authors of The Gilded Age attempted to reproduce certain aspects of this degraded scene. Their characters manifested various phases of the speculative spirit by which they were all bound together: Beriah Sellers's comic excesses of wishful planning and promotion, Senator Dilworthy's hypocritical dishonesty, Laura Hawkins's calculating unscrupulousness, Harry Brierly's careless expansiveness, and Philip Sterling's resolute progressivism.[13] The action centered principally in Washington, where "high moral" senators were portrayed as supporters of only such legislative appropriations as would enrich them personally, where the most successful politicians enlisted the services of beautiful women, where everyone was striving to rob the government. "There

---

12. In 1875 the Whisky Ring scandal broke, revealing that Grant's private secretary Babcock and other prominent officials had permitted the Ring to cheat the government of millions of dollars of taxes. The following year it was proved that Secretary of War Belknap had accepted bribes for appointment to office in the matter of the Indian affairs.

13. Cf. Granville Hicks, op. cit., p.71.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

is something good and motherly about Washington, the grand old benevolent National Asylum for the Helpless."[14] The canvas was broad--it even included portraits of the workings of stupid, sentimental juries and the efficient Tweed Ring--but the satire was thin. The more obvious, superficial evils were attacked, usually in the humorous manner of Twain's which removed much of the sting, and the reasons for their existence ignored. Granville Hicks asks rhetorically, "How did it happen that so many Congressmen were venal and so many business men untrustworthy?" And then says: "Such questions Clemens and Warner were not prepared to answer. It was easier to turn to the most obvious kind of satire on the jury system...to preach a sermon against speculation."[15] It is quite true that the authors were not prepared to answer; but it is not true, as Brooks would insist and Hicks does imply, that their inability arose from choice. Mark Twain saw only those surface blotches which reveal the rotten core of the fruit. Neither by training nor inclination was he equipped to cut deeper. He himself was too much a part of the age to see more than the objective manifestations apparent to all. He could write that "the eight years in America from 1860 to 1868 uprooted institutions that were centuries old, changed the politics of a people, transformed the social life of half the country, and wrought so profoundly upon the entire national character that the influence cannot be measured short of two or three generations." He could hint at a significant approach to social criticism, and then switch immediately to the question of the

---

14. Gilded Age, I, 240.

15. Op. cit., pp.71-72.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

comparative value of the life of an individual as weighed against that of a nation. His whole emphasis was upon the tragedy inherent in the betrayal of a woman's soul, "more significant than the overturning of any human institution whatever."[16] And it was so because Mark Twain was primarily concerned with that soul and not with the reasons for the revolution in American life. His own interests, not frustration or dishonesty, were responsible for Twain's comparative failure as a social satirist.

The Gilded Age was Twain's first and last attempt at sustained political satire. Thereafter his remarks on government, politicians, and related topics took shape mainly as sporadic outbursts, inspired by the conduct of officials or by specific examples of governmental blundering.[17] The transition did not, on the other hand, represent a return to his earlier indifference. On the contrary he became more engrossed in the drama of politics, but not apparently as literary material. His letters now revealed his opinions. One written in 1876, which was read at a dinner of the Knights of St. Patrick, indicated that he was aware of the

---

16. Gilded Age, I, 176-177.

17. Typical is the brief sketch, "The Facts in the Case of George Fisher, Deceased," in which Twain professes to have sketched a case from the Court of Claim's Reports for the purpose of disclosing the type of fraud practiced upon the Treasury. The case involves a damage suit against the government for losses suffered during the 1813 Creek War in Florida. Twain shows that this hereditary fraud has already extracted $67,000 from the government, and that the descendants are still petitioning in 1870, and finding ready political grafters to further their claims (A Curious Dream; and other Sketches, London, 1872, pp.48-61). It should be noted that this is the converse of the contract story, wherein government red-tape and ineffeciency are exposed.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

scandals then shaking the government and was aroused by them to the point of disparaging Grant's loyalty to the thieves in his administration. Twain praised St. Patrick for his great work in Ireland, but the description of the nature of his accomplishment made the analogy plain:

> He observed that the president of that republic was in the habit of sheltering his great officials from deserved punishment, so he lifted up his staff and smote him, and he died. He found that the secretary of war had been so unbecomingly economical as to have laid up $12,000 a year out of a salary of $8,000, and he killed him.... He found that a very foul private secretary had been engineered through a sham trial.... He discovered that the congress which pretended to prodigious virtue was very anxious to investigate an ambassador who had dishonored the country abroad;...that this congress had no God but party; no system of morals but party policy.... Therefore he massacred that congress.... St. Patrick had no politics.... When he came across a reptile, he forgot to inquire whether he was a democrat or a republican.... I wish we had him here to trim us up. 18

Twain's concern over the corruption in government, moreover, stimulated his interest in elections so markedly that he commented on it in letters to his close friends. Republican at the time, he strongly favored Hayes over Tilden. "It seems odd," he confessed to Howells, "to find myself interested in an election. I never was before. And I can't seem to get over my repugnance to reading or thinking about politics, y yet. But in truth I care little about any party's politics--the man behind it is the important thing."[19] Hayes's letter of acceptance, in which he declared himself for civil service reform and for the unsparing prosecution of dishonest public servants, had struck a responsive

---

18. Tom Sawyer Abroad, pp.451-452.

19. Letters, I, 286.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

chord in Twain. It expressed, as he told his friend, "my own political convictions."[20] He thought the country would go to hell if Tilden were elected; and he wanted to act on Howells's advice and make a speech or write a letter in support of Hayes, but he was afraid of being misunderstood. "When a humorist ventures upon the grave concerns of life he must do his job better than another man or he works harm to his cause."[21] His political views were not generally known, and he was invited to give a Tilden Club some counsel at a flag-raising. His declination contained a sharp suggestion: "In view of Mr. Tilden's Civil War record my advice is not to raise the flag."[22] Eventually he delivered an address in behalf of Hayes, which Howells declared "put civil-service reform in a nutshell" and was doubly important because the speaker was "the only Republican orator, quoted without distinction of party by all the newspapers."[23] Twain was so excited over the fight that he nearly agreed to make political speeches with Connecticut's candidate for governor. Only the appearance of Bret Harte at that moment, with plans for their literary collaboration, put a stop to the idea.

---

20. Biography, I, 581. His low opinion of Andrew Jackson's presidency doubtless had its inception in his increasing hatred for the spoils system. Commenting on the fact that the Battle of New Orleans would have not been fought if there had been a cable telegraph then, Twain added: "Better still, Jackson would probably never have been President. We have gotten over the harms done by the War of 1812, but not over some of those done us by Jackson's presidency" (Life on the Mississippi, p.383).

21. Letters, I, 281 and 283-284.

22. Biography, I, 581. Paine added that in later life he was led through sympathy to change his mind about Tilden. "Sympathy could make Mark Twain change his mind any time" (ibid., I, 582). Certainly his slur on Tilden's war record was made doubly questionable by his own conduct during that conflict.

23. Letters, I, 287.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Twain had not lost any of his enthusiasm, moreover, by the time of the next Presidential campaign. "I mean to heave some holiness into the Hartford primaries," he boasted to Howells, and added: "If there was a solitary office in the land which majestic ignorance and incapacity, coupled with purity of heart, could fill, I would run for it."[24] Despite his great admiration for Grant--he journeyed to Chicago to experience "a fierce upstirring" of soul at the reunion of Grant and his commanders--Twain worked publicly for the election of Garfield, who had defeated Grant in the convention. "I prefer him to Grant ('s friends)," he wrote. "The Presidency can't add anything to Grant; he will shine on without it."[25] During the height of the campaign he spoke at a big rally in Hartford. It proved to be his last public appearance as a Republican; four year's later he spoke before another Hartford mass meeting as an active Mugwump.

Twain's bolt from the Republican Party in the campaign of 1884 has been discussed already. It typified his political independence. He could not understand those who apparently put party allegiance before principle. When the nomination had not yet been made, he pointed out, the Republican press had implied editorial disapproval of Blaine, had cast doubts on his qualifications for the Presidency; and he for one would not support a man so condemned. "No party holds the privilege of dictating to me how I shall vote," he said, and he was nonplussed by Howells's and Warner's refusal to follow him.[26] Warner did resign his editorship of the Courant in order to remain neutral. Twichell, swayed

---

24. Ibid., I, 363. 25. Biography, I, 691. 26. Ibid., I, 779.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

by his friend's reasoning, came out for Cleveland and almost lost his pastorate. Howells considered Blaine preferable to Cleveland for moral reasons. Although Twain was against Blaine rather than for Cleveland--he tried desperately up to the eve of the election to inaugurate a movement which would put an Independent candidate in the field--, he made a number of speeches defending the Mugwumps and voted for Cleveland.[27] He never went back to his old party. Not even the dynamic Theodore Roosevelt could recapture the renegade. Twain said that he loved him as a man but hated him as a politician. Roosevelt represented for him the divorce of principle and policy characteristic of American politics in that era. "Roosevelt the statesman and politician, I find...destitute of morals and not respectworthy," he wrote Twichell. "It is plain that where his political self and his party self are concerned he has nothing resembling a conscience."[28] To his last days Twain was seldom able to see anything good in Republican promises or performances.[29] By 1904, moreover, he had lost whatever active interest he had in politics. Disheartened by the hollowness and pretence of office-seeking and the methods of office-seekers in general, he protested bitterly to his friends, urging them to get out of that sewer, party politics. He was grieved that they should be forced to compromise their characters in their fidelity to groups which were obviously venal and time-serving.[30]

Apparently his conversion had been so complete that it eliminated the need for concern over future Presidential elections; thereafter

---

27. Letters, II, 446-447.
28. Ibid., II, 766.
29. Ibid., II, 766.
30. Ibid., II, 761.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

comment centered more on minor matters of government. His renunciation of Republican principles may also have prompted his remarks on tariffs. Tom Sawyer, it is interesting to note, described impost duties as "just hogging," and predicted that the blessings of the Lord would be taxed next session of Congress, because "there warn't nothing foreign that warn't taxed."[31] In a more serious vein Twain himself pointed out that the tariff plan discriminated against the Western areas, since the additional expense of shipping made the price of an imported article prohibitive. "The result to the Pacific Coast is the same as if there were several rows of custom-fences between the coast and the East."[32] Furthermore, the continual shift in the rate of tax and in duty-free articles was a serious threat to importers. "A man invests years of work and a vast sum of money in a worthy enterprise, upon the faith of existing laws i.e., [tariffs]; then the law is changed, and the man is robbed by his own government."[33] Twain went no further with the intricate problem. If he approved of free-trade, he never made his approval clear.

Another condition relative to government provoked an article by Twain entitled "Diplomatic Pay and Clothes." As America's self-appointed "ambassador of goodwill to the world," he saw many of his country's representatives in other lands, and he decided that the laxity in regard to the salaries and costumes of the diplomats had political implications. The salaries were too low to attract the best men, and the use of swallow-tail coats probably offended royal circles. "All the

---

31. Tom Sawyer Abroad, pp.99-100.
32. Following the Equator, I, 133.
33. Ibid., I, 209.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

social customs of civilized peoples are entitled to respectful observance, and...no man with a right spirit of courtesy in him ever has any disposition to transgress these customs."[34] This incongruous association of financial and sartorial considerations was worthy of Twain.

Of internal affairs he made other criticisms of a less definite character. He denounced generous pensions to soldiers as a system of vote-buying which both Republicans and Democrats used when in office.[35] He criticized the wastful methods of dealing with Indians.[36] He thought the Capitol would be moved farther west.[37] He approved of the government's efforts to develop the Mississippi for traffic, and he recognized the general excellence and thoroughness of most projects handled under federal supervision.[38] It was the waste of time and money on short-sighted, graft-ridden enterprises that infuriated him.

Although, as we have seen, Twain was not moved by the problems of labor to the extent that Howells was, he, nevertheless, appreciated the workingman's plight and favored unionization as a method of bringing improvement. Paine tells of one of the last evenings Howells spent with

---

34. The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg, p.232. His first trip abroad apparently gave him his low opinion of America's diplomatic service. When offered a post on his return to Washington in 1868, he wrote Orion: "God knows I am mean enough and lazy enough, now, without being a foreign consul" (Letters, I, 149).

35. Biography, II, 942; Letters, II, 752.

36. Notebook, p.166.

37. Letters, II, 456. In 1869 he had explained to Pamela why he thought the Capital would not be moved to St. Louis in their lifetime (ibid., I, 160-161).

38. Life on the Mississippi, pp.241 and 302.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Twain. "The talk drifted to sociology and to the labor-unions, which Clemens defended as being the only means by which the workman could obtain recognition of his rights."[39] It will be recalled that he also wrote an essay on the Knights of Labor, which Howells praised extravagantly. Following the Equator has a passage in which the author described the sovereignty of the worker in Australia: "His vote is the desire of the politician.... The parliament exists to deliver the will of the working-man, and the Government exists to execute it. The working-man...has had a hard time in this world, and has earned a paradise. I am glad he has found it."[40] Feeling as he did, it was natural that Twain should take particular pride in the admiration tendered him by this group. In describing the rousing cheers the stevedores accorded him when he landed at Tilbury, England, he said of the men: "they build civilization, and without them no civilization can be built."[41]

With his general respect for labor, as it was apt to be true of his thinking, went certain pet theories. In the Connecticut Yankee appeared his analysis of the reason for high and low wages. Evidently he understood the basic economic principle, for he said quite simply that "it isn't what sum you get, it's how much you can buy with it...that tells whether your wages are high in fact or only high in name."[42] That is as far as he carried the matter. It is not surprising, moreover, that he

---

39. Biography, II, 1557.

40. I, 171.

41. "The Savage Club Dinner," Speeches, p.356.

42. P. 304.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

should mouth the time-worn shibboleth for success: Joan of Arc told her soldiers to "'work! work! and God will work with us.'" The narrator added: "'Whoever will take that motto and live by it will be likely to succeed. There's many a way to win in this world, but none of them is worth much without good hard work back of it."[43] Twain, making his practical application, boasted that he had a scheme for getting employment. He advised ambitious young journalists to give their services to newspaper offices for nothing. Then they were to make themselves invaluable. He thought so well of the plan that he wrote a detailed account of it for McClure's Magazine.[44] It was as far as any theoretical sociologist could go.

Like many Americans who travel a great deal, Mark Twain considered New York his adopted home. In 1900, when he returned in triumph from his trip around the world, he took a house in the city, where he might more readily receive the plaudits of the crowd. People were eager to hear what he had to say on any subject, and he was quite willing to oblige them. In addition to his remarks on international and national topics, which have been summarized elsewhere, he generally had something to say relative to municipal affairs. He had been deeply impressed by the Berlin of 1892, and had written an article suggesting that American cities adopt the methodical handling of details characteristic of the German metropolis. Berlin's system of collecting taxes, its police force,

---

43. Joan of Arc, I, 302-303.

44. Robert Barr, "Samuel L. Clemens, 'Mark Twain,' A Character Sketch," (January, 1898), 246-251.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

building code, advertizing restrictions, cleanliness--all recommended it to Twain as a model. The reason for the city's success, he decided, was to be found in the personnel of the board of aldermen:

> I don't know that we in America could venture to ask our most illustrious citizen to serve in a board of aldermen, and if we might venture it I am not positively sure that we could elect him. But here the municipal system is such that the best men in the city consider it an honor to serve gratis... and the people have the good sense to prefer these men.... As a result Berlin is a thoroughly well-governed city. 45

Twain wanted New York to benefit similarly by a good administration of affairs. He fully realized what Boss Tweed had done to wreck the city--he had included a description of his thieving in The Gilded Age--, and he joined the forces of reform against such parasites. He praised the St. Nickolas Society for its contribution to civic improvement, attributing its success to a "manly refusal to let base men invade the high places of your government, and by instant retaliation when any public officer has insulted...the city's name by swerving in the slightest from the upright and full performance of his duty." 46 He urged the City Club, then engaged in an important fight for reform, to emphasize organization, pointing out that forty-nine men out of fifty were honest and only needed to combine to disqualify the fiftieth. 47 Not content merely to give advice, Twain became a member of The Acorns, a group fighting to defeat Tammany in the mayoralty election of 1901. At one of the dinners he delivered a fierce arraignment of Croker, who then headed

---

45. "The German Chicago," Literary Essays, p.262.

46. "Municipal Government," Speeches, p.217.

47. Biography, II, 1122.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Tammany, and his hirelings. The speech was really a set of extracts from Edmund Burke's famous impeachment of Hastings, in which Twain substituted Croker's name for Hasting's. Copies were printed and circulated. When the Fusion ticket won, Twain was accorded a due share of the credit. One paper wrote:

> Who killed Croker?
> I, said Mark Twain,
> I killed Croker
> I, the Jolly Joker! 48

Twain's penchant for reform measures at this period was not, on the other hand, limited to politics. Any seeming abuse perpetrated at the expense of the public was grist for his mill. His concept of good citizenship included, in fact, an obligation to protest against all such forms of exploitation, regardless of how trivial they might seem. "We allow our commonest rights to be trampled underfoot every day and everywhere," he insisted. "Among us citizenship is an unknown virtue;" [49] we are too meek to fight for reforms. Accordingly he set about proving himself a useful citizen by engaging in a personal crusade against all types of imposition. "There were many public and private abuses," Paine writes. "He wanted to correct them all. He covered reams of paper with lurid heresies--political, religious, civic--for most of which there was no

---

48. Ibid., II, 1147.

49. "Introducing Doctor Van Dyke," Speeches, p.301.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

hope of publication."[50] Clara Clemens says that her father "did not easily or meekly succumb to rules and regulations imposed upon the public.... If some rule seemed unreasonable to him he fought it and could go the greatest lengths to oppose these official requirements."[51] He considered the railroads the worst offenders in that respect, and he tried repeatedly to arouse the traveling public to its responsibility. In a letter he boasts of how he defied a train crew which tried to make him stop breaking a regulation. His concluding observation fully depicts the reason for his conduct: "I wonder if we shall have any liberties left, by and by if we keep up our American habit of meekly submitting to every imposition that is put upon us."[52] He wrote an essay, "Travelling with a Reformer," in which the hero demonstrated the proper technique to use in dealing with discourtesy and inefficiency on the trains. "He stood for citizenship," Twain pointed out. "His idea was that every citizen of the republic ought to consider himself an unofficial policeman...that the only effective way of preserving and protecting public rights was for each citizen to do his share in preventing or punishing such infringements of them as came under his personal notice."[53] Twain argued that if more people accepted this duty of

---

50. Biography, I, 723. Typical of the suppressed material was a paper on the matter of postage rates, which began: "'Reader, suppose you were an idiot. And...a member of Congress. But I repeat myself'" (ibid., I, 724). Yet Brooks finds the fact that he indulged inthese outpourings evidence of his desire to make up for opportunities sacrificed (op. cit., pp.312-313).

51. Op. cit., pp.54-55.

52. Clara Clemens, op. cit., p.56.

53. Literary Essays, pp.78-79.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

citizenship, they could make the railroads improve the service, so that fewer persons would be maimed and killed. He estimated that more people were crippled and destroyed because of carelessness and inefficiency in the transportation systems than in all the wars. He prepared statistics and articles. He wrote letters to the relatives of victims, denouncing the situation and urging action:

> The government's official report, showing that our railways killed twelve hundred persons last year & injured sixty thousand, convinces me that under present conditions one Providence is not enough properly & efficiently to take care of our railroad business. But it is characteristically American--always trying to get along short-handed & save wages. 54

Other public services were objects of less vindictive but more colorful castigation. He described the inspection of incoming ocean liners by health authorities as the graft dodge it was.[55] He appeared in court against a cab-driver who had overcharged one of the servants.[56] He protested heatedly to the New York Street Railway Company that his daughters were "frequently robbed by conductors."[57] He sent scathing

---

54. Biography, II, 1228. At the same time Twain satirized the corruption responsible for the condition. Tom Sawyer thinks the magic salve which brings temporary blindness is still in existence. "They've got it in New York, and they put it on country people's eyes and show them all the railroads in the world, and they go in and git them, and then when they rub the salve on the other eye the other man bids them good-by and goes off with their railroads" (Tom Sawyer Abroad, p.88). Writing of rival political candidates, Twain said: "Each had bought a great tract of land, with a purpose; there was going to be a new railway, and each wanted to be in the legislature and help locate the route to his own advantage" (The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg, p.58).

55. "Notes of an Idle Excursion," Tom Sawyer Abroad, pp.300-301.

56. Lawton, op. cit., pp.196-200.

57. Cyril Clemens, Mark Twain the Letter Writer, Boston, 1932, pp.156-161.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

letters to light, telephone, and telegraph companies when their services did not meet his standard, and letters of encouragement to others battling for similar reforms. He wrote to Henniker-Heaton during his fight for cheaper wireless rates: "Wireless, not being imprisoned as yet in a Chinese wall of private cash and high-placed and formidable influence, will come to your aid."[58] Somewhat earlier he denounced the burial racket, devoting two chapters of Life on the Mississippi to a discussion of it from the point of view of hygiene and sentiment. He decided that cremation was the desirable substitute.[59]

These gleanings represent the more trivial manifestations of Twain's sense of citizenship. It should be remembered that during the same period from 1885-1909--there also came the attacks on Christian Science, missionaries, race prejudices, war, and imperialism. Twain's minor crusades are therefore all the more important since they betray the unevenness of his critical judgment, his incapacity for objective evaluations. Furthermore, they exemplify, as Henderson noted, "the consciousness of personal responsibility for the standards, government, and ideals of his town, his city, and his country. Civic conscience burned strong within him; and he fought to develop and to maintain breadth of public view and sanity of popular ideals."[60]

---

58. Letters, II, 827-828.

59. Chapters XLII and XLIII; cf. Following the Equator, II, 45.

60. Op. cit., p.65.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

B. Education

If readiness to protest were a major requisite of citizenship, then education was essential to prepare for that attitude. But here, Twain contended, education as he knew it in this country failed:

> Citizenship should be placed above everything else, even learning.... Is there a college in the country where there is a chair of good citizenship? There is a kind of bad citizenship which is taught in the schools, but no real good citizenship.... You can begin that chair.... You can place it above mathematics and literature, and that is where it belongs.... Good citizenship would teach accuracy of thinking and accuracy of statement. 61

The weakness of public instruction, as Twain saw it, was attributable to its failure to train students to think accurately and clearly. Education in America stressed the learning of facts to the neglect of meanings, and Twain distrusted this "book-learning," which seemed devoid of common sense and intelligence. He charged that "a large part of the pupil's 'instruction' consists in cramming him with obscure and wordy 'rules' which he does not understand and has no time to understand."[62] The child was apparently taught to spell cat and was then asked to calculate an eclipse.[63] No allowances were made for individual differences; no attempt was made to measure the pupil's intellectual capacity before he was assigned his tasks; consequently, there was frequently such a gap between ability and objective that nothing was accomplished. The benefits accruing from this system were superficial, and the possessor of

---

61. "Education and Citizenship," Speeches, pp.378-379.

62. "English as She is Taught," What Is Man?, p.254.

63. Following the Equator, II, 273.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

them was obliged to compete for livelihood without the proper equipment for doing difficult jobs or the inclination for working at simple ones. The result was the formation of an ever-increasing group of disgruntled drifters who thought society owed them a good job because they were officially educated and who refused to start in menial positions. The schools of this country--and the corresponding units of instruction in other countries--had fallen in with a dangerous tendency to ignore the need for training in manual arts and agriculture. They unwittingly made "handicrafts distasteful to boys who would have been willing to make a living at trades and agriculture if they had but had the good luck to stop with the common school."[64] This over-emphasis on the so-called "classical" education, by creating a surplus of educated idlers and a shortage of skilled craftsmen, constituted a growing menace to the welfare of the country.

Twain's criticism of the method did not, of course, constitute disagreement with the theory. The fact that he had managed to achieve success with the meagerest of formal schooling did not betray him into eulogizing pioneer ideas of instruction or into renouncing mass education in America.[65] He recognized early schools for what they were, and he

---

64. Following the Equator, II, 274-275. A landlady attributes a young Englishman's troubles to his inadequate schooling: "He knew he had to get to work or starve. Well, he'd been to college...and so he judged he was all right.... And there's where he was mistaken. Why, he mighty near starved" (American Claimant, pp.89-90).

65. It was what passed for a school in those days: "a place where tender young humanity devoted itself for eight or ten hours a day to learning incomprehensible rubbish by heart out of books and reciting it by rote, like parrots; so that a finished education consisted simply of a permanent headache and the ability to read without stopping to spell the words or take breath" (Gilded Age, I, 47).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

deplored Russia's use of her school appropriation for the army.[66] He recommended an educational qualification for voters. Yet he was suspicious of the extreme specialization in the higher schools which appeared responsible for the conditions already sketched. After all, he asked himself and the educators, were the college-bred people responsible for America's unprecedented material progress? Granted that they contributed the intellectual aspects of that development, this century, "the only century worth living in since time itself was invented, is the creation of men not college-bred.... It is the stupendous creation of those humble, un-lettered, un-college-bred inventors."[67] In view of the evidence, then, he considered it imperative that a place be provided in the curriculum for the types of training needed to balance the classical program and to provide the skilled workmen essential to the development of the country. Above all, the emphasis in every field of study should be on the learning process rather than on the subject itself. Meanings, not just facts, should be mastered. The objective should be the balanced, flexible, education so perfectly typified in Hellen Keller's achievements. "She doesn't know merely _things_," Twain wrote. "She is splendidly familiar with the _meanings_ of them."[68] One who could say that of himself, he

---

66. "It said that the vast expense of maintaining the army had made it necessary to retrench, and so the Government had decided that to support the army it would be necessary to withdraw the appropriation from the public school. This is a monstrous idea to us. We believe that out of the public school grows the greatness of a nation" (Public Education Association," _Speeches_, p.212).

67. _The American Claimant_, pp.83-85.

68. _Following the Equator_, II, 280.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

believed, was an educated person.

Twain's interest in the problem is further illustrated by the specific theories he formulated, theories which go beyond his attack on the failure of the schools. For example, he placed a high value on the theater as a medium of mental and moral instruction. He loved to act; he tried to dramatize his stories; he was immensely proud of his presidency of the East Side Children's Theater. He considered such dramatic societies "one of the very, very great inventions of the twentieth century," groups whose educational value would eventually make them "the most valuable adjunct that any educational institution for the young can have."

> It is much the most effective teacher of morals and promoter of good conduct that the ingenuity of man has yet devised, for the reason that its lessons are not taught wearily by books and by dreary homily, but by visible and enthusing action; and they go straight to the heart.... Book morals often go no further than the intellect, if they even get that far. 69

In addition to teaching morals, which, it should be noticed, had an emotional rather than an intellectual foundation in Twain's opinion, the Children's Theater stimulated interest in history among adults as well as young people. Everyone--parents and offsprings--fell into an animated study of bygone manners, customs, costumes, in preparing the plays. The attention was not confined to the plot; on the contrary, Twain said, "it spreads out all around the period of the story, and gives to all the outlying and unrelated happenings of that period a fascinating

---

69. Letters, I, 818-819. "In other schools the way of teaching morals is revolting. Here the children who come in thousands live through each part" ("Educational Theatre," Speeches, p.333).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

interest."[70] The potential influence of this type of instruction, therefore, was too vital to be neglected. He told a New York audience that the city needed forty children's theaters. They "would make better citizens, honest citizens...would make of you a real Republic, and bring about an educational level."[71] He hoped the time would come when they would be a part of the public school system of the land, and to that end he urged millionaires to include the building and endowing of theaters in their philanthropies.[72]

Twain, as we must expect, believed in the worth of travel as another important form of education. His wanderings had made so obvious a contribution to his own development that he urged others to yield to their nomadic instincts in order to benefit by the extension of perspective.[73] On his return from his famous jaunt to the Holy Land, he made a speech in praise of the liberalizing effect of seeing the world. Not only did travel give one the proper estimate of his relationship to the rest of mankind, but it also made one compassionate and generous. The distressed traveler who receives the care of strangers, he pointed out,

> ...begins to learn that best lesson of all--that one which culminates in the conviction that God puts <u>something</u> good and something lovable in every man his hands create--that the world is

---

70. <u>Ibid</u>., II, 820. <u>Cf</u>. also "The Educational Theatre," <u>Speeches</u>, pp.332-334.

71. "Educating Theatre-Goers," <u>Speeches</u>, p.331.

72. <u>Loc. cit</u>.

73. "We are descended from desert-lounging Arabs, and countless ages of growth toward perfect civilization have failed to root out of us the nomadic instinct" (<u>Roughing It</u>, I, 192).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> not a cold, harsh, cruel, prison-house, stocked with all manner of selfishness and hate and wickedness. It liberalizes the Vandal to travel. You never saw a bigoted, opinionated, stubborn, narrow-minded, self-conceited, almighty mean man in your life but he had stuck in one place ever since he was born and thought God made the world and dyspepsia and bile for his especial comfort and satisfaction. 74

Twain would not substitute travel, on the other hand, for the traditional modes of education. Unlike most self-made men, he did not hold that experience was the best teacher. The self-taught person, he insisted, seldom knew anything accurately, acquired what knowledge he had had at the cost of greater effort than was necessary, and made himself dangerous by encouraging others to emulate him. Life's "experiences"--those lucky and unlucky accidents--were not useful as knowledge because they rarely happened again:

> If personal experience can be worth anything as an education, it wouldn't seem likely that you could trip Methuselah; and yet if that old person could come back here it is more than likely that one of the first things he would do would be to take hold of one of these electric wires and tie himself all up in a knot. 75

Common sense, however, prompts the intelligent man to make full use of the short cuts to knowledge which experience affords, and here travel has its uses. "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts," Twain wrote. "Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime." 76

---

74. "The American Vandal," Speeches, pp.29-30.

75. "Taming the Bicycle," What Is Man?, p.291.

76. Innocents Abroad, II, 407.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Finally, as a word of warning to educators, Twain urged that the divorce of education from religion be made permanent. His Yankee says: "Everybody could be any kind of a Christian he wanted to.... But I confined public religious teaching to the churches and the Sunday-schools, permitting nothing of it in my other educational buildings."[77] Education, furthermore, should not be looked upon as the complete cure-all for the world's ills. Twain quoted an Englishman who said that his countrymen's idea "that compulsory education would reduce bastardy and intemperance was an error."[78] It had no such effect. It could, on the other hand, contribute to that temperate temperance which was so much more effective than prohibitions. It could become a potent weapon for moral and mental betterment if wielded intelligently; and Twain hoped that society would derive the maximum benefit from its use.

C. Newspapers

An institution which could be a definite and powerful medium for either good or harmful education was the press. Although not literally a part of the teaching system, the newspaper was nevertheless the most active and influential agent for controlling adult opinion. As such Twain feared it and resented its misuse. His resentment, as was often the case, betrayed him into making an absurd demand for censorship, absurd because he was at the same time vociferous in his praise of freedom in this country. In 1873, in a talk to the Monday Evening Club of

---

77. Connecticut Yankee, p.77.

78. A Tramp Abroad, II, 156.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Hartford, he attacked the liberty enjoyed by the press as responsible for many of the evils of contemporary society. He charged that it had defended so many official criminals on party pretexts that it had

> ...created a United States Senate whose members are incapable of determining what crime against law is, they are so morally blind, and it has made light of dishonesty till we have...a Congress which contracts to work for a certain sum and then deliberately steals additional wages out of the public pocket.... There is too much liberty of the press in this country, and...through the absence of all wholesome restraint the newspaper has become in a large degree a national curse, and will probably damn the Republic yet. 79

Twain had strong reasons, as had any American in that period, to be incensed with the newspapers. They had sold out repeatedly to the politicians by protecting their grafting enterprises and supporting their candidates for office.[80] Henry Watterson, Lincoln Steffens, and the other "muck-rakers" had not yet come into prominence; until their advent the press remained a political tool. It was no wonder, then, that Twain should have agitated for some control over it. It seems incongruous, nevertheless, that he sould have advocated government censorship when he knew that the government was controlled by the very crooks who had been

---

79. "License of the Press," Speeches, p.46 and 52.

80. The methods employed in supporting candidates drew Twain's ire. He pretended to run for governor of New York against John T. Hoffman (one of the Erie crowd caricatured in the Burlesque Autobiography). He felt his good character gave him an insurmountable advantage over his opponent. It became painfully evident to him, however, that he would not be allowed to enjoy his reputation. Evidently he had been guilty of all manner of shameful crimes, because the journals accused him of having been convicted of most of them. He surrendered when nine toddling children rushed on the platform at a public meeting, clasped him firmly about the legs, and called him "Pa." He had finally to admit that it took more than a good character to beat a politician ("Running for Governor," Screamers, London, 1871, pp.99-107).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

put there by the newspapers; that he should likewise fail to consider the possibilities of misuse of any type of censorship.[81] Twain had again neglected to think a problem through to a sound conclusion.

The superficiality of his thought became evident in his contradictory defense of the American press when Matthew Arnold charged it with being irreverent. Twain put his caustic replies in the mouth of an essayist who pointed out that the very quality which Arnold missed in the American press--respectfulness, reverence--was in reality the most valuable of all its qualities, the one which differentiated it from the journalism of the world, and the one which made it distinctly American:

> For its mission--overlooked by Mr. Arnold--is to stand guard over a nation's liberties, not its humbugs and shams.... With its limited reverence, it at least reveres the things which this nation reveres, as a rule, and that is sufficient.... Our press does not reverence kings...so-called nobilities...established ecclesiastical slaveries...any fraud or sham or infamy, howsoever old or rotten or holy, which sets one citizen above his neighbor by accident of birth.... Our press is certainly bankrupt in... reverence.... Let us sincerely hope that this fact will remain a fact forever; for to my mind a discriminatory irreverence is the creator and protector of human liberty--even as the other thing [reverence] is the creator, nurse, and steadfast protector of all forms of human slavery, bodily and mental. [82]

To see what happens when the press was swayed "by the other thing" one had only to study English papers, Twain charged. They must consciously misguide their readers, being careful to keep the public's eyes fixed

---

81. Once he wrote a full account of the rigid, somewhat erratic, censoring of the press in Vienna. He analyzed the methods employed, pointing out the weakness and general inefficiency of them, but that was the extent of his comment. Apparently he did not object to the principle ("Stirring Times in Austria," Literary Essays, pp.199-202).

82. American Claimant, pp.80-81.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

approvingly upon the glories of England, the sacredness of the throne, the Established Church, and the hereditary nobility. Never must they let their subscribers see the truth, the reality: that all of the glories are realized at the expense of the many for the enrichment of the privileged few; that no throne was ever established by the unhampered vote of a majority of the nation; that the Church is an invention of machine politics; and that a hereditary nobility is the baldest contradiction of common justice.[83] America would do well to cherish and encourage its irreverent press, Twain thought; perhaps, by so doing, the country could break the shackles of outworn traditions which retarded a natural and desireable progress. A free press was one of the prime requisites of a democracy. If it was properly skeptical, it should help to turn people away from a complacent acceptance of the philosophy expressed in the words "What's good enough for father is good enough for me." A misguided reverence imposed many slaveries.

> By the absence of an irreverent press, Europe for a thousand years has existed merely for the advantage of half a dozen seventh-rate families called Monarchs, and some hundreds of riff-raff sarcastically called Nobles. Our papers have one peculiarity--it is American--it exists nowhere else--their irreverence. May they never lose and never modify it. They are irreverent toward pretty much everything, but where they laugh one good king to death, they laugh a thousand cruel and infamous shams and superstitions into the grave, and the account is squared. Irreverence is the champion of liberty, and its only sure defence. 84

The newspaper he held, is the most effective organ for the expression of that irreverence.

---

83. Ibid., p.80.

84. Notebook, p.195.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

D. Law

One of the conspicuous slaveries imposed by an illogical reverence for custom, Twain decided, was represented in American legal theory and practice. As early as Roughing It he inveighed against the miscarriage of justice which was characteristic of that system, and he blamed outmoded jury procedure for it. Criminal conditions in the mining region gave him abundant material to illustrate his criticism. The men who murdered the original twenty-six occupants of the Virginia City cemetery were never brought to justice, he pointed out. The reason lay in the law's perverted respect for outworn forms.

> Alfred the Great, when he invented trial by jury, and knew that he had admirably framed it to secure justice in his age of the world, was not aware that in the nineteenth century the condition of things would be so entirely changed that unless he rose from the grave and altered the jury plan to meet the emergency, it would prove the most ingenious and infallible agency for defeating justice that human wisdom could contrive. For how could he imagine that we simpletons would go on using his jury plan after circumstances had stripped it of its usefullness. [85]

The system was no longer useful because its restrictions put "a ban upon intelligence, and honesty, and a premium upon ignorance, stupidity, and perjury."[86] Alfred, for example, could easily find an upright, conscientious group of men who had never heard of the case they were called to try. In the day of telegraphs and newspapers, on the other hand, the practice of impaneling only those who could swear they had "neither heard, read, talked about, nor expressed an opinion" about the case insured the selection of juries composed of fools and rascals.

It is a shame that we must continue to use a worthless

---

85. II, 55-56.

86. Ibid., II, 57.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> system because it was good a thousand years ago. In this age, when a gentleman of high social standing, intelligence and probity, swears that testimony given under solemn oath will outweigh, with him, street talk and newspaper reports based upon more hearsay, he is worth a hundred jurymen who will swear to their own ignorance and stupidity, and justice would be far safer in his hands. 87

This fundamental weakness needed to be recognized and eradicated if the country was to be the better for having laws. Twain believed that democracies eliminated cruel statutes more readily than monarchies because "where every man in a state has a vote, brutal laws are impossible."[88] He felt, nevertheless, that the former had nullified their remaining laws with the stupid interpretation and inefficient enforcement which were typified by the jury plan. He considered it his business as a good citizen to protest against the injustice perpetrated in the name of righteousness.

Characteristically, his attack presented conflicting attitudes on some issues. Obviously he deplored the conservative nature of legal procedure; yet his denunciation of the function of the past in jurisprudence only skirted the question of precedents, the very foundation of legal theory. In "Those Extraordinary Twins" he described a judge who had no knowledge of laws or courts and who defended his disregard for precedent as necessary to freedom. "I cannot conscientiously allow

---

87. Loc. cit.

88. Connecticut Yankee, p.237. His interest in the problem of legal punishments was stimulated by his indignation over the bloody record of the English in this respect. He portrayed the penal code of the sixth century with all its horrible cruelty in the Connecticut Yankee. He reported with some passion a historian&s account of the inhuman discipline exercised in British penal colonies in Australia after 1800 (Following the Equator, I, 103, for latter item).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

my judgment to be warped and my judicial liberty hampered by trying to conform to the caprices of other courts," the old fellow said. "This court is not run on the European plan.... We will do the best we can by the light that God has given us, and...will remain indifferent to what other organizations may think of it."[89] This seeming indifference to uniformity would accord with Twain's inclination, and the agreement was underlined by the judge's comment: "Imitation is the bane of courts. ... I would have compelled these culprits to expose their guilt, but support failed me.... And I was confronted by a law made in the interest of crime, which protects the criminal from testifying against himself."[90] This evidence of Twain's disregard for precedents would be convincing if the reader did not also see the trial conducted in a high-handed, prejudiced manner by the presiding officer. Taken in their context the same passages indicate Twain's equally strong disapproval of the individual and arbitrary administration of justice. About all that can be concluded is that he did not favor a strict respect for tradition, because changes in conditions were too frequently ignored; and that, on the other hand, he did not believe that utter disregard for all precedents was a desirable alternative.[91] Apparently he urged only that as

---

89. Pudd'nhead Wilson, pp.258-260.

90. Ibid., pp.267-268.

91. Passages in one of his minor essays could be interpreted as direct refutations of the first part of this statement if they were not intended primarily as a slap at French justice. During the retrial of an accused murderer, the justice says: "By the decision of the French courts in the Dreyfus matter, it is established beyond cavil or question that the decisions of courts are permanent and cannot be revised. We are obliged to respect and

(Cont'd p.312)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the first move toward the eradication of them, an intelligent analysis be made of the system in order to ascertain some of the dangerous flaws.

To demonstrate even more clearly the consequence of the stupid jury plan, Twain pointed to the abuse of the insanity plea, the one a natural corollary of the other. He contemplated dedicating Roughing It "To the late Cain...out of a mere human commiseration for him that it was his misfortune to live in a dark age that knew not the beneficent Insanity Plea."[92] He devised several plots in which he burlesqued the practice, showing that the excuse was offered regardless of the character of the defendant or the nature of the crime, that customarily twelve good and true men decided the murderer insane, and that the court usually freed the dangerous lunatic.[93] He described how the perpetrators of murders were released on the grounds of temporary insanity if they were wealthy; but were hanged if they were poor. This miscarriage of justice alarmed him. He wondered if the plea was not becoming so common that the public fully expected to hear it in every criminal case and smiled knowingly when the prisoner was acquitted. "It does not seem possible," Twain wrote, "for a man to so conduct

---

91. (cont'd) adopt this precedent. It is upon precedents that the enduring ediface of jurisprudence is reared." The prisoner had been fairly condemned for killing Szczepanik, and the fact that the victim had been discovered to be alive and well did not alter the decision. Dreyfus was alive, too, but there was no reason for reversing the court's decree. "In the end it was found impossible to ignore French precedent.... Clayton was hanged yesterday.... All America is vocal with scorn of 'French Justice,' and of the malignant little soldiers who invented it and inflicted it upon the other Christian lands" ("From the London Times of 1904," Literary Essays, pp.326-329).

92. Letters, I, 188.

93. "Our Precious Lunatics," Curious Republic of Gondour, pp.117-118; The Gilded Age, II, 222-265.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

himself, before killing another man, as not to be manifestly insane. If he...appears nervous and uneasy...he is unquestionably insane. What we want now, is not laws against crime, but a law against insanity. There is where the true evil lies."[94]

The public could be held only in part responsible for the abuse of the insanity plea, however; the law had to accept its share. In one other deplorable aspect of crime, on the other hand, the public was the sole culprit. The great sniveling populace was alone at fault in making heroes of criminals. Twain hated this tendency, and he ridiculed it in several short pieces.[95] In "Lionizing Murderers" he explained how a fortune-teller had revealed to him that he would be hanged for murder; she described the "lionizing" he would receive when he professed to be converted by the exhortations of the young ladies who visited his cell to sing hymns. The idea for this account was derived, he said, from a similar occurrence in the Pike-Brown assassination case in 1869, which served "to illustrate a custom that prevails...in every state in the Union...of visiting, petting, glorifying, and snuffling over murderers like this Pike." The condemned man was visited by young ladies who sang hymns, brought him flowers, and in general tried to console him. He excited public admiration by magnanimously forgiving his victims; and he was finally honored with a huge funeral. All of this led Twain to wonder if it were "well to glorify a murderous villain on the scaffold...? Is it

---

94. "A New Crime," Sketches New and Old, pp.225-226.

95. "Lionizing Murderers," Sketches New and Old, pp.214-219; "Edward Mills and George Benton," The $30,000 Bequest, pp.209-217.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

safe?"[96] It will be remembered that in Tom Sawyer a petition to the governor for the release of the notorious Indian Joe was being circulated at the time that worthy was found dead in the cave. The blast against that petition, while purporting to be Tom's, was obviously the author's, and it stands as another instance of his injection of comment into a novel without bothering to keep it in character. Tom notes that Joe's death stopped the growth of the movement to secure his pardon:

> The petition had been largely signed; many tearful and eloquent meetings had been held, and a committee of sappy women had been appointed to go in deep mourning and wail around the governor, and implore him to be a merciful ass and trample his duty under foot. Injun Joe was believed to have killed five citizens of the village, but what of that? If he had been Satan himself there would have been weaklings ready to scribble their names to a pardon petition, and drip a tear on it from their permanently impaired and leaky water-works. 97

Mark Twain was anything but hard-boiled. Emotion and sentiment inspired and controlled much of his criticism. At the same time he had a certain common sense which frequently prevented his being led astray by a shallow and harmful sentimentality. Although not a serious student of the eighteenth century, he realized that the triumph of feeling over reason, best typified in the novels of Sterne, often worked more harm than good. The public's tendency to glorify criminals afforded a good example of how dangerous the consequences might be. Humanitarian instincts had an important place in lawmaking and law-enforcement, but only in so far as the objectives of the system were preserved.

That he permitted feeling to dictate some of his theories on

---

96. Sketches New and Old, pp.216 and 219.

97. Tom Sawyer, pp.269-270.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the legal system, however, is suggested by his change in attitude toward the question of capital punishment. During those early years in the East, when his insatiable curiosity fed on the new and the unusual facets of his environment, he frequently rushed into print with his opinions. On one such occasion he revealed in a curious way that he was in favor of the death penalty for murderers: A linguist had been condemned to die for an atrocious crime. The papers were full of accounts of his prodigious learning and his plans for a book explaining the unity of languages. Twain, deciding that his executors would entail a great loss to humanity and that justice would be done if some stupid person were hanged in his place, wrote the New York Tribune, offering to supply a substitute for the condemned man. He signed the note simply Samuel Langhorne, and it was published without comment. The first paragraph was important: "I believe in capital punishment. I believe that when a murder has been done it should be answered for with blood.... The fact that the death-law is rendered almost inoperative by its very severity does not alter my belief in its righteousness.... It is better to hang one murderer in sixteen [convictions, i.e. the ratio in England]...than not to hang any at all."[98]

He wrote the Tribune letter in 1871. Apparently it represented his only public expression of an attitude on the matter; although his point of view had changed entirely by 1879, he mentioned it only in the notebooks. Perhaps he realized the possibility that such remarks would be misinterpreted by the rank and file. Perhaps he preferred to risk

---

98. Biography, II, 1628.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

being labeled as the type of sentimentalist he had attacked. He now opposed capital punishment because he considered it barbaric and ineffective. He remembered that Macaulay had spoken of the public executioner's "odious" office; and he charged that of necessity the law which created the office and the death penalty, the jury which applied the penalty, and the judge who pronounced it were all odious and legitimate objects of contempt and obloquy.[99] He would replace capital punishment with public humiliations. Reverting to the principle behind the stocks and the pillory, he would punish all crimes with public exposure of the convicted in ridiculous and grotesque situations. "Death makes a hero of the villain, and he is envied by some spectators and by imitators."[100]

On the basis of his contention that spectacular executions glorified the victim in the eyes of some spectators, he developed a theory that everyone was capable of being insane for brief periods and that exciting events brought on these moments:

> No one is sane, straight along, year in and year out.... Our insanities are of varying sorts, and express themselves in varying forms--fortunately harmless forms as a rule--but in whatever form they occur an immense upheaval of feeling can at any time topple us distinctly over the sanity-line for a little while; and then if our form happens to be of the murderous kind we must look out--and so must the spectator. [101]

He believed that the minds of thousands of people were on that so-called border line between apparent sanity and the momentary madness responsible for most major crimes. Balanced there, they needed only the excitement

---

99. Notebook, pp.288-289.

100. Ibid., p.193.

101. Letters, II, 713.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

attendant upon any extraordinary occurrence to upset the balance and plunge them into insanity for a few minutes, hours, or days. "No man has a wholly undiseased mind.... In one way or another all men are mad" --for money, love, notoriety, Mild forms of these madnesses are harmless and those subject to them pass for sane; but once they take possession of a man they can make him do many things--cheat, rob, steal. "Nothing saves any man but...the accident of not having his malady put to the supreme test." He reasoned that the exciting, colorful, gory, details surrounding any such event as an assassination, a lynching, a sex crime, a robbery, or a fire were devoured by men on the mental boundary line, and that the noise the world made over the affair led these precariously poised individuals to envy the criminal his vast notoriety to the extent that--if the stimuli were strong enough--they felt a desire to imitate him.[103] This craving to copy sprang from either one of two prominent general characteristics of human nature: an almost unanimous craving to attract attention, and an equally powerful fear of being unpleasantly conspicuous. "One of the commonest forms of madness is the desire to be noticed," Twain decided. "In its mildest form it doubtless

---

102. "Memorable Assassination," What Is Man?, pp.170-171.

103. Twain told how the hanging of the first Abolitionist in Mississippi attracted so much attention that four boys were moved to declare themselves Abolitionists, to organize a secret society, to bomb the home of an opposition minister. The hanging of the bomber only served to draw more youths to the society. "Wild-brained martyrdom was succeeded by uprising and organization. Then, in natural order, followed riot, insurrection, and the wrack and restitutions of war.... It has been the manner of reform since the beginning of the world" ("A Scrap of Curious History," What Is Man?, p.192).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

is universal.... This common madness can develop, by nurture, into a hunger for notoriety in one, for fame in another.... It...has invented kingship...raised up prize-fighters, and poets, and village mayors, and little and big politicians."[104] It has driven assassins and martyrs to their deeds. All strive to imitate the successful in their respective spheres. This instinct to imitate, however, also derives its power from "Moral Cowardice," as Twain labeled man's aversion for the unpopular side of any question.

> History...persistently and sardonically reminds us that... no revolt against a public infamy or oppression has ever been begun but by the one daring man in the 10,000, the rest timidly waiting, and slowly and reluctantly joining, under the influence of that man.... Each man is afraid of his neighbor's disapproval--a thing which, to the general run of the race, is more dreaded than wounds and death. [105]

These two antithetical human drives explained, it seemed to him, a singular American social phenomenon: the wave of lynching which swept the country periodically in his day. He argued that whenever a negro was burned at the stake, the act "unsettles the excitable brain of another one--I mean the inflaming details of his crime, and the lurid theatricality of his exit do it--and the duplicate crime follows."[106] Border-line mentalities gave way before the craving for notoriety to make possible a second crime. The same factors, moreover, operated to contribute a second mob, because "every lynching-account unsettles the brains of

---

104. "Memorable Assassination," What Is Man?, pp.171-172.

105. "United States of Lyncherdom," Europe and Elsewhere, pp.243-245.

106. Letters, II, 715.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

another set of excitable white men, and lights another pyre."[107]

The momentarily insane group, however, did not alone constitute the personnel of the entire mob. What brought the sane members into it? Twain asked. The second characteristic--fear of unpleasantly standing out from the crowd--supplied the answer. "Man's commonest weakness," as Twain saw it, sacrificed his better nature; the weakness which kept man timidly waiting for leadership accounted for mob violence, because people could not enjoy burning a negro, as some psychologists contended, or they would derive similar pleasure from watching a building burn with its trapped occupants. "A lynching mob would _like_ to be scattered, for of a certainty there are never ten men in it who would not prefer to be somewhere else--and would be, if they but had the courage to go." "We may believe this," he added, "for we all know how we feel about such spectacles--also, how we would act under the like pressure."[108]

Further evidence of the validity of his conclusion appeared in the ability of one strong man to stop a mob and browbeat the normal members into giving play to their genuine impulses.[109] In this fact lay

---

107. _Loc. cit._

108. "The United States of Lyncherdom," _Europe and Elsewhere_, p.245.

109. He told how one such gang, formed to lynch Colonel Sherburn, was thwarted by a shotgun and contempt. The Colonel sneered at them from his porch: "I know you clear through.... The average man's a coward.... Your newspapers call you a brave people so much that you think you _are_.... Why don't your juries hang murderers? Because they're afraid the man's friends will shoot them in the back.... So they always acquit; and then a _man_ goes in the night, with a hundred masked cowards at his back, and lynches the rascal. Your mistake is, that you didn't bring a man with you.... You didn't want to come. The average man don't like trouble and anger.... But if only _half_ a man

(Cont'd p.319)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the possible method of prevention, Twain decided. The problem was how to find such a man. If he could be located and stationed in every community--one morally brave man--lynchings would end. The sheriff should be that man, but he was usually not equal to the task.[110] Twain suggested that the missionaries in China be recalled from their futile attempt to Christianize the heathen, and that they be distributed throughout the lynching area. It seemed to him that the missionary should have the martial personality necessary to stop "this epidemic of bloody insanities" by facing mobs without flinching, because the missionary had been trained and seasoned by familiarity with danger in China.[111] It was impossible to say just how serious Twain was in making his proposal, but it is apparent that he had given considerable thought to the problem of lynching and felt deeply about the injustice it represented.[112]

---

109. (cont'd) shouts...'Lynch him!' You're afraid to back down--afraid you'll be found out to be what you are--cowards. The pitifulest thing out is a mob" (Huckleberry Finn, pp.202-203). Clara Clemens tells how Twain once said in answer to the question whether he, as a Southerner, thought lynching negroes necessary as protection for the whites, that he did not think murder right under any circumstances, and that when a hundred men killed one trembling, terrified rag of humanity they were guilty of murder and fantastic cowardice; their crime was made worse by the fact that in more than half the cases they put to death an innocent man (My Husband:Gabrilowitsch, New York, 1938, pp.13-14).

110. "The sheriff that lets a mob take a prisoner away from him is the lowest-down coward there is" ("A Double-Barrelled Detective Story," The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg, p.356).

111. "The United States of Lyncherdom," Europe and Elsewhere, p.249.

112. "The government should...police the South so thoroughly that wherever a negro steps he bumps into an officer of the peace, and these same officers must control the lynchers in their criminal defiance of the law" (Clara Clemens, My Husband: Gabrilowitsh, p.14).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Just as morally strong men were required to face down mobs, so also men of personal integrity were essential to effective law-enforcement. "The best English characteristic," Twain pointed out, "is its plucky and persistent and individual standing up for its rights.... It makes every man in the whole nations a policeman--the administration of law can never go lax where every individual sees that it grows not lax in his own case, or in cases which fall under his eyes."[113] The observation represented merely the application of his definition of citizenship to the problem of law-enforcement. People needed to consider themselves personally responsible for the administration of justice, just as they needed to demand the correction of public abuses. Hence it was vital to the success of any legal restriction that the citizens should approve of it to the end that they gave their full support. It has been shown elsewhere that Twain considered an unpopular prohibition useless, because those who were opposed would never admit an obligation to abide by it. He would accordingly make a conscientious attempt to base laws on the ascertained facts of human nature in so far as this was feasible.[114] Temperance would be encouraged as more consonant with man's makeup than absolute restraint.

---

113. Notebook, p.140.

114. In the case of duels, for example, the law should provide for the presence of the families of the duelists; then no one would get hurt; for no gentleman could bring himself deliberately to kill another before the eyes of his loved ones. Such a law would be based upon facts of human nature ("Dueling," Europe and Elsewhere, p.230).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Of laws in general he had little to say. Brutal and stupid statutes were marks of a low civilization.[115] He denounced that decree which required the defendant to prove his innocence instead of the prosecution to prove his guilt. "Under it," he went on to show, "hundreds of freemen in the South ...had been sold into life-long slavery without the circumstance making any particular impression."[116] He felt that official interpretations were frequently the source of bad laws. In complaining of the silly restrictions for addresses on letters, he wrote "...the departmental interpreters...in Washington...can always be depended on to take any reasonably good law and interpret the common sense all out of it."[117] He naturally objected to legal restrictions with religious backgrounds. When he learned that card-playing was forbidden on Sunday trains in deference to the religious passengers, he protested vigorously: since such passengers were willing to desecrate the Sabbath themselves by traveling on Sunday, they had no right to object to the manner in which other travelers behaved on that day.[118] He did imply, on the other hand, that Christian ethics should take part in law-making:

---

115. Writing of conditions under the British penal code of 1800, he said: "We are obliged to believe that a nation that could look on, unmoved, and see starving or freezing women hang for stealing twenty-six cents' worth of bacon or rags, and boys snatched from their mothers, and men from their families, and sent to the other side of the world...for similar trifling offenses, was a nation to whom the term 'civilized' could not in any large way be applied" (Following the Equator, I, 103).

116. Connecticut Yankee, p.351.

117. Letters, II, 481-482.

118. "Traveling with a Reformer," Literary Essays, p.95.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

"If we only had some God in the country's laws, instead of being in such a sweat to get Him into the Constitution, it would be better all around."[119]

As one might expect, in Twain's comments on legal matters he could not resist poking fun at the police. The officers of that day were the prototype of the familiar Keystone cops of the first screen comedies, and Twain ridiculed them in much the same way in which he had satirized the politicians. Their slowness, stupidity, and egotism were targets for his barbs. In Germany, when he heard of an arrest reported in the newspapers two weeks after an inquest, he was reminded of the brisk methods of the police in the United States.[120] He doubted whether a pompous detective could catch a mysterious old woman, because, he pointed out, "old people don't often outlive the cautious pace of the professional detective."[121] "The Stolen White Elephant" described an egotistical detective's country-wide hunt for a valuable animal; it was finally discovered in the local police barracks, where it had died.[122] "A Double-Barrelled Detective Story" was nothing more than an elaborate burlesque of the popular type of fiction in which Sherlock Holmes figured.[123]

---

119. Letters, I, 262.

120. "German Journals," A Tramp Abroad, II, 295.

121. Pudd'nhead Wilson, p.133. It is in this story that Twain introduced the use of finger prints to solve cases of contested identity. He was particularly interested in the practical possibilities of finger-printing, and Paine remarks that this "was a new feature in fiction then--in law, too, for that matter" (Biography, II, 999).

122. Tom Sawyer Abroad, pp.215-241.

123. The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg, pp.285-357.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Twain did make a serious protest against the use of circumstantial evidence to gain convictions, but in general his comments on the guardians of the law were intended to be humorous rather than constructive.[124]

---

124. "Even the clearest and most perfect circumstantial evidence is likely to be at fault, after all, and therefore ought to be received with great caution. Take the case of any pencil, sharpened by any woman; if you have witnesses, you will find she did it with a knife; but if you take simply the aspect of the pencil, you will say she did it with her teeth"(Pudd'nhead Wilson, p.176).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Democracy

> "That government is not best which best secures mere life and property--there is a more valuable thing--manhood." [1]

It is appropriate to close a discussion of Mark Twain's social criticism with a detailed consideration of his all-embracing principle of social organization--democracy. He accepted the premise that all men are created free and equal, although Warner insisted that this belief was responsible for many of the weaknesses of the system; and upon it Twain constructed his ideal state. The doctrine was the basis, spirit, and end of his attack on slaveries, monarchies, and aristocracies.

The love of freedom was ingrained in Twain. As a boy he had lived in a region which had been settled by restless, independent spirits; as a youth he had wandered over the East and Mid-west, vigorously asserting his ability to care for himself; as a man he had exulted in the license of the mining camps. His hatred of fetters governed his decisions; if he refused a place on the Territorial Enterprise, he would become dependent upon somebody for his food, "a thing necessarily distasteful to a man who had never experienced such a humiliation since he was thirteen years old." [2] Love of freedom stimulated his already active sympathies for those deprived of their liberty. The names carved on the walls of the French political prison, the Chateau d'If, poignantly symbolized the misery of the occupants; and he devoted several pages of Innocents Abroad to a discussion of the horrors of imprisonment. The site of the

---

1. Notebook, p.210.
2. Roughing It, II, 4.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Bastille represented a "grave of human hopes and happiness."[3] His almost wild denunciation of forces which threatened freedom of thought and action sprang from his natural independence of spirit, while his periods of bitterness and despondency were apt to be caused by the apparent triumph of the enemies of liberty.

In view of Twain's passionate demand for liberty both for himself and all men, it was natural and inevitable that he should champion the negro. His personal acceptance of the black man as a social equal has been described; it was merely the logical consequence of his attitude toward the question of freedom. It will be remembered that his opinions on slavery did not take shape until after the Civil War. He grew up in Hannibal wholly unconscious of the anomaly presented by the presence of that institution in a locality settled by seekers for freedom. His father and uncle both owned slaves, and the boy naturally accepted them as part of his environment. Looking back over his childhood, he later admitted that in his schooldays he had had no aversion to slavery, and went on to explain the seeming paradox in terms which might be used for an explanation of the South's confusion when confronted with the disgraceful incongruity:

> I was not aware that there was anything wrong about it. No one arraigned it in my hearing; the local papers said nothing against it; the local pulpit taught us that God approved it, that it was a holy thing, and that the doubter need only look in the Bible if he wished to settle his mind--and then the texts were read aloud to us to make the matter sure; if the slaves themselves had an aversion to slavery, they were wise

---

3. I, 95-96 and 105. Cf. also his morbid description of prisons and their tragic inmates in A Connecticut Yankee, pp.157-161.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> and said nothing. In Hannibal we seldom saw a slave misused; on the farm, never. [4]

The absence of brutality accounted in part, he suggested, for the general indifference of Hannibal people to the situation. The mild domestic slavery of that district--so far removed from the harsh plantation article--did not "rouse one's dozing humane instincts to activity."[5] Cruelty was infrequent and unpopular; the breaking up of negro families was discouraged: "The 'nigger trader' was loathed by everybody. He was regarded as a sort of human devil who bought and conveyed poor helpless creatures to hell--for to our whites and blacks alike the Southern plantation was simply hell."[6] The nature of slavery in Missouri towns tended therefore to stupefy everybody's humanity and to engender satisfaction with the organization of society as it was. A terrific shock was needed to jar them out of their undemocratic complacency toward the enslaving of their fellowmen.

The Civil War supplied the necessary jolt, and the country set about rebuilding democracy on a broader foundation. Twain, too, came to recognize the truth and justice of the North's point of view, and his subsequent writings revealed him as bitterly opposed to any curtailment of a human being's right to freedom and the pursuit of happiness.[7]

---

4. Autobiography, I, 101.

5. Ibid., p.124.

6. Ibid., p.124. Twain added: "If the threat to sell an incorrigible slave 'down the river' would not reform him, nothing would."

7. He did not limit to any race or group his hatred of man-made forms of slavery. After his lecture tour of the world he wrote in Following the Equator a vigorous protest against the enslavement

(Cont'd p.328)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

His hatred of the thing he had accepted as a boy flashed now in his novels, sketches, speeches, aphorisms; it was best expressed in his realistic--though sometimes slightly sentimental--descriptions of the inhumanity characteristic of the institution and the suffering it entailed on fellow men. A representative example is his True Story, built upon an incident related to him by a slave on his uncle's farm. It is the history of a negro mammy's life: how the traders sold her family apart; how she spent the listless years waiting for word of them; how she eventually met the youngest--then the servant of a Union officer; and how she finally managed to prove to her son that she was his mother. The description of the selling of the family graphically illustrates the author's concern for the humanitarian elements involved:

> Dey put chains on us an' put us on a stan' as high as dis po'ch--twenty feet high--an' all de people stood aroun'.... An' dey sole my ole man, an' took him away, an' dey begin to sell my chil'en...an' I begin to cry; an' de man say "Shet up yo' 'damn blubbering," an' hit me on de mouf wid his han'. An' when de las' one was gone but my little Henry, I grab' him clost up to my breas' so...but dey got him...de men did; but I took and tear de clo'es mos' off of 'em an' beat 'em over de head wid my chain; an' dey give it to me, too, but I didn't mine dat. 8

Howells bought the tale for the Atlantic, thereby establishing Twain's relationship with the magazine of the elect of Eastern writers. It is indicative of the public's attitude toward Twain at the time that they looked upon the piece with suspicion as one of the author's extravaganzas. So general was this skeptical reaction that Howells felt called

---

7. (cont'd) of the savage Kanakas by the sugar-planters of Queensland, Australia (I, 60-72).

8. Sketches New and Old, pp.242-243.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

upon to make a special plea for the story in his review of Sketches New and Old in which it was reprinted.[9]

The idea for the book about Huckleberry Finn was forming in Twain's mind at the time he wrote the True Story; hence it is not surprising that in the novel there were passages indicating a continuation of the author's concern for the suffering of the negro. In this instance, moreover, he exposed the blindness which had permitted slavery to exist. Huck is made to reflect in his reactions to Nigger Jim's conduct something of the typical slave-holder's stupid attitude toward his slaves. On the raft one night Huck awakens and hears Jim moaning and moaning to himself: "I knowed what it was about," he says. "He was thinking about his wife and children, away up yonder, and he was low and homesick.... I do believe he cared just as much for his people as white folks does for their'n. It don't seem natural, but I reckon it's so."[10] That "It don't seem natural" is eloquent. It sums up the reason for much of the blundering cruelty of men.

Another soliloquy of Huck's elaborates on the same theme while revealing the untenable position in which the Southerner found himself because of his perverted understanding of the negro's character. Huck overhears Jim talking to himself about his chances of becoming a free man by getting to a free state: how he will save money until he can get enough to buy his wife; how they will both work to buy back the children; how they'll get an ab'litionist to steal them if their masters

---

9. My Mark Twain, pp.123-124.

10. Huckleberry Finn, p.215.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

won't sell them back. Huck is appalled by his friend's treacherous boldness:

> It most froze me to hear such talk. He wouldn't ever dared to talk such talk in his life before. Just see what a difference it made in him the minute he judged he was about free. It was according to the old saying "give a nigger an inch and he'll take an ell." Thinks I, this is what comes of my not thinking. Here was this nigger, which I had as good as helped to run away, coming right out flat-footed and saying he would steal his children--children that belonged to a man I didn't even know; a man that hadn't ever done me no harm. 11

In such scenes and in the famous battle with his conscience over helping Jim escape, Huck Finn symbolized the conflict which Twain thought every slave-holder should know in his soul. Booker T. Washington sensed this fact when he said he could not help feeling that, in the character of Jim, Twain had exhibited his sympathy and interest in the masses of the negro people.[12] "The little outcast boy, floating down the broad flood of the Mississippi on his raft, the clarity of his unsullied soul--and with him Nigger Jim, who embodied the docility, the forgiveness of the negro race--...this is a searching indictment of our civilization."[13] A black skin did not deprive a man of human instincts, emotions, and feelings. A black skin did not render a woman incapable of knowing mother love: "'Ain't you my chile?'" a mullato asks her worthless son when he is unable to understand her willingness to be sold back into

---

11. Ibid., pp.123-124. For further expressions of the point of view portrayed in Huck cf. pp.306-307 and 395-396. The latter reference is to the description of the treatment accorded Jim after he had saved Tom's life at the sacrifice of his own liberty.

12. Henderson, op. cit., p.185.

13. Stephen Leacock, "Two Humorists:Charles Dickens and Mark Twain," Yale Review, XXIV (September, 1934), 129.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

slavery for his sake. "'Dey ain't nothing a white mother won't do for her chile. Who made 'em so? De Lord done it. En who made the niggers? De Lord made 'em. In de inside, mothers is all de same. De good Lord he made 'em so.'"[14] The words constituted Mark Twain's answer to all arguments against the negro's right to freedom and equality.

In addition to this purely humanitarian objection to slavery, Twain condemned the system on the important--but usually neglected--ground of its effect on the ruling group. In 1907, speaking before the American Society in London, he said:

> We have, however, one Fourth of July which is absolutely our own.... Lincoln's proclamation, which not only set the black slaves free, but set the white man free also. The owner was set free from the burden and offence, that sad condition of things where he was in so many instances a master and owner of slaves when he did not want to be. That proclamation set them all free. 15

This thought summarized his contention of almost thirty years that slavery brutalized the finer sensibilities of a slave-holder if he had any. Twain developed this idea pointedly in A Connecticut Yankee where he used it to explain the failure of a group of pilgrims to stop the beating of a slave girl who had fallen by the wayside from fatigue: "All our pilgrims looked on and commented," the Yankee said, "on the expert way in which the whip was handled. They were too much hardened by lifelong

---

14. Pudd'nhead Wilson, p.143. A character in the same story says: "Why were niggers and whites made? What crime did the uncreated first nigger commit that the curse of birth was decreed for him? And why is this awful difference made between white and black?.... How hard the nigger's fate seems" (p.76).

15. "Independence Day," Speeches, p.349.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

every-day familiarity with slavery to notice that there was anything else in the exhibition that invited comment. This was what slavery could do, in the way of ossifying what one may call the superior lobe of human feeling; for these pilgrims were kind-hearted people, and they would not have allowed that man to treat a horse like that."[16]

He later enlarged on this degrading aspect of slavery, incorporating it in his arraignment of the caste system. His method was to demonstrate that a king, even though disguised as a beggar and sympathetic to the plight of the serfs, instinctively favored the upper group in any disputes that members of it had with persons of low degree.

> It was impossible that this should be otherwise. The blunting effects of slavery upon the slave-holder's moral perceptions are known and conceded, the world over; and a privileged class, an aristocracy, is but a band of slave-holders under another name.... The repulsive feature of slavery is the thing, not its name. One needs but to hear an aristocrat speak of the classes that are below him to recognize...the very air and tone of the actual slave-holder; and behind these are the slaveholder's spirit...blunted feeling. They are the result of the same cause in both cases: the possessor's old and inbred custom of regarding himself as a superior being. 17

In Pudd'nhead Wilson there was another example of this illogical prejudice nurtured by the institution of slavery. When Mr. Driscoll noticed that small sums of money were being stolen from him, he immediately accused his slaves. "He was a fairly humane man toward slaves and other animals," the narrator says. "He was an exceedingly humane man toward the erring of his own race. Theft he could not abide, and plainly there was a thief in his house. Necessarily the thief must be one of his

---

16. Connecticut Yankee, p.189.

17. Ibid., pp.233-234.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

negroes. Sharp measures must be taken." His threat to sell all of them "down the river" to the living death of a Louisiana plantation brought ready confessions from the guiltless unfortunates. Their joy knew no bounds when their master then relented and decided instead to sell them locally. Their joy and gratitude were sincere, the writer says, "for like a God he had stretched forth his mighty hand and closed the gates of hell against them. He knew, himself, that he had done a noble and gracious thing, and was privately well pleased with his magnanimity; and that night he set the incident down in his diary, so that his son might read it in after years, and be thereby moved to deeds of gentleness and humanity himself."[18]

Twain summed up his theory of the hardening process engendered in the ruling class of a slave-holding society with a comment which involved his father. While staying at a Bombay hotel during his lecture in India, Twain saw the German manager strike a native on the jaw for failing to execute a command properly. The incident started a train of thought which eventually carried him back to the Missouri of his childhood. "I had not seen the like of this for fifty years," he reflected. "It...flashed upon me the forgotten fact that this was the usual way of

---

18. Pp.14 and 17. Twain said that the negroes were justified in their frequent thefts. "They had an unfair show in the battle of life, and they held it no sin to take military advantage of the enemy--in a small way.... They would smouch provisions...small articles of clothing, or any other property of light value... perfectly sure that in taking this trifle from the man who daily robbed them of an inestimable treasure-- their liberty-- they were not committing any sin that God would remember...in the Last Great Day" (Ibid., pp.15-16).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

explaining one's desires to a slave. I was able to remember that the method seemed right and natural to me in those days, I being born to it and unaware that elsewhere there were other methods; but I was also able to remember that those unresented cuffings made me sorry for the victim and ashamed for the punisher."[19] His father, a kind and refined man who seldom punished even his most wayward son, occasionally cuffed the harmless little slave boy for trifling blunders and once horse-whipped a slave girl for being insolent to Mrs. Clemens. "My father had passed his life among the slaves from his cradle up, and his cuffings proceeded from the custom of the time, not from his nature."[20]

The same custom tolerated murder at times. Twain also told how when he was ten years old he saw a man fling a lump of iron-ore at his slave-man in anger, for merely doing something awkwardly. The negro died from the blow. "I knew the man had a right to kill his slave if he wanted to," Twain said, "and yet it seemed a pitiful thing and somehow wrong.... Nobody in the village approved of that murder, but of course no one said much about it." This was the type of indifference and hardness which slavery strengthened in men.[21] The slave man was not the only

---

19. Following the Equator, II, 18.

20. Ibid., II, 18-19.

21. "The thing in man which makes him cruel to a slave is in him permanently and will not be rooted out for a million years. To admit that slavery exists in any country is to admit that you may describe any form of brutal treatment which you can imagine and go there and find it...applied" (Notebook, pp.198-199). It is interesting in this connection, too, that Twain should picture the Yankee overseers as the terror of the negroes, despite his indictment of the Southerners. "Dat overseer wuz a Yank, too, outen New England," a negro who had been sold down the river says

(Cont'd p.335)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

one who suffered injury under the system.

Slavery did have an effect on the spirit of the slave, however, just as it did on the sensitivity of the owner, but with a different result. The difference was that, whereas it only deadened the humanity of the one, it frequently killed the soul of the other even before it ruined his body. To those who considered the slave a mere chattel, a beast of burden, this was a negligible consideration. But to a man like Twain, endowed with respect for human personality, particularly as related to the unfortunate, the killing of a man's spirit--a race's spirit--was a major tragedy, calculated to incite pity and wrath. To illustrate his point he described the reception by their families of a group of prisoners, released after long confinement. They made no outcry; there was no rejoicing among them as they quietly and stolidly attempted to bridge the gulfs made by thirty-five years of separation. "This dreadful matter brought from these downtrodden people no outburst of rage against these oppressors," he pointed out. "They had been heritors and subjects of cruelty and outrage so long that nothing could have startled them but a kindness.... Their entire being was reduced to a monotonous dead level of patience, resignation, dumb uncomplaining acceptance of whatever might befall them in this life. Their very imagination was dead. When you can say that of a man, he has struck bottom."[22]

---

21. (cont'd) on her return, "'en anybody down South kin tell you what dat mean. Dey knows how to work a nigger to death, en dey knows how to whale 'em, too--whale 'em till dey backs is welted like a washboard" (Pudd'nhead Wilson, pp.152-153).

22. Connecticut Yankee, p.170.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The tragic paradox of slavery, according to Twain, was that its victims accepted as inevitable an evil which they had it in their power to destroy. Pudd'nhead Wilson illustrated his observation that servility was a product of mental attitude and that the differences between white men and black existed only in the minds of both. In the story a mulatto who had been considered a white boy for twenty years of his life was forced to rejoin his race. Once convinced that he was truly a negro, he reverted to type, although he had never known any life but the white men's and had shared their contempt for the blacks. "If he met a friend," after the change, "he found that the habit of a lifetime had in some mysterious way vanished.... It was the 'nigger' in him asserting its humility.... He found the 'nigger' in him involuntarily giving the road...to the white rowdy and loafer."[23] Apparently his blood carried the taint of the race; apparently the negro had been created to serve. Twain, however, went on: "Under the influence of a great mental and moral upheaval [the boy's] character and habits had taken on the appearance of complete change, but after a while with the subsidence of the storm both began to settle toward their former places."[24]

---

23. Pp.77-78.

24. Ibid., p.79. Similarly the white child who had been reared as a negro could not free his mind of the impressions put there by his experiences. "The poor fellow could not endure the terrors of the white man's parlor, and felt at home and at peace nowhere but in the kitchen" (ibid., p.202). The ease with which the negro nurse lost her fear of her little white charge once she had put her son in his place further indicates the psychological basis for slavery. "She was surprised to see how steadily and surely the awe which had kept her tongue reverent and her manner humble toward her young master was transferring itself to her speech and manner toward the usurper" (ibid., p.23).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

His assumption of servility and humility had been the product of his mind and imagination. In a broader sense the premises of slavery had no validity and existed only because of the great influence training and environment exerted in the formation of ideas. The white man had simply delegated to himself power over the life of his black brother, and had managed to impress the fact of slavery upon the minds of the subjected group.[25] Any such concept of inequality was a figment of the imagination.

Men's delegation of superiority to themselves in a social scheme built on supposed inequalities was not limited to the white-black relationship, however. Twain surveyed his world, read history, and concluded that in most parts of the earth since the beginning of history man had demonstrated his superiority over his neighbor by enslaving him. A particular nationality, race, or creed apparently was no prerequisite to enslavement, since the most popular medium of maintaining these inequalities was a system of government known as monarchy, which made slaves of its very supporters. Twain hated this form of rule as he hated negro slavery.

It was only natural then, in view of his vehement insistence on liberty for himself and all men, and his dislike for monarchies, that he should consider representative government of and by the people the

---

25. In one passage in Pudd'nhead Wilson Twain scoffs at the manifest absurdity of the attitude held toward those unfortunates who are supposedly cursed by the slight taint of negro blood in their veins. "To all intents and purposes Roxy was as white as anybody," he wrote of one mulatto, "but the one-sixteenth of her which was black outvoted the other fifteen parts and made her a negro.... Her child was thirty-one parts white, and he, too, was a slave, and by a fiction of law and custom a negro" (ibid., p.12).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

only means for securing that liberty. He criticized the administration of the system, as we have seen, but he never questioned the principle. Bad as it was, improvement could and should come from within. The alternatives, furthermore, offered no reliable improvement. Socialism was slow and inefficient; communism was idiocy; dictatorships offered the worst form possible; monarchy was beneath consideration. The best government was a democracy after the American model.[26] It was best because it encouraged the development of manhood, a more valuable thing than mere life and property; because it promoted peaceful relations

---

26. Having clambered up on the Gorner Glacier intending to ride it back to their hotel, Twain and his agent Harris became indignant when they learned the trip would require slightly over five hundred years. Harris said: "'It's a government glacier.... Over here the government runs everything--so everything runs slow.... But with us, everything is done by private enterprise--and there ain't much lolling around" (Tramp Abroad, II, 133). Of the communists Twain said: "They want to divide up the property. Suppose they did it. It requires brains to keep money as well as to make it. In a precious little while the money would be back in the former owner's hands and the communists would be poor again. The division would have to be remade every three years or it would do the communists no good" (Biography, I, 644). As for the dictators, he wrote: "Unlimited power is the ideal thing when it is in safe hands. The despotism of heaven is the one absolutely perfect government. An earthly despotism would be the absolutely perfect earthly government, if the conditions were the same, namely, the despot the perfectest individual of the human race, and his lease of life perpetual. But as a perishable perfect man must die, and leave his despotism in the hands of an imperfect successor, an earthly despotism is not merely a bad form of government, it is the worst form that is possible" (Connecticut Yankee, p.78). Monarchy was out of date: "It belongs to the state of culture that admires a ring in your nose, a head full of feathers, and your belly painted blue" (Notebook, p.210).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

between its members; and because it was possible to all men.[27]

The last attribute particularly recommended it to Twain. The supposition that any nation was not as well fitted to govern itself as s some self-appointed specialists were to govern it was a manifest absurdity:

> The master minds of all nations, in all ages, have sprung in affluent multitude from the mass of the nation...only--not from its privileged classes; and so, no matter what the nation's intellectual grade was...the bulk of its ability was in the long ranks of its nameless and its poor, and so it never saw the day that it had not the material in abundance whereby to govern itself. Which is to assert an always self-proven fact: that even the best-governed and most free and most enlightened monarchy is still behind the best condition attainable by its people; and that the same is true of kindred governments of lower grades. 28

It was the implied inequality in the monarchial system and its inevitable class divisions that drew Twain's heaviest satirical fire.

> Mark Twain was a radical, resolute, and rather uncritical democrat, committed to the principles of the preamble to the Constitution, preserving a tang of Tom Paine's contempt for kings, and not without a suggestion of the republican insolence caricatured by Dickens in Martin Chuzzlewit.... He refused all recognition to aristocratic virtues, which retard the complete establishment of the brotherhood of man.... He was of the people and for the people at all times. 29

The Connecticut Yankee contains the majority of passages in which he shows

---

27. His description in the "Great Revolution in Pitcairn" of the discord which sprang up among the happy descendants of the Bounty mutineers when an empire was organized on terms similar to those endured by Germany and Italy for the sake of unification seems to imply that man lives more peacefully and comfortably in a democratic society, accepting the doctrine of absolute equality (Tom Sawyer Abroad, pp.343-360). "Reserves and restraints are things that are bred by differences of rank.... Where masses of people are gathered together in England, caste is submerged, and with it the English reserve; equality exists for the moment, and every individual is free" (Following the Equator, I, 112).

28. Connecticut Yankee, pp.237-238.

29. Stuart Sherman, On Contemporary Literature, New York, 1917, p.41.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

his contempt for monarchy, but there are likewise numerous expressions of it scattered throughout his writing. One letter, written just before the novel was published, indicated how serious he was in his denunciation. The Brazilian monarchy had fallen, and Twain was moved to comment on it to a Mr. Baxter of the Boston Herald. Having expressed deep satisfaction over the event, he predicted that by 1939 the thrones of Europe would sell at auction for old iron:

> I believe I should really see the end of what is surely the grotesquest of all the swindles ever invented by man--monarchy. It is enough to make a graven image laugh, to see apparently rational people...still mouthing empty reverence for those moss-backed frauds and scoundrelisms, hereditary kingship and so-called "nobility." It is enough to make the monarchs and nobles themselves laugh--and in private they do.... Have you noticed the rumor that the Portuguese throne is unsteady, and that the Portuguese slaves are getting restive? Also, that the head slave-driver of Europe, Alexander III, has so reduced his usual monthly order for chains that the Russian foundries are running on only half time now? Also that other rumor that English nobility acquired an added stench the other day--and had to ship it to India.... By and by there is going to be an emigration.... In a few years from now we shall have nothing but played-out kings and dukes on the police.... Then we shall wish...that we had taken common and reasonable precautions and drowned them at Castle Garden. 30

He asked Baxter to note the similarity in the wording of the state papers in which the Connecticut Yankee and the Brazilian populace proclaim their respective republics, and to prepare to defend the book from plagiarism.[31]

The novel Twain filled with all his hatred and resentment of royalty and nobility as he had come to know them in the pages of history and in the contemporary world. To him they represented a fiendish

---

30. Letters, II, 519-521.

31. Ibid., II, 520.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

application of the age-old principle of dominating man through his ideologies. Environment and training had been properly controlled in order to infuse the helpless subject with a stock of inherited ideas which completely enslaved him. Before the spectacle Twain grew hot with indignation, both against the enslavers and the enslaved.

> It was pitiful for a person born in a wholesome free atmosphere to listen to their humble and hearty outpourings of loyalty toward their king and Church and nobility; as if they had any more occasion to love and honor [them] than a slave has to love and honor the lash.... Any kind of royalty, howsoever modified, any kind of aristocracy, howsoever pruned is rightly an insult; but if you are born and brought up under that sort of arrangement you probably never find it out yourself, and don't believe it when somebody else tells you. It is enough to make a body ashamed of his race to think of the sort of froth that has always occupied its throne without shadow of right or reason, and the seventh-rate people that have always figured as its aristocracies. 32

As if his mission were to help such people come to their senses, Twain ripped up the premises upon which monarchies were built. The doctrine of the divinity of kings offered a logical and tempting starting point. Accordingly King Arthur, who had been wandering incognito through his realm with the Yankee, was captured by slave-traders and chained with other slaves in a convoy. The Yankee, musing on the King's inability to attract attention to his plight, concluded: "It only shows that there is nothing diviner about a king than there is about a tramp, after all. He is just a cheap and hollow artificiality when you don't know he is a king. But reveal his quality, and, dear me, it takes your very

---

32. Connecticut Yankee, p.62.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

breath away to look at him. I reckon we are all fools."[33] For all of the logic in the theory of divine right, cats would make perfect kings. It was not absolutely necessary that there be a man on the throne before whom the abject mob might crawl and worship. Cats might even be an improvement:

> They would be as useful as any other royal family, they would know as much, they would have the same virtues and the same treacheries.... They would be laughably vain and absurd and never know it, they would be wholly inexpensive; finally, they would have as sound a divine right as any other royal house, and "Tom VII., or Tom XI., or Tom XIV., by the Grace of God King," would sound as well as it would when when applied to the ordinary royal tom-cat with tights on. And as a rule...the character of these cats would be considerably above the character of the average king, and this would be an immense moral advantage to the nation.... The worship of royalty being founded in unreason, these graceful and harmless cats would easily become as sacred as any other royalties, and indeed more so, because it would presently be noticed that they hanged nobody, beheaded nobody...and so must be worthy of a deeper love and reverence than the customary human king. 34

The conception is worthy of Swift.

---

33. Ibid., p.352. In the notes made at this time Twain wrote heatedly on this point. He contended that the kingly office was entitled to no respect, since it was originally procured by highwayman's methods and had remained a symbol of crime; that if a king were crossed with a prostitute, the resulting mongrel would perfectly satisfy the English idea of nobility; and that if masters of kingdoms were divinely appointed, one was logically compelled to say--"Nell Gwynne, by the Grace of God Monarch of Great Britain etc" (Notebook, p.202). In the Prince and the Pauper he further depicted the flimsiness of a king's assumption of divinity, when a pauper boy and a young prince change places without the courtiers' sensing any lack of divinity in the poor lad's person.

34. Connecticut Yankee, pp.400-401.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Twain appropriated Carlyle's clothes metaphor in later years to express his continued detestation of the crowned heads of nations and their claims of superiority. The Czar meditated as he surveyed his nude form in the mirror:

> Naked, what am I? A lank, skinny, spider-legged libel on the image of God!... Is it this that a hundred and forty million Russians kiss the dust before and worship? Manifestly not! .... It is my clothes. Without my clothes I should be as destitute of authority as any other naked person.... One realizes that without his clothes a man would be nothing at all. ... Titles--another artificiality--are a part of his clothing. ... An Emperor...by the sheer might of these artificialities ...can get himself worshipped as a deity by his people. 35

It was behind such flimsy pretexts that the monarchs of the world operated. "Strip the human race, absolutely naked, and it would be a real democracy," Twain wrote. "But the introduction of even a rag of tiger skin, or a cowtail, could make a badge of distinction and be the beginning of a monarchy."[36] Man is enslaved by baubles.

Next to the kings themselves and their assumptions of divinity was the social stratification inevitable in a monarchy. Steeped in the democratic tradition, which supposedly ignored differences attributable to ancestry, he sneered at the pretensions of aristocrats. His western sojourn had only strengthened the antipathy natural to one of his origin. He described the attitude of the miners toward anyone who appeared to be violating the spirit of equality: "If a man wanted a fight...all he had to do was to appear in public in a white shirt or a stove-pipe hat.... Those people hated aristocrats. They had a particular and malignant

---

35. North American Review, CLXXX (March, 1905), 321-322.

36. Notebook, p.337.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

animosity toward what they called a 'biled shirt'."[37]

His reading in history, particularly that of the French Revolution, was the climax of the mounting resentment which Twain poured out in the Connecticut Yankee and the American Claimant. He reviled caste as a destroyer of manhood: "In a country where they have ranks... a man isn't ever a man, he is only part of a man, he can't ever get his full growth. You prove your superiority over him in station, or rank, or fortune, and that's the end of it--he knuckles down. You can't insult him after that."[38] The entire concept of class, with its rules of precedence and conduct, would be a laughable absurdity were it not that the majority of the world's population took it very seriously.[39] There was a ring to Twain's words as he wrote how a young Englishman held "all hereditary lordships and privilege to be usurpation, all nobility a tinsel sham, all aristocratic institutions a fraud, all inequalities in rank a legalized crime and an infamy, and no bread honest bread that a man doesn't earn by his own work." The rebel's views moved another sensitive young aristocrat to defy his father and to forfeit his lordship. "'I wish to retire from what to me is a false existence, a false position,' he told his parent, 'and begin my life over again...on the level of mere manhood, unassisted by factitious aids, and succeed or

---

37. Roughing It, II, 133.

38. Connecticut Yankee, p.322.

39. "The £1,000,000 Bank Note" includes a description of an English dinner party where no food could be served because "the matter of precedence couldn't be settled" (The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg, pp.124-125.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

fail by pure merit or the want of it. I will go to America, where all men are equal and all have an equal chance; I will live or die...as just a man'"[40] Therein lay the essence of democracy's contribution to the world. It was what Twain had in mind when he praised John Hay and himself for having climbed from obscurity. "He is a Secretary of State and I am a gentleman," he told the diners on the occasion of his sixty-seventh birthday celebration. "It could not happen in any other country. Our institutions give men the positions that of right belong to them through merit...not by heredities, and not by family influences or extraneous help."[41] America permitted a man to live as just a man; all that was needed was the kind of pride, integrity, and spirit expressed by Sally Seller's when she discarded her false claim to be Gwendolen, the daughter of the Earl of Rossmore. She made her stirring declaration to her fiance, a struggling artist:

> There is no grain of social inequality between us; I, like you, am poor; I, like you, am without position or distinction. ...Our bread is honest bread; we work for our living...and though our place is low, judged by the world's eye, we will make it as high as the highest in the great essentials of honest work for what we eat and wear, and conduct above reproach. We live in a land, let us be thankful, where this is all-sufficient and no man is better than his neighbor by the Grace of God, but only by his own merit. [42]

America, therefore, was the country for Mark Twain. He was fully conscious of her faults and could hold her up to ridicule; but at the same time he was tremendously proud of his native land for her adventure in

---

40. American Claimant, pp.5-6.

41. "Sixty-Seventh Birthday," Speeches, 251-252.

42. American Claimant, pp.208-209.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

government and her comparative success. It thrilled him to see the principles of equality and freedom being applied, because he loved and valued his independence as his most treasured heritage.

Twain's pride in his country's political philosophy did not blind him, on the other hand, to what he considered serious and increasing weaknesses in it. He thought he saw, in the labor movement, for example, evidence of the formation of a modified caste system. In the American Claimant a young Englishman could not get a job because he did not belong to a union, and he was denied membership in the union because he was considered a foreigner, "taking honest men's bread out of their mouths." "So there is an aristocracy of position here," he concluded, "of prosperity...and of the ins as opposed to the outs, and I am with the outs.... Plainly there are all kinds of castes here."[43] The Englishman found, moreover, that the land of the free and equal also observed social distinctions. He commented on the sort of aristocracy he encountered in a cheap boarding house in New York:

> There are people at this table who are looked up to for some reason or another, and here is a poor devil of a boy who is looked down upon, treated with indifference and shamed by humiliations, when he has committed no crime but that common one of being poor. Equality ought to make man noble minded.... There is respect, there is deference here, but it doesn't fall to [his] share. It is lavished on two men. One...a retired plumber.... The other person is a policeman.... The deference paid to these two men is not so very far short of that paid to an earl in England, though the method of it differs...and there is obsequiousness, too. It does rather look as if in a republic where all are free and equal prosperity and position constitute rank. 44

---

43. Pp.111-112.

44. Ibid., pp.105 and 110. "Essentially, nobilities are foolishnesses, but if I were a citizen where they prevail I would do my best to get a title, for the consideration it furnishes.... In Republics we strive for it with the surest means we have--money" (Notebook, p.367.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Such conditions represented a travesty on the democratic ideal, and Twain lashed out against them. He condemned the female title-seekers: "these wretched American women who buy titles (and noble tramps) with their money-mongrel breeders; should have a bench show of their children."[45] He himself locked his daughter up to keep her from flirting with a German officer whom she had met at a ball. Although Olivia Clemens attributes her husband's conduct to a latent spirit of conventiality, Clara believed her father was moved by "an ingrained objection to foreign suitors."[46] Much of Pudd'nhead Wilson, furthermore, is a burlesque of the American's own brand of aristocracy. The leading citizens of Dawson's Landing, Missouri, impressively embellished with such given names as Percy Northumberland, York Leicester, Pembroke, and Cecil Burleigh Essex, disport themselves in a fashion consonant with the code of the First Families of Virginia.[47] While admitting that some benefit was derived from any group which put honor before all else, Twain also implied that its concept of honor frequently nullified the good that might be done, as when it led to dueling over petty insults. The example, furthermore, of such social

---

45. Notebook, p.209.

46. Clara Clemens, My Father:Mark Twain, pp.93-94.

47. "This aristocracy...was a nobility. It had its unwritten laws.... The F.F.V. was born a gentleman; his highest duty in life was to watch over that great inheritance and keep it unsmirched.... These laws required certain things of him which his religion might forbid; then his religion must yield.... Honor stood first; and the laws defined...wherein it differed in certain details from honor as defined by church creeds and by the social laws and customs of some of the minor divisions of the globe that had got crowded out when the sacred boundaries of Virginia were staked out" (p.102).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

orgies was apt to be harmful in another way, in that they incited imitators, and kindred societies sprang up to turn the minds of people from serious matters. The institution called the Daughters of the Crown, for instance, stood for a typical American idea, Twain said, "born of God knows what kind of specialized insanity, but not softening of the brain--you cannot soften a thing that doesn't exist."[48] This penchant of a free people to rebuild a form of tyranny from which their ancestors had fled must be recognized in order to be combated. "Unquestionably," Twain scribbled in his notebook, "the person that can get lowest down in cringing before royalty and nobility and can get most satisfaction out of crawling on his belly before them, is an American. Not all Americans, but when an American does it he makes competition impossible."[49] Ridicule seemed to him the most potent force with which to fight this blindness. "No nobility, no royalty or other fraud can face ridicule in a fair field and live."[50]

But in view of his vehemently expressed opinions of those who dared admire a society recognizing class division, Twain's capitulation to the charm of royalty on several occasions is interesting and requires some comment. Always the prey of his emotions, he was perfectly capable of forgetting the inconsistency of his position in the glow of some moving experience. Only his restatement at a later date of old opinions indicated that the mood was fleeting and transitory.

Although his warm reception by the English in the beginning of

---

48. "Welcome Home," Speeches, p.202.

49. Notebook, pp.336-337.

50. Ibid., p.198.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

his career mellowed Twain slightly toward their system of government and society, it was the recognition extended him by Austrian royalty in the last decade of the century that definitely softened him for a time. His daughter described his reaction upon being invited to call on the Emperor's sister: "We could tell by the little agitated muscles under his eyes that a battle was going on between a largely cultivated inclination toward democratic passions and a largely inborn inclination to worship distinction of position, which supposedly includes distinction of person."[51] Apparently conscious of his weakening, he attempted to make it less heinous by pointing out that the Germans took a sensible attitude toward royalty, devoting much less space in the newspapers to its movements. "In Germany, they respect titles, in England they revere them, in France they adore them, that is, the French newspapers do."[52]

By 1898 he seemed to have been completely won over by the admirable qualities of the nobility. He wrote in his notebook: "There are princes which I cast in the Echte (genuine) princely mold, and they make me regret--again--that I am not a prince myself. It is not a new regret but a very old one. I have never been properly and humbly satisfied with my condition. I am a democrat only on principle, not by instinct--nobody is that."[53] Had he forgotten how rabidly democratic he

---

51. Clara Clemens, My Father:Mark Twain, p.206.

52. Notebook, p.222.

53. Ibid., p.357. He narrates at some length the manner in which an aristocratic old Austrian deliberately snubbed the wife of a young doctor, who was not recognized socially. Even Paine was moved to comment on the leniency with which Twain dealt with the event. "Imagine what he would have said had that incident

(Cont'd p.350)

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

had been when writing A Connecticut Yankee? For the moment he had; but the depredations of the Czar of Russia and Leopold of Belgium quickly aroused his antipathy for the political philosophy they personified.

m Returning to the attack on the forces of hereditary privilege about 1900, Twain polished a weapon which he had used sparingly in the Yankee: the direct responsibility of the downtrodden for their plight. He spent less of his energy in exposing the tyrannies now and more of it in blasting the serfs of the world for submitting to them. Just as the citizens of any nation were fully capable of governing themselves, so they were also endowed with the manhood requisite for building any type of society they wanted if they would but assert themselves. His Yankee had already affirmed this:

> A man is a man, at bottom. Whole ages of abuse and oppression cannot crush the manhood clear out of him.... There is plenty good enough material for a republic in the most degraded people that ever existed--even the Russians...even in the Germans--if one could but force it out of its timid and suspicious privacy, to overthrow and trample in the mud any throne that ever was set up and any nobility that ever supported it. 54

The inertia of the populace was directly responsible for kings and their dissolute forms of government. "The institution of Royalty in any form is an insult to the human race," Twain charged;[55] and he

---

53. (cont'd) occurred in England. He would not have referred to that prince as 'proud.' He would have combed the dictionary to find adjectives to convey his scorn" (ibid., p.221).

54. Connecticut Yankee, p.301.

55. Notebook, p.202.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

proceeded to depict the surprise among rulers like the Czar at being permitted to continue the tyrannies:

> A curious invention...the human race! The swarming Russian millions have for centuries meekly allowed our Family to rob them, insult them, trample them under foot, while they lived and suffered and died with no purpose and no function but to make make that Family comfortable!... Is the human race a joke?.... Has it no respect for itself? I think my respect for it is drooping, sinking. 56

Leopold of Belgium, equally incredulous, sneered at the supposition that a monarch should want respect:

> What king has valued the respect of the human race?.... He stands upon an eminence...and sees multitudes of meek human things...who are in no way better or finer than themselves.... If men were really men, how could a Czar be possible? and how could I be possible? But we are possible; we are quite safe.... The race will put up with us, in its docile immemorial way. It will...make large talk, but it will stay on its knees all the same.... It finds fault with me and my occupations, and forgets that neither of us [the Czar or Leopold] could exist an hour without its sanction. 57

It followed in Twain's reasoning that "the first...second...third...and the only gospel in any monarchy should be Rebellion."[58]

A similar responsibility rested upon the people subject to the illogical effrontery of the class system. "The man who believes there is a man in the world who is better than himself merely because he was born royal or noble, is a dog with a soul of a dog--and at bottom is a liar."[59] He is submitting to a condition of life of which he is both the creator

---

56. "Czar's Soliloquy," North American Review, CLXXX (March, 1905), 323-326.

57. King Leopold's Soliloquy, pp.33-36.

58. Ibid., p.207.

59. Ibid., p.202.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

and the victim. An enlightened Englishman admitted this fact in the American Claimant: "I think I realize that caste does not exist and cannot exist except by common consent of the masses outside of its limits. I thought caste created itself and perpetuated itself; but it seems quite true that it only creates itself, and is perpetuated by the people whom it despises, and who can dissolve it at any time by assuming its mere sign-names themselves."[60] The lucky few who hang onto the pleasant nests in which they were born are not to be blamed. Anyone would be an earl if he had the opportunity. The less fortunate have only themselves to censure for allowing the nests to exist.[61]

When Twain wrote Joan of Arc he felt that eventually the downtrodden would assert their strength: "I believe that some day it will be found out that peasants are people.... And I believe that some day they will find this out, too--and there! Well, then I think they will rise up and demand to be regarded as part of the race.... Our peasants are not merely animals, beasts of burden put here by the good God to produce food and comfort for the 'nation,' but something more and better."[62] By 1905, however, the seeming apathy of suppressed peoples, particularly in Russia, had destroyed much of the hope he had held for their relief. Conditions in the United States, moreover,--the mad rush for power and

---

60. P.97.

61. Ibid., p.130. In his sketch, "Does the Race of Man Love a Lord?" Twain argued that everyone envied the possessors of power and position, and loved anyone whose situation was higher than his own ($30,000 Bequest, pp.325-342).

62. II, 65-66.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

the blind exercise of the privileges attending its acquisition--moved him to doubt concerning the future of democracy in the new world. He began to predict the ultimate triumph of the old aristocratic form of government. He thought the signs of the coming monarchy were already evident, and he declared the facetious letter he had written Mrs. Clemens in 1874, in which he had pretended to be living in an Irish monarchial state in 1935, had contained something of a prophecy.[63] He had come to believe that the prediction would be realized for several reasons. One was that the nature of man made him want a definite something to worship and obey, such as a God or King. A second reason was that only small republics, protected by their poverty and insignificance, had managed to last long, since vast power and wealth bred commercial and political corruptions and incited public favorites to dangerous ambitions. The likelihood that the change would come to pass was materially strengthened by the great wealth of the United States.[64] He saw a ruling public and political hierarchy in the country which were already powerful enough to create a presidential succession, and he drew the usual analogy to Rome: "This country is not Rome in the days of the early Caesars," he wrote his daughter after one of his periodic returns to Suetonius, "but--there are resemblances.... In a hundred years there'll be a King roosting here. ... I already know the monarchy's ancestor, the same being the Republican Party; after which comes the Labor Party, and after it the

---

63. "'It seems curious now that I should have been dreaming dreams of a future monarchy and never suspect that the monarchy was already present and the Republic a thing of the past'" (Biography, I, 530).

64. Biography, II, 1467, 1533.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Monarchy."[65] His old fear of concentrated power was again finding expression, with the difference, according to Paine, that he no longer said these things bitterly but reflectively and rather indifferently.[64]

In 1906 or 1907 he wrote several chapters of a projected work, called variously Glances at History and Outlines of History, which purported to be ninth century versions of the fall of the Great Republic. Only two chapters were written, and both were suppressed along with other sketches developing the idea. De Voto has printed one of the short chapters as an example of this material; it represents little more than a variation of the point of view discussed above. The Republic was pictured as rotten to the heart. Imperialism had done its work thoroughly: "multitudes who had applauded the crushing of other people's liberties, lived to suffer for their mistake in their own persons. The government was irrevocably in the hands of the prodigiously rich and their hangers-on, the suffrage was become a mere machine, which they used as they chose. There was no principle but commercialism, no patriotism but of the pocket." The envy of neighboring aristocracies had caused the plutocrats to desire similar titles and heredities. The drift toward monarchy gained momentum. It was at this strategic point that a mysterious "Prodigy" rose in the far south, a shoemaker who led his armies northward. Although the Republic awoke to its danger and drove the money-changers out of the government, the reform came too late, for those money-changers had long before assured themselves of their power by buying up the allegiance of half the country and the armed forces with

---

65. Clara Clemens, My Father:Mark Twain, p.273.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

soldiers' pensions. In the end they even sold out to the shoemaker. "He conferred titles of nobility upon the money-changers, and mounted the republic's throne without firing a shot."[66] It is little wonder that a man as conscious of the blessings of democracy as Twain should have been depressed by the prospect of its being replaced by monarchy, a system which "has for its ends the degradation of the many to exalt the few...the cold and hunger and overworking of the useful that the useless may live in luxury and idleness."[67] That type of government represented for him an outdated state of culture, one which admired "a ring in your nose, a head full of feathers, and your belly painted blue."[68] Yet, in his opinion, the United States was destined for such an end, the great experiment was doomed to failure, if the all-powerful masses did not rise in their might to combat the forces threatening the democratic ideal.

Until Twain had come to hold these doubts relative to the survival of the democratic form of government, he had had considerable faith in the potential power of the suffrage to maintain and to improve the system. Although he himself became discouraged over the prospect of saving the Republic, his ideas on the suffrage may, nevertheless, represent what at one time he thought were the means of preventing the debacle.

It is another of the inconsistencies of Twain's political

---

66. "The Mark Twain Papers," Saturday Review of Literature, XIX, (December 10, 1938), 4.

67. Notebook, pp.196-197.

68. Ibid., p.210.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

criticism that he should have always favored some limitation of the right to vote and at the same time have insisted upon the fundamental equality of all. He began during his first visit to Honolulu by suggesting a property qualification for every voter. Having told how a king of the Kanakas had managed to control the electorate by granting the ballot only to those with property and money, Twain added that "he did a wise thing."[69] Several years later, when he went to England, he had occasion to praise the London plan for limiting the franchise to tax-payers. "There is no law here," he wrote, "which gives a useless idler the privilege of disposing of public moneys furnished by other people."[70] But it was when he reached Washington and saw the useless idlers in Congress disposing of the tax-payer's money, and heard of the incredible bribery and corruption of the people's representatives, that he really became concerned. He saw ruthless politicians manipulating the franchise to their own ends, thereby gaining power and creating an oligarchy. Insisting that in a democracy the citizenry held the fate of the government in their own hands, he set about making them conscious of their duty and privilege. For the period between the years 1872 and 1880 he was vitally interested in the problem of how to use the suffrage most intelligently and effectively.

In The Gilded Age he and Warner, who, it will be remembered, was also concerned over the problem, showed how unscrupulous politicians

---

69. Sacramento Union, June 23, 1866. Reprinted in Letters from the Sandwich Islands, p.81.

70. "Property in Opulent London," Number One, Mark Twain's Sketches, New York, 1874, p.28.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

directed the wishes of the public to their personal benefit. The voters themselves bore the brunt of the attacks, however. Twain blamed their indifference for the evils perpetrated under the system. He tried to make the intelligent, honest members of the electorate realize that their failure to go to the polls permitted ward bosses to seize control. He traced the career of Patrick O'Riley, an immigrant hodcarrier who became a rich political leader in New York, to demonstrate the consequences of the negligence of qualified voters. By staying at home on election day, they enabled the ward organizations to send their hand-picked delegates to the nominating convention, where they in turn made up a list of "incorruptibles" suitable to their purposes. "Then," Twain wrote, "the great meek public come forward at the proper time and make unhampered choice and bless Heaven that they live in a free land where no form of despotism can ever intrude."[71] When their trust was betrayed, however, as when Senator Dilworthy was exposed in trying to bribe an opponent, they were furious, not because "bribery was uncommon," Twain pointedly added, "but merely because here was another case. Perhaps it did not occur to the nation of good and worthy people that while they continued to sit comfortably at home and leave the true source of our political power (the 'primaries') in the hands of saloon-keepers, dog-fanciers, and hod-carriers, they could go on expecting 'another' case of this kind.... However, they may have thought that to sit at home and grumble would some day right the evil."[72]

---

71. Gilded Age, II, 18.

72. Ibid., II, 276-277.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The flaws in representative government, however, were not due to indifference alone. Emotionalism likewise contributed its impetus to the forces of degeneration.[73] Politics, like religion, Twain charged, was apparently a thing of the heart rather than the mind; it was dominated by emotion instead of reason. As he saw them, men did not want to know the other side of a political question, did not want facts or arguments for that other side. They were not interested in reasoning about the matter. They thought, mused, and reflected about it, rehearsed the statistics and comments supporting their point of view, and refused to consider differences of opinion. Twain decided they were incapable of doing anything else.[74] "Ignorance, intolerance, egotism, self-assertion, opaque perception, dense and pitiful chuckle-headedness--and an almost pathetic unconsciousness of it all.... It is of...this, that voters are made. And such is the primal source of our government! A man hardly knows whether to swear or cry over it."[75] Little wonder that government was composed of crooks. Colonel Sellers argued that it was to be expected, since "in a free country...where any man can run for Congress and anybody can vote for him...sixty or eighty or a hundred and fifty

---

73. Senator Dilworthy welcomed editorial denunciation of his thieving appropriation bill, because he knew that vigorous persecution frequently won support for an act. "Persecution," he told a companion," changes the tide of public opinion. The great public is weak-minded...sentimental.... The great putty-hearted public loves to 'gush,' and there is no such darling opportunity to gush as a case of persecution affords" (ibid., II, 119-120).

74. Notebook, p.307.

75. Letters, I, 289.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

are bound to get in who are not angels in disguise."[76] The Colonel found consolation in the existence of a very respectable minority of honest men among the lawmakers. Little wonder that Twain denounced the system "where a man like R. H. Dana can't be confirmed, and where a person like Jones, whose proper place is shyster in a Tombs court, is sent to the U. S. Senate; where it is impossible to reward the most illustrous and fittest citizen with the Presidency. "Look at the list," he added: "Polk, Tyler, Pierce, etc., and almost Tilden, with the suit pending for swindling the revenue. Half the nation voted for him."[77] The condition represented a dangerous debasement of the democratic principle.

In Twain's opinion, a third factor contributing to the enervation of the suffrage was the characteristic dual moral standard among American voters. It was suggested in the discussion of his religion that morality was essential to the cause of honest government. Yet he saw all about him evidence of the double-standard of moral conduct observed by Christians:

> There are two kinds of Christian morals, one private and the other public.... During three hundred and sixty-three days in the year the American citizen is true to his Christian private morals, and keeps undefiled the nation's character at its best and and highest; then in the other two days of the year he...carries his Christian public morals to the tax office and the polls, and does the best he can to damage and undo his whole year's faithful and righteous work. Without a blush he will vote for an unclean boss if that boss is his party's Moses.... Every year... he helps put corrupt men in office, whereas if he would but...

---

76. Gilded Age, II, 201.

77. Notebook, p.130.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> carry his Christian private morals to the polls, he could promptly purify the public service and make the possession of office a high and honorable distinction. 78

With the supposedly honest, moral, and upright citizens of the country so indifferent to their responsibility, it was to be expected that political bosses should control the government. The public's indifference was bad enough in itself, but when it fathered a general acceptance of the doctrine of strict party loyalties, it struck at the root of the democratic process. As we have seen in the discussion of Twain's concept of bad patriotism, he hated blind allegiance to a political group as the negation of the theory of universal suffrage and as an affront to the intelligent, open-minded, conscientious voter. He had defended his bolting from the Republican party on those grounds, had accused his friends who refused to turn Mugwump of disloyalty to the country; and he now showed clearly that he believed nothing would save democratic government if the electorate continued to follow the dictators of their public morality in marking the ballot.

In his distress over the misuse of the franchise, Twain first turned to women as potential saviors of democracy. He began in 1870 to inveigh against the stupid prejudice which kept them from voting in a land which boasted of universal suffrage and absolute equality:

---

78. "Taxes and Morals," Speeches, pp.276-277. In "A Mysterious Visit" Twain satirized the tax-dodgers by describing how a prominent and respected business man showed him the way to avoid paying income tax by simply padding the "deductions" and swearing falsely to fraud after fraud (Sketches, New and Old, pp.384-390).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

> All that we require of a voter is that he shall be forked, wear pantaloons instead of petticoats, and bear a more or less humorous resemblance to the reported image of God. He need not know anything whatever; he may be wholly useless and a cumberer of the earth; he may even be known to be a consummate scoundrel. No matter. While he can steer clear of the penitentiary his vote is as weighty as the vote of a president, a bishop, a college professor, a merchant prince. We brag of our universal, unrestricted suffrage; but we are shams after all, for we restrict when we come to the women. 79

A perfect civilization could only be built when there was the complete equality between the sexes which would permit women to vote on the side of morality against the political scum placed in power through the negligence of male voters.[80] Civilized people considered the suppression of one sex by the other as a mark of savagery; yet in the freest country in the world, Twain pointed out, the ballot was refused women on such absurd grounds as insistance that they could not go to the polls without being insulted. Democracy was being sacrificed to bigotry.

Because of this stupid discrimination Twain supported women in their temperance crusades during the 1870's. True he thought their method of picketing illegal when they congregated in and around rum shops to pray until the rum-sellers closed out of humiliation rather than conversion, yet he argued that the women were justified because they were "voiceless in the making of laws and the election of officers to execute them. Born

---

79. Biography, I, 541-542. Twain may have first become interested in the feminist movement as early as 1866, when he was reporting the activities of the numerous spiritualists in San Francisco. One medium, Laura Cuppy, drew her audiences by mixing spiritualism and pleas for a single standard for men and women. She headed a society calling itself the Friends of Progress, which Twain burlesqued in at least one of his articles (Walker, op. cit., p.119. Cf. also "Spiritual Insanity," pp.129-131).

80. Notebook, p.256.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

with brains, born in the country, educated, having large interests at stake they find their tongues tied and their hands fettered," he charged, "while every ignorant whisky-drinking foreign-born savage in the land may hold office, help to make the laws, degrade the dignity of the former and break the latter at his own sweet will."[81] He did not believe they could do much against intemperance in that fashion, but he hoped for an indirect yet greater benefit.

> I think it will suggest to more than one man that if women could vote they would vote on the side of morality... would not sit indolently at home as their husbands and brothers do now, but would...set up some candidates fit for decent human beings to vote for. I dearly want the women to be raised to the political altitude of the negro, the imported savage, and the pardoned thief, and allowed to vote. It is our last chance.... Both the great parties have failed. I wish we might have a woman's party now. [82]

---

81. "Temperance and Women's Rights," Europe and Elsewhere, p.27. Twain refused to countenance similar violations by the clergy of the laws of trespass, because he considered them free to act via the ballot. "It seems to me," he wrote, "that it would better become clergymen to teach their flocks to respect the laws of the land, and urge them to refrain from breaking them" (ibid., p.30).

82. Ibid., pp.29-30. He cited the performance of New Zealand women, upon being granted the suffrage, as proof of their active interest in politics and their right to have a place in government. Of eligible females 85.18 per cent voted and none of the prophesied disturbances occurred. "The prophets have been prophesying ever since the woman's rights movement began in 1848," Twain charged, "and in forty-seven years they have never scored a hit.... The women deserve a change of attitude...for they have wrought well. In forty-seven years they have swept an imposingly large number of unfair laws from the statute-books of America. In that brief time these serfs have set themselves free--essentially. Men could not have done so much for themselves in that time without bloodshed" (Following the Equator, II, 285-286).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

He cherished that hope for the rest of his life, confident that it would some day be realized. "If I should live twenty-five years longer," he said in 1901, "I think I'll see women handle the ballot."[83]

Co-existent with Twain's demand for an extension of the suffrage was his plan for limiting it on the basis of the voter's education and wealth. The idea was developed in an article entitled "The Curious Republic of Gondour," which appeared in the Atlantic for October, 1875. The republic was a Utopia in which it had been established that

> ...every citizen, howsoever poor or ignorant, possessed one vote, so universal suffrage still reigned; but if a man possessed a good common-school education and no money, he had two votes; a high-school education gave him four; if he had property likewise, to the value of three thousand sacos, he wielded one more vote; for every fifty thousand sacos a man added to his property, he was entitled to another vote; a university education entitled a man to nine votes even though he owned no property. [84]

The author went on to demonstrate the multiple benefits resulting from this practice. Learning became more prevalent, and educated men acted as a check upon the wealthy men, since they could outvote them. Furthermore, since learning usually went with uprightness, broad views, and humanity, the learned voters, possessing the balance of power, protected the lower ranks of society. These conditions led eventually to the establishment of a true Utopia: officials no longer stole, because their salaries were liberal enough to obviate the need; the country was governed by a ministry which resigned as the administration changed; the head of the state was elected for twenty years, but was subject to

---

83. "Votes for Women," Speeches, p.224.

84. The Curious Republic of Gondour, p.3. He also advocated educational tests for the negro vote (Notebook, p.65).

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

parliament; education meant power.[85] The suffrage finally produced the democratic institution possible among any free people.

Twain had not signed this contribution to the Atlantic, because he had been afraid that the public would refuse to accept it seriously over his name.[86] His general and lasting interest in the suffrage testifies to his sincere concern, and Howells urged him to send more reports from the model land. But Twain was off on another tangent, and did not return to the problem for almost a quarter of a century. One wonders if his sketch of the Republic of Gondour contributed anything to Howells's Altruria.

Twain's third and last plan for the effective use of the franchise in the cause of good government necessitated the creation of a new political party. He gave this idea an ingenious twist, however, which greatly enhanced its power and practicality. In the first place he did not make the usual mistake of third-party advocates and come to consider his organization a threat to the supremacy of the Democratic or Republican machines. He wisely realized that no reform group could hope to defeat either of the major parties without getting considerable help from one of them. Since the likelihood of ever receiving this support was slight, Twain worked out a scheme which eliminated that need. Starting with the premise that only one man in every fifty is crooked--or else the country would not exist--, he demonstrated how that one controlled politics by means of organization. Now if an additional faction could

---

85. The Curious Republic of Gondour, pp.5-11.

86. Biography, I, 555.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

obtain and keep the balance of power, it could throw out the crooked bosses by forcing the other two parties to nominate their very best men or face the "Casting Vote Party's" threat to defeat any candidate of which it did not approve. It could carry out its threat by securing enough members to nullify the majority of the winner of the last contest. Its purpose was not to elect its own candidates but to see to it that the Democrats and Republicans nominated only acceptable men. Thus, in a small election in which a thousand votes were cast with a majority of fifty for the winner, the casting voters would find it necessary to secure only seventy-five or one-hundred names in order to swing the election as they desired. Such control of the primaries would guarantee the selection of the right contestants:

> From constable up to President there is no office for which the two great Parties cannot furnish able, clean, and acceptable men. Whenever the balance of power shall be lodged in a permanent third party with no candidates of its own and no function but to cast its whole vote for the best man put forward by the Republicans and Democrats, these two parties will select the best men they have in their ranks. Good and clean government will follow. 87

Twain did not stop, moreover, with the bare outline here presented. He tackled the major difficulty of how to learn the mind of the party, and developed a logical, if somewhat improbable, conclusion. To facilitate the process, there should be lodges which would elect delegates to meet in secondary lodges, there to decide which candidate of the two parties they would support. Once a selection had been made the party would cast a unanimous vote, which would swing the elections as desired.

---

87. "Proposed Casting Vote Party," Europe and Elsewhere, pp.236-237.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Splits within the group itself were impossible, since willingness to accept the decision of the delegates constituted one of the conditions of membership.

The scheme, which was not printed during Twain's lifetime, for some unaccountable reason, represented his final hope of saving the state from its own citizenry. In his eagerness he urged his readers to begin a private canvass among his friends to enlist their support for a practical trial of the proposal. The need was desperate, he warned; everything was to be gained, for something had to be done. "If in the hands of men who regard their citizenship as a high trust this scheme shall fail upon trial, a better must be sought, a better must be invented; for it cannot be well or safe to let the present political conditions continue indefinitely. They can be improved, and American citizenship should rouse up from its disheartenment and see that it is done."[88]

Regardless of the workability of the plan itself, the spirit which conceived it and which permeated the above passage is indispensible to any fight for clean, efficient government. The comment is equally true of Twain's other theories about ways and means of improving the suffrage. Superficial as many of them are, they represent a sincere and conscientious effort to do what he could in the fullness of his little wisdom to purge democracy's ranks of the elements which threatened to destroy the institution itself.

---

88. Ibid., p.238.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

IV

CONCLUSION

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Conclusion

What conclusions are to be drawn from this analysis of Mark Twain's political and social criticism? What does this summary reveal concerning his point of view toward problems in these two fields and his methods of resolving them? In the first place, the record indicates graphically Mark Twain's limitations as a satirist. Although frequently sharp and sweeping, his attacks generally lacked the continuity and force of Swift's political strictures, the brilliance and intensity of Voltaire's philippics. Twain was too much the week-day preacher, too much the counterpart of Don Quixote, to be capable of the concentration of force essential to great satire. He understood the power of ridicule in the eradication of evil, and he could use it effectively for a limited period. His failure arose from his careless management of that power. He turned it against minor abuses even more readily than against major ones; his judgment, not his weapon, was at fault. The possessor of keen perceptive faculties, and of an exceptional capacity for fine indignation, he was at the same time handicapped by his inability to drive to the core of things. His criticism frequently resembled that of the average man venting his spleen on the obvious weaknesses of the system within which he lives. Twain saw more than his neighbor perhaps; he was certainly capable of greater scorn; but he was equally indiscriminate in his application of it. Side by side with his condemnation of false patriotism, hollow Christian morality, debasing political loyalties, imperialism, race prejudice, monarchies, and slaveries stood his diatribes against the minor irritations of life. He expended quite as much energy in his denunciation of impolite railway conductors as in his protests against

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

illogical and dangerous allegiances in political matters.

As it is summarized here, Twain's criticism seems to bulk large. After all, it might be asserted, if he offered critical opinions on so many important subjects, why should he not be considered a satirist or at least a sociologist? But the question ignores the relation of the body of Twain's satire to his work as a whole. He wrote a great deal, and his ideas and theories have to be culled from a mass of extraneous material. When read in the original context, they appear desultory and vague. The haphazard distribution deprives them of much of the vitality and sting they seem to possess when quoted here. They may still constitute satire, and as a result Twain is sometimes called a satirist; but they are not satire in the sense in which the term may be applied to the achievement and method of a Voltaire or a Swift. Twain's comments lack the depth, consistency, and power which mark important criticism. They are scattered examples of invective, sarcasm, and irony rather than great satire.

The attempt to credit Twain with being a sociologist, furthermore, involves a corresponding distortion of values. Henderson pointed to his artistic expression of his attitude toward slavery, to his plea for racial tolerance, to his diatribes against imperialism, to his attack on Christian Science, and concluded that "Mark Twain's supreme title to distinction as a great writer inheres in his natural, if not wholly conscious, mastery in that highest sphere of thought, embracing religion, philosophy, morality, and even humour, which we call sociology."[1]

---

1. Op.cit., p.200.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

This judgment is belied by the evidence of Twain's whole work. Brooks, on the other hand, distorts the same evidence in order to justify the opposite interpretation. He charges Twain with having understood the American people so ill as to predict that Christian Science would dominate their life by 1938 and that representative government would be replaced by monarchy in a generation after his death. For all his condemnation of imperialism and bloodshed, moreover, he divined hardly one of the social tendencies that culminated in the World War. His notebooks, Brooks contends, have "remarks on social, political and economic subjects...precisely of the sort one would expect from what is called the average man."[2] Obviously, Brooks has swung to the other extreme. It should be evident from the present discussion of Twain's views that he occasionally reflected in a way which was neither juvenile nor average on the problems of contemporary society. It is not necessary to agree with Brooks in order to refute Henderson.

The logical conclusion which one can draw from the evidence, it seems to me, is that Twain was a satirist in expression but not in penetration, and a sociologist in only the most superficial sense. He was rather a moralist than a sociologist; he was more emotional than rational, more sentimental than objective; he was more destructive than constructive in his attacks. No stricter characterization should be attempted. His very lack of discrimination prohibits a more rigid classification. With his whole soul he hated the mess people made of their lives. He sickened before man's inhumanity to man. What he wrote of

---

2. Op. cit., p.190.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

these things was sometimes effective and deserved to be considered satire of a high order; The Tsar's Soliloquy and Leopold's Soliloquy, along with portions of A Connecticut Yankee, and Following the Equator, merit such recognition. But he saw a great deal else of considerably lesser significance, and his pronouncements on it shadow his nobler utterances. In view of his achievements and his failures, his social and political criticism reveal that he was an average critic, endowed with some perceptivity but devoid of profundity, blessed with the ability to express his opinions but hampered by the lack of a faculty for objective discrimination.

To insist that Mark Twain was a great satirist or sociologist is, then, to ignore the evidence presented by his criticism. To assert, on the other hand, that he was neither, because he was frustrated by his wife, his friends, and the age itself, is to overlook the more plausible explanation contained in the character of his background, his training, and his temperament. Theorists who would use Twain's social and political opinions to support extreme judgments fail to understand the man and his material. He did the best that he could within the limitations of his own nature and training.

Mark Twain was no greater as a social and political satirist because he had neither the requisite intellectual capacity nor the compelling interest. He was not frustrated by external factors; he was handicapped by internal forces. Intellectually, he was the product of his life on the river and in the mining camps and printing offices of the West rather than of his associations in New England. By the time he settled in the East his thought-molds were somewhat hardened. Although

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

he continued to grow mentally and to gather the ideas offered by a new and broader environment, he was limited in his application of them by the character of his intellectual perceptivity and inclination. The truth of this observation is apparent in his relationship with Howells and Warner and in the use he made of his reading. He was not thwarted by those two intimate friends. They went further and deeper than he in their social pronouncements. Their example should have afforded him inspiration and encouragement, but he was incapable of emulating them in that particular field of thought. Endowed with a capricious and volatile emotionalism; devoid of an adequate formal education, which might have served to guide and to stabilize his naturally keen and active mind; trained in a school of reporting which stressed objectivity, humour, effectiveness of presentation, and fact, rather than truth, profundity, reasonableness, or theory; cast into the vortex of an age whose superficialities hid its deeper evils from sharper eyes than his, Mark Twain's failure to become a Jonathan Swift is understandable and less remarkable than his success in seeing, despite these handicaps, some of the evils of the social and political system. If he failed to become a social critic for any one reason, that reason is to be found in his training in the newspaper offices of the West and not in the tyranny over him of Calvin, Olivia Langdon, or the Genteel Tradition. His weakness in the field of social and political satire was attributable to his inability to distinguish between the origins of social evils and their manifestations, and his incapacity for philosophical reasoning. He could not see the woods for the trees, and he dissipated so much of his energy in hacking at the underbrush that the

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

giants of the forest remained untouched. If, then, poetic justice must be served, the critics would do well not to censure John Calvin, Olivia Langdon, and William Dean Howells, but rather those Fates which controlled Mark Twain in his extensive wanderings during the formative years of his life.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I

PRIMARY SOURCES

A.

Bibliography

Johnson, Merle. A Bibliography of the Works of Mark Twain. Revised and Enlarged. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1935.

B.

Writings of Mark Twain

1.

The Author's National Edition of the Writings of Mark Twain consists of the following volumes, published by Harper & Brothers, New York, under various imprints:

The Innocents Abroad, 2 vols.

A Tramp Abroard, 2 vols.

Following the Equator, 2 vols.

Roughing It, 2 vols.

Life on the Mississippi

The Gilded Age (with Charles Dudley Warner), 2 vols.

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

Pudd'nhead Wilson and Those Extraordinary Twins

The Prince and the Pauper

A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court

Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc, 2 vols.

Sketches New and Old

Tom Sawyer Abroad, Tom Sawyer Detective, and other Stories.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

The American Claimant

Literary Essays

The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg and other Essays and Stories

The $30,000 Bequest and Other Stories

Christian Science

2.

The following volumes contain material not included in the Author's National Edition

Adventures of Thomas Jefferson Snodgrass. Edited by Charles Honce, with a Foreword by Vincent Starrett and a Note on "A Celebrated Village Idiot" [Orion Clemens] by James O'Donnell Bennett. Chicago: Pascal Covici, 1928.

The Choice Humorous Works of Mark Twain [etc.]. London: Chatto & Windus, 1922.

A Curious Dream: and Other Sketches. London: George Routledge and Sons, 1872.

The Curious Republic of Gondour and Other Whimsical Sketches. New York: Boni & Liveright, 1919.

Europe and Elsewhere. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1923.

King Leopold's Soliloquy: A Defense of his Congo Rule. Boston: P.R. Warren Co., 1905.

Letters from the Sandwich Islands. Written for the Sacramento Union by Mark Twain. Introduction & Conclusion by G. Ezra Dane. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1938.

Mark Twain's Notebook. Prepared for Publication with Comments by Albert Bigelow Paine. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1935.

The Mysterious Stranger and Other Stories. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1922.

Number One. Mark Twain's Sketches. New York: American News Co., 1874.

Screamers [etc.]. London: John Camden Hotten, 1871.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Sketches of the Sixties. By Bret Harte and Mark Twain. Being forgotten material now collected for the first time from The Californian 1864-1867. San Francisco: John Howell, 1927.

The Washoe Giant in San Francisco. Being heretofore uncollected sketches by Mark Twain published in The Golden Era in the Sixties [etc.]. Collected and edited, with an Introduction by Franklin Walker. San Francisco: George Fields, 1938.

What Is Man? and Other Essays. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1917.

3.

The following magazine articles have not been taken up in a collection.

"The Czar's Soliloquy." North American Review, CLXXX (March, 1905), 321-326.

"A Defense of General Funston." North American Review, CLXXIV (May, 1902), 613-624.

C.

Autobiography

Mark Twain's Autobiography. With an Introduction by Albert Bigelow Paine. 4 volumes in 2. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1924.

Mark Twain's (Burlesque) Autobiography. Larchmont: Peter Pauper Press, 1930.

D.

Letters

Mark Twain's Letters. Arranged with Comment by Albert Bigelow Paine. 2 vols. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1917.

Mark Twain the Letter Writer. Compiled with Comment by Cyril Clemens. Boston: Meador Publishing Co., 1937.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

E.

Speeches

Mark Twain's Speeches. With an Introduction by William Dean Howells. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1910.

Mark Twain's Speeches. With an Introduction by Albert Bigelow Paine and an Appreciation by William Dean Howells. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1923.

F.

The Authorized Biography

Paine, Albert Bigelow. Mark Twain: A Biography. The Personal and Literary Life of Samuel Langhorne Clemens. 2 vols. Centenary Edition. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1935.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

II

SUPPLEMENTARY SOURCES

A.

Chief Biographical and Critical Works

Benson, Ivon, Mark Twain's Western Years. Together with hitherto unreprinted Clemens Western Items. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1938.

-----The Western Development of Mark Twain. Thesis, Ph. D., University of Southern California, 1937.

Brashear, Minnie M., Formative Influences in the Mind and Writings of Mark Twain. Thesis, Ph. D., University of North Carolina, 1930.

-----Mark Twain:Son of Missouri. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1934.

Brooks, Van Wyck. The Ordeal of Mark Twain. New and Revised Edition. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1933.

Clemens, Clara, My Father Mark Twain. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1931.

Clemens, Cyril. Cf. "Primary Sources, D."

Dane, Ezra. Cf. "Primary Sources, B, 2."

De Voto, Bernard, Mark Twain's America. Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1935.

Henderson, Archibald, Mark Twain. New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co., 1912.

Howell, John. Cf. "Primary Sources, B, 2."

Howells, William Dean, My Mark Twain. Reminiscences and Criticism. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1910.

Lawton, Mary. A Lifetime with Mark Twain. The memories of Katy Leary, for thirty years his faithful and devoted servant. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1925.

Leacock, Stephen, Mark Twain. New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1935.

Masters, Edgar Lee, Mark Twain, a Portrait. New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1938.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Wagenknecht, Edward, Mark Twain: The Man and His Work. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935.

Walker, Franklin. Cf. "Primary Sources, B, 2."

B.

Additional Material Used in This Study

Armstrong, C. J. "Mark Twain's Early Writings Discovered." Missouri Historical Review, XXIV (July, 1930), 485-501.

Barr, Robert. "Samuel L. Clemens, 'Mark Twain,' A Character Sketch." McClure's Magazine, (January, 1898), 246-251.

Campbell, Oscar James, "Twain Versus Clemens," 1936 Essay Annual. Edited by Erich A. Walter. New York: Scott, Foresman & Co.

Carlyle, Thomas. The French Revolution: A History. 3 vols. Volumes 2-4 of Centenary Edition of The Works of Thomas Carlyle. Edited by H. D. Traill. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896-1901.

Clemens, Cyril. "The True Character of Mark Twain's Wife." Missouri Historical Review, XXIV (1929), 40-49.

De Voto, Bernard. "Mark Twain and the Genteel Tradition": Harvard Graduate Magazine, XL (December, 1931), 155-163.

-----"The Mark Twain Papers," Saturday Review of Literature, XIX (December 10, 1938), pp.3-4, 14-15.

Eastman, Max. "Mark Twain's Elmira." Harper's Magazine, CLXXVI (May, 1938), 620-632.

Fields, Mrs. J. R. "Bret Harte and Mark Twain in the Seventies." Atlantic Monthly, CXXX (September, 1922), 341-348.

Greenslet, Ferris. The Life of Thomas Bailey Aldrich. Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1908.

Hannibal Evening Courier-Post, March 6, 1935. Centennial Edition.

Hicks, Granville. The Great Tradition. New York: MacMillan, 1933.

Hingston, Edward P. xThe Genial Showman. 2 vols. London: John Camden Hotten, 1870.

Howells, Mildred. ed. Life in Letters of William Dean Howells. 2 vols. Garden City: Doubleday, Doran & Co., 1928.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Howells, William Dean, A Hazard of New Fortunes, 2 vols. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1889.

-----My Literary Passions. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1895.

Josephson, Matthew. The Robber Barons. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1934.

Leacock, Stephen. "Two Humorists:Charles Dickens and Mark Twain." The Yale Review, XXIV (September, 1934), pp.118-129.

Lecky, William E. H. History of European Morals from Augustus to Charlemagne. Authorized Copyright Edition. London: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1913.

Leisy, E. E. "Mark Twain's Part in The Gilded Age." American Literature, VIII (January, 1937), 445-447.

Lyman, George D. The Saga of the Comstock Lode:Boom Days in Virginia City. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1934.

"Mark Twain, American Citizen," Nation, LXXI (November 29, 1900), 419-420.

Moore, O. H. "Mark Twain and Don Quixote." Publication of Modern Language Association. XXXVII (June, 1922), 324-346.

Mumford, Lewis. The Golden Day:A Study in American Experience and Culture. Boni & Liveright, 1926.

O'Higgins, Harvey and Edward N. Reede. The American Mind in Action. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1924.

Parrington, Vernon L. The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America. New York, Harcourt, Brace, & Co., 1930.

Sherman, Stuart P. On Contemporary Literature. New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1917.

Taylor, Coley B. Mark Twain's Margins on Thackeray's "Swift." New York: Gotham House, 1935.

Taylor, Walter F. "On the Origin of Howells' Interest in Economic Reform." American Literature, II (March, 1930), pp.3-14.

-----"That Gilded Age." Sewanee Review, XLV (January-March, 1937), 41-54.

Ticknor, Caroline. "Mark Twain's Missing Chapter." Bookman, XXXIX (May, 1914), 298-309.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

Waggoner, H. W. "Science in the Thought of Mark Twain." American Literature, VIII (January, 1937), 357-370.

Wallace, Elizabeth. Mark Twain and the Happy Isle. Chicago: A. C. McClurg & Co., 1913.

Webster, Doris and Samuel. "Whitewashing Jane Clemens." Bookman, LXI (July, 1925), 531-535.

West, Willis M. American History and Government. New York: Allyn & Bacon, 1913.

White, Frank Marshall. "Mark Twain as a Newspaper Reporter." Outlook, XCVI (December 24, 1910), 961-967.

The Complete Writings of Charles Dudley Warner. Edited by Thomas R. Lounsbury. Hartford: The American Publishing Co., 1904.

The Writings of Thomas Paine. 4 vols. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1896.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.