MARK TWAIN AS A LITERARY CRITIC

APPROVED:

M. J. Shockley
Major Professor

Paul A. Arnold
Minor Professor

J. L. Blanton
Director of the Department of English

Jack Johnson
Dean of the Graduate School
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Lucy Craddock Jones, B. A.

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PREFACE

It is curious that few of those who have written about Mark Twain have called attention to any of the essays and the letters in which he himself discussed the art of writing or assumed the role of a literary critic. It is the purpose of this paper to present some of these writings and to call to the mind of the reader this phase of Mark Twain's ability which has been neglected. Mark Twain's ventures into literary criticism are not many. But they are significant.

The Definitive Edition of Mark Twain's works was used for the study with a very few references to secondary sources.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Who has said that Mark Twain was a literary critic? Perhaps no one would have said it while Twain lived, for he had a violent and uncontrolled temper. Perhaps if one should search diligently in the libraries of this country and read voraciously on literary criticism, he would find no treatise wherein Mark Twain was called one of America's greater or lesser literary critics; but unconsciously, he was a literary critic and a most unusual one. Certainly he would not rank with Poe, Emerson, Lowell, or Whitman, for he was as individual in this field as he was in his sealskin coat and his white serge suit!

The cultured H. L. Mencken might have guffawed at the imbecility of anyone's calling Mark Twain a literary critic as he, with finality, expressed himself on this issue in "Puritanism As a Literary Force."

... In the presence of all beauty of man's creation—in brief, of what we really call art, whatever its form—the voice of Mark Twain was the voice of the Philistine. A literary artist of very high rank himself with instinctive gifts that lifted him, in Huckleberry Finn, to kinship with Cervantes and Aristophanes, he was yet so far the victim of his nationality that he seems to have had no capacity for
distinguishing between the good and the bad in the work of other men of his own craft. The literary criticism that one occasionally finds in his writings is chiefly trivial and ignorant; his private inclination appears to have been toward such romantic sentimentality as entrances school-boys; the thing that interested him in Shakespeare was not the man's colossal genius, but the absurd theory that Bacon wrote his plays. ¹

As Pudd'nhead Wilson's Calendar quipped: "It were not best that we should all think alike; it is difference of opinion that makes horse-races."²

How did Mark Twain feel about critics? When he and Charles Dudley Warner were bringing out The Gilded Age, an editor of the Daily Graphic persuaded Twain to let him have an advance copy. For this privilege the editor promised to withhold his review until the Atlantic review had come out. Untrue to his promise, this editor published a review three days after the manuscript came into his possession. In this scathing review the editor accused Mark Twain of allowing Warner to write over half the book and then using Twain's name to float it. In other words, he accused Twain of swindling the public. Many prominent papers followed suit in the accusation—even the Chicago Tribune.³ Mark Twain blurted forth his resentment:

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¹H. L. Mencken, A Book of Prefaces, p. 204.

²Samuel L. Clemens, The Writings of Mark Twain, Definitive Edition (37 vols.), XVI, 164. (Hereinafter referred to as Works.)

³Works, XXXVII, 70.
I believe that the trade of critic, in literature, music, and the drama, is the most degraded of all trades, and that it has no real value—certainly no large value. ... It is the will of God that we must have critics, and missionaries, and congressmen, and humorists, and we must bear the burden. 4

Mark Twain considered the average critic a mere parrot—

... In the matter of slavish imitation, 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. A generation ago, I found out that the latest review of a book was pretty sure to be just a reflection of the earliest review of it. That whatever the first reviewer found to praise or censure in the book would be repeated in the latest reviewer's report, with nothing fresh added. Therefore, more than once I took the precaution of sending my book, in manuscript, to Mr. Howells, when he was editor of the Atlantic Monthly, so that he could prepare a review of it at leisure. I knew he would say the truth about the book—I also knew that he would find more merit than demerit in it, because I already knew that that was the condition of the book. I allowed no copy of that book to go out to the press until after Mr. Howells's notice of it had appeared. That book was always safe. There wasn't a man behind a pen in all America that had the courage to find anything in the book which Mr. Howells had not found—there wasn't a man behind a pen in America that had spirit enough to say a brave and original thing about the book on his own responsibility. 5

In talking with his conscience in "Crime Carnival in Connecticut," Twain said:

"I told the girl in the kindest, gentlest way, that I could not consent to deliver judgment upon any one's


5Ibid., pp. 68-69.
manuscript, because an individual's verdict was worthless. It might underrate a work of high merit and lose it to the world, or it might overrate a trashy production and so open the way for its infliction upon the world. I said that the great public was the only tribunal competent to sit in judgment upon a literary effort, and therefore it must be best to lay it before that tribunal in the outset, since in the end it must stand or fall by that mighty court's decision anyway.6

Yes, Susy, Mark Twain's fourteen-year-old daughter, was absolutely right when she made the first entry in 1885 in her charming biography:

We are a very happy family. We consist of Papa, Mamma, Jean, Clara, and me. It is papa I am writing about, and I shall have no trouble in not knowing what to say about him, as he is a very striking character.7

Concerning A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, Twain wrote to Howells:

I'm not writing for those parties who miscall themselves critics, and I don't care to have them paw the book at all. It's my swan song, my retirement from literature permanently, and I wish to pass to the cemetery unclodded . . . 8

Mark Twain's pen "warmed up in hell"9 was too hot for satire, as he himself acknowledged in a letter to Howells from Rome in 1878.

I wish I could give those sharp satires on European life which you mention, but of course a man can't write successful satire except he be in a calm, judicial good-humor;

6Works, XIX, 307.
7Works, XXXVII, 68.
8Works, XXXII, 889.
9Ibid., p. 889.
whereas I hate travel, and I hate hotels, and I hate the opera, and I hate the old masters. In truth, I don't ever seem to be in a good-enough humor with anything to satirize it. No, I want to stand up before it and curse it and foam at the mouth, or take a club and pound it to rags and pulp. I have got in two or three chapters about Wagner's operas, and managed to do it without showing temper, but the strain of another such effort would burst me. 10

Perhaps Mark Twain's letter to Andrew Lang in London in 1889 expressed more completely his opinion of critics than anything else he wrote. One page of it is missing, but the meaning is not lost.

The little child is permitted to label its drawings "This is a cow—this is a horse," and so on. This protects the child. It saves it from the sorrow and wrong of hearing its cows and its horses criticized as kangaroos and work-benches. A man who is white-washing a fence is doing a useful thing, so also is the man who is adorning a rich man's house with costly frescoes; and all of us are sane enough to judge these performances by standards proper to each. Now, then, to be fair, an author ought to be allowed to put upon his book an explanatory line: "This is written for the Head; "This is written for the Belly and the Members." And the critic ought to hold himself in honor bound to put away from him his ancient habit of judging all books by one standard, and thenceforth follow a fairer course.

The critic assumes, every time, that if a book doesn't meet the cultivated-class standard, it isn't valuable. Let us apply this law all around: for if it is sound in the case of novels, narratives, pictures, and such things, it is certainly sound and applicable to all the steps which lead up to culture and make culture possible. It condemns the spelling book, for a spelling book is of no use to a person of culture; it condemns all school books and all schools which lie between the child's primer and Greek, and between the infant school and the university; it condemns all the rounds of art which lie between the cheap terra cotta

groups and the Venus de Medici, and between the chromo and the Transfiguration; it requires Whitcomb Riley to sing no more till he can sing like Shakespeare, and it forbids all amateur music and will grant its sanction to nothing below the "classic." 

If a critic should start a religion it would not have any object but to convert angels: and they wouldn't need it. 11

These excerpts from Mark Twain's explosions concerning critics are only a few representative ones, but they prove that he would not have relished the idea of being called a literary critic.

11 Works, XXXV, 525-527.
CHAPTER II

HIS EQUIPMENT FOR LITERARY CRITICISM

Was Mark Twain equipped for literary criticism? What native attributes did he possess? What education had he? Who were his influential literary acquaintances? How extensive and of what nature was his reading? These are the qualities which a critic should possess, according to Norman Foerster, author of American Criticism.

Let us begin with Mark Twain's equipment for literary criticism. This equipment included first and foremost a humorous originality, something with which few authors are gifted. The following bits of literary criticism one remembers a long time:

My books are water; those of the great geniuses are wine. Everybody drinks water;¹ [and] a successful book is not made of what is in it, but what is left out of it.²

Concerning the court circular in A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court he said:

... As a rule the grammar was leaky and the construction more or less lame; but I did not much minding these things. They are common defects of my own, and one mustn't

¹Mark Twain's Notebook, edited by A. B. Paine, p. 196.
²Works, XXXV, 644.
criticize other people on grounds where he can't stand perpendicular himself. ³

Mark Twain's Notice in the beginning of Huckleberry Finn is unexcelled for cleverness and originality:

**NOTICE**

Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot. ⁴

Sometime in 1875 he made a speech at an old spelling-bee, given at the Asylum Hill Church. As usual, the talk was breezy and charming and ran like this:

I don't see any use in spelling a word right—and never did. I mean I don't see any use in having a uniform and arbitrary way of spelling words. We might as well make all clothes alike and cook all dishes alike. Sameness is tiresome; variety is pleasing. I have a correspondent whose letters are always a refreshment to me; there is such a breezy, unfettered originality about his orthography. He always spells "kow" with a large "K." Now that is just as good as to spell it with a small one. It is better. It gives the imagination a broader field, a wider scope. It suggests to the mind a grand, vague, impressive new kind of a cow. ⁵

In Following the Equator Mark Twain said: "... My own luck has been curious all my literary life; I never could tell a lie that anybody would doubt, nor a truth that anybody would believe." ⁶

³ Works, XIV, 260.
⁴ Works, XIII, Introduction, xix.
⁵ Works, XXXI, 541.
⁶ Works, XXI, 287.
At a Savage Club dinner in 1907 he wittily alluded to the honorary degree which Oxford University had bestowed upon him.

I am not one of those who in expressing opinions confine themselves to facts. I don't know anything that mars good literature so completely as too much truth. Facts contain a deal of poetry, but you can't use too many of them without damaging your literature. I love all literature, and as long as I am a doctor of literature—I have suggested to you for twenty years I have been diligently trying to improve my own literature, and now, by virtue of the University of Oxford, I mean to doctor everybody else's. 7

The borrowed quip of Mark Twain about the "classic" has become as well-worn as the one about the "weather," but it is always worth repeating:

Professor Winchester also said something about there being no modern epics like Paradise Lost. I guess he's right. He talked as if he was pretty familiar with that piece of literary work, and nobody would suppose that he had never read it. I don't believe any of you have ever read Paradise Lost, and you don't want to. That's something that you just want to take on trust. It's a classic, just as Professor Winchester says, and it meets his definition of a classic—something that everybody wants to have read and nobody wants to read. 8

Mark Twain later put this borrowed adage in Pudd'nhead Wilson's Calendar as: "'Classic.' A book which people praise and don't read." 9

Once Mark Twain received a letter from a gentleman in Buffalo, and he had enclosed an incomplete list of the world's "One Hundred

7Works, XXVIII, 354.
9Works, XX, 220.
Greatest Men"—men who had exerted "the largest visible influence on the life and activities of the race." The man asked that Mark Twain carefully examine that list and suggest some more names. In the letter which he wrote to Twain he asked, "Would you include Jesus, the founder of Christianity, in the list?"

Twain added several names to the list: Alexander Graham Bell, Thomas Paine, and Thomas A. Edison. He answered the letter:

I like your list.
The "largest visible influence."
These terms require you to add Jesus. And they doubly and trebly require you to add Satan. . . .

American literature without all the pleasurable hours of reading that Mark Twain has given us would indeed be undernourished. He has been the comedy which came to relieve the monotony of a much too serious movie of life. We often find ourselves saying, "As Mark Twain said . . . "

Accepting as true that Mark Twain was well equipped with one of the necessary tools of criticism, humorous originality, let us now consider his education.

The matter of the value of Mark Twain's lack of formal education has been a controversial question. Certainly one would think that the average literary critic would need to be formally educated, or, perhaps, scholarly. Mark Twain was neither.

10 Works, XXXV, 817.
Susy, again in her biography, tells us about Papa:

Grandma couldn't make papa go to school; so she let him go into a printing-office to learn the trade. He did so, and gradually picked up enough education to enable him to do about as well as those who were more studious in early life.  

Paine agreed with Susy.

. . . 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.

We do not mean to infer that Mark Twain was an ignoramus—not by any means. Very early in his life when he was a pilot on the Mississippi River, he began the study of French. He passed by a school of languages where three tongues, French, German, and Italian, were taught. Each language was taught in a separate room, and the course was fairly expensive: twenty-five dollars for one language, or three for fifty dollars. Each student was given a set of cards for each language, and he was supposed to go from one room to the other, changing tongues at the threshold. Mark Twain enthusiastically took all three to start with but wound up with French. He bought some books and did individual study. Evidently he worked sincerely, for the

11 Works, XXXVII, 92.
12 Works, XXX, 219.
river notebook contains a French exercise, all neatly written, and it is from the Dialogues of Voltaire.  

Mark Twain's school-days were brief for several reasons. His father died when Mark was only twelve years of age. Besides, the Mississippi River and the bustling life there interested the adventurous Mark much more than the dull schoolroom.

A good description of the pioneer Missouri school he gave in The Gilded Age:

... The children were put to school; at least, 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. . . .

School days over, Mark Twain began his real education by working as a printer on the Hannibal Courier. Later, he worked for Orion, his brother, whom he later described as "as good and ridiculous a soul as ever was." One could write a small volume and not tell all the screamingly funny things that Mark Twain said about Orion.

From Hannibal Mark Twain went to work on the St. Louis Evening News. He lived with a Pavey family, and his roommate was Frank E.

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13 Ibid., p. 151.

14 Works, V, 47.

15 Works, XXXIV, 347.
Burrough. He described him as a journeyman chairmaker with a
taste for Dickens, Thackeray, Scott, and Disraeli. 16 The boys were
comrades and close friends.

Later on, he secured work at his trade in Cincinnati at the print-
ing-office of Wrightson and Company, and he remained there until
April, 1857. That winter in Cincinnati was eventless enough, but it
was marked by one notable association—one that beyond doubt for-
warded Mark Twain's general interest in books, influenced his taste,
and inspired in him certain views and philosophies which he never for-
got. 17

He lodged at a cheap boarding house filled with the usual common-
place people, with one exception. This exception was a long, lank,
unsmiling Scotchman named Macfarlane. 18

Macfarlane had books, serious books: histories, philosophies,
and scientific works; also a Bible and a dictionary. He had studied
these and knew them by heart; he was a direct and diligent talker. He
never talked of himself, and beyond the statement that he had acquired
his knowledge from reading, and not at school, his personality was a
mystery. 19

16 Works, XXX, 103.
17 Ibid., p. 114.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
Mark Twain learned that Macfarlane was a veritable storehouse of abstruse knowledge, a living dictionary, a thinker, and a philosopher. A. B. Paine says of this friendship:

They were long, fermenting discourses that young Samuel Clemens listened to that winter in Macfarlane's room, and those who knew the real Mark Twain and his philosophies will recognize that those evenings left their impress upon him for life.  

In the first volume of his autobiography Mark Twain told some interesting things about Macfarlane:

He said that man's heart was the only bad heart in the animal kingdom; that man was the only animal capable of feeling malice, envy, vindictiveness, revengefulness, hatred, selfishness, the only animal that loved drunkenness, almost the only animal that could endure personal uncleanliness and a filthy habitation, the sole animal in whom was fully developed the base instinct called patriotism, the sole animal that robs, persecutes, oppresses, and kills members of his own immediate tribe, the sole animal that steals and enslaves the members of any tribe.

He claimed that man's intellect was a brutal addition to him and degraded him to a rank far below the plane of the other animals, and that there was never a man who did not use his intellect daily all his life to advantage himself at other people's expense. . . .

One of Twain's first associations with a literary person was in Virginia City in 1863. He was working on the staff of the Enterprise

21 Ibid., p. 115.
22 Works, XXXVI, 146-147.
when Artemus Ward (Charles F. Browne) came to the city on a lecture tour. Ward had planned to stay only a few days, but he remained three weeks. The office of the Enterprise was his headquarters. He and Mark Twain became companions. 23

These were three memorable weeks in Mark Twain's life. Artemus Ward was in the height of his fame, and he encouraged his new-found brother-humorist and prophesied great things of him. Clemens, on his side, measured himself by this man who had achieved fame, and perhaps with good reason concluded that Ward's estimate was correct, that he too could win fame and honor, once he got a start. If he had lacked ambition before Ward's visit, the latter's unqualified approval inspired him with that priceless article of equipment. . . . 24

Years later Twain built one of his famous literary essays, "How To Tell a Story," around Artemus Ward.

During his stay in California, Twain met Bret Harte. Harte was twenty-four years old at the time, and he had already received some literary notice. The two men liked each other and found that they had much in common. When Harte was made editor of The Californian, he put Mark Twain on the weekly staff.

Both Twain and Harte were beginning their literary careers when they met. They had had a little success in their writing, but neither had found his true medium of expression. Mark Twain revealed his first impression of Harte's writing in a letter to his family:

23 Works, XXX, 239.
24 Ibid., pp. 239-240.
Though I am generally placed at the head of my breed of scribblers in this part of the country, the place properly belongs to Bret Harte, I think, though he denies it, along with the rest. He wants me to club a lot of old sketches together with a lot of his, and publish a book. . . .

In the fall of 1876 Harte came to Hartford and collaborated with Mark Twain on the play _Ah Sin_, a comedy-drama, or melodrama, written for Charles T. Parsloe, the great impersonator of Chinese character. Harte had written a successful play, but he had sold it outright for no great sum and was eager for another venture. He had the dramatic sense and the constructive genius. He also had humor, but he felt he needed the sort of humor that Mark Twain could furnish.

The eventual production of the play caused friction between the two men (a story too long to discuss here), and there came a complete break in their friendship.

In a letter to Thomas Bailey Aldrich in 1871, Twain referred to their break:

But I did hate to be accused of plagiarizing Bret Harte, who trimmed and trained and schooled me patiently until he changed me from an awkward utterer of coarse grotesquenesses to a writer of paragraphs and chapters that have found a certain favor in the eyes of even some of the very decentest people in the land—and this grateful remembrance of mine ought to be worth its face, seeing that Bret broke our long friendship a year ago without any cause or provocation that I am aware of.

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25Ibid., p. 280.

26Works, XXXI, 587.

27Works, XXXIV, 162.
By 1875 Twain was not so liberal toward Harte. In a letter to William Dean Howells, he had changed his mind altogether about Bret Harte's influence on him.

Herewith is the proof. In spite of myself, how awkwardly I do jumble words together; and how often I do use three words where one would answer—a thing I am always trying to guard against. I shall become as slovenly a writer as Charles Francis Adams, if I don't look out. (That is said in jest; because of course I do not seriously fear getting so bad as that. I never shall drop so far toward his and Bret Harte's level as to catch myself saying "It must have been wiser to have believed that he might have accomplished it if he could have felt that he would have been supported by those who should have, &c. &c. &c.) The reference to Bret Harte reminds me that I often accuse him of being a deliberate imitator of Dickens. . . .

Of course, the pot finally boiled over and he seared Bret Harte a dark brown:

Edward Everett Hale wrote a book which made a great and pathetic sensation when it issued from the press in the lurid days when the Civil War was about to break out and the North and the South were crouched for a spring at each other's throats. It was called The Man Without a Country. Harte, in a mild and colorless way, was that kind of a man—that is to say, he was a man without a country; no, not man—man is too strong a term; he was an invertebrate without a country. He hadn't any more passion for his country than an oyster has for its bed; in fact, not so much, and I apologize to the oyster. The higher passions were left out of Harte; what he knew about them he got from books.

Mark Twain became acquainted with Thomas Bailey Aldrich in about 1870. They were never very close friends, for Mark Twain did

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28 Ibid., pp. 266-267.

29 Mark Twain in Eruption, edited by Bernard DeVoto, p. 286.
not like Mrs. Aldrich. He never could justify her idea for an Aldrich
Memorial Museum at Portsmouth, New Hampshire. He explained his
aversion for her in these words:

For the protection of the reader I must confess that
I am perhaps prejudiced. It is possible that I would never
be able to see anything creditable in anything Mrs. Aldrich
might do. I conceived an aversion for her the first time I
ever saw her, which was thirty-nine years ago, and that
aversion has remained with me ever since. She was one
of those people who are profusely affectionate, and whose
demonstrations disorder your stomach. You never believe
in them; you always regard them as fictions, artificialities,
with a selfish motive back of them. Aldrich was delightful
company, but we never saw a great deal of him because we
couldn't have him by himself.  

Mark Twain considered Thomas Bailey Aldrich excellent com-
pany. In a conversation with Robert L. Stevenson he once remarked:

"Aldrich has never had his peer for prompt and pithy
and witty and humorous sayings. None has equaled him,
certainly none has surpassed him, in the felicity of phrasing
with which he clothed these children of his fancy. Aldrich
was always brilliant, he couldn't help it; he is a fire opal
set round with rose diamonds; when he is not speaking,
you know that his dainty fancies are twinkling and glim-
mering around in him; when he speaks the diamonds flash.
Yes, he was always brilliant; he will always be brilliant;
he will be brilliant in hell—you will see."

Stevenson, smiling a chuckly smile said, "I hope
not."  

Charles Dudley Warner went to Hartford in 1860; he had pub-
lished Book of Eloquence in 1853 and some of his essays had appeared

30ibid., pp. 294-295.

31Works, XXXVI, 247-248.
in *Putnam's Magazine*. The Warners were members of the active, intelligent group which the Twains had joined in Hartford. The two families became very close, and they did much entertaining together. On a challenge from their wives, Mark Twain and Charles Warner wrote *The Gilded Age*. It seemed that he and Warner had been discussing the current novels with some severity, and their wives challenged them to "write a better one." Clemens had a story in his mind, and Warner agreed to collaborate. They began without delay. Clemens wrote the first three hundred and ninety-nine pages, and read them aloud to Warner, who took up the story at this point and continued it through twelve chapters, after which they worked alternately, with great enjoyment.

The idea of the book was to show how speculation fever united the destinies and warped the lives of men. Warner and Twain failed because they had so much plot that it kept getting in the way of the theme, and because they lacked a sense of proportion in their satire. However, the book was an immediate success despite its weaknesses.

Some of Warner's best work was done in the field of criticism. As a critic he considered literature an opportunity to understand society (an idea similar to Twain's). Warner does not make a direct

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statement concerning Mark Twain, but sections of The Relation of Literature to Life, published in 1896, seem to indicate that he had Twain in mind.

The best entertainment is that which lifts the imagination and quickens the spirit ... by taking us for a time out of our humdrum and perhaps sordid conditions, so that we can see familiar life somewhat idealized, and probably see it all the more truly from an artistic point of view.  

To William Dean Howells Mark Twain wrote from Heidelberg, May 26, 1878.

While Livy and Miss Spaulding have been writing at the table, I have sat tilted back, near by, with a pipe and the last Atlantic, and read Charley Warner's article with prodigious enjoyment. I think it is exquisite. I think it must be the roundest and broadest and completest short essay he has ever written. It is clear, and compact, and charmingly done.

The year 1898 brought the Spanish-American War. Twain was constitutionally against all wars, but writing to his beloved Joe Twichell, whose son had enlisted, we gather that this was one war which was an exception:

I have never enjoyed a war—even in written history—as I am enjoying this one. For this is the worthiest one that was ever fought, so far as my knowledge goes. It is a worthy thing to fight for one's freedom; it is another sight finer to fight for another man's. And I think this is the first time it has been done.

34 Kenneth R. Andrews, Nook Farm, Mark Twain's Hartford Circle, p. 160.

35 Works, XXXIV, 331.
Oh, never mind Charley Warner, he would interrupt the raising of Lazarus. He would say, the will has been probated, the property distributed, it will be a world of trouble to settle the rows—better leave well enough alone; don't ever disturb anything, where it's going to break the soft smooth flow of things and wobble our tranquility. . . .

Another literary personage with whom Mark Twain associated was George Washington Cable. In a letter to Howells in Switzerland, dated November 4, 1882, he told of a midnight dinner in Boston at which Cable had been present.

Cable has been here, creating worshipers on all hands. He is a marvelous talker on a deep subject. I do not see how even Spencer could unwind a thought more smoothly or orderly, and do it in a cleaner, clearer, crisper English. He astounded Twichell with his faculty. You know when it comes down to moral honesty, limpid innocence, and utterly blemishless piety, the apostles were mere policemen to Cable; so with this in mind you must imagine him at a midnight dinner in Boston the other night, where we gathered around the board of the Summer- set Club: Osgood full, Boyle O'Reilly full, Fairchild responsively loaded, and Aldrich and myself possessing the floor and properly fortified. Cable told Mrs. Clemens when he returned here, that he seemed to have been entertaining himself with horses, and had a dreamy idea that he must have gone to Boston in a cattle-car. It was a very large time. He called it an orgy. And no doubt it was, viewed from his standpoint.

In November, 1884, Clemens and Cable set out on a reading tour. They were a curiously-assorted pair. Cable was of orthodox religion, exact as to habits, neat, prim, all that Clemens was not.

36 Works, XXXV, 663.
37 Works, XXXI, 743.
38 Works, XXXV, 447.
He had a keen sense of humor, and most things that Mark Twain did, whether he approved or not, amused him. Cable did not smoke, but when they traveled, he seemed always to prefer the smoking compartment to the more respectable portions of the car. One day Clemens said to him:

"Cable, why do you sit in here? You don't smoke, and you know I always smoke, and sometimes swear."

Cable said, "I know, Mark, I don't do these things, but I can't help admiring the way you do them." 39

Harriet Beecher Stowe was also a member of the Hartford Circle and a friend of Mark Twain's. She had moved her family to Hartford in April, 1864. At that time she was a prominent literary figure. Besides Uncle Tom's Cabin, she had written a number of books on domestic problems and religious problems. She was too busy with her home and her writing to be very sociable. She was much older than the other members of the group, and they had great respect for her.

Mark Twain, who shared the neighborhood's respect for the aged heroine of antislavery, sought to amuse her whenever he could, as in the famous incident in which he sent his tie by the butler when Livy reminded him he had called on Harriet Beecher Stowe without it. 40

39 Works, XXXI. 784.

40 Andrews, op. cit., p. 87.
One of the most interesting events in the literary career of the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was her publication of the story of Lord Byron's incest. The American public and critics were outraged, and no woman suffered so much as did the author of this article. She lost her reading public as a result of it, but the friends in Hartford remained true even though they thought she acted unwisely. In his *Autobiography*, Mark Twain recalled some memories of his old neighbor's last days:

In a diary which Mrs. Clemens kept for a little while, a great many years ago, I find various mentions of Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe, who was a near neighbor of ours in Hartford, with no fences between. And in those days she made as much use of our grounds as of her own, in pleasant weather. Her mind had decayed and she was a pathetic figure. She wandered about all the day long in the care of a muscular Irishwoman. Among the colonists of our neighborhood the doors always stood open in pleasant weather. Mrs. Stowe entered them at her own free will, and as she was always softly slippered and generally full of animal spirits, she was able to deal in surprises, and she liked to do it. She would slip up behind a person who was deep in dreams and musings and fetch a war whoop that would jump that person out of his clothes. And she had other moods. Sometimes we would hear gentle music in the drawing-room and would find her there at the piano singing ancient and melancholy songs with infinitely touching effect.  

By 1883 the only literary Englishman left who had not accepted Mark Twain at his larger value was Matthew Arnold. Arriving in Boston in 1883, Arnold inquired for Howells at his home. The visitor was

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told by Howells' wife that Howells had gone to see Mark Twain. He seemed quite surprised and said:

"Oh, but he doesn't like that sort of thing, does he?"
To which Mrs. Howells replied:
"He likes Mr. Clemens very much, and he thinks him one of the greatest men he ever knew." 42

Arnold proceeded to Hartford to lecture, and one night Howells and Clemens went to meet him at a reception. Howells described the situation thusly:

While his hand [Arnold's] laxly held mine in greeting, I saw his eyes fixed intensely on the other side of the room. "Who—who in the world is that?" I looked and said, "Oh, that is Mark Twain." I do not remember just how their instant encounter was contrived by Arnold's wish, but I have the impression that they were not parted for long during the evening, and the next night Arnold, as if still under the glamour of that potent presence, was at Clemens's house. 43

Paine carries the story further:

He came there to dine with the Twichells and the Rev. Dr. Edwin P. Parker. Dr. Parker and Arnold left together, and, walking quietly homeward, discussed the remarkable creature whose presence they had just left. Clemens had been at his best that night—at his humorous best. He had kept a perpetual gale of laughter going, with a string of comment and anecdote of a kind which Twichell once declared the world had never before seen and would never see again. He repeated some of the things Mark Twain had said, thoughtfully, as if trying to analyze their magic. Then he asked solemnly:
"And is he never serious?"

42 Works, XXXI, 758.

43 Ibid.
And Dr. Parker as solemnly answered:
"Mr. Arnold, he is the most serious man in the
world." 44

Among the cultured men of England, Mark Twain had no greater
admirer, or warmer friend than Andrew Lang. They were at one on
most literary subjects, and especially so in their admiration of the
life and character of Joan of Arc. Both had written of her, and both
held her to be something almost more than mortal. When, therefore,
Anatole France published his exhaustive biography of the Maid of Dom-
remy, a book in which he followed, with exaggerated minuteness and
innumerable footnotes, every step of Joan's physical career at the
expense of her spiritual life which he was inclined to cheapen, Lang
wrote feelingly and with some contempt of the performance, inviting
the author of _Personal Recollections_ to come to the rescue of their
heroine. He wrote: "Treat him like Dowden, and oblige." 45

One could go on indefinitely naming the literary people with whom
Mark Twain had some association: Charles Warren Stoddard, Robert
Louis Stevenson, John Brown (Rab and His Friends), Joel Chandler
Harris, James Whitcomb Riley, Edward Everett Hale, Bayard Taylor,
Charles Dickens, Anson Burlingame and his son, Edward, Lewis
Carroll, Helen Keller, Brander Matthews, J. Howard Moore, William

44 Ibid., pp. 758-759.

45 Works, XXXV, 810.
Lyon Phelps, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Joe Goodman, Elinor Glyn, George Bernard Shaw, and Rudyard Kipling. But one of the strangest companionships of all literature is that of Mark Twain and the minister, Joe Twichell. Three people—Joe Twichell, Olivia Langdon Clemens, and William Dean Howells—were the brightest stars in Mark Twain's life.

Mark Twain had a natural leaning toward ministers of the gospel, and the explanation of it is easier to realize than to convey. He was hopelessly unorthodox—rankly rebellious as to creeds. Anything resembling cant or the curtailment of mental liberty roused only his resentment and irony. Yet something in his heart always warmed toward any laborer in the vineyard, and if we could put the explanation into a single sentence, perhaps we might say it was because he could meet them on that wide common ground—sympathy with mankind. Mark Twain's creed, then and always, may be put into three words, "liberty, justice, humanity." It may be put into one word, "humanity." 46

Twain had made the acquaintance of Joseph Hopkins Twichell and his wife during his sojourn in Hartford, and the two men had immediately become firm friends. Twichell had come to Elmira in February, 1870, to the wedding of Mark Twain and Olivia Langdon, and to assist the Reverend Thomas K. Beecher in the ceremony. Twichell

46 Works, XXX, 371.
was a devout Christian, while Mark Twain was a doubter, even a scoffer, where orthodoxy was concerned; yet the sincerity and humanity of the two men drew them together; their friendship was lifelong. 47

When Twichell went home, Mark wrote him from Rome, November 3, 1878:

... I have received your several letters, and we have prodigiously enjoyed them. How I do admire a man who can sit down and whale away with a pen just the same as if it was fishing—or something else as full of pleasure and as void of labor. I can't do it; else in common decency, I would when I write to you. Joe, if I can make a book out of the matter gathered in your company over here, the book is safe; but I don't think I have gathered any matter before or since your visit worth writing up. I do wish you were in Rome to do my sight-seeing for me. Rome interests me as much as East Hartford could, and no more. That is, the Rome which the average tourist feels an interest in; but there are other things here which stir me enough to make life worth living. Livy and Clara Spaulding are having a royal time worshiping the old Masters, and I as good a time gritting my ineffectual teeth over them. 48

In November, 1895, Twichell was engaged by Harper's Magazine to write an article concerning the home life and characteristics of Mark Twain. By the time the Clemens party had completed their tour of India—a splendid, triumphant tour, too full of work and recreation for letter-writing—and had reached South Africa, the article had appeared, a satisfactory one. 49

47 Works, XXXIV, 178.

48 Ibid., p. 339.

49 Works, XXXV, 630.
After the death of Livy, Mark appealed to his old friend, Twichell, to serve as his "equilibrium-restorer."

... I have to work my bile off whenever it gets to where I can't stand it, but I can work if off on you economically, because I don't have to make it suit me. It may not suit you, but that isn't any matter; I'm not writing it for that. I have used you as an equilibrium-restorer more than once in my life & shall continue, I guess. I would like to use Mr. Rogers, & he is plenty good-natured enough, but it wouldn't be fair to keep him rescuing me from my leather-headed business snarls & make him read interminable bile-irruptions besides; I can't use Howells; he is busy & old & lazy & won't stand it; I don't use Clara, there's things I have to say which she wouldn't put up with—a very dear little ashcat, but has claws.

And so—you're It. 50

And Joe Twichell was "It" throughout Mark Twain's life. A volume could be written about the influence of Olivia Langdon Clemens over her famous husband, Mark Twain. There have been few more unselfish and courageous women in history than Mark Twain's wife. 51 She guarded his work sacredly; and reviewing the manuscripts which he was induced to discard, and certain edited manuscripts, one gets a partial view of what the reading world owes to Olivia Clemens. Of the discarded manuscripts (he seems seldom to have destroyed them) there are a multitude, and among them all scarcely one that is not a proof of her sanity and high regard for his literary honor. They

50 Works, XXXII, 1235-1236.
51 Works, XXXV, 585.
are amusing—some of them; but they are unworthy—most of them, though a number remain unfinished because theme or interest failed.  

Mark Twain was likely to write not wisely but too much, piling up hundreds of manuscript pages only because his brain was thronging as with a myriad of fireflies, a swarm of darting, flashing ideas demanding release.  

Susy knew what Mama meant to Papa, as was shown by her entry in her biography. (The spelling is Susy's, and Mark Twain loved it.)

Ever since papa and mama were married papa has written his books and then taken them to mama in manuscript, and she has expurgated them. Papa read Huckleberry Finn to us in manuscript, just before it came out, and then he would leave parts of it with mama to expurgate, while he went off to the study to work, and sometimes Clara and I would be sitting with mama while she was looking the manuscript over, and I remember so well, with what pangs of regret we used to see her turn down the leaves of the pages, which meant that some delightfully terrible part must be scratched out. And I remember one part particularly which was perfectly fascinating it was so terrible, that Clara and I used to delight in and oh, with what despair we saw mama turn down the leaf on which it was written, we thought the book would almost be ruined without it. But we gradually came to think as mama did.

Although quite frail in her human body, Olivia Clemens proved to be a tower of strength to her robust and vigorous husband.

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52 Works, XXXI, 560.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid., pp. 774-775.
On the whole, we find him well-equipped for the task of literary criticism. He possessed the necessary quality of humor, he was educated in life's school, he had common sense, and he had the influence of numerous literary friends. We propose to show that this side of Mark Twain, this natural, unconscious bent for literary criticism, has escaped the notice of many of his biographers and critics.
CHAPTER III

HIS LITERARY TASTE

We know that Mark Twain did not come from a particularly literary environment. Critics and biographers have had much to say concerning what he read, and the general consensus seems to be that he did not read many books, but he read a few books often. He read voraciously just what he wanted to read. However, he was never "book suffocated," as James Lowell described Cotton Mather. ¹ One of his first allusions to his reading is found in the fragments of a letter to Pamela Moffett in the summer of 1853.

... 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 home to talk to?²

Practically all biographers of Twain have reiterated the story which they commonly call the "turning point in Mark Twain's life."

So, the story goes, according to Dixon Wector's late book, Sam Clemens of Hannibal, Mark Twain made much of this in his later years.

¹ Norman Foerster, American Criticism, p. 113.
² Works, XXXIV, 22.
While he was under apprenticeship to Ament, owner of the Missouri Courier, he was going home from the shop one afternoon when a stray leaf from a book blew across his path. The story of the leaf was about Joan of Arc. Biographers contend that this stray leaf opened to him the kingdom of literature and its power over the imagination of man.  

Albert Bigelow Paine carried the incident further than Wecter did:

Sam had never heard of Joan before—he knew nothing of history. He was no reader. Orion was fond of books, and Pamela; even little Henry had read more than Sam. But now, as he read, there awoke in him a deep feeling of pity and indignation, and with it a longing to know more of the tragic story. It was an interest that would last his life through, and in the course of time find expression in one of the rarest books ever written.

The first result was that Sam began to read. He hunted up everything he could find on the subject of Joan, and from that went into French history in general—indeed, into history of every kind. Samuel Clemens had suddenly become a reader—almost a student. He even began the study of languages, German and Latin, but was not able to go on for lack of time and teachers.

The years 1853-1861 were important in Mark Twain's life for the reading that he accomplished. He had two friends, Macfarlane and Burrough, who had inspired him to spend many nights in the New York libraries. Tom Paine, Poe, Shakespeare, Goldsmith, Hood, Dickens, Cervantes, and Voltaire were some of the authors he read

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3 Dixon Wecter, Sam Clemens of Hannibal, p. 211.

4 Albert B. Paine, Boys' Life of Mark Twain, p. 45.
during these years. His fellow pilots thought of him as a great reader. Possibly his reading was as chaotic as the world he knew along the Mississippi; yet, if we may judge by his later use of books, he read with an eye to his own opinions and writing. Certainly Tom Hood's letters provided standards by which to judge Orion Clemens' wit and humor and quite possibly his own.  

At Quarry Farm, just before the publication of Tom Sawyer, he wrote on the back of an old envelope his literary declaration of that period: "I like history, biography, travels, curious facts and strange happenings and science. And I detest novels, poetry, and theology."  

On the table near him, and in his billiard-room shelves and on his bed, Mark Twain kept the books which he read the most. There were not many, not more than a dozen, but they were manifestly of familiar and frequent usage. Nearly all of them had spicy or serious marginal notes and comments. Some of them he had read again and again, and with each fresh reading, he had a new and apropos comment.  

From all evidences, Mark Twain must have liked history best of all. There is no available record as to just when he first read Carlyle's

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5Edgar Branch, The Literary Apprenticeship of Mark Twain, p. 25.

6Works, XXXI, 512.

7Works, XXXIII, 1356.
French Revolution, but in a letter to Howells, dated August 22, 1887, he told him that he had just finished re-reading it. Here is what he said:

How stunning are the changes which age makes in a man while he sleeps. 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 St. 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.

Carlyle's French Revolution remained a favorite of his until his death in 1910. When Paine brought him home, a sick man, from his last voyage (to Bermuda), he asked for the second volume of the French Revolution, and a copy was on his bed the day he died.

In true Mark Twain fashion, he once said: "... Carlyle said 'a lie cannot live.' It shows that he did not know how to tell them." Mark Twain had a retentive mind and enjoyed reviewing history with his friends. To the end of his life, he possessed a keen memory and amazed his friends with his knowledge. Paine commented on this fact in his biography of Twain.

I am constantly amazed at his knowledge of history—all history—religious, political, military. He seems to

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8Works, XXXV, 490.
9Works, XXXIII, 1577.
10Mark Twain in Eruption, edited by Bernard DeVoto, p. 131.
have read everything in the world concerning Rome, France, and England particularly.

Last night we stopped playing billiards while he reviewed in the most vivid and picturesque phrasing, the reasons for Rome's decline. Such a presentation would have enthralled any audience—I could not help feeling a great pity that he had not devoted some of his public effort to work of that sort. No one could have equalled him at it. He concluded with some comments on the possibility of America following Rome's example, though he thought the vote of the people would always, or at least for a long period, prevent imperialism.  

Among the books of his summer reading at Quarry Farm, as far back as 1874, there were two much-worn copies of W. E. H. Lecky's History of European Morals. Lecky was an Irish historian, and this volume of his made no small impression upon Mark Twain. In it he found warrant for his own philosophies and stimulation to still wider fields of thought. Paine says:

... One point in particular would seem to have made a special appeal to him: Lecky refers to those who have undertaken to prove that all our morality is a product of experience, that a desire to obtain happiness and to avoid pain is the only possible motive to action; the reason and the only reason, why we should perform virtuous deeds being that "on the whole such a course will bring us the greatest amount of happiness." Mark Twain was in full agreement.  

He called this book "not theology, but the history of it."

Mark Twain always kept a copy of Tranquillus C. Suetonius' Life of the Twelve Caesars. Strange to say, there were not many marginal

11Works, XXXIII, 1533.

12Works, XXVI, Introduction, ix.
notes in his copy, though this was one of the books he read most often. Perhaps it expressed for him too completely and too richly its subject matter to require anything at his hand. Here and there are marked passages and occasional cross-reference to related history and circumstance. A copy of this, too, was on his bed the day he died.

On page 492 of the old volume of Suetonius, which Mark Twain read until his very last day, there is a reference to one Flavius Clemens, a man of wide repute "for his want of energy," and in a marginal note, Twain had written, "I guess this is where our line starts." Mark Twain read Macaulay. In *Following the Equator* he mentioned Macaulay's historical sketch of Warren Hastings.

The criminal side of the native has always been picturesque, always readable. The Thugee and one or two other particularly outrageous features of it have been suppressed by the English, but there is enough of it to keep it darkly interesting. One finds evidence of these survivals in the newspapers. Macaulay has a light-throwing passage upon this matter in his great historical sketch of Warren Hastings, where he is describing some effects which followed the temporary paralysis of Hastings's powerful government brought about by Sir Philip Francis and his party.

When Paine went to bring Mark Twain home from Bermuda, Twain had just re-read Macaulay and spoke at considerable length of the hypocrisy and intrigue of the English court under James II.

13 *Works*, XXXIII, 1537-1538.
14 Ibid., p. 1577.
15 *Works*, XXX, 1.
17 *Works*, XXXIII, 1565.
Francis Parkman's Canadian Histories he read periodically, especially the story of the Old Regime and of the Jesuits in North America. As late as January, 1908, he wrote on the title page of the Old Regime: "Very interesting. It tells how people religiously and otherwise insane came over from France and colonized Canada."  

He read Tacitus, Gibbon, and other histories, mainly English and French—read and digested every word of them. 

Mark Twain had a passion for diaries and letters and other bits of intimate human history. He owned three big volumes of Saint Simon—the Memoirs—which, he once told Paine, he had read no less than twenty times. On the fly-leaf of the first volume he wrote: "This & Casanova & Pepys, set in parallel columns, could afford a good coup d'oeil of French & English high life of the period." 

He found little to admire in the human nature of Saint Simon's period—little to approve in Saint Simon himself beyond his unrestrained frankness, which he admired without stint. In one margin he wrote: "Oh, incomparable Saint-Simon." 

There was not much room for comment on the narrow margin of the old copy of Pepys, which he had read steadily since the early

18 Ibid., p. 1538.  
19 Ibid., p. 1536.  
20 Ibid.  
21 Ibid.
seventies; only here and there were a few crisp words, but the under-
scoring and marked passages are plentiful enough to convey his devo-
tion to that quaint record which, perhaps next to Suetonius, was the
book he read and quoted most.

One summer at Quarry Farm Mark Twain gave more than the cus-
tomary attention to "gorgeous old Pepy's Diary," that captivating and
quaint old record which no one can follow continuously without catching
the infection of its manner and the desire for imitation. He had been
reading diligently one day when he determined to try his hand on an
imaginary record of conversation and court manners of a bygone day,
written in the phrase of the period. The essay was called "1601."  

George Ticknor, a professor and history-writer of some distinc-
tion at Harvard College, had written his diary, and Mark Twain
reveled in it, but he had a sound criticism to offer concerning it.
This criticism he expressed in a letter to Howells, August 29, 1877.

I am re-reading Ticknor's diary, and am charmed with it, though I still say he refers to too many good things when he could just as well have told them. Think of the man traveling 8 days in convoy and familiar intercourse with a band of outlaws through the mountain fastnesses of Spain—he the fourth stranger they had encountered in thirty years—and compressing this priceless experience into a single colorless paragraph of his diary! They spun yarns to this unworthy devil, too.  

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22 Works, XXXIV, 207.
23 Works, XXXI, 579-580.
24 Works, XXXIV, 303.
Greville’s *Journal of the Reigns of George IV and William IV* and Victoria Twain had read often and annotated freely. Greville abhorred Byron's personality, but he admired him for his talents. In one place he condemned him as a vicious person and a debaucher. He said that Byron was "a pretender" although he said he hated pretenders and charlatans of all sorts. Mark Twain wrote in the margin:

> But, dear sir, you are forgetting that what a man sees in the human race is merely himself in the deep and honest privacy of his own heart. Byron despised the race because he despised himself. ... 25

A little further along Greville laments that Byron can take no profit to himself from the sinful characters he depicts so faithfully. Twain commented in the margin again:

> If Byron—if any man—draws 50 characters, they are all himself—50 shades, 50 moods, of his own character. And when the man draws them well why do they stir my admiration? Because they are me. I recognize myself. 26

Mark Twain read many volumes of letters: James Russell Lowell, Tom Hood, Daniel Webster, and Madame de Sévigné. In a letter to Joe Twichell from Elmira in 1880, he expressed his opinion of Daniel Webster, as only Twain could:

> Been reading Daniel Webster's *Private Correspondence*. Have read a hundred of his diffuse, conceited "eloquent," bathotic (or bathostic) letters, written in that dim

25 *Works*, XXXIII, 1539.

26 Ibid., p. 1540.
(no, vanished) past when he was a student. And Lord, to
think that this boy, who is so real to me now, and so boom-
ing with fresh young blood and bountiful life, and sappy
cynicisms about girls, has since climbed the Alps of fame
and stood against the sun one brief, tremendous moment
with the world’s eyes on him, and then—fzt! where is he? 27

Orion once wrote Mark Twain a letter which Twain compared to
the letters of Thomas Hood to his family, a volume which he had just
read. He wrote Orion:

... But yours only remind me of his, for although there
is a striking likeness, your humour is much finer than
his, and far better expressed. Tom Hood’s wit, (in his
letters) has a savor of labor about it which is very dis-
agreeable. Your letter is good. That portion of it
wherein the old sow figures is the very best thing I have
seen lately. Its quiet style resembles Goldsmith’s
"Citizen of the World" and "Don Quixote,"—which are my
beau ideals of fine writing. 28

His volume of the Letters of Madame de Sévigné had some anno-
tated margins which were not complimentary to the translator, or for
that matter to Sévigné herself, whom he once designated as a "nauseat-
ing" person, many of whose letters had been uselessly translated, as
well as poorly arranged for reading. But he would read any volume
of letters or personal memoirs. None were too poor that had the throb
of life in them, however slight. Usually when he traveled by ship,
the catalogue of the ship’s library was one of the first things he asked
for, and so often he chose memoirs—maybe those of the Countess of
Cardigan—to read.

27 Works, XXXI, 683.
28 Works, XXXIV, 45.
Mark Twain loved to read biography. Twichell knew this; so he suggested that he read a biography of Phillips Brooks. Mark Twain retorted in a letter.

Just a word, to scoff at you, with your extravagant suggestion that I read the biography of Phillips Brooks—the very dullest book that has been printed for a century. Joe, ten pages of Mrs. Cheney's masterly biography of her father—no, five pages of it—contain more meat, more sense, more literature, more brilliancy, than that whole basketful of drowsy rubbish put together. Why in that dead atmosphere even Brooks himself is dull—he wearied me; oh how he wearied me!  

(Mrs. Cheney's father referred to in the letter above was Horace Bushnell of Hartford.)

The Life of P. T. Barnum Written by Himself was a book which Mark Twain enjoyed thoroughly. Twain's wife did not always approve some of her husband's reading, and she was certainly at a loss to understand his interest here. Wagenknecht says that "he sat up nights to absorb it and woke early and lighted the lamp to follow the career of this great showman."  

He read the life of Victor Hugo and described it as "the life of that marvelous being by his wife." He also read Younge's Life of

29 Works, XXXV, 712.

30 Edward Wagenknecht, Mark Twain, the Man and His Work, p. 178.

31 Mark Twain to Mrs. Fairbanks, edited by Dixon Wecter, p. 207.
Marie Antoinette which he described as "without exception, the worst, blindest and slovenliest piece of literary construction" he had ever seen.

... it starts out to make you a pitying & lamenting friend of Marie, but only succeeds in making you loathe her all the way through & swing your hat with unappeasable joy when they finally behead her. 32

Twichell and Twain had regular arguments on theology. Early in 1902, Twain had paid Twichell a visit, and they had had the usual discussion of man's moral accountability. For something to read on his return trip home, Joe gave Mark a copy of Jonathan Edwards' Freedom of the Will. Of course, Mark wrote him and thanked him and blasted the book:

... From Bridgeport to New York; thence to home; and continuously until near midnight I wallowed and reeked with Jonathan in his insane debauch; rose immediately refreshed and fine at 10 this morning, but with a strange and haunting sense of having been on a three days' tear with a drunken lunatic. It is years since I have known these sensations. All through the book is the glare of a resplendent intellect gone mad—a marvelous spectacle. No, not all through the book—the drunk does not come on till the last third, where what I take to be Calvinism and its God begins to show up and shine red and hideous in the glow from the fires of hell, their only right and proper adornment. By God I was ashamed to be in such company. 33

32 Ibid.

33 Works, XXXV, 719-720.
In many instances, Mark Twain spoke of re-reading Andrew D. White's *Science and Theology* which he called "a lovely book—a most amusing book." In June, 1909, he entered in his notebook:

... When you read it you see how those old theologians never reasoned at all. White tells of an old bishop who figured out that God created the world in an instant on a certain day in October exactly so many years before Christ, and proved it. And I knew a preacher myself once who declared that the fossils in the rocks proved nothing as to the age of the world. He said that God could create the rocks with those fossils in them for ornaments if He wanted to. Why, it takes twenty years to build a little island in the Mississippi River. ...  

Mark Twain read Paine's *The Age of Reason* when he was a cub-pilot on the Mississippi River. He felt a fear and a hesitation in reading it then and marveled at its fearlessness and wonderful power. When he re-read it years later, he called it "a mild book—a tame book, with the author apologizing everywhere for hurting the feelings of his readers."  

When Mark Twain said he hated novels, this statement excluded all the novels of William Dean Howells. Sometimes it is hard to understand his enjoyment of certain novels and his revolt against others, but he cared little for any writing that did not convey its purpose in the simplest and most direct terms. He once wrote Howells:

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34 Works, XXXIII, 1506.

What people cannot see is that I analyze as little as possible; they go on talking about the analytical school, which I am supposed to belong to, and I want to thank you for using your eyes. . . . Did you ever read De Foe's *Roxana*? If not, then read it, not merely for some of the deepest insights into the lying, suffering, sinning, well-meaning human soul, but for the best and most natural English that a book was ever written in. 36

When George Meredith was a reigning literary favorite, there was a Meredith cult of which Livy was a member. She read *Diana at the Crossways* with reverential appreciation. Mark Twain was not caught in the Meredith epidemic; in fact, he found his characters to be overrated artificialities, ingeniously contrived puppets, rather than human beings. 37 Livy read part of *Diana at the Crossways* aloud, but her husband commented:

It doesn't seem to me that Diana lives up to her reputation. The author keeps telling us how smart she is, how brilliant, but I never seem to hear her say anything smart or brilliant. Read me some of Diana's smart utterances. 38

One evening when Paine and Twain were in Washington on copyright business, they were entertained at dinner in the home of Thomas Nelson Page. Many guests were there, and, of course, Mark Twain led the dinner-table talk, which eventually drifted to reading. He told of his wife's embarrassment when Stepniak had visited them and talked

36 *Works*, XXXV, 455.
37 *Works*, XXXII, 847.
books, and asked what her husband thought of Balzac, Thackeray, and the others. She had had to confess that he had not read them. This confession tortured her. 39

In Following the Equator, he quipped:

All that I remember about Madagascar is that Thackeray's little Billee went up to the top of the mast and then knelt upon his knee; saying,

"I see
Jerusalem and Madagascar,
And North and South Amerikee."40

Mark Twain read some Dickens. During the Humboldt mining days he read Dombey and Son.41 In the spring months of 1873 in Paris he read A Tale of Two Cities.42 Of the Pickwick Papers he said, "I have no sense of humor. In illustration of this fact I will say this—by way of confession—that if there is a humorous passage in the Pickwick Papers I have never been able to find it."43

It is not surprising to learn that Mark Twain read and enjoyed sea stories. He spoke several times of having read Dana's Two Years Before the Mast and used some of the humor of the book in his after-dinner speeches.44 He was a great admirer of the sea stories of

39 Works, XXXIII, 1350.
40 Works, XXI, 308.
41 Works, XXV, 183.
42 Works, XXXI, 644.
44 Works, XXXIII, 1402.
W. W. Jacobs and generally kept one or more of that author's volumes in reach of his bed, where most of his reading was done. He had read Dialstone Lane earlier, and when he finished Salthaven in 1908, he acknowledged its worth in a letter to the author:

It was a delightful book. I will not venture to say how delightful, because the words would sound extravagant, and would thereby lose some of their strength and to that degree misrepresent me. It is my conviction that Dialstone Lane holds the supremacy over all purely humorous books in our language...

He read a hodgepodge of novels during his lifetime: Don Quixote, Les Miserables, Goldsmith's Citizen of the World, George Eliot's Daniel Deronda, Flaubert's Salammbo, James Branch Cabell's Chivalry, Eugene Sue's The Wandering Jew, and Tarkington's Beasley's Christmas Party. Concerning the last named, he commented that he did not care for Christmas stories, but Tarkington's true touch always satisfied him.

45 Works, XXXV, 823.
46 Works, XIII, 18.
47 Mark Twain to Mrs. Fairbanks, p. 207.
48 Works, XXXIV, 45.
49 Works, XXXV, 455.
50 Works, XXXIII, 1516.
51 Ibid., p. 1535.
52 Works, XXI, 98.
53 Works, XXXIII, 1535.
54 Ibid.
The last novel that Mark Twain read was Hardy's *Jude the Obscure*. He spoke of it with high approval and commented on the lack of morals in the book. This was his last continuous reading. 55

In the appreciation of poetry, Mark Twain progressed from a lowly stage in which the one poem he really cared for was C. F. Alexander's "The Burial of Moses" to an abiding love for the poetry of Robert Browning.

He had long admired the poetry of one Eugene F. Ware, whose pen-name was "Ironquill." Ware was a breezy westerner, and there was in his work that same spirit of Americanism and humor and humanity that is found in Mark Twain's writings. Twain and "Ironquill" met for the first time at a luncheon at The Players. The day before, Mark Twain read *The Rhymes of Ironquill*, and he declared his work to rank with the greatest of American poetry. 56 Among Ware's poems he was especially impressed with "Fables" and "Whist"—poems which conformed to his own philosophy. It is easy to understand why Mark Twain would like these lines from "Whist":

> Life is a game of whist. From unseen sources  
> The cards are shuffled, and the hands are dealt.  
> Blind are our efforts to control the forces  
> That, though unseen, are no less strongly felt. 57

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55 Ibid., p. 1567.
56 Ibid., p. 1374.
57 Ibid.
Mark Twain was familiar with the work of some of the great poets—Byron, Poe, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Tennyson, Burns, and others—but he had no general fondness for poetry.

It was one of the puzzling phases of Mark Twain's character that, notwithstanding his passion for direct and lucid expression, he should have found pleasure in the poetry of Robert Browning. This interest in Browning was born some time in the middle eighties. A Browning Club assembled about once a week at Twain's home, and they listened to his readings of the master. For each reading Mark Twain somewhat laboriously prepared himself. The hearers did not realize that before each reading he studied the poem line by line, even word by word. He dug out every syllable of meaning as nearly as was possible. On a fly-leaf of one of his copies of Browning's poetry he wrote:

One's glimpses and confusions, as one reads Browning, remind me of looking through a telescope (the small sort which you must move with your hand, not clock-work). You toil across dark spaces which are (to your lens) empty, but every now & then a splendor of stars & sun bursts upon you and fills the whole field with flame.
Feb. 23, 1887.58

Mrs. Fairbanks was always interested in Mark Twain's doings, and he wrote her about his Browning Club.

I study & prepare 30 or 40 pages of new matter for each sitting—along with a modest, small lecture, usually—and then re-read poems called for by the class. I suppose I have read Rabbi Ben Ezra & Up in the Villa a couple of

58 Works, XXXII, 847.
dozen times, & Abt Vogler, Caliban in Setebos, & some others nearly as often. Ben Ezra & Abt Vogler are called for oftenest—yes, & Up in the Villa. We should read Easter Day just as often, but for its length...

Another author whom Mark Twain admired greatly was Rudyard Kipling who once said of him: "I love to think of the great and God-like Clemens. He is the biggest man you have on your side of the water by a damn sight, and don't you forget it. Cervantes was a relative of his." 60

In Following the Equator, Mark Twain accredited Kipling with having delivered the best description of the bewitching Indian Ocean:

The Injian Ocean sets an' smiles
So sof', so bright, so bloomin' blue;
There ain't a wave for miles and miles
Excep' the jiggle from the screw. 61

For specific Kipling poems which Twain liked, he named here and there in his writings: "The Bell Buoy," "The Old Men," and "On the Road to Mandalay." "I am not fond of all poetry," he said, "but there's something in Kipling that appeals to me. I guess he's just about my level." 62

In The Literary Apprenticeship of Mark Twain is found, quoted, the most characteristically Twainian discussion of poetry that one could hope to find:

59 Mark Twain to Mrs. Fairbanks, pp. 260-261.
60 Works, XXXV, 747.
61 Works, XXI, 291.
62 Works, XXXIII, 1440.
A "connoisseur" should never be in doubt about anything. It is ruinous. I will give you a few hints. Attribute all the royal blank verse, with a martial ring to it, to Shakespeare; all the grand ponderous ditto, with a solemn lustre as of holiness about it, to Milton; all the ardent love poetry, tricked out in affluent imagery, to Byron; all the scouring, dashing, descriptive warrior rhymes to Scott; all the sleepy, tiresome, rural stuff, to Thomson and his eternal Seasons; all the genial, warm-hearted jolly Scotch poetry, to Burns; all the tender, broken-hearted song-verses to Moore; all the broken English poetry to Chaucer or Spenser—whichever occurs to you first; all the heroic poetry, about the impossible deeds done before Troy, to Homer; all the nauseating rebellion mush-and-milk about young fellows who have come home to die—just before the battle, mother—to George F. Root and kindred spirits; all the poetry that everybody admires and appreciates, but nobody ever reads or quotes from, to Dryden, Cowper, and Shelley; all the grave-yard poetry to Elegy Gray or Wolfe, indiscriminately; all the poetry that you can't understand, to Emerson; all the harmless old platitudes, delivered with a stately and oppressive pretense of originality, to Tupper; and all the "Anonymous" poetry to yourself. Bear these rules in mind, and you will pass muster as a connoisseur; as long as you can talk glibly about the "styles" of authors, you will get as much credit as if you were really acquainted with their works. 63

The Syrian chapters in The Innocents Abroad certainly do not fail to reveal that Mark Twain read the Bible. He reviewed his Bible exhaustively while visiting in Palestine, and his notebooks of this period fairly overflowed with Bible references. The beautiful and direct English of the King James Version could not have failed to affect his own literary method. Mark Twain considered the language of the Bible unsurpassed for beauty.

63 Branch, op. cit., pp. 141-142.
It is hard to make a choice of the most beautiful passage in a book which is so gemmed with beautiful passages as the Bible; but it is certain that not many things within its lids may take rank above the exquisite story of Joseph. Who taught those ancient writers their simplicity of language, their felicity of expression, their pathos, and, above all, their faculty of sinking themselves entirely out of sight of the reader and making the narrative stand out alone and seem to tell itself? Shakespeare is always present when one reads his book; Macaulay is present when we follow the march of his stately sentences; but the Old Testament writers are hidden from view.  

Concerning the Mormon Bible, Mark Twain commented:

The Mormon Bible is rather stupid and tiresome to read, but there is nothing vicious in its teachings. Its code of morals is unobjectionable—it is "smouched" from the New Testament and no credit given.  

Mark Twain did a great deal of what we shall call miscellaneous reading. Joel Chandler Harris, whom he described as "the shyest grown man he had ever met," charmed the entire Twain family with his "Uncle Remus" stories. The Death of King Arthur by Malory—written when we had no vocabulary—he considered one of the most beautiful things ever written in English. He immensely enjoyed the old-time New England tales of Rose Terry Cooke in the Atlantic.
He mentioned having read *The Arabian Nights*, 69 *Pilgrim's Progress*, 70 *The Descent of Man*, 71 and a charming book called *The Legends of the Rhine* which he bought while tramping abroad. 72 Scattered throughout the definitive edition of his works are allusions to many other books he had read.

Mark Twain has been condemned as lacking in taste because he did not value highly the popular writers of his day, writers whose Victorian pruderies and sentimentalities are generally objected to by writers of our own time. His reading was both extensive and thorough, and in perspective, his taste, especially in history and biography, seems to have been superior to the popular tastes of his time. He read Cervantes and other great works of literature, and he scoffed at contemporary stuff like Meredith. He was original and independent enough to say, "Nonsense," and read Suetonius, Carlyle, and Cervantes instead.

69*Works*, XIX, 74.
70*Works*, XIII, 140.
71*Works*, XXXIII, 1540.
72*Works*, IX, 3.
CHAPTER IV

HIS CRITICISMS ON FORM AND TECHNIQUE

Throughout the definitive edition of Mark Twain's works one finds bits of literary criticism in the most unexpected places. He had definite ideas about what a biography and an autobiography should be like, and in his own Autobiography he carried out these ideas.

There were definite statements that he made concerning biography:

What is biography? Unadorned romance. What is romance? Adorned biography. Adorn it less and it will be better than it is.  

and

What a wee little part of a person's life are his acts and his words! His real life is led in his head, and is known to none but himself... Biographies are but the clothes and buttons of the man—the biography of the man himself cannot be written.  

In Florence, Italy, in the winter of 1904, Mark Twain began dictating to his secretary some autobiographical chapters. This was the work which was "not to see print until I am dead." He wrote to Howells in March, 1904, and revealed that his mind was turning toward writing his autobiography.

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1Works, XXXII, 871.
2Works, XXXVI, 2.
An autobiography is the truest of all books; for while it inevitably consists mainly of extinctions of the truth, shirkins of the truth, partial revealments of the truth, with hardly an instance of plain straight truth, the remorseless truth is there, between the lines, where the author is raking dust upon it, the result being that the reader knows the author in spite of his wily diligences.  

He had made up his mind that there was a proper way to write autobiography, and it was best conveyed in his introductory note:

Start at no particular time of your life; wander at your free will all over your life; talk only about the things which interest you for the moment; drop it the moment its interest threatens to pale, and turn your talk upon the new and more interesting thing that has intruded itself into your mind meantime.  

Also, he had intended to write "the autobiography of all autobiographies."

I intend that this autobiography shall become a model for all future autobiographies when it is published, after my death, and I also intend that it shall be read and admired a good many centuries because of the form and method—a form and method whereby the past and the present are constantly brought face to face, resulting in contrasts which newly fire up the interest all along like contact of flint with steel. Moreover, this autobiography of mine does not select from my life its showy episodes, but deals merely in the common experiences which go to make up the life of the average human being, and the narrative must interest the average human being because these episodes are of a sort which he is familiar with in his own life, and in which he sees his own life reflected and set down in print. The usual conventional autobiographer seems to particularly hunt out those occasions in his career when

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3 Works, XXXV, 751.

4 Works, XXXVI, Introduction, pp. x-xi.
he came into contact with celebrated persons, whereas his contacts with the uncelebrated were just as interesting to him, and would be to his reader, and were vastly more numerous than his collisions with the famous.  

Mark Twain says that there is never a minute, an hour, or a day which is too uninteresting for autobiography.

Now one must not imagine that because it has taken all day Tuesday to write up the autobiographical matter of Monday, there will be nothing to write on Wednesday. No, there will be just as much to write on Wednesday as Monday had furnished for Tuesday. And that is because life does not consist mainly—or even largely—of facts and happenings. It consists mainly of the storm of thoughts that is forever blowing through one's head. Could you set them down stenographically? No. Could you set down any fraction of them stenographically? No. Fifteen stenographers hard at work couldn't keep up. 

And if this be true, we read to reach the same conclusion that Mark Twain reaches: writing a complete autobiography would be an impossibility.

... Therefore a full autobiography has never been written, and it never will be. It would consist of 365 double-size volumes per year—and so if I had been doing my whole autobiographical duty ever since my youth, all the library buildings on earth could not contain the result.

Bearing in mind that the complete and perfect autobiography would never be written, Mark Twain continued with his plan to write a "model autobiography." He told Howells about his plans:

\[5\text{Works, XXXVII, 245.}\]
\[6\text{Works, XXXVI, 283.}\]
Howells was here yesterday afternoon, and I told him the whole scheme of this autobiography and its apparently systemless system—only apparently systemless, for it is not that. It is a deliberate system, and the law of the system is that I shall talk about the matter which for the moment interests me, and cast it aside and talk about something else the moment its interest for me is exhausted. It is a system which follows no charted course and is not going to follow any such course. It is a system which is a complete and purposed jumble— a course which begins nowhere, follows no specified route, and can never reach an end while I am alive, for the reason that if I should talk to the stenographer two hours a day for a hundred years, I should still never to able to set down a tenth part of the things which have interested me in my lifetime. I told Howells that this autobiography of mine would live a couple of thousand years without any effort and would then take a fresh start and live the rest of the time. 8

Orion, Mark Twain's erratic and eel-like brother, who slipped from one fancy to another, wrote his autobiography. Twain was willing, indeed anxious, for Howells to run Orion's autobiography in the Atlantic. He wrote his brother, Orion, this commendation:

It is a model autobiography.

Continue to develop your character in the same gradual inconspicuous and apparently unconscious way. The reader, up to this time, may have his doubts, perhaps, but he can't say decidedly, "This writer is not such a simpleton as he has been letting on to be." Keep him in that state of mind. If, when you shall have finished, the reader shall say, "The man is an ass, but I really don't know whether he knows it or not," your work will be a triumph.

Stop re-writing. I saw places in your last batch where re-writing had done formidable injury. Do not try to find those places, else you will mar them further

7 Ibid.

8 Works, XXXVII, 245-246.
by trying to better them. It is perilous to revise a book while it is under way. All of us have injured our books in that foolish way.

Keep in mind what I tell you—when you recollect something which belonged in an earlier chapter, do not go back, but jam it in where you are. Discursiveness does not hurt an autobiography in the least. 9

But Howells could not bring himself to print so frank a confession as Orion had made. The best touches of it were those which acquainted one with Mark. Howells and Mark agreed that had Orion continued as he began, the work might have proved an important contribution to literature, but he went trailing off into by-paths of theology and discussion where the interest was lost. There were, perhaps, as many as two thousand pages of it, which few could undertake to read. 10

Twain compared his autobiography to one other—that of Benvenuto Cellini.

This autobiography of mine differs from other autobiographies—differs from all other autobiographies, except Benvenuto's perhaps. The conventional biography of all the ages is an open window. The autobiographer sits there and examines and discusses the people that go by—not all of them, but the notorious ones, the famous ones; those that wear fine uniforms, and crowns when it is not raining; and very great poets and statesmen—illustrious people with whom he has had the high privilege of coming in contact. He likes to toss a wave of recognition to these with his hand as they go by, and he likes to notice that the others are seeing him do this, and are admiring. He likes to let on that in discussing these occasional people that wear the good clothes he is only interested in interesting his reader, and is in a measure unconscious of himself.

9Works, XXXIV, 378-379.

10Ibid., p. 379.
But this autobiography of mine is not that kind of an autobiography. This autobiography of mine is a mirror, and I am looking at myself in it all the time. Incidentally I notice the people that pass along at my back—I get glimpses of them in the mirror—and whenever they say or do anything that can help advertise me and flatter me and raise me in my own estimation, I set these things down in my autobiography. I rejoice when a king or a duke comes my way and makes himself useful to this autobiography, but they are rare easterners, with wide intervals between. I can use them with good effect as lighthouses and monuments along my way, but for real business I depend upon the common herd.

Mark Twain felt that an autobiography should never be exposed to an eye until the author was "dead and unaware and indifferent." I speak from the grave rather than with my living tongue, for a good reason: I can speak thence freely. When a man is writing a book dealing with the privacies of his life—a book which is to be read while he is still alive—he shrinks from speaking his whole frank mind; all his attempts to do it fail, he recognizes that he is trying to do a thing which is wholly impossible to a human being. The frankest and freest and privatest product of the human mind and heart is a love letter; the writer gets his limitless freedom of statement and expression from his sense that no stranger is going to see what he is writing...

Mark Twain's Autobiography has a conversational tone—just as if he were reared back in bed, smothered in pillows, puffing on a smelly cigar, mentally flitting from one thing to another with no visible evidence of any definite connection between his thoughts.

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11 Works, XXXVII, 311-312.

12 Works, XXXVI, Preface, xvi.

13 Ibid., p. xv.
Paine spoke of Twain's Autobiography as a "so called Autobiography, which was not that, in fact, but a series of remarkable chapters, reminiscent, reflective, commentative, written without any particular sequence as to time or subject-matter."  

Mark Twain has a very down-to-earth philosophy concerning the novelist. His conception of what the novelist should be is best expressed in the essays, "What Paul Bourget Thinks of Us," written when Mark Twain read Bourget's book on America.

What would the new teacher, representing France, teach us? . . . Novel writing? No. M. Bourget and the others know only one plan, and when that is expurgated, there is nothing left of the book.  

It seems evident that Twain considered himself a "native novelist"; he had spent twenty-five years in absorption before he began writing novels.

There is only one expert who is qualified to examine the souls and the life of the people and make a valuable report—the native novelist. This expert is so rare that the most populous country can never have fifteen conspicuously and confessedly competent ones in stock at one time. This native specialist is not qualified to begin work until he has been absorbing during twenty-five years. How much of his competency is derived from conscious "observation"? The amount is so slight that it counts for next to nothing in the equipment. Almost the whole capital of the novelist is the slow accumulation of unconscious observation—absorption. The native expert's intentional observation of manners, speech, character, and ways of life can have

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14 Works, XXXV, 795.

15 Works, XXII, 150.
value, for the native knows what they mean without having to cipher out the meaning. But I should be astonished to see a foreigner get at the right meanings, catch the elusive shades of these subtle things. Even the native novelist becomes a foreigner, with a foreigner's limitations, when he steps from the state whose life is familiar to him into a state whose life he has not lived. Bret Harte got his California and his Californians by unconscious absorption, and put both of them into his tales alive. But when he came from the Pacific to the Atlantic and tried to do Newport life from study—conscious observation—his failure was absolutely monumental.

To return to novel-building. Does the native novelist try to generalize the nation? No, he lays plainly before you the ways and speech and life of a few people grouped in a certain place—his own place—and that is one book. In time he and his brethren will report to you the life and the people of the whole nation—the life of a group in a New England village; in a New York village; in a Texas village; in an Oregon village; in villages in fifty states and territories; then the farm-life in fifty states and territories; a hundred patches of life and groups of people in a dozen widely separated cities. And the Indians will be attended to; and the cowboys; and the gold and silver miners; and the negroes; and the Idiots and Congressmen; and the Irish, the Germans, the Italians, the Swedes, the French, the Chinamen, the Greasers; and the Catholics, the Methodists, the Presbyterians, the Congregationalists, the Baptists, the Spiritualists, the Mormons, the Shakers, the Jews, the Campbellsites, the infidels, the Christian Scientists, the Mind-Curists, the Faith-Curists, the train-robbers, the White Caps, the moonshiners. And when a thousand novels have been written, there you have the soul of the people, the life of the people, the speech of the people; and not anywhere else can these be had. And the shadings of character, manners, feelings, ambitions, will be definite.¹⁶

In true Mark Twain fashion, this bit of humor was inserted at the end of the essay as a sort of an aside:

¹⁶Ibid., pp. 152-154.
But I wish M. Bourget had read more of our novels before he came. It is the only way to thoroughly understand a people. When I found out I was coming to Paris, I read _La Terre_. 17

_The Gilded Age_ was an outgrowth of Mark Twain's and Charles Dudley Warner's severe criticism of the current novels. They were attempting to write a "better one" on a dare from their wives. Sprinkled throughout the book we find numerous jabs at the novelist.

Recalling the story of _The Gilded Age_, we remember that the villagers were upset when they heard that Laura was not really a daughter of the Hawkins family, for she was adopted. Even Ned, her boy friend, quit going to the house because of the talk, talk, talk.

But as soon as Maria was gone, Laura stamped her expressive foot and said:

"The coward! Are all books lies? I thought he would fly to the front, and be brave and noble, and stand up for me against all the world, and defy my enemies, and wither these gossips with his scorn! Poor crawling thing, let him go. I do begin to despise the world." 18

Laura Hawkins had not read the proper literature:

For Laura had her dreams. She detested the narrow limits in which her lot was cast, she hated poverty. Much of her reading had been of modern works of fiction, written by her own sex, which had revealed to her something of her own powers and given her, indeed, an exaggerated notion of the influence, the wealth, the position a woman may attain who has beauty and talent and ambition and a little culture, and is not too scrupulous in the use of them. She wanted to

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17 Ibid., p. 170.

18 _Works_, V, 102.
be rich, she wanted luxury, she wanted men at her feet, her
slaves, and she had not—thanks to some of the novels she had
read—the nicest discrimination between notoriety and reputa-
tion . . . 19

Any person who did not possess the native ability—the novel-
writing gift—met all kinds of disconcerting situations in his attempts to
write novels, so Twain thought.

A man who is not born with the novel-writing gift has
a troublesome time of it when he tries to build a novel. I
know this from experience. He has no clear idea of his
story; in fact he has no story. He merely has some people
in his mind, and an incident or two, also a locality. He
knows these people, he knows the selected locality, and he
trusts that he can plunge those people into those incidents
with interesting results. So he goes to work. To write a
novel? No—that is a thought which comes later; in the be-
ginning he is only proposing to tell a little tale; a very little
tale; a six-page tale. But as it is a tale which he is not ac-
quainted with, and can only find out what it is by listening as
it goes along telling itself, it is more than apt to go on and
on and on till it spreads itself into a book. I know about
this, because it has happened to me so many times. 20

Mark Twain seriously turned to literary work in 1891 because
"he had always enjoyed writing and felt now that he was equipped better
than ever for authorship, at least so far as material was concerned." 21

There exists a fragmentary copy of a letter to some unknown cor-
respondent, in which he recites his qualifications:

19 Ibid., p. 192.

20 Works, XVI, 207.

21 Works, XXXV, 543.
And I have been an author for 20 years and an ass for 55.

Now then; as the most valuable capital or culture or education usable in the building of novels is personal experience I ought to be well equipped for that trade.

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. 22

Following the Equator was begun in 1896 and published in November, 1897. It was written from his experiences during the lecturing trip around the world in 1895. The starting point of the lecture tour was Paris, but Twain's discussion of the travels begins with the Islands of the South Pacific. The journey included Australia, New Zealand, India, and South Africa. Mark Twain included in the book a clever exposé of the tricks of the Australian novelist:

We started at four-twenty in the afternoon, and moved across the level plains until night. In the morning we had a stretch of "scrub" country—the kind of thing which is so useful to the Australian novelist. In the scrub the hostile aboriginal lurks, and flits mysteriously about, slipping out from time to time to surprise and slaughter the settler; then slipping back again, and leaving no track that the white man can follow. In the scrub the novelist's heroine gets lost, search fails of result; she wanders here and there, and finally sinks down exhausted and unconscious, and the searchers pass within a yard or two of her, not suspecting that she is near, and by and by some rambler finds her bones and the pathetic diary which she had scribbled with her failing hand and left behind. Nobody can find a lost heroine in the scrub but the aboriginal "tracker," and he will not lend himself to the scheme if it will interfere with the novelist's plot. The scrub stretches miles and miles in all directions, and looks like a level roof of bush-tops without a

22 Ibid.
break or a crack in it—as seamless as a blanket, to all appearances. One might as well walk under water and hope to guess out a route and stick to it, I should think. Yet it is claimed that the aboriginal "tracker" was able to hunt out people lost in the scrub. Also in the "bush;" also in the desert; and even follow them over patches of bare rocks and over alluvial ground which had to all appearance been washed clear of footprints.

From reading Australian books and talking with the people, I became convinced that the aboriginal tracker's performances evince a craft, a penetration, a luminous sagacity, and a minuteness and accuracy of observation in the matter of detective work not found in nearly so remarkable a degree in any other people, white or colored. In an official account of the blacks of Australia published by the government of Victoria; one reads that the aboriginal not only notices the faint marks left on the bark of a tree by the claws of a climbing opossum, but knows in some way or other whether the marks were made today or yesterday. 23

In "From Answers to Correspondents," Mark Twain wrote advice to a young man who had written him from Los Angeles: "My life is a failure; I have adored wildly, madly, and she whom I love has turned coldly from me and shed her affection upon another. What would you advise me to do?"

You should set your affections on another also—or on several, if there are enough to go around. Also, do everything you can to make your former flame unhappy. There is an absurd idea disseminated in novels, that the happier a girl is with another man, the happier it makes the old lover she has blighted. Don't allow yourself to believe any such nonsense as that. The more cause that girl finds to regret that she did not marry you, the more comfortable you will feel over it. It isn't poetical, but it is mighty sound doctrine. 24

23 Works, XX, 155-156.
24 Works, VII, 73.
In Mark Twain's Autobiography, we find some very poetic assertions—probably some of his last—concerning the narrative:

... With the pen in one's hand, narrative is a difficult art; narrative should flow as flows the brook down through the hills and the leafy woodlands, its course changed by every boulder it comes across and by every grass-clad gravelly spur that projects into its path; its surface broken, but its course not stayed by rocks and gravel on the bottom in the shoal places; a brook that never goes straight for a minute, but goes, and goes briskly, sometimes ungrammatically, and sometimes fetching a horseshoe three-quarters of a mile around, and at the end of the circuit flowing within a yard of the path it traversed an hour before; but always going, and always following at least one law, and always loyal to that law, the law of narrative which has no law...  

Humorously and with a twinkle in his eye, Mark Twain put many of his juicy jabs at the novel into Tom Sawyer's mouth in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. Ben Rogers and Tom Sawyer are discussing the meaning of the big word "ransomed" which Tom is casually throwing around. Ben speaks first:

"Ransomed? What's that?"
"I don't know. But that's what they do. I've seen it in books; and so of course that's what we've got to do."
"But how can we do it if we don't know what it is?"
"Why, blame it all, we've got to do it. Don't I tell you it's in the books? Do you want to go to doing different from what's in the books, and get things all muddled up?"

Later on in the same conversation we find Tom still trying to convince Ben that they would have to do it "like the books." Again Ben speaks first:

25 Works, XXXVI, 237.
26 Works, XIII, 11.
"A guard! Well, that is good. So somebody's got to set up all night and never get any sleep, just so as to watch them. I think that's foolishness. Why can't a body take a club and ransom them as soon as they get here?"

"Because it ain't in the books so—that's why. Now, Ben Rogers, do you want to do things regular, or don't you?—that's the idea. Don't you reckon that the people that made the books knows what's the correct thing to do? Do you reckon you can learn 'em anything? Not by a good deal. No, sir, we'll just go on and ransom them in the regular way."

"All right. I don't mind; but I say it's a fool way, anyhow. Say, do we kill the women, too?"

"Well, Ben Rogers, if I was as ignorant as you I wouldn't let on. Kill the women? No; nobody ever saw anything in the books like that. You fetch them to the cave, and you're always as polite as pie to them; and by and by they fall in love with you, and never want to go home any more." 27

Toward the end of the story, Tom and Huck discuss the rescue of Jim. Tom, again, knows all that's "in the books."

"It don't make no difference how foolish it is, it's the right way—and it's the regular way. And there ain't no other way, that ever I heard of, and I've read all the books that gives any information about these things. They always dig out with a case-knife—and not through dirt, mind you; generly it's through solid rock. And it takes them weeks and weeks and weeks, and for ever and ever. Why, look at one of them prisoners in the bottom dungeon of the Castle Deef, in the harbor of Marseilles, that dug himself out that way; how long was he at it, you reckon?"

"I don't know."

"Well, guess."

"I don't know. A month and a half?"

"Thirty-seven year—and he come out in China..." 28


28 Ibid., pp. 337-338.
Still concerning the rescue of Jim, Tom Sawyer is demeaning Huck for his ignorance of books. Huck speaks first:

"What do we want of a saw?"
"What do we want of a saw? Hain't we got to saw the leg of Jim's bed off, so as to get the chain loose?"
"Why, you just said a body could lift up the bedstead and slip the chain off."
"Well, if that ain't just like you, Huck Finn. You can get up the infant-schooliest ways of going at a thing. Why, hain't you ever read any books at all?—Baron Trenck, nor Casanova, nor Benvenuto Chelissen, nor Henri IV., nor none of them heroes? Who ever heard of getting a prisoner loose in such an old-maidy way as that? No; the way all the best authorities does is to saw the bed-leg in two, and leave it just so, and swallow the sawdust, so it can't be found, and put some dirt and grease around the sawed place so the very keenest seneskal can't see no sign of its being sawed, and thinks the bed-leg is perfectly sound . . . "

In the companion book, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, Tom and Huck are discussing the Tom Sawyer Gang and its activities. Huck does not understand the meaning of "ransom."

"What's a ransom?"
"Money. You make them raise all they can off'n their friends; and after you've kept them a year, if it ain't raised then you kill them. That's the general way. Only you don't kill the women. You shut up the women, but you don't kill them. They're always beautiful and rich, and awfully scared. You take their watches and things, but you always take your hat off and talk polite. They ain't anybody as polite as robbers—you'll see that in any book. Well, the women get to loving you, and after they've been in the cave a week or two weeks they stop crying and after that you couldn't get them to leave. If you drove them out they'd turn right around and come back. It's so in all the books."

29 Ibid., pp. 331-332.
30 Works, VIII, 273.
Mark Twain brought to light some semi-underhanded tactics of authors who would probably deny that such was the case or who would rather their secrets had not been revealed. He included himself as a guilty one. In Following the Equator we find the revelation of one of these tactics:

The battle of Waterloo was fought on the 18th of June, 1815. I do not state this fact as a reminder to the reader, but as news to him. For a forgotten fact is news when it comes again. Writers of books have the fashion of whizzing by vast and renowned historical events with the remark, "The details of this tremendous episode are too familiar to the reader to need repeating here." They know that this is not true. It is a low kind of flattery. They know that the reader has forgotten every detail of it, and that nothing of the tremendous event is left in his mind but a vague and formless luminous smudge. Aside from the desire to flatter the reader they have another reason for making the remark—two reasons, indeed. They do not remember the details themselves, and do not want the trouble of hunting them up and copying them out; also, they are afraid that if they search them out and print them they will be scoffed at by the book-reviewers for retelling those worn old things which are familiar to everybody. They should not mind the reviewer's jeer; he doesn't remember any of the worn old things until the book which he is reviewing has retold them to him.

I have made the quoted remark myself, at one time and another, but I was not doing it to flatter the reader; I was merely doing it to save work. If I had known the details without brushing up, I would have put them in; but I didn't, and I did not want the labor of posting myself; so I said, "The details of this tremendous episode are too familiar to the reader to need repeating here." I do not like that kind of a lie; still, it does save work.

Works, XXI, 239-240.
Mark Twain despised any author who made a deliberate and ostentatious show of his "learning." In *A Tramp Abroad* he conversed with Harris (Joe Twichell) on this subject.

"... When really learned men write books for other learned men to read, they are justified in using as many learned words as they please—their audience will understand them; but a man who writes a book for the general public to read is not justified in disfiguring his pages with untranslated foreign expressions. It is an insolence toward the majority of the purchasers, for it is a very frank and impudent way of saying, 'Get the translations made yourself if you want them, this book is not written for the ignorant classes.' There are men who know a foreign language so well and have used it so long in their daily life that they seem to discharge whole volleys of it into their English writings unconsciously, and so they omit to translate, as much as half the time. That is a great cruelty to nine out of ten of the man's readers. What is the excuse for this? The writer would say he only uses the foreign language when the delicacy of his point cannot be conveyed in English. Very well, then he writes his best things for the tenth man, and he ought to warn the other nine not to buy his book. However, the excuse he offers is at least an excuse; but there is another set of men who are like you; they know a word here and there, of a foreign language, or a few beggarly little three-word phrases, filched from the back of a Dictionary, and these they are continually peppering into their literature, with a pretense of knowing that language—what excuse can they offer? The foreign words and phrases which they use have their exact equivalents in a nobler language—English; yet they think they "adorn their page" when they say Strasse for street, and Bahnhof for railway-station, and so on—flaunting these fluttering rags of poverty in the reader’s face and imagining he will be ass enough to take them for the sign of untold riches held in reserve. . . . "

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32 *Works, X, 11-12.*
One good device for writers is to cram a quotation in a spot and leave it there even though it fails to fit. In Roughing It, Mark Twain relieved himself of a quotation "which had kept his mind distracted and ill at ease."

... But there could not have been found in a whole library of dictionaries language sufficient to tell how tired those mules were after their twenty-three mile pull. To try to give the reader an idea of how thirsty they were, would be to "gild refined gold or paint the lily."

Somehow, now that it is there, the quotation does not seem to fit—but no matter, let it stay anyhow. I think it is a graceful and attractive thing, and therefore have tried time and time again to work it in where it would fit, but could not succeed... Under the circumstances it seems to me best to leave it in, as above, since this will afford at least a temporary respite from the wear and tear of trying to "lead up" to this really apt and beautiful quotation. 33

Mark Twain resented some of the shackles that modern society put upon literature. In September, 1877, he had written Howells the story of how Lewis, a colored man at the farm, had saved the lives of Charley Langdon's wife, his little daughter, Julia, and the nurse, Nora, when a horse had run away. Howells wanted to use the story in the "Contributor's Club," and warned Twain against letting it get into the newspapers. He thought the story one of the most impressive things he had ever read. Mark Twain never used the story in any form, and the reason is clearly stated in his letter to Howells, September 19, 1877:

33 Works, III, 129-130.
I don't really see how the story of the runaway horse could read well with the little details of names and places and things left out. They are the true life of all narrative. It wouldn't quite do to print them at this time. We'll talk about it when you come. Delicacy—a sad, sad false delicacy—robs literature of the best two things among its belongings. Family-circle narrative and obscene stories. But no matter; in that better world which I trust we are all going to I have the hope and belief that they will not be denied us.  

Puzzled by the freedom which Art possessed to express itself in any sort of way and receive approval, Mark Twain questioned the fact that literature was fettered by public opinion. In *A Tramp Abroad* he observed:

I wonder why some things are? For instance, Art is allowed as much indecent license today as in earlier times—but the privileges of Literature in this respect have been sharply curtailed within the past eighty or ninety years. Fielding and Smollett could portray the beastliness of their day in the beastliest language; we have plenty of foul subjects to deal with in our day, but we are not allowed to approach them very near, even with nice and guarded forms of speech. . . .

Mark Twain repeatedly expressed a need for greater freedom of expression in literature. So often he bolted and put things which horrified Livy in his books, and she immediately took them out. Howells' "Better get that swearing out" he heard now and then; however, he was charmed with Twain's tendency to ignore traditional and conventional practices and to write at times as he pleased.

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But his great charm is his absolute freedom in a region where most of us are fettered and shackled by immemorial convention. He saunters out into the trim world of letters, and lounges across the neatly kept paths, and walks about on the grass at will, in spite of all the signs that have been put up from the beginning of literature, warning people of the dangers and penalties for the slightest trespass. 36

As the various quotations gleaned from here and there in Mark Twain's works reveal, he had a great deal to say about literary forms and the craft of writing. He believed that one should write as he talked and thus impart to the printed page the vivacity of the spoken word. This is exactly what he attempted to accomplish in his writings—be it an essay, a travel book, an autobiography, or a novel. His work can be characterized by a manly love of truth, a hatred of humbug, and a scorn of cant. That explains his dislike for many novels, and his love for history and biography.

36 Howells, My Mark Twain, p. 169.
CHAPTER V

HIS MAJOR CRITICISMS

In the spring and summer of 1893 Mark Twain was alternately in Europe and America. Apparently he was never at rest in his mind, which was beset by all kinds of worries. In April, 1893, he had made a flying visit to America. Paige was still an optimist concerning the typesetting machine, but there was no visible remuneration. Fred Hall was not buoyant in spirit concerning the Webster Company affairs. To add to Mark's worries, the financial panic of 1893 was evident since banks were restricting credit and calling in notes. Financially, he was about to give up. He was panicky—spending sleepless nights walking the floor. So many of his manuscripts of this period show in the margin figures where he had added his debts and subtracted his income.

One cannot believe that he had much success with literary undertakings while in such a mood as this, but one accomplishment of this trying period was his revision of Pudd'nhead Wilson—cutting it from eighty-one thousand five hundred words to only fifty-eight thousand. This story he considered one in which the public would manifest a
great interest because of his use of "virgin ground—absolutely fresh and mighty curious and interesting to everybody—finger-printing.""¹

In a letter to Fred Hall in New York, dated July 26, 1893, he wrote: "Where is the Shelly article? If you have it on hand, keep it and I will presently tell you what to do with it. Don't forget to tell me."²

This "Shelly article" about which he spoke was one of the very best of his essays, and was entitled "In Defense of Harriet Shelley," an essay in which he literally heaped coals of fire on Professor Edward Dowden's biography entitled The Life of Shelley. Even though Twain's mind was beset by so many business troubles, he put them all aside to go to the defense of the ill-fated Harriet, wife of Percy Bysshe. This paper which he prepared was "as direct, compact and cumulative as could have been formulated by a trained mind with the added advantage of having been inspired by indignation and righteous resentment."³ He felt that Dowden had attempted to whitewash the darkest period in Shelley's career at the expense of the maligned Harriet.

Mark Twain was proud of the purity of American women, and he was also proud of the fact that "even the most degraded woman can walk

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¹ Works, XXXV, 596.
² Ibid.
³ Works, XXII, Introduction, ix.
our streets unmolested, her sex and her weakness being her sufficient protection."⁴ So when Dowden permitted himself to blacken the good name of Harriet Shelley in an attempt to make the best case that could be made for her husband, Twain wrote his reply in a white flame of anger:

The charge insinuated by these odious slanders is one of the most difficult of all offenses to prove; it is also one which no man has a right to mention even in a whisper about any woman, living or dead, unless he knows it to be true, and not even then unless he can also prove it to be true.⁵

Mark Twain attacked Dowden’s biography in a lawyer-like manner. First, he called the book the "fat diet spread for the righteous." He deplored the fact that college students in America were accepting this book’s verdict and asserted his attempt to interest them in an account of "this romantic historical fable and the fabulist's manner of constructing and adorning it."

His first indictment is that the Shelley biography is a literary cake-walk.

... The ordinary forms of speech are absent from it. All the pages, all the paragraphs, walk by sedately, elegantly, not to say mincingly, in their Sunday-best, shiny and sleek, perfumed, and with boutonnieres in their buttonholes; it is rare to find even a chance sentence that has forgotten to dress. If the book wishes to tell us that Mary Godwin, child

⁴Wagenknecht, Mark Twain, the Man and His Work, p. 147.
⁵Ibid.
of sixteen, had known afflictions, the fact saunters forth in this nobby outfit: "Mary was herself not unlearned in the lore of pain"—meaning by that that she had not always traveled on asphalt; or, as some authorities would frame it, that she had "been there herself," a form which, while preferable to the book's form, is still not to be recommended. If the book wishes to tell us that Harriet Shelley hired a wet-nurse, that commonplace fact gets turned into a dancing-master, who does his professional bow before us in pumps and knee-breeches, with his fiddle under one arm and his crush-hat under the other, thus: "The beauty of Harriet's motherly relation to her babe was marred in Shelley's eyes by the introduction into his house of a hireling nurse to whom was delegated the mother's tenderest office."

... The materials of his biographical fable are facts, rumors, and poetry.  

Mark Twain says that Shelley has done something which "in the case of other men is called a grave crime, but in the case of Shelley it is not, because he does not think of these things as other men do"—Dowden speaking.

But the fabulist, as he continually calls Dowden, fastens the crime on Harriet Shelley. She is entirely and unforgivably responsible for her husband's innocently taking up with another woman, even though historical facts leave her free of offense. So the fabulist here has to be wily and cautious at his work—and as entertaining as a magician:

... He arranges his facts, his rumors, and his poems on his table in full view of the house, and shows you that everything is there—no deception, everything fair and

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6 Works, XXII, 3-4.

7 Ibid., pp. 4-5.
aboveboard. And this is apparently true, yet there is a de-
fect, for some of his best stock is hid in an appendix-basket
behind the door, and you do not come upon it until the exhibi-
tion is over and the enchantment of your mind accomplished—
as the magician thinks.  

Mark Twain says the fairness of the book is "engaging at first,
then a trifle burdensome, then a trifle fatiguing, then progressively
suspicious, annoying, irritating and oppressive."  

. . . The few meager facts of Harriet Shelley's life, as
furnished by the book, acquit her of offense; but by call-
ing in the forbidden helps of rumor, gossip, conjecture,
insinuation, and innuendo he destroys her character and
rehabilitates Shelley's—as he believes. . . .  

Twain says all the book is interesting on account of the sor-
cerer's methods and the attractiveness of some of his characters and
the repulsiveness of the rest, but no part of it is so much so as are
the chapters wherein Dowden tries to think he thinks he sets forth the
causes which led to Shelley's desertion of his wife in 1814.

When Shelley was nineteen and Harriet was sixteen, they eloped
to Scotland and were married. They settled in Edinburgh and were
happy—"as contented as birds in a nest."  Mark Twain pictures their
home-life:

. . . Harriet sang evenings or read aloud; also she studied
and tried to improve her mind, her husband instructing her
in Latin. She was very beautiful, she was modest, quiet,
genuine, and according to her husband's testimony, she had no fine lady airs or aspirations about her. In Matthew Arnold's judgment, she was "a pleasing figure."\(^{11}\)

The lovers remained in Edinburgh for five weeks and then moved to York, where Shelley's college friend, Hogg, lived. While Shelley was on business in London, Hogg made love to Harriet, but she repulsed him and told the whole story to her husband when he returned.

At the end of their first year of marriage, Shelley addressed a long love poem to Harriet and also wrote a lovely sonnet to her to celebrate her birthday. She was most happy. It was the year 1812, and she was only seventeen.

In June, 1813, little Ianthe was born, and in September, her father addressed a poem to the dear child of three months. Mark Twain calls these poems as they were written Exhibits A, B, and C.

Up to this point the fabulist counsel for Shelley and prosecutor of his young wife has had easy sailing, but now his trouble begins, for Shelley is getting ready to make some unpleasant history for himself, and it will be necessary to put the blame of it on the wife.\(^ {12}\)

Shelley had met a charming Mrs. Boinville who lived at Bracknell and who had a daughter named Cornelia who was "equipped with many fascinations." So Shelley moved to Bracknell July 27, 1813, to be

\(^{11}\)Ibid., p. 9.

\(^{12}\)Ibid., p. 11.
near this unwholesome "prairie-dogs' nest." Mark Twain snorts:

"The fabulist says: 'It was the entrance into a world more amiable and exquisite than he had yet known.'"  

Cornelia Turner and Shelley began studying the Italian poets together, and presently—only four days and Cornelia's attractions have dimmed Harriet's—the fabulist detects a "rift" in a little sonnet to Harriet, entitled "Evening." Mark Twain says:

I cannot find the "rift;" still it may be there. What the poem seems to say is, that a person would be coldly ungrateful who could consent to count and consider little spots and flaws in such a warm, great, satisfying sun as Harriet is.

Also,

... It is the fabulist's secret; he knows how to detect what does not exist, he knows how to see what is not seeable; it is his gift, and he works it many a time to poor dead Harriet Shelley's deep damage.

Shelley was now a "pupil" of Mrs. Boinville and her young married daughter, Cornelia. He had stopped instructing Harriet. The fabulist biographer says it was because of the busy life in London and the intrusion of the baby. Mark Twain says there are other reasons which the fabulist biographer has so easily overlooked:

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\(^{13}\) Ibid.

\(^{14}\) Ibid., p. 12.

\(^{15}\) Ibid., p. 13.
He is always overlooking a detail here and there that might be valuable in helping us understand a situation. For instance, when a man has been hard at work at the Italian poets with a pretty woman, hour after hour, and responding like a tremulous instrument to every breath of passion or of sentiment in the mean time, that man is dog-tired when he gets home, and he can't teach his wife Latin; it would be unreasonable to expect it.\(^{16}\)

When Shelley moved Harriet and the baby back to Edinburgh, the biographer said that "Harriet was happy because the baby had borne the journey well." Mark Twain says the real reason Harriet was happy was because "there was much territory between her husband and Cornelia Turner, but we learn—by authority of deeply reasoned and searching conjecture—that the baby bore the journey well, and that was why the young wife was happy. That accounts for two per cent of the happiness, but it was not right to imply that it accounted for the other ninety-eight also."\(^{17}\)

In November Shelley had to make a business trip to London. He left Harriet and the baby with Harriet's sister, Eliza. Eliza was a practical, sensible maiden of thirty years and had spent much time with her sister's family.

She was an estimable woman and Shelley had reason to like her and did like her, but along about this time his feeling toward her changed. Part of Shelley's plan, as he wrote Hogg, was to spend his London evenings with the Newtons—members of the Boinville Hysterical Society.

\(^{16}\)Ibid.

\(^{17}\)Ibid., p. 16.
But, alas, when he arrived early in December, that pleasant game was partially blocked, for Eliza and the family arrived with him. We are left destitute of conjectures at this point by the biographer, and it is my duty to supply one. I chance the conjecture that it was Eliza who interfered with that game. I think she tried to do what she could toward modifying the Boinville connection, in the interest of her young sister's peace and honor.  

However, as Twain reveals, Eliza was not able to block the next move. Christmas finds the Shelleys nested in a furnished house in Windsor "at no great distance from the Boinvilles—these decoys still residing at Bracknell."

Just as a misleading conjecture becomes necessary, Dowden is always near with "promptness and depravity."

But Prince Athanase found not the aged Zonoras, the friend of his boyhood, in any wanderings to Windsor. Dr. Lind had died a year since, and with his death Windsor must have lost, for Shelley, its chief attraction.  

Mark Twain bounces on Dowden here:

... Shelley is represented by this biographer as doing a great many careless things, but to my mind this hiring a furnished house for three months in order to be with a man who has been dead a year, is the carelessest of them all. One feels for him—that is but natural, and does us honor besides—yet one is vexed for all that. He could have written and asked about the aged Zonoras before taking the house. He may not have had the address, but that is nothing—any postman would know the aged Zonoras; a dead postman would remember a name like that.

\[18\] Ibid., p. 17.
\[19\] Ibid., p. 18.
And yet why throw a rag like this to us ravening wolves? Is it seriously supposable that we will stop to chew it and let our prey escape? No, we are getting to expect this kind of device, and to give it merely a sniff for certainty's sake and then walk around it and leave it lying. Shelley was not after the aged Zonoras; he was pointed for Cornelia and the Italian lessons, for his warm nature was craving sympathy. 20

Part II of the essay begins with the year 1814. Using true legal tactics, Mark Twain recapitulates:

... How much of Cornelia's society had Shelley thus far? Portions of August and September, and four days of July. ... Did he want some more of it? We must fall back on history and go to conjecturing. 21

And he reads from Dowden's biography: "In the early part of the year 1814, Shelley was a frequent visitor at Bracknell."

Mark Twain is wary of the word "frequent," especially when it is in Dowden's mouth. The Boinvilles fixed a bedroom for Shelley in their home and "one doesn't need a bedroom if one is only going to run over now and then in a disconnected way to respond like a tremulous instrument to every breath of passion or sentiment and rub up on one's Italian poetry perhaps," says Mark. 22

Harriet, of course, was not invited to Bracknell where Shelley "found an easeful resting-place in the house of Mrs. Boinville—the whitehaired Maimuna—and of her daughter, Mrs. Turner."

20 Ibid., pp. 18-19.
21 Ibid., p. 19.
22 Ibid.
(Zonoras was deceased, but the white-haired Maimuna was still on deck.)

Shelley has been resting mind and body a month "with Italian and tea, and manna of sentiment and late hours, and every restful thing a young husband could need for the refreshment of weary limbs and a sore conscience and a nagging sense of shabbiness and treachery." Here Mark Twain comments on the biographer's success in keeping Harriet silent.

That young wife is always silent. We are never allowed to hear from her. She must have opinions about such things, she cannot be indifferent, she must be approving or disapproving, surely she would speak if she were allowed— even today and from her grave she would if she could, I think—but we get only the other side, they keep her silent always.

Then Mark Twain quotes several sentences from Mrs. Boinville's letter to Hogg:

He has deeply interested us. In the course of your intimacy he must have made you feel what we now feel for him. He is seeking a house close to us and if he succeeds we shall have an additional motive to induce you to come among us in the summer.

At this point, Mark Twain gives the reader a chance to guess what Dowden's comment on the letter was. It is this: "These sound

\[23\] Ibid., p. 20.
\[24\] Ibid., p. 21.
\[25\] Ibid.
\[26\] Ibid., p. 22.
like the words of a considerate and judicious friend. "27 Here Mark

Twain accuses Dowden:

That is what he thinks. That is, it is what he thinks he thinks. No, that is not quite it; it is what he thinks he can stupefy a particularly and unspeakably dull reader into thinking it is what he thinks. He makes that comment with the knowledge that Shelley is in love with this woman's daughter, and that it is because of the fascinations of these two that Shelley has deserted his wife—for this month, considering all the circumstance, and his new passion, and his employment of the time, amounted to desertion; that is its rightful name. 28

At this point Dowden quotes from a letter which Shelley wrote to Hogg:

I have been staying with Mrs. Boinville for the last month; I have escaped, in the society of all that philosophy and friendship combine, from the dismaying solitude of myself. . . . They have revived in my heart the expiring flame of life. . . .

I have begun to learn Italian again. . . . Cornelia assists me in this language. Did I not once tell you that I thought her cold and reserved? She is the reverse of this; as she is the reverse of everything bad. She inherits all the divinity of her mother. . . .

I have written nothing but one stanza, which has no meaning, and that I have written only in thought:

Thy dewy looks sink in my heart;
Thy gentle words stir poison there;
Thou hast disturbed the only rest
That was the portion of despair. . . . 29

27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
Here the biographer says that portions of the letter "read like the tired moaning of a wounded creature." Twain says that it is the "cry of a tortured conscience. He had deserted his wife and was now lamenting that he must leave his 'home' and the person whose 'dewy looks had sunk into his breast and whose seducing words had stirred poison there.'" This is conjecture, of course, but one has to assist himself with conjectures like these "when trying to find his way through a literary swamp which has so many misleading finger-boards up as this book is furnished with."

Now Dowden has to explain why Shelley deserted his wife and took up with Cornelia Turner and Italian. The explanation? His happiness in his home had been wounded and bruised almost to death.

When the evidence against Harriet Shelley comes in, there are six counts by which she drove her husband into the "sty" at Bracknell. Here they are:

First: Harriet persuaded him to set up a carriage.

Second: After the intrusion of the baby, Harriet stopped reading aloud and studying.

Third: Harriet's walks with Hogg "commonly conducted us to some fashionable bonnet-shop."

Fourth: Harriet hired a wet-nurse.
Fifth: When an operation was being performed upon the baby, "Harriet stood by, narrowly observing all that was done, but, to the astonishment of the operator, betraying not the smallest sign of emotion."

Sixth: Eliza Westbrook, sister-in-law, was still of the household.

One by one, Mark Twain, in masterly fashion, throws out the ungrounded counts against Harriet and then wields a sharp sword of criticism at the biographer:

How seldom he shows his hand! He is always lurking behind a non-committal "if" or something of that kind; always gliding and dodging around, distributing colorless poison here and there and everywhere, but always leaving himself in a position to say that his language will be found innocuous if taken to pieces and examined. He clearly exhibits a steady and never-relaxing purpose to make Harriet the scapegoat for her husband's first great sin—but it is in the general view that this is revealed, not in details. His insidious literature is like blue water; you know what it is that makes it blue, but you cannot produce and verify any detail of the cloud of microscopic dust in it that does it. Your adversary can dip up a glassful and show you that it is pure white and you cannot deny it; and he can dip the lake dry, glass by glass, and show that every glassful is white, and prove it to any one's eye—and yet that lake was blue and you can swear it. This book is blue—with slander in solution. 30

In Part III of the essay the time is March 16, 1814. To recapitulate, Harriet is in her husbandless home. Shelley has been in the Boinville paradise for a month and has written the letter to Hogg.

30 Ibid., p. 32.
Mark Twain comments on our need of Harriet's side of the case. No diary? No letters? No document of any kind to shed a light on this subject? Then the reader can only resort to conjecture, just as our fabulist does when he has nothing more substantial to work with.

... Deserted wives—deserted whether for cause or without cause—find small charity among the virtuous and the discreet. We conjecture that one after another the neighbors ceased to call; that one after another they got to being "engaged" when Harriet called, that finally they one after another cut her dead on the street; that after that she stayed in the house daytimes, and brooded over her sorrows, and night-times did the same, there being nothing else to do with the heavy hours and the silence and solitude and the dreary intervals which sleep should have charitably bridged but didn't.  

Yes, mischief had been wrought. The biographer arrives at this conclusion, and it is a most just one. Then, just as you begin to half hope he is going to discover the cause of it and launch hot bolts of wrath at the guilty manufacturers of it, you have to turn away disappointed.  

But not seeming to deliver judgment at all, he says:

However the mischief may have been wrought—and at this day no one can wish to heap blame on any buried head—it is certain that some cause or causes of deep division between Shelley and his wife were in operation during the early part of the year 1814. To guess at the precise nature of these causes, in the absence of definite statement, were useless.  

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31 Ibid., p. 37.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid., p. 39.
Shelley's own words were: "Delicacy forbids me to say more than that we were disunited by incurable dissensions." Mark Twain calls this not a very definite statement—a way of saying that he did not wish to say, "I was in love with Cornelia all that time; my wife kept crying and worrying about it and upbraiding me and begging me to cut myself free from a connection which was wronging her and disgracing us both; and I being stung by these reproaches retorted with fierce and bitter speeches—for it is my nature to do that when I am stirred, especially if the target of them is a person whom I had greatly loved and respected before, as witness my various attitudes toward Miss Hitchener, the Gisbornes, Harriet's sister, and others—and finally I did not improve this state of things when I deserted my wife and spent a whole month with the woman who had infatuated me."  

Shelley and Harriet were re-married according to the rites of the English Church on March 24. Within three weeks the new husband and wife were apart again, and he was back in his odorous paradise. This time Harriet does the deserting—Cornelia has turned cold and does not entreat him to stay, and he must go back to his solitude. Of course, Shelley wrote a poem. Mark Twain says of the poems in the biography:

Shelley's poems are a good deal of trouble to his biographer. They are constantly inserted as "evidence"
and they make much confusion. As soon as one of them has proved one thing, another one follows and proves quite a different thing.  

It is May. The Shelleys are corresponding, and it looks as if there will be a reconciliation, if there had been time—but there was not. By the eighth of June, Shelley loved Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin. As Mark Twain says: "And so—perhaps while Harriet was walking the floor nights, trying to get her poem by heart—her husband was doing a fresh one—for the other girl—Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin."

Mark Twain’s description of the sixteen-year-old Mary Godwin is superb:

However, she was a child in years only. From the day that she set her masculine grip on Shelley he was to frisk no more. If she had occupied the only kind and gentle Harriet’s place in March it would have been a thrilling spectacle to see her invade the Boinville rookery and read the riot act. That holiday of Shelley’s would have been of short duration, and Cornelia’s hair would have been as gray as her mother’s when the services were over.

Shelley loved to be "in love" with two women at one time: Miss Hitchener and Harriet, Cornelia and Harriet, and Mary and Harriet. When Shelley encountered Mary Godwin, he was looking for another paradise; and the new head of the paradise, Godwin, Mark Twain characterizes perfectly:

35 Ibid., p. 43.
36 Ibid., p. 45.
37 Ibid.
. . . Godwin was not without self-appreciation; indeed, it may be conjectured that from his point of view the last syllable of his name was surplusage. He lived serenely in his lofty world of philosophy, far above the mean interests that absorbed smaller men, and only came down to the ground at intervals to pass the hat for alms to pay his debts with, and insult the man that relieved him. . . . 38

The way that Shelley and Mary Godwin fell in love is best expressed in Twain's lines:

. . . He told her about the wet-nurse, she told him about political justice; he told her about the deadly sister-in-law, she told him about her mother; he told her about the bonnet-shop, she murmured back about the rights of woman; then he assuaged her, then she assuaged him; then he assuaged her some more, next she assuaged him some more; then they both assuaged one another simultaneously; and so they went on by the hour assuaging and assuaging and assuaging, until at last what was the result? They were in love. It will happen so every time. 39

According to the biographer's attitude there was nothing wrong with the curious inharmoniousness and irreconcilabilities of Shelley—he was doing his best to keep two creatures happy all the time—regarding one with affectionate consideration by mail, while he assuaged the other one at home. His love poems were truth one day and chilled love the next. "The very supplication for a rewarming of Harriet's chilled love was followed so suddenly by the poet's plunge into an adoring passion for Mary Godwin that if it had been a check

38 Ibid., pp. 47-48.
39 Ibid., p. 50.
it would have lost its value before a lazy person could have gotten to
the bank with it." 40

After Shelley had been dining daily in the Skinner Street paradise
for fifteen days, he "forgot" to write to Harriet, and in order to hear
from him she wrote his publisher:

You will greatly oblige me by giving the inclosed to
Mr. Shelley. I would not trouble you, but it is now four
days since I have heard from him, which to me is an age.
Will you write by return of post and tell me what has
become of him? as I always fancy something dreadful
has happened if I do not hear from him. If you tell me
that he is well I shall not come to London, but if I do not
hear from you or him I shall certainly come, as I cannot
endure this dreadful state of suspense. You are his friend
and you can feel for me. 41

Then Mark Twain says the biographer follows Harriet's letter
with a conjecture. He conjectures that she "would now gladly retrace
her steps"—which means that it is proven that she had steps to re-
trace—proven by the poem. The biographer has a Coliseum of conjec-
ture built out of a wastebasket of poetry. 42

Then Dowden has the audacity to attack Harriet Shelley's honor,
using "random and unverified gossip scavenged from a group of
people whose very names make a person shudder: Mary Godwin,
mistress of Shelley; her part-sister, discarded mistress of Lord

40 Ibid., p. 52.
41 Ibid., p. 54.
42 Ibid., p. 53.
Byron; Godwin, the philosophical tramp... Yet the biographer dignifies this sorry rubbish with the name of 'evidence.'

At this point Mark Twain fires on Dowden:

How any man in his right mind could bring himself to defile the grave of a shamefully abused and defenseless girl with these baseless fabrications, this manufactured filth, is inconceivable. How any man, in his right mind or out of it, could sit down and coldly try to persuade anybody to believe it, or listen patiently to it, or indeed, do anything but scoff at it and deride it is astonishing... Against Harriet Shelley’s good name there is not one scrap of tarnishing evidence, and not even a scrap of evil gossip, that comes from a source that entitles it to a hearing.

Using the names of Peacock, Thornton Hunt, and Trelawney—people who knew her best—Mark Twain quotes opinions of Harriet. One of these, Thornton Hunt, who had picked and published slight flaws in Harriet’s character, says: "There is not a trace of evidence or a whisper of scandal against her before her voluntary departure from Shelley." 45

Harriet wrote her letter to Shelley’s publisher on the seventh day of July, and on the twenty-eighth day of the same month Shelley left the country with Mary Godwin and her part-sister, Claire. Harriet bore his second child in November, and Mary bore another one for him two months later.

43 Ibid., p. 55.
44 Ibid., pp. 55-56.
45 Ibid., p. 56.
For better than two years after the birth of her second child, Harriet Shelley bore her burdens. Then she drowned herself. Three weeks later Mary Godwin married Shelley.

For one last blow at the biographer Mark Twain takes over here. Dowden had remarked: "that no act of Shelley's during the two years which immediately preceded her death tended to cause the rash act which brought her life to its close seems certain." 46

The biographer throws off that extraordinary remark without any perceptible disturbance to his serenity; for he follows it with a sentimental justification of Shelley's conduct which has not a pang of conscience in it, but is silky and smooth and undulating and pious—a cake-walk with all the colored brethren at their best. There may be people who can read that page and keep their temper, but it is doubtful. . . . 47

Mark Twain closes the essay with the statement that "even Shelley himself acknowledged that his taking up with Mary Godwin was an act which Eliza might excusably regard as the cause of her sister's ruin."

Concerning this essay, biographers have voiced the highest sort of praise. Paine says:

He proceeded to employ all the skill and gifts he could command—logic, humor, satire—to confute those chapters which had been intended to lay a blight on Harriet Shelley's memory. . . . And in all his work there is hardly a finer example of the literary gifts which made him, perhaps more

46 Ibid., p. 58.

47 Ibid.
than any other writer of his time, the advocate and defender of the weak. It is Mark Twain at his best and noblest, Mark Twain full of righteous wrath. No biography of the man can reveal him so adequately as he revealed himself in this paper. It is a mirror of his soul. 48

Ferguson says:

. . . Mark Twain never wrote a more brilliant piece of prose. It crackles and scintillates with wit, but wit controlled and directed into a masterpiece of destructive analysis. Though more can be said against Harriet than Mark was willing to admit, his demolition of Dowden's specific charges has stood. Shelley's latest and most scholarly biographer, Newman Ivey White, follows Mark Twain almost word for word in dismissing most of the Dowden accusations as frivolous and disingenuous. 49

Mark Twain took up his pen to defend Harriet Shelley because he loathed anything that saavored of insincerity, pretense, and pretentiousness. What he most relished in an author was straightforwardness and concreteness of presentation. Dowden's biography, in its false tone and unfair intent, moved him to wrath. He considered the book intellectually dishonest, and he proceeded to expose Dowden mercilessly.

As a piece of literary criticism the essay is important since it, in a manner, reversed the trend of literary history, demolishing a popular interpretation of Shelley as an irresponsible child and presented him as an adult who was entirely responsible for his actions.

48 Works, XXII, Introduction, x.

49 Ferguson, Mark Twain: Man and Legend, p. 255.
This is a turning point in the interpretation of Shelley, and Mark Twain has been upheld by subsequent biographers and critics. He literally demolished Edward Dowden's attempt to whiten Shelley as he blackened Harriet.

On his way back to his family in Paris in 1894, Mark Twain wrote on the steamer "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses," a piece of criticism almost as good as the Harriet Shelley paper. It was published in the *North American Review* in July, 1895, and was reprinted in 1898 in *Literary Essays*.

Before Mark Twain wrote "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses" he wrote (in 1871) "A Day at Niagara," an essay in which he ridiculed Cooper. In this essay he addressed the "Indians" at Niagara Falls "in the language of friendship:" "Noble Red Men, Braves, War Chiefs, Squaws and high Muck-a-Mucks, the paleface from the land of the setting sun greets you. . . . Remember your ancestors. . . . Remember Uncas, Red Jacket, Hole in the Day and Whoopdedoodledo."\(^{50}\) This was a little slur paving the way for a big slur against Cooper.

Still in the way of background before he wrote his appreciation of Cooper, he wrote in a letter to his mother in 1862 an account of the lovely Indians, not gleaned from Cooper's novels. He described an

\(^{50}\) Quoted in Edgar Branch, *The Literary Apprenticeship of Mark Twain*, p. 284.
Indian whom he had met in the West—Chief Hoop-de-doodle-do—

... with his battered hat trimmed all over with bits of gaudy ribbon and tarnished artificial flowers. The chief also had an imperial robe of rabbit skins, but the crowning glory of his costume was a set of ladies patent steel-spring hoops. The chief's person was covered with vermin of monstrous size which he shed at every step and ate when hungry. Naturally his odor was very great. 51

The selection, "Cooper's Literary Offenses," opens with a brief criticism of Cooper by three well-known critics. Mark gives the statements of very favorable remarks about Cooper; then in his next sentence he leads the readers to believe that these three staunch admirers of Cooper—Professor Lounsbury and Professor Brander Matthews and Wilkie Collins—had not read any of Cooper's writings. This was evidently intended to be a joke. A few years after Mark Twain published his essay on Cooper, Brander Matthews wrote the introduction to the later print of "The Leather Stocking Tales," and in it mentioned Mark's article, calling it bad appreciation of Cooper in one direction and exaggeration in another, but nowhere did Matthews take note of its value as literary criticism.

It is hard to disentangle the exaggerated fun from the points made against Cooper, but Mark Twain listed eighteen violations out of nineteen rules of literary art. Briefly, the eleven large rules require:

51 Ibid., p. 70.
1. That a tale shall accomplish something and arrive somewhere.

2. That the episodes of a tale shall be necessary parts of a tale, and shall help to develop it.

3. That the personages in a tale shall be alive, except in the case of corpses, and that the reader shall be able to know the difference.

4. That the personages in a tale shall have an excuse for being there.

5. That the personages of a tale deal in human talk that has a discoverable meaning and purpose.

6. That the conversation of a personage shall match his character and conduct.

7. That the personages talk in the same dialect in the end of the story that they used in the beginning.

8. That crass stupidities should not be played upon the reader.

9. That the personages let miracles alone.

10. That the author shall make the reader feel a deep interest in his characters.

11. That the characters in a tale shall be clearly defined.

The seven "little" rules require that the author shall: (1) say what he is proposing to say; (2) use the right word, not its second cousin; (3) eschew surplusage; (4) not omit necessary details; (5) avoid
slovenliness of form; (6) employ a simple and straightforward style; and (7) use good grammar.

In addition to these violations of the rules of literary art, Mark Twain says Cooper used "tricks of the trade" too often. Two of his tricks, Mark calls the "moccasin" trick and the "broken twig" trick:

... In his little box of stage properties he kept six or eight cunning devices, tricks, artifices for his savages and woodsmen to deceive and circumvent each other with, and he was never so happy as when he was working these innocent things and seeing them go. A favorite one was to make a moccasined person tread in the tracks of the moccasined enemy, and thus hide his own trail. Cooper wore out barrels and barrels of moccasins in working that trick. Another stage-property that he pulled out of his box pretty frequently was his broken twig. He prized his broken twig above all the rest of his effects, and worked it the hardest. It is a restful chapter in any book of his when somebody doesn't step on a dry twig and alarm all the reds and whites for two hundred yards around. Every time a Cooper person is in peril, and absolute silence is worth four dollars a minute, he is sure to step on a dry twig. There may be a hundred handier things to step on, but that wouldn't satisfy Cooper. Cooper requires him to turn out and find a dry twig; and if he can't do it, go and borrow one. In fact, the Leatherstocking Series ought to have been called the Broken Twig Series. 52

Mark Twain listed Cooper's "delicate arts of the forest" as the sailor art, artillery art, nature's art, and the "situation" art. As an example of the sailor art, he says:

... Cooper was a sailor—a naval officer; yet he gravely tells us how a vessel, driving toward a lee shore in a gale, is steered for a particular spot by her skipper because

52 Works, XXII, 63-64.
he knows of an undertow there which will hold her back against the gale and save her. For just pure woodcraft, or sailorcraft, or whatever it is, isn't that neat? 53

The artillery art is illustrated by Twain's story about the cannonball. He brings to light how Cooper had allowed a cannonball to behave in *The Last of the Mohicans*. He says:

... For several years Cooper was daily in the society of artillery, and he ought to have noticed that when a cannonball strikes the ground it either buries itself or skips a hundred feet or so; skips again a hundred feet or so—and so on, till finally it gets tired and rolls. Now in one place he loses some "females"—as he always calls women—in the edge of a wood near a plain at night in a fog, on purpose to give Bumppo a chance to show off the delicate art of the forest before the reader. These mislaid people are hunting for a fort. They hear a cannon-blast, and a cannon-ball presently comes rolling into the wood and stops at their feet. To the females this suggests nothing. The case is very different with the admirable Bumppo. I wish I may never know peace again if he doesn't strike out promptly and follow the track of that cannon-ball across the plain through the dense fog and find the fort. 54

An example of nature's art was the food for laughter which Mark Twain found when Chingachgook (pronounced Chicago) turns a running stream out of its course and finds traces of a footprint—a moccasined footprint—in its bed. In reality, Cooper was careful to describe the stream as a "turbid little rill."

The situation art is illustrated by the eighteen-foot boat on the twenty-foot stream in *The Deerslayer*. In much detail Mark describes

53 Ibid., p. 64.

54 Ibid., pp. 64-65.
this incident and decorates each paragraph with some reference to Cooper, such as: "Cooper's eye was splendidly inaccurate"; 55 "Cooper's Indians never notice anything; Cooper thinks they are marvelous creatures for noticing, but he was always in error about his Indians. There was seldom a sane one among them"; 56 "Cooper was no architect"; 57 or, "in the matter of intellect, the difference between a Cooper Indian and an Indian that stands in front of the cigar-shop is not spacious." 58

When one reads the essay, he asks himself, "Where does humor end and sobriety begin?" In the last part of the essay Mark Twain does summarize Cooper's literary failings. He says that his stories do not move, his characters are without life, the dialogue is inconsistent, absurd miracles are numerous, diction, form and grammar are poor (Cooper's word sense was singularly dull), and his humor is pathetic and his pathos is funny.

As to the evaluation of the essay, critics agree that Cooper will not stand up today, but at the same time Mark Twain was not content to just expose Cooper's real clumsiness and improbabilities—he must exaggerate them. Cooper did exasperate Mark Twain with his stilted

55 Ibid., p. 66.
56 Ibid., p. 68.
57 Ibid., p. 69.
58 Ibid.
artificialities and slipshod English, and it was hard for Twain to realize that in spite of these things the author of The Deerslayer was a mighty story-teller. 59

Wagenknecht calls "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses" Mark Twain's most ambitious piece of literary criticism. 60

"Fenimore Cooper's Further Literary Offenses," first published in The New England Quarterly for September, 1946, is a continuation of Mark Twain's "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses."

Bernard DeVoto's study of the Mark Twain Papers has revealed that not all the original essay was published, "presumably because it was overlong for a magazine." The Mark Twain Papers also indicate that at one time the author planned to publish it as a lecture by "Mark Twain, M. A., Professor of Belles Lettres in the Veterinary College of Arizona."61

Progressing from The Deerslayer, which Mark Twain labels "a literary delirium tremens," he takes a passage from Chapter XI of The Last of the Mohicans:

Notwithstanding the swiftness of their flight, one of the Indians had found an opportunity to strike a straggling fawn with an arrow, and had borne the more preferable

59 Works, XXXII, 981.

60 Wagenknecht, op. cit., p. 40.

fragments of the victim, patiently on his shoulders, to the stopping place. Without any aid from the science of cookery, he was immediately employed, in common with his fellows, in gorging himself with this digestible sustenance, Magua alone sat apart, without participating in the revolting meal, and apparently buried in the deepest thought.  

Deleting the "unnecessary" from the passage, Mark Twain shows that there was only one fact worth stating in the paragraph: "During the flight one of the Indians had killed a fawn, and he brought it into camp."  

"Style," explains Twain, "is an author's way of setting forth a matter, and an author's style is a main part of his equipment for business." Cooper's style he finds never varying—always "grand and stately and noble."

... Style may be likened to an army, the author to its general, the book to the campaign. Some authors proportion an attacking force to the strength or weakness, the importance or unimportance, of the object to be attacked; but Cooper doesn't. It doesn't make any difference to Cooper whether the object of attack is a hundred thousand men or a cow; he hurls his entire force against it. ...  

Returning to the quoted passage from Chapter XI of The Last of the Mohicans, Mark Twain makes certain suggestions concerning substitution of better words for the ones used by Cooper. For "strike" he suggests "shot" since the Indian did not use a brickbat; "fragments"
might refer to cats' meat, but it does not exactly fit when applied to
the hindquarter of a fawn; "he and the others ate the meat raw" would
be much more economical than "without any aid from the science of
cookery he was immediately employed, in common with his fellows, in
gorging himself with this digestible sustenance." Besides, how did
Cooper know the meat was going to agree with them?

In one passage from The Last of the Mohicans, Cooper scored
one hundred fourteen literary transgressions out of a possible one hun-
dred fifteen, and in another selection he used three hundred twenty
words to do what two hundred twenty could have more capably done—
"the generous spendthrift." "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses" and "Fenimore Cooper's
Further Literary Offenses" are important pieces of literary criticism
in that Mark Twain has been upheld generally in his opinions of Cooper's
faults. Cooper was overrated by contemporary critics, and Mark
Twain deflated their extreme and unmerited high opinion of Cooper's
art.

This essay on Cooper is less carefully controlled than the one
concerning Harriet Shelley, but even the most ardent admirer of
Cooper's tales cannot but admit that there is much justice in Mark's

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65Ibid., pp. 87-88.
66Ibid., p. 89.
disparaging criticism. Cooper does flounce around in words, and he sometimes pounces upon a most inappropriate one. Mark Twain's own practice of never being satisfied with an "approximate" word made him more impatient with Cooper. His word sense was keen and alert always. Cooper annoyed him with his failure to pierce below the surface, and his cold and persistent violations of the rules of correct composition Mark could not tolerate.

The third major piece of literary criticism that Mark Twain wrote was an article for the *Youth's Companion* of October 3, 1895, and was entitled "How to Tell a Story." The essay was inspired by his remembrance of the humorous lectures of Artemus Ward, as Mark Twain considered Ward a superb story-teller.

The theme or aim of the story is twofold: to define the differences between the humorous, and witty or comical stories, and to explain how a humorous story should be told.

Mark Twain says that the humorous story is of American origin, its effect is dependent upon the manner of telling, it may be spun to great length, it bubbles gently along, it can be told only by an artist, and it may be told seriously without any hint of humor.

He says the comic story is of English origin, and the witty story comes from France. The effect of these stories is in the matter only; they must be brief, must end with a point, and the end must burst suddenly.
In this essay Mark Twain virtually writes a treatise on the pause. He says:

The pause is an exceedingly important feature in any kind of story, and a frequently recurring feature, too. It is a dainty thing, and delicate, and also uncertain and treacherous; for it must be exactly the right length—no more and no less—or it fails of its purpose and makes trouble. If the pause is too short the impressive point is passed, and the audience have had time to divine that a surprise is intended—and then you can't surprise them, of course. 67

When one reads "How to Tell a Story," he feels that Mark Twain considered the techniques of his subject down to the most minute detail; the essay reveals his serious concern for literary art.

Another essay to which some few biographers have called our attention is the one on "General Grant's Grammar" which was written in 1886 and was delivered the same year as a speech at an Army and Navy Club dinner in New York City. Matthew Arnold, "a great and honored author," had criticized General Grant's grammar in Grant's Personal Memoirs. Mark Twain rushed to his hero's defense and pointed out that in Arnold's criticism there were no less than "two grammatical crimes and more than several examples of very crude and slovenly English." 68

Mark Twain compares some of Grant's chapters with Caesar's Commentaries, and says in all sincerity that the same high merits

67Works, XXIV, 268.
68Works, XXXII, 841.
distinguish both books: clarity of statement, directness, simplicity, manifest truthfulness, fairness and justice toward friend and foe alike, soldierly candor and frankness, and soldierly avoidance of flowery speech. 69

In the essay Mark Twain calls to our attention that he has a book entitled Modern English Literature: Its Blemishes and Defects, by Henry Breen, a countryman of Arnold. He says:

In it I find examples of bad grammar and slovenly English from the pens of Sydney Smith, Sheridan, Hallam, Whateley, Carlyle, Disraeli, Allison, Junius Blair, Macaulay, Shakespeare, Milton, Gibbon, Southey, Lamb, Landor, Smollet, Walpole, Walker (of the dictionary), Christopher North, Kirk White, Benjamin Franklin, Sir Walter Scott, and Mr. Lindley Murray (who made the grammar). 70

Closing the essay, Mark Twain expresses his opinion of the Memoirs as a great book:

People may hunt out what microscopic motes they please, but, after all, the fact remains and cannot be dislodged, that General Grant's book is a great, and in its peculiar department unique and unapproachable, literary masterpiece. In their line, there is no higher literature than those modest, simple memoirs. Their style is at least flawless and no man could improve upon it, and great books are weighed and measured by their style and matter, and not by the trimmings and shadings of their grammar. 71

69 Works, XXXI, 810.
70 Works, XXVIII, 135-136.
71 Ibid., pp. 136-137.
Now that we have considered in some detail Mark Twain's major pieces of literary criticism, we can come to some sort of agreement as to their value. They give him an assured seat among the literary critics of America. Possibly what he said, if for no other reason than the way he said it, will live after other critics' words have been forgotten.

"In Defense of Harriet Shelley" has no peer in literary criticism. In "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses" and "Fenimore Cooper's Further Literary Offenses" we find under the coating of exaggeration and burlesque a sincere attempt to expose Cooper's lack of literary art. "How to Tell a Story" establishes valid distinctions among the literary terms most closely related to his own writings. William Dean Howells agreed with Mark Twain in what he said in defense of General Grant's grammar:

... But the Personal Memoirs of U. S. Grant, written as simply and straightforwardly as his battles were fought, couched in the most unpretentious phrase, with never a touch of grandiosity or attitudinizing, familiar, homely in style, form a great piece of literature, because great literature is nothing more nor less than the clear expression of minds that have something great in them, whether religion, or beauty, or deep experience.  

We can believe that fiction was the instinctive part of Mark Twain's life; but his literary criticism reveals extensive reading, perceptive study, sound logic, and great good sense. He wanted it to

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72 William Dean Howells, _Criticism and Fiction_, pp. 89-90.
be read, not caring whom he pleased or displeased; he insisted on truth, and was impatient of anything savoring of humbug, in literature as in life.
CHAPTER VI

HIS ABOMINATIONS

Mark Twain did not care much for fiction, and among the books and the authors of fiction he had certain distinct loathings. There were certain authors whose names he seemed not so much to pronounce as to spew out of his mouth. His vigorous denunciation of them was so characteristically Twainian that they usually stick in the memory.

He despised George Meredith mainly for the artificialities of his characters. He had a tendency to lump George Eliot, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Henry James together for their tendency toward over-analysis.

Concerning Howells' Indian Summer, Twain said in a letter dated July 21, 1885:

I bored through Middlemarch during the past week, with its labored and tedious analysis of feelings and motives, its paltry and tiresome people, its unexciting and uninteresting story, and its frequent blinding flashes of single-sentence poetry, philosophy, wit and what not, and nearly died from overwork. I wouldn't read another of

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1Howells, My Mark Twain, p. 15.

2Gladys Bellamy, Mark Twain as a Literary Artist, p. 44.
those books for a farm. I did try to read another—Daniel Deronda. I dragged through three chapters losing flesh all the time, and then was honest enough to quit, and confess to myself that I haven't any romance literature appetite, as far as I can see, except for your books.

... Well, you have done it with marvelous facility and you make all the motives and feelings perfectly clear without analyzing the guts out of them, the way George Eliot does. I can't stand George Eliot and Hawthorne and those people; I see what they are at a hundred years before they get to it and they just tire me to death. And as for "The Bostonians," I would rather be damned to John Bunyan's heaven than read that.î

Mark Twain attempted no detailed analysis of the faults of Goldsmith's The Vicar of Wakefield, but he always spoke of the book with contempt. In Following the Equator he praised the library of the ship:

... Also, to be fair, there is another word of praise due to this ship's library: it contains no copy of The Vicar of Wakefield, that strange menagerie of complacent hypocrites and idiots, of theatrical cheap-john heroes and heroines, who are always showing off, of bad people who are not interesting, and good people who are fatiguing. A singular book. Not a sincere line in it, and not a character that invites respect; a book which is one long waste-pipe discharge of goody-goody puerilities and dreary moralities; a book which is full of pathos which revolts, and humor which grieves the heart. There are few things in literature that are more piteous, more pathetic, than the celebrated "humorous" incident of Moses and the spectacles.î

And yet he considered Goldsmith's Citizen of the World one of his beau ideals of literature!

In his books, letters, and speeches, Mark Twain had more to say about Sir Walter Scott than about any of his other author abominations.

3Works, XXXV, 454-455.
4Works, XXI, 288-289.
While Mark Twain was at Quarry Farm working on *Tom Sawyer*, Howells' *Foregone Conclusion* was running in the *Atlantic*. He had read Howells' work and was delighted with it. When he wrote him to compliment his work, he said:

I should think that this must be the daintiest, truest, most admirable workmanship that was ever put on a story. The creatures of God do not act out their natures more unerringly than yours do. If your genuine stories can die I wonder by what right old Walter Scott's artificialities shall continue to life.\(^5\)

In *Life on the Mississippi* Mark Twain repeatedly poured scorn upon "the second-hand Walter Scotticized, pseudo-chivalry of the Southern ideal."\(^6\) Concerning the capital at Baton Rouge he wrote:

Sir Walter Scott is probably responsible for the Capitol building, for it is not conceivable that the little sham castle would ever have been built if he had not run the people mad, a couple of generations ago, with his medieval romances. The South has not yet recovered from the debilitating influence of his books. Admiration of his fantastic heroes and their grotesque "chivalry" doings and romantic juvenilities still survives here, in an atmosphere in which is already perceptible the wholesome and practical nineteenth century smell of cotton fabrics and locomotives; and traces of its inflated language and other windy humbuggeries survive along with it.\(^7\)

According to Mark Twain in *Life on the Mississippi*, the real trouble with the Southern newspaper reporter was women—women

\(^5\) *Works*, XXXI, 510.

\(^6\) *Howells, op. cit.*, p. 35.

\(^7\) *Works*, XII, 332-333.
supplemented by Sir Walter Scott and his knights and beauty and chivalry, and so on:

The Times-Democrat [sic] sent a relief steamer up one of the bayous, last April. This steamer landed at a village up there somewhere, and the captain invited some of the ladies of the village to make a short trip with him. They accepted and came aboard and the steamboat shoved out up the creek. That was all there was "to it." And that is all that editor of the Times-Democrat would have got out of it. He would probably have even tabulated them; partly to secure perfect clearness of statement, and partly to give space. But his special correspondent knows other methods of handling statistics. He just throws off all restraint and wallows in them:

"On Saturday, early in the morning, the beauty of the place graced our cabin, and proud of her fair freight the gallant little boat glided up the bayou."

Twenty-two words to say the ladies came aboard and the boat shoved out up the creek, is a clean waste of ten good words and is also destructive of compactness of statement.

The trouble with the Southern reporter is—Women. They unsettle him; they throw him off his balance. He is plain and sensible and satisfactory, until woman heaves in sight. Then he goes all to pieces; his mind totters, becomes flowery and exotic. From reading the above extract, you would imagine that this student of Sir Walter Scott is an apprentice, and knows next to nothing about handling a pen. On the contrary, he furnishes plenty of proofs, in his long letter, that he knows well enough how to handle it when the women are not around to give him the artificial-flower complaint. 8

Life on the Mississippi is an imperishable saga in which the lordly river is the main character, but in one section of the book the reader believes that Sir Walter Scott has become its stand-in. For

8 Ibid., pp. 368-369.
several pages Mark Twain unloads his longest and most accusing dissertation upon Scott:

Then comes Sir Walter Scott with his enchantments, and by his single might checks this wave of progress, and even turns it back; sets the world in love with dreams and phantoms; with decayed and swinish forms of religion; with decayed 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. He did measureless harm; more real and lasting harm, perhaps, than any other individual that ever wrote. Most of the world has now outlived a good part of these harms, though by no means all of them; but in our South they flourish pretty forcefully still. Not so forcefully as half a generation ago perhaps, but still forcefully. 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 that is dead, and out of charity ought to be buried. But for the Sir Walter disease, the character of the Southerner—or Southron, according to Sir Walter’s starchier way of phrasing it—would be wholly modern, in place of modern and medieval mixed, and the South would be fully a generation further advanced than it is. 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. For it was he that created rank and caste down there, and also reverence for rank and caste, and pride and pleasure in them. Enough is laid on slavery, without fathering upon it these creations and contributions of Sir Walter.

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. It seems a little harsh toward a dead man to say that we never should have had any war but for Sir Walter; and yet something of a plausible argument might, perhaps, be made in support of that wild proposition. The Southerner of the American Revolution owned slaves; so did the Southerner of the Civil War;
but the former resembles the latter as an Englishman resembles a Frenchman. The change of character can be traced rather more easily to Sir Walter's influence than to that of any other thing or person.

One may observe, by one or two signs, how deeply that influence penetrated, and how strongly it holds. If one takes up a Northern or Southern literary periodical of forty or fifty years ago, he will find it filled with wordy, windy, flowery "eloquence," romanticism, sentimentality—all imitated from Sir Walter, and sufficiently badly done, too—innocent travesties of his style and methods, in fact. This sort of literature being the fashion in both sections of the country, there was opportunity for the fairest competition; and as a consequence, the South was able to show as many well-known literary names, proportioned to population, as the North could.

But a change has come, and there is no opportunity now for a fair competition between North and South. For the North has thrown out that old inflated style, whereas the Southern writer still clings to it—clings to it and has a restricted market for his wares, as a consequence. There is as much literary talent in the South, now, as ever there was, of course; but its work can gain but slight currency under present conditions; the authors write for the past, not the present; they use obsolete forms and a dead language. But when a Southerner of genius writes modern English, his book goes upon crutches no longer, but upon wings; and they carry it swiftly all about America and England, and through the great English reprint publishing-houses of Germany—as witness the experience of Mr. Cable and "Uncle Remus," two of the very few Southern authors who do not write in the Southern style. Instead of three or four widely known literary names, the South ought to have a dozen or two—and will have them when Sir Walter's time is out.

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; and 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.  

\[9\]Ibid., pp. 375-378.
In Tom Sawyer Abroad, Huck and Tom had been discussing the Crusades, and Tom had explained that "a Crusade was a war to recover the Holy Land from the paynim." Huck thinks all this over and says:

Now Tom he got all that notion out of Walter Scott's book, which he was always reading. And it was a wild notion, because in my opinion he never could've raised the men, and if he did, as like as not he would've got licked. I took the book and read all about it, and as near as I could make it out, most of the folks that shook farming to go crusading had a mighty rocky time of it.  

On November 20, 1900, Mark Twain attended a dinner of the Nineteenth Century Club at Sherry's in New York City. Two professors, Trent and Winchester, who attended the dinner had made speeches on the subject, "The Disappearance of Literature." Concerning Professor Winchester's remarks Mark Twain responded:

We have heard a discussion tonight on the disappearance of literature. That's no new thing. That's what certain kinds of literature have been doing for several years. The fact is, my friend, that the fashion in literature changes, and the literary tailors have to change their cuts or go out of business. Professor Winchester here, if I remember fairly correctly what he said, remarked that few, if any, of the novels produced today would live as long as the novels of Walter Scott. That may be his notion. Maybe he is right; but so far as I am concerned, I don't care if they don't.  

Concerning Professor Trent's remarks he continued:

10 Works, XIX, 12.

Professor Trent also had a good deal to say about the disappearance of literature. He said that Scott would outlive all his critics. I guess that's true. The fact of the business is, you've got to be one of two ages to appreciate Scott. When you're eighteen you can read Ivanhoe, and you want to wait until you are ninety to read some of the rest. It takes a pretty well-regulated abstemious critic to live ninety years.\footnote{Ibid., p. 210.}

There are two interesting letters that Mark Twain wrote Brander Matthews concerning Walter Scott. One is dated May 4, 1903, and the other one is dated May 8, 1903. The last one was not mailed for some reason—possibly it was mislaid—but after Mark Twain's death it was found and forwarded. In the one dated May 4, 1903, there are many questions concerning Walter Scott. Here it is in full:

I haven't been out of my bed for four weeks, but—well, I have been reading, a good deal, and it occurs to me to ask you to sit down, some time or other when you have 8 or 9 months to spare, and jot me down a certain few literary particulars for my help and elevation. Your time need not be thrown away, for at your further leisure you can make Columbian lectures out of the results and do your students a good turn.

1. Are there in Sir Walter Scott's novels passages done in good English—English which is neither slovenly or involved?
2. Are there passages whose English is not poor and thin and commonplace, but is of a quality above that?
3. Are there passages which burn with real fire—not punk, fox-fire, make believe?
4. Has he heroes and heroines who are not cads and caddesses?
5. Has he personages whose acts and talk correspond with their characters as described by him?
6. Has he heroes and heroines whom the reader admires, admires, and knows why?
7. Has he funny characters that are funny, and humorous passages that are humorous?
8. Does he ever chain the reader's interest, and make him reluctant to lay the book down?
9. Are there pages where he ceases from posing, ceases from admiring the placid flood and flow of his own dilutions, ceases from being artificial, and is for a time, long or short, recognizably sincere and in earnest?
10. Did he know how to write English, and didn't do it because he didn't want to?
11. Did he use the right word only when he couldn't think of another one, or did he run so much to wrong because he didn't know the right one when he saw it?
12. Can you read him? and keep your respect for him? Of course a person could in his day—an era of sentimentality and sloppy romantics—but land! can a body do it today?

Brander, I lie here dying, slowly dying, under the blight of Sir Walter. I have read the first volume of Rob Roy, and as far chapter XIX of Guy Mannering, and I can no longer hold my head up nor take my nourishment. Lord, it's all so juvenile! so artificial, so shoddy; and such wax figures and skeletons and spectres. Interest? Why, it is impossible to feel an interest in these bloodless shams, these milk-and-water humbugs. And oh, the poverty of the invention! Not poverty in inventing situations, but poverty in furnishing reasons for them. Sir Walter usually gives himself away when he arranges for a situation—elaborates, and elaborates, and elaborates, till if you live to get to it you don't believe it when it happens.

I can't find the rest of Rob Roy, I can't stand any more Mannering—I do not know just what to do, but I will reflect, and not quit this great study rashly. He was great, in his day, and to his proper audience; and so was God in Jewish times, for that matter, but why should either of them rank high now? And do they?—honest, now, do they? Dam'd if I believe it. . . . 13

And here is the letter of May 8, 1903, mailed in June, 1910:

13Works, XXXV, 737-738.
I'm still in bed, but the days have lost their dullness since I broke into Sir Walter and lost my temper. I finished Guy Mannering—that curious, curious book, with its mob of squalid shadows jabbering around a single flesh-and-blood being—Dinmont; a book crazily put together out of the very refuse of the romance-artist's stage properties—finished it and took up Quentin Durward, and finished that.

It was like leaving the dead to mingle with the living: it was like withdrawing from the infant class in the College of Journalism to sit under the lectures in English literature in Columbia University.

I wonder who wrote Quentin Durward? 14

But not even against Scott does Mark Twain breathe so much fire and brimstone as against Jane Austen. 15 Perhaps Howells was the instigator of the antipathy because he constantly sang her praises. He evidently held her perfections up to Twain until he developed a mania on the subject.

... but his prime abhorrence was my dear and honored prime favorite, Jane Austen. He once said to me, I suppose after he had been reading some of my unsparing praises of her—"You seem to think that woman could write," and he forbode withering me with his scorn, apparently because we had been friends so long, and he more pitied than hated me for my bad taste. . . . 16

Homeward bound with his material for Following the Equator, Mark Twain commented on the ship's library—one part of the ship in which he always registered great interest: "Jane Austen's books, too,

14 Ibid., pp. 737-739.
15 Wagenknecht, Mark Twain, the Man and His Work, p. 41.
16 Howells, op. cit., pp. 15-16.
are absent from this library. Just that one omission alone would make
a fairly good library out of a library that hadn't a book in it."17

Mark Twain made a lecture tour in 1895, and this entry was made
in his notebook:

In the past year have read Vicar of Wakefield and some
of Jane Austen—thoroughly artificial. Have begun Children
of the Abbey. It begins with this "Impromptu" from the
sentimental heroine:

"Hail, sweet asylum of my infancy! Content and
innocence reside beneath your humble roof and charity
unboastful of the good it renders. . . . Here unmolested
may I wait till the rude storm of sorrow is overblown
and my father's arms are again extended to receive me."
Has the ear-marks of preparation. 18

The definitive edition of Mark Twain's works does not record
one complimentary statement about Jane Austen. He once told Paine:

... "When I take up one of Jane Austen's books, such as
Pride and Prejudice, I feel like a barkeeper entering the
kingdom of heaven. I know what his sensation would be and
his private comments. He would not find the place to his
taste, and he would probably say so."19

William Dean Howells wrote an article on Poe in early 1909,

and Twain wrote him to express his delight with it:

... I am in agreement with substantially all you say
about his literature. To me his prose is unreadable—
like Jane Austin's. No, there is a difference. I could
read his prose on salary, but not Jane's. Jane is

17 Works, XXI, 289.
18 Works, XXXII, 1016.
19 Works, XXXIII, 1500.
entirely impossible. It seems a great pity that they allowed her to die a natural death.  

Mark Twain knew that there was an unfairness about his criticism of Jane Austen, his chief abomination, and he acknowledged this fact to Twichell in a letter from Kaltenleutgeben, September 13, 1898.

Twichell had sent him an article by Brander Matthews.

... And so I thank you very much for sending me Brander's article. When you say "I like Brander Matthews; he impresses me as a man of parts and power," I back you, right up to the hub—I feel the same way—but when you say he has earned your gratitude for cuffing me for my crimes against the Leather stockings and the Vicar, I ain't making any objection. Dern your gratitude.

His article is as sound as a nut. Brander knows literature, and loves it; he can talk about it and keep his temper; he can state his case so lucidly and so fairly and so forcibly that you have to agree with him even when you don't agree with him; and he can discover and praise such merits as a book has, even when are half a dozen diamonds scattered through an acre of mud. And so he has a right to be a critic.

To detail just the opposite of the above invoice is to describe me. I haven't any right to criticize books, and I don't do it except when I hate them. I often want to criticize Jane Austen, but her books madden me so that I can't conceal my frenzy from the reader; and therefore I have to stop every time I begin.

Mark Twain had powers of sarcasm and a relentless rancor in his contempt which those who knew him best appreciated most, and he acknowledged his inability to "satirize." Even ardent admirers of The Heart of Midlothian and Quentin Durward cannot deny that

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20 Works, XXXV, 830.

21 Ibid., pp. 666-667.
Scott was at times most inaccurate and inelegant in his long and flowing paragraphs. Scott evidently did not take his fiction so seriously as Mark Twain did. Mark had trained himself to be careful of verbal untidiness—something which he found all too frequently in Scott's works.

In addition to calling attention to Scott's linguistic deficiencies, Mark Twain expressed a dislike for his story material. He knew very well what he liked and what he did not like, and even though we may not agree with some of his prejudices, we can rest assured that there was veracity in the literary judgments he made.

Why Mark Twain used such vigorous vernacular in voicing his contempt of Jane Austen could be answered only when one reads Mark Twain extensively. Possibly his sphere of American life was so much broader than her stilted and smug English environment, that he considered her narrow and superficial. Perhaps her placid acceptance of the society about which she wrote was too far from Mark Twain's masculine and robust conception of what life really was.

There is a similarity in the works of Mark Twain's chief abomina-
ations—Eliot, Hawthorne, Meredith, James, Goldsmith, Cooper, Scott, and Jane Austen. Each wrote in a style which Mark Twain considered inflated, unnatural, and devoid of sincerity. He consid-
ered their created characters mere artificialities, the society in which
they played their uninteresting and useless lives he despised. Somehow we register no surprise at his dislike for their pretense and prissiness, for Mark Twain was an imaginative realist who did what many popular novelists failed to do—he created real characters.
CHAPTER VII

HIS ADORATION

Mark Twain's unbroken friendship with William Dean Howells is one of the most beautiful in all literature. He could have written well and interestingly a book called My William Dean Howells, for their friendship endured cloudless for twoscore years, and its full significance is revealed in their letters.

It was during a Boston sojourn that he first met Howells, who was assistant editor of the Atlantic at the time. This was the winter of 1869-1870. The men, so widely different, became friends almost on sight. Howells had favorably reviewed The Innocents Abroad, and after the first moments of their introduction had passed, Mark Twain said: "When I read that review of yours, I felt like the woman who said that she was so glad that her baby had come white."¹ This was not the sort of thing Howells would have said, but it was the sort of thing that he could understand and appreciate from Mark Twain. Evidently, Howells' review satisfied the public, and by the end of January, 1870, more than thirty thousand copies of The Innocents Abroad had been sold.

¹Works, XXXIV, 166.
By 1874 Howells was editor of the *Atlantic*, and he kept urging Mark to write something suitable for that magazine. One night at Quarry Farm Mrs. Crane's cook told him a story which he set down the next morning, as nearly in her words as possible. He sent it and another, "The Fable for Good Old Boys and Girls," to Howells with this note: "I have not altered the old colored woman's story except to begin at the beginning, instead of the middle, as she did—and traveled both ways."²

Howells was delighted with the Negro story and its "realest kind of black talk," but he returned "The Fable for Good Old Boys and Girls," because the *Atlantic* on matters of religion was in that "Good Lord, Good Devil condition when a little fable like yours wouldn't leave it a single Presbyterian, Baptist, Unitarian, Episcopalian, Methodist, or Millerite paying subscriber, while all the dead-heads would stick to it and abuse it in the denominational newspapers!"³

Howells was in those days writing those vividly realistic, indeed photographic, stories which fixed his place among American men of letters.⁴ He had written *Their Wedding Journey* and *A Chance Acquaintance*, when *A Foregone Conclusion* appeared. Mark Twain always admired Howells' books, possibly because his work was so

²Ibid., p. 223.
³Ibid.
⁴Ibid., p. 222.
different from Howells' and possibly just because of his great fondness for Howells himself. The sincerity of this appreciation for Howells need not be questioned, for not one derogatory remark about his idol is recorded in all of Mark Twain's published works.

During the days of 1874 the Howells and Twain families were visiting back and forth between Boston and Hartford, and these never-to-be-forgotten days were always happy memories of both families and the congenial neighborhoods.

Howells' notice of Sketches appeared in the Atlantic in 1875, and Twain wrote to acknowledge it gratefully:

"That is a perfectly superb notice. You can easily believe that nothing ever gratified me so much before. The newspaper praises bestowed upon "The Innocents Abroad" were large and generous, but somehow I hadn't confidence in the critical judgment of the parties who furnished them. You know how that is, yourself, from reading the newspaper notices of your own books. They gratify a body, but they always leave a small pang behind in the shape of a fear that the critic's good words could not safely be depended upon as authority. Yours is the recognized Court of Last Resort in this country; from its decision there is no appeal; and so to have gained this decree of yours before I am forty years old, I regard as a thing to be right down proud of. . . ."

Mark Twain carried the manuscript of Tom Sawyer to Boston and dropped it in Howells' lap. Livy was especially anxious for him to see it, for her opinion of Howells matched Mark Twain's. When Howells wrote his opinion, the Twain household was pleased:

5Ibid., p. 263.
I finished reading *Tom Sawyer* a week ago, sitting up till one A. M. to get to the end, simply because it was impossible to leave off. It's altogether the best boy's story I ever read. It will be an immense success. . . .

Late in May, 1877, Mark Twain and Twichell went on an excursion to Bermuda. Howells was too involved in literary affairs to go along and the two missed him. When they returned, Mark wrote him how their conversation on the four days' tramp over Bermuda had constantly turned to, "It is a burning shame that Howells isn't here."

He recorded such conversation as this:

... What a rattling chapter Howells would make out of the small boy Alfred, with his alert eye and military brevity and exactness of speech; and out of the old landlady; and her sacred onions; and her daughter; and the visiting clergyman; and the ancient pianos of Hamilton and the venerable music in vogue there—and forty other things which we shall leave untouched or touched but lightly upon, we not being worthy!  

The Twains sailed for Europe on the Holsatia, April 11, 1878, and in a characteristic manner and from his heart Mark wrote Howells a tribute on the eve of their departure.

... And that reminds me, ungrateful dog that I am, that I owe as much to your training as the rude country job-printer owes to the city boss who takes him in hand and teaches him the right way to handle his art. . . . Nothing that has passed under your eye needs any revision before going into a volume, while all my other stuff does need so much.  

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From Munich in 1879 Mark Twain wrote Howells concerning

The Lady of the Aroostook which was then running in the Atlantic. He always regarded with awe Howells' ability to dissect and photograph with such delicacy the minutiae of human nature.

If your literature has not struck perfection now we are not able to see what is lacking. It is all such truth—truth to the life; everywhere your pen falls it leaves a photograph. . . . Possibly you will not be a fully accepted classic until you have been dead one hundred years—it is the fate of all the Shakespeares of all genuine professions—but then your books will be as common as Bibles, I believe. In that day I shall be in the encyclopedias, too, thus: "Mark Twain, history and occupation unknown; but he was personally acquainted with Howells."

William Dean Howells at the age of forty-five reached what many regard as his highest point of achievement in American realism with the publication of his novel, The Rise of Silas Lapham. During the summer of 1882 Mark Twain read it and overflowed with adjectives. We can believe he was most sincere, for in the letter he criticizes Howells' inability to read:

I am in a state of wild enthusiasm over this July instalment of your story. It's perfectly dazzling—it's masterly—incomparable. Yet I heard you read it—without losing my balance. Well, the difference between your reading and your writing is—remarkable. . . . That's the best drunk scene—because the truest—that I ever read. There are touches in it that I never saw any writer take note of before. And they are set before

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9 Works, XXXI, 640.

10 Works, XXXIV, 421.
the reader with amazing accuracy. How very drunk, and how recently drunk, and how altogether admirably drunk you must have been to enable you to contrive that masterpiece! 11

In 1882 in the Century Magazine William Dean Howells seems to have determined to declare himself, in a large, free way, concerning his own personal estimate of Mark Twain. He prepared a biographical appreciation of him in which he served notice to the world that Mark Twain's work was of considerable importance indeed. This article was a kind of manifesto—a declaration of independence. 12

Concerning Howells' A Woman's Reason Mark Twain playfully wrote him:

We are enjoying your story with our usual unspeakableness; and I'm right glad you threw in the shipwreck and the mystery—I like it. Mrs. Crane thinks it's the best story you've written yet. We—but we always think the last one is the best. And why shouldn't it be? Practice helps. 13

Reading the proofs of his own stories wearied Mark Twain, and he was boundless in his gratitude to Howells when he offered to read the proofs of Huckleberry Finn. Twain had remarked that reading the proofs of The Prince and the Pauper had cost him the "last rags of his religion"; so he wrote a letter of boy-like gratitude to the man who seemed never to do any wrong:

11 Ibid., pp. 420-421.
12 Works, XXXI, 731-732.
13 Works, XXXIV, 437.
Now if you mean it, old man—if you are in earnest—proceed, in God's name, and be by me forever blest. I cannot conceive of a rational man deliberately piling such an atrocious job upon himself; but if there is such a man and you be that man, why then pile it on. It will cost me a pang every time I think of it, but this anguish will be eingeübisset to me in the joy and comfort I shall get out of not having to read the verfluchtete proofs myself. . . .

Mark Twain's opinion of Howells' reading must have been steadily improving, for following an entertainment given for the Longfellow Memorial he wrote Howells:

... Who taught you to read? Observation and thought I guess. And practice at the Tavern Club?—yes; and that was the best teaching of all.

Well, you sent even your daintiest and most delicate and fleeting points home to that audience—absolute proof of good reading. But you couldn't read worth a damn a few years ago. I do not say this to flatter. . . .

Howells' Indian Summer appeared in 1885, and Mark Twain could not praise it too highly. He said that there was not "a waste line in it or one that could be improved." He read it aloud to his family and wrote Howells the family's praise and his personal reaction:

... It is a beautiful story, and makes a body laugh all the time, and cry inside, and feel so old and forlorn; and gives him gracious glimpses of his lost youth that fill him with a measureless regret, and build up in him a cloudy sense of his having been a prince, once, in some enchanted far off land, and of being an exile now,

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14 Works, XXXV, 442.

15 Ibid., p. 453.
and desolate—and Lord, no chance ever to get back there again! That is the thing that hurts. . . .

Mark Twain resented everybody's criticism but that of Howells. He considered him the dean of all critics. In 1889 he wrote Howells a letter in which he had the following to say about literary criticism:

I am waiting to see your study set a fashion in criticism. When that happens—as please God it must—consider that if you lived three centuries you couldn't do a more valuable work for this country, or a humaner.

As a rule a critic's dissent merely enrages, and so does no good; but by the new art which you use, your dissent must be as welcome as your approval, and as valuable. I do not know what the secret of it is, unless it is your attitude—man courteously reasoning with man and brother, in place of the worn and wearisome critical attitude of all this long time—superior being lecturing a boy.

A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court was brought to a close in 1899. Mark Twain wanted Howells to read the proofs, and Livy was especially anxious for this to happen because she had her doubts about the acceptability of some of the chapters. Her eyes were bothering her, and she was not able to read the manuscript. Howells delighted in the subject matter so that, peerless critic though he was, he was perhaps somewhat blinded to its literary defects.

The Yankee had come from the press, and Howells had praised it in Harper's. He gave it a high commendation, and his opinion of

16 Ibid., p. 455.

17 Ibid., p. 514.
it seems not to have changed through the years. "Of all fanciful schemes of fiction it pleases me most," he wrote; and, "A greatly imagined and symmetrically developed tale" was his comment. 18

In his letters to Mark concerning the Yankee, he was even more fulsome in his praise. First he wrote: "It's charming, original, wonderful! good in fancy and sound to the core in morals." And again, "It's a mighty great book, and it makes my heart burn with wrath. . . ." Then a few days later he wrote: "The book is glorious—simply noble; what masses of virgin truth never touched in print before!" Finally, he wrote, "Last night I read your last chapter. As Stedman says of the whole book, it's titanic." 19

The Clemens apartment at the Métropole in 1898 became a sort of social clearing house of the Viennese art and literary life, much more like an embassy than the home of a mere literary man. Howells wrote Twain this great tribute when they were in Vienna:

I wish you could understand how unshaken you are, you old tower, in every way; your foundations are struck so deep that you will catch the sunshine of immortal years, and bask in the same light as Cervantes and Shakespeare. 20

Another great tribute that Howells paid to Mark Twain when the family was spending the second winter in Vienna was:

18Ibid., p. 522.
19Ibid., p. 513.
20Ibid., p. 657.
You are the greatest man of your sort that ever lived, and there is no use saying anything else. . . . You have pervaded your century almost more than any other man of letters, if not more; and it is astonishing how you keep spreading. . . . You are my "shadow of a great rock in a weary land" more than any other writer.21

On November 28, 1902, Colonel Harvey, president of Harper and Brothers, gave a dinner honoring Twain at the Metropolitan Club in New York. In the "Sixty-Seventh Birthday" address Mark Twain discussed what Howells had meant to him:

. . . Howells has a peculiar gift for seeing the merits of people, and he has always exhibited them in my favor. Howells has never written anything about me that I couldn't read six or seven times a day; he is always just and always fair; he has written more appreciatively of me than anyone in this world, and published it in the North American Review. He did me the justice to say that my intentions—he italicized that—that my intentions were always good, that I wounded people's conventions rather than their convictions. Now I wouldn't want anything handsomer than that said of me. I would rather wait, with anything harsh I might have to say, till the convictions become conventions.22

In the last few years of Mark Twain's life he did not correspond with Howells or any of his friends with the frequency of former years. He was old and tired and weary. In 1906 he was praising "After the Wedding," Howells' story in Harper's.

21 Works, XXXII, 1079.

22 Works, XXVIII, 248-249.
I read "After the Wedding" aloud and we felt all the pain of it and the truth. It was very moving and very beautiful—would have been overwhelmingly moving, at times, but for the haltings and pausings compelled by the difficulties of manuscript—these were a protection, in that they furnished me time to brace up my voice, and get a new start. . . .  

At this point we should discuss in some detail Mark Twain's famous essay on William Dean Howells which was written in 1905 and published in Harper's in 1906. It begins with a question:

Is it true that the sun of a man's mentality touches noon at forty and then begins to wane toward the setting? Doctor Osier is charged with saying so. Maybe he said it, maybe he didn't; I don't know which it is. But if he said it, I can point him to a case which proves his rule. Proves it by being an exception to it. To this place I nominate Mr. Howells.

I read his Venetian Days about forty years ago. I compared it with his paper on Machiavelli in a late number of Harpers, and I cannot find that his English has suffered any impairment. For forty years his English has been to me a continual delight and astonishment. In the sustained exhibition of certain great qualities—clearness, compression, verbal exactness, and enforced and seemingly unconscious felicity of phrasing—he is, in my belief, without his peer in the English-writing world.

Later on in the essay he wrote:

In the matter of verbal exactness Mr. Howells has no superior I suppose. He seems to be almost always able to find that elusive and shifty grain of gold, the right word.
After having quoted from the Machiavelli paper, he continued:

You see how easy and flowing it is; how unvexed by ruggedness, clumsiness, broken meters; how simple and —so far as you and I can make out—unstudied; how clear, how limpid, how understandable, how confused by cross-currents, eddies, under-tows; how seemingly unadorned, yet is all adornment, like the lily-of-the-valley; and how compressed, how compact, without a complacency-signal hung out anywhere to call attention to it. . . .

Concerning Howells' humor, Mark Twain said:

As concerns Mr. Howells' humor, I will not try to say anything, yet I would try, if I had the words that might approximately reach up to its high place. I do not think any one else can play with humorous fancies so gracefully and delicately and deliciously as he does, nor has so many to play with, nor can come so near making them look as if they were doing the playing themselves and he was not aware that they were at it. For they are unobtrusive, and quiet in their ways, and well conducted. His is a humor which flows softly all around about and over and through the mesh of the pages, pervasive, refreshing, health-giving, and makes no more show and no more noise than does the circulation of the blood.27

A great portion of the essay is devoted to a discussion of stage directions, "those artifices which authors employ to throw a kind of naturalness around a scene and a conversation, and help the reader to see the one and get at meanings in the other which might not be perceived if intrusted unexplained to the bare words of the talk."

Mark Twain says that most authors are entirely ignorant of this literary art.

26 Ibid., p. 231.

27 Ibid., p. 235.
Some authors overdo the stage directions, they elaborate them quite beyond necessity; they spend so much time and take up so much room in telling us how a person said a thing and how he looked and acted when he said it that we get tired and vexed and wish he hadn't said it at all. Other authors' directions are brief enough, but it is seldom that the brevity contains either wit or information. Writers of this school go in rags, in the matter of stage direction; the majority of them having nothing in stock but a cigar, a laugh, a blush, and a bursting into tears. In their poverty they work these sorry things to the bone. They say:

"... replied Alfred, flipping the ash from his cigar." (This explains nothing; it only wastes space.)

"... responded Richard with a laugh." (There was nothing to laugh about; there never is. The writer puts it in from habit—automatically; he is paying no attention to his work, or he would see that there is nothing to laugh at; often when a remark is unusually and poignantly flat and silly, he tries to deceive the reader by enlarging the stage directions and making Richard break into "frenzies of uncontrollable laughter." This makes the reader sad.)

"... murmured Gladys, blushing." (This poor old shopworn blush is a tiresome thing. We get so we would rather Gladys would fall out of the book and break her neck than do it again. . . .) 28

Of course, the competent and discriminating Howells is an artist at handling stage directions, and he pleases Mark Twain more than any other author does because of his faithful adherence to the "requirements of a stage direction's proper and lawful office, which is to inform."

... Sometimes they convey a scene and its conditions so well that I believe I could see the scene and get the spirit and meaning of the accompanying dialogue if some one would read merely the stage directions to me and leave out

28 Ibid., pp. 235-236.
the talk. For instance, a scene like this, from The Undiscovered Country:

"... And she laid her arms with a beseeching gesture on her father's shoulder."

"... she asked, turning swiftly upon him that strange, searching glance."\(^{29}\)

Mark Twain closes the essay with a tribute to Howells' enduring ability as a writer:

Mr. Howells has done much work, and the spirit of it is as beautiful as the make of it. I have held him in admiration and affection so many years that I know by the number of those years that he is old now; but his heart isn't, nor his pen; and years do not count. Let him have plenty of them; there is profit in them for us.\(^{30}\)

The beautiful friendship of Howells and Twain could be compared to that of Goethe and Schiller or Emerson and Carlyle, but neither of those two friendships has the depth of sincerity that rang through every association, every letter, and every silent assent of mutual affection between Howells and Mark Twain. Somehow we feel that each supplied something that the other needed. Howells' encouragement carried Mark Twain through many dark hours, and his restraining influence on Twain's tempestuous nature was invaluable. Mark Twain furnished Howells with a loyal friendship sprinkled with nuggets of humor which took a great deal of the humdrum from his life—"I turn to his books for cheer when I am downhearted. There was never anybody like him. . . ."\(^{31}\)

\(^{29}\)Ibid., pp. 236-237.

\(^{30}\)Ibid., p. 239.

\(^{31}\)Works, XXXIII, 1557.
In the last paragraph of *My Mark Twain*, Howells pays his tribute to his old friend:

> Next I saw him dead, lying in his coffin amid those flowers with which we garland our despair in that pitiless hour. After the voice of his old friend Twichell had been lifted in the prayer which it wailed through in broken-hearted supplication, I looked a moment at the face I knew so well; and it was patient with the patience I had so often seen in it: something of puzzle, a great silent dignity, an assent to what must be from the depths of a nature whose tragical seriousness broke in the laughter which the unwise took for the whole of him. Emerson, Longfellow, Lowell, Holmes—I knew them all and all the rest of our sages, poets, seers, critics, humorists; they were like one another and like other literary men; but Clemens was sole, incompasætable, the Lincoln of our literature.

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CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

A close examination of Mark Twain's published writings reveals much valuable material in literary criticism. This may be surprising to the average reader who remembers Mark Twain only as the creator of Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn. His criticism extends from the illuminating adage of Pudd'nhead Wilson's Calendar—"As to the adjective: when in doubt, strike it out"—to the masterly essays on Harriet Shelley, Fenimore Cooper, and William Dean Howells.

Mark Twain had definite ideas on the function of criticism.

Quoting Paine:

A man of Mark Twain's profession and prominence must necessarily be the subject of much newspaper comment. Jest, compliment, criticism—none of these things disturbed him, as a rule. He was pleased that his books should receive favorable notices by men whose opinion he respected, but he was not grieved by adverse expressions. Jests at his expense, if well written, usually amused him; cheap jokes only made him sad; but sarcasms and innuendos were likely to enrage him, particularly if he believed them prompted by malice.  

He did not call himself a literary critic; in fact, he cared little for the trade. He said of criticism: "I am persuaded that a coldly-

1Works, XVI, 83.

2Works, XXXIV, 413.
thought-out and independent verdict upon a fashion in clothes, or manners, or literature, or politics, or religion, or any other matter that is projected into the field of our notice and interest, it is a most rare thing—if it has indeed ever existed."^3

Was Mark Twain equipped for literary criticism? His quips concerning authors and their devices show a humorous originality unlike that of any other author. His comments, sometimes short, sometimes long, and always pointed, we can remember much longer than some scholarly and well-thought-out essay born in the brain of a more cultivated, more serious critic.

As to his education, we can only say that Mark Twain had little formal schooling. He left school at the age of thirteen and began work on the Hannibal Courier, and thus received his real education in the university of life. He was always interested in learning something new, and a most remarkable thing was his life-time enjoyment in the study of the dictionary. All of his life he was extremely conscious of words and their exact meanings. The "right word" to him was invaluable. Much of his criticism of authors is aimed at their inability to use "the right word" or their indifference to it—"trifling carelessness of statement or Expression."^4

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^3Works, XXIX, 400-401.

^4Works, XXXV, 498.
Mark Twain fell under the influence of many famous literary men—men whose formal training probably was superior to his. Of his close literary acquaintances, William Dean Howells was his chief adviser and critic, and their friendship is one of the most beautiful among literary men.

Much has been said about Mark Twain's reading. Mrs. J. T. Fields commented that in the early days he read "everything." By the time Paine knew him in 1906 he read largely some old favorites which he had read again and again. They were always near him—on the table—on the bed—in a chair. These included: Pepys, Lecky, Carlyle, Malory, Suetonius, and Saint-Simon. When he died, copies of Suetonius and Carlyle were on the bed. In his earlier life he read Cervantes, Plutarch, Casanova, Darwin, Macaulay, and some of Dickens. At various times he had read Shaw, Thomas Hardy, Elizabeth Robbins, Willa Cather, Booth Tarkington, William Allen White, and James Branch Cabell. His favorites were always in the field of history and biography. He cared little for the novels of his day, and his taste in poetry extended from "The Burial of Moses" to the poetry of Robert Browning.

As to his reading in general, we can say that he was well read in English and American literature. Mark Twain was no literary buffoon who scoffed at books which he had not read or did not understand.
He had read and grasped more literature than the average critic gave him credit for. Thus he possessed another of the necessary tools for literary criticism—a wide and thorough reading of some of the best literature the world affords.

Among authors, Mark Twain had what we have called abominations, his chief ones being Eliot, Meredith, James, Hawthorne, Jane Austen, Goldsmith, Cooper, and Scott. He indicts them all for affectation, pretense, and an absence of truth in their novels. Mark Twain, "so promptly, so absolutely, so positively, so almost aggressively truthful," as Howells said, had a distaste for the romantic "mush and milk" of these authors.

But the heaviest and most merciless censure he puts on Walter Scott and Fenimore Cooper. He mentions the others in short, sword-like sentences, and when he begins a sentence about Jane Austen, we never know how it will end. It is only when one thinks over his writings in their entirety that one realizes how numerous his literary criticisms were—favorable and unfavorable—and taken together they represent a much more far-sighted survey of literature than the average critic of Mark Twain has ever considered.

But to return to Scott and Cooper. Much of Life on the Mississippi is devoted to his abuse of Scott. Even the Capitol Building at Baton

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5William Dean Howells, My Mark Twain, p. 30.
Rouge—"the little sham castle"—is due to the debilitating influence of Sir Walter's books. The newspaper reporter labors under the blight of Sir Walter's style. Each sentence which the reporter writes has the "artificial-flower complaint," and he has to use twenty-two words to say, "The ladies came aboard and the boat shoved out up the creek."
The fact that all Southern literature is lost irretrievably in quality and quantity is due to Walter Scott. Although Mark Twain never prepared a formal paper on Scott, he held him guilty of verbal misdemeanors comparable to those of Cooper.

Mark Twain also read and studied the works of Fenimore Cooper, who was called "the American Sir Walter Scott." His knowledge of both Scott and Cooper was extensive. In his essay, "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses," and the continuation of it, "Further Offenses of Fenimore Cooper," he really sets himself up as a literary critic and goes to work in earnest. Using only part of one page of *The Deerslayer* as evidence, he accuses Cooper of one hundred fourteen offenses against literary art out of a possible one hundred fifteen. Again, he brings out this aversion he has for an author's "failure to hit upon the right word"—not saying what he means to say. Lengthily he enumerates from half a dozen pages of *The Deerslayer* thirty instances of Cooper's "dull word sense"—instances where he "sharp and flatted," and then he says:
There have been daring people in the world who claimed that Cooper could write English, but they are all dead now—all dead but Louaibory. . . . Now I feel sure, deep down in my heart, that Cooper wrote about the poorest English that exists in our language, and that the English of Deerslayer is the very worst that ever Cooper wrote.\(^6\)

In Roughing It Mark Twain speaks of the scholarly savages in The Last of the Mohicans,

. . . who are fittingly associated with backwoodsmen who divide each sentence into two equal parts; one part critically grammatical, refined, and choice of language, the other part just such an attempt to talk like a hunter or a mountaineer as a Broadway clerk might make after eating an edition of Emerson Bennett's works and studying frontier life at the Bowery Theater a couple of weeks.\(^7\)

Mark Twain exposed Cooper's stilted manner, loose English, and careless planning with which he had so little patience. This was a pretty serious step for him to take when one remembers that Cooper had been widely accepted and widely praised by foremost literary critics. Yet even the die-hards could not keep from seeing truth in what Mark Twain wrote. His critical essay was so logical and coherent, he did not digress from his point, the object was in view from the beginning, and his reasoning was straightforward. He put his facts down and handled them with vigor, and whether you agree with him or not, you have to say that his ideas are clear, his convictions are strong, his common sense is alerting, and his facts are all in.

\(^6\)Works, XXII, 76-77.
\(^7\)Works, III, 134.
Subsequent evaluations of Cooper have more nearly agreed with Mark Twain's evaluation than with those of more highly regarded critics of his time. Mark Twain's essay helped to bring about a re-reading and a re-evaluation of Cooper's literary art.

"In Defense of Harriet Shelley" is Mark Twain's best piece of literary criticism. No critic ever attacked his problem any more seriously than he attacked the "hated" biography of Shelley by Edward Dowden. Despite the fact that his mind was besieged by his own worries, he put everything aside and openly defended Shelley's wife, Harriet. Edward Dowden was an accepted writer of the day, and no other author but Mark Twain had the courage to bring him to the "literary court" for his offenses. Twain has not been contradicted. He felt that the world had grown tired of biography that did not let it see all the evidence. His wording is vigorous, and his reflections are sincere. There was never a more truly chivalrous performance than this essay. Even Newman Ivey White, the most famous of Shelley's biographers, backed Mark Twain in what he had to say. There is no more informing literary criticism to be found than this reply to Dowden's attempt to shield Shelley in his escapades and to place the blame for it all on the shoulders of the defenseless Harriet.

Mark Twain wrote many other pieces of literary criticism which the average reader of his works fails to find. One of these is "How to Tell a Story," of which he said:
I do not claim that I can tell a story as it ought to be told. I only claim to know how a story ought to be told, for I have been almost daily in the company of the most expert story tellers for many years.  

Critics of Mark Twain have charged that he never analyzed any effect beyond its mere grammar. To defend him we can say that his essays and his letters to William Dean Howells reveal discussions of practically every problem of writing technique. These references to biography, autobiography, novels, authors' devices, and likes and dislikes in literature are valuable to us as an index to his conception concerning the nature and function of literature.

Mark Twain would not have attempted detailed literary criticism if he had not had literary ideals and ideas himself. He would not have attacked the authors that he attacked had he not felt that he was capable of rendering a sound literary verdict.

The present writer believes that careful and extensive reading of the works of Mark Twain will reveal that he was a literary critic of penetrating discrimination and sound literary judgment. His judgments have stood the test of time better than those of many of his contemporaries who are still respected as critics of literature. Mark Twain's originality, independence, good taste, and common sense are clearly revealed in his literary criticism.

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\(^8\text{Works, XXIV, 263.}\)
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