MARK TWAIN: "CRADLE SKEPTIC"

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Critics discussing Mark Twain's early skepticism have, to date, confined their explorations to short studies (articles or book chapters), brief references in passing, or buried their insights in discussions on other topics. Other critics ignore Twain's atheistic statements and see his beliefs as theistic or deterministic. Others ascribe his attitudes in the "dark writings" to late life disappointments. This study demonstrates that Twain's later attitudes towards religion, determinism, social reform and institutions were products of his family heritage, his social environment, and his early reading.

Chapter 1 introduces the major premises of the study, and Chapter 2 reviews the critical background. Chapter 3 discusses the family and hometown influences on Twain's skeptical thought, and Chapter 4 discusses Twain's early literary and philosophical influences. Chapter 5 examines Twain's early writings in letters and frontier tales and sketches, showing the development of his anti-religious attitudes. Chapter 6 concludes the study.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

If any reader were here present—let him be of either sexes or any age, between ten and ninety—I would make him answer this question himself—and he could answer in only one way. He would be obliged to say that by his knowledge and experience of the days of his early youth he knows positively that the Bible defiles all Protestant children, without exception. Mark Twain, "Reflections on Religion." (The Outrageous Mark Twain 41)

There is a scholarly consensus that Mark Twain’s late-life concerns with reform, “the damned human race,” religious skepticism, and deterministic thinking were not the products of latter day pessimism due to personal tragedies and setbacks, but rather that these concerns can be seen in his earliest years, in his earliest writings, and in his family heritage. This consensus is based on a miscellany of evidence from a wide variety of sources that when combined make for a convincing case. What has so far been missing in Twain scholarship, however, is a full-length study summarizing and consolidating evidence. Previous studies have either looked to only a few examples of the available
materials, or they have limited their discussions to biographical overviews without examining the early texts themselves. This study combines a review of pertinent criticism, a focused study on Clemens's early life and influences, and a fuller examination of the early texts than has yet been made available to Twain scholars. By examining Twain's earliest letters, sketches, and tales, I will demonstrate in detail that Mark Twain was, if you will, a "cradle skeptic," a man who continually faced varying religious doctrines and found them all wanting. He was, in short, without any faith or belief in any deity or religion, orthodox or "wildcat," even though, at times, he would have preferred otherwise.

Mark Twain's religious sensibilities and overall world views had deep roots in the experiences and influences of his early years from his family heritage as well as from the literary tradition in which he worked. From a very early age, Sam Clemens began to escape his "Presbyterian conscience." Escape was perhaps easier for the brash young Sam Clemens than for the elder family man Mark Twain, but his escapes were largely successful as he established his early points of view regarding society and the state of man.

I review the history of Twain's early religious experiences to show how his frontier irreverence came naturally to him by both nature and nurture. This philosophical stance was fostered by his environment, career, and
readings. I demonstrate how that early foundation can be detected in his first writings as well as in his less reliable memories of his youth.

It might seem to some readers of Mark Twain that the focus of this study is a restatement of the obvious, that Twain's skeptical attitudes are clearly seen in all his major writings and that this subject has already been fully explored. As early as 1873, an unknown Brooklyn Daily Herald columnist said of Twain, "Nature seems to have designed him for a Methodist circuit preacher, but forgot to endow him with a particle of reverence, which has happened in the cases of other preachers, Rabelais, Swift, Sterne, Sydney Smith, and one of our Brooklyn preachers." Henry Nash Smith in his "How True Are Dreams? The Theme of Fantasy in Mark Twain's Later Fiction" identifies the "Brooklyn preacher" as Henry Ward Beecher (9). In spite of such brief, perceptive observations, there are several reasons why this study needed to be done.

First, some recent critics still find Twain a religious man, though one with numerous doubts. They believe that he carried religion as an onerous burden; William C. S. Pellow, for example, wrote in his Mark Twain: Pilgrim from Hannibal that "Twain was a religious man, right up to the last, for no irreligious person could have written The Mysterious Stranger" (185). E. Hudson Long claimed in the Mark Twain Handbook that Twain never denied the resurrection or the
power of prayer. This notion is far from accurate: to quote Twain himself, "When we pray, when we beg, when we implore does He listen? Does He answer? There is not a single authentic instance of it in human history." (Neider Outrageous 43). Pages 43-45 from Twain's "Reflections on Religion" are, in fact, a detailed and lengthy essay decrying any belief in prayer.

Such interpretations as Long's ignore Twain's many denials of Christian doctrines such as the outcries throughout his 1906 "Reflections on Religion." For example:

If there is anything more amusing than the Immaculate Conception doctrine it is the quaint reasonings whereby ostensibly intelligent human beings persuade themselves that the impossible fact is proven.

. . . to a person who does not believe in it, it seems a most puerile invention. (Neider Outrageous 35-36)

Perhaps the same sort of reasoning results in some critical claims.

Other critics still follow in Van Wyck Brooks and Bernard DeVoto's footsteps by seeing Twain's skepticism in light of late-life disappointments. Wendy Bie's 1972 essay "Mark Twain's Bitter Duality," in the Mark Twain Journal asserts that Twain's duality, his views on good and evil, man and beast, and man's separation from God, were best recorded
in *Letters from The Earth*, the closest thing we have, says Bie, to a philosophical treatise from Twain (14). According to Bie, in that work Twain "left the guise of crochety novelist and gave his increasing spleen full vent" and Twain's notions of the good-evil duality can be seen only "as early as 1882 in *The Prince and the Pauper*" (14). I show that such notions can be seen in Twain's work much earlier; we can, for example, see duality in the early stories "The Good Little Boy" and "The Bad Little Boy" (discussed in Chapter 5 below.)

Others have missed the obvious as well. One of the most exhaustive bibliographies of Twain studies, Roger Asselineau's *The Literary Reputation of Mark Twain from 1910-1950*, does not mention religious skepticism even with its listing of 1300 entries. Twain is seen by other critics as being an agnostic (see Anderson 13-15), a deist (see Wilson 169), or simply "a skeptic," a man with doubts. The most recent major study on Twain, Sherwood Cummings's 1988 *Mark Twain and Science*, states that "[Twain] had established indissoluble loyalties, first to the theistic world view and later to a deistic one" (xi). Critics quote Twain's theistic credos such as his "I think the goodness, the justice, and the mercy of God are manifested in His works" (1880) and "The book of Nature distinctly tells us God cares not a rap for us nor for any living creature" (1898) (Cummings 16). A man of continual searching, probing, and questioning of both
human and cosmic causes, such as Twain certainly was, would have both optimistic and pessimistic moods about the nature of "God." The distanced character of "God" worked as a symbol in his attempt to reconcile and accept a unified world view, a search never ultimately satisfying. And, in between the two extremes of hope and despair, atheism was the only constant thread that dominated Twain's religious tendencies.

Critics are still skittish about admitting that Twain went beyond doubt and deism into full-blown denial of any god. I have found no study in which Twain is called an atheist despite the fact that he himself, on more than one occasion, said he did not have any religious belief. This point warrants further discussion here before we move on to the other purposes of this study.

Some recent Twainians have seen at least part of the obvious and have pointed to Twain's early religious skepticism in published books and articles dealing with Twain's life after 1876. These critics and biographers usually give only fleeting mention of evidence of Twain's early skepticism; this study is the first close examination of what others have only alluded to in passing. (John Hays's 1989 Mark Twain and Religion: A Mirror of American Eclecticism is a near exception to this point; more on his book below.) A typical example of this trend is Minoru Okabayashi's "Mark Twain and His Pessimism" (1983) in which the critic sees suggestions of Twain's negative concept of
the "Moral Sense" as early as *Roughing It*, the stories of "The Good Little Boy" and "The Bad Little Boy," and the 1870 sketch "My Watch" (85-86). But Okabayashi only mentions this idea in passing without exploring or developing this point, without any evidence or explication of the texts mentioned.

James D. Wilson's excellent essay "The Religious and Esthetic Vision of Mark Twain's Early Career" notes one reason why the study of Twain's religious sense has been so elusive: Twain kept up "a modicum of religious" behavior after his marriage, attending church regularly, and having Bible readings in his home to appeal to the wishes of his wife (169). Wilson believes that Twain's attempt to appear, to pose, as a Moral Man, to live a moral life, and to live in a socially respectable manner encouraged Albert Bigelow Paine and William Dean Howells to think that Twain leaned towards a disinterested Deism until he manifested his frustration with all religion in his later works (169). Wilson may be in error regarding Howells on this point; more on this below. But, despite outward appearances and Twain's occasional sincere wish to have faith in a deity, the "cradle skepticism" of his youth always prevented any permanent religious conversion.

Another misconception is voiced by the otherwise astute John Frederick that "The notebooks and family letters from the five years Twain spent in Nevada and California throw little light on his religious attitudes" (131-32). Chapters
3 through 5 of this study are a cornucopia of this very evidence; indeed, this study is primarily built on these primary sources, especially Sam’s letters and frontier squibs. In short, much has been said, but no definitive work has yet fully explored what Sam Clemens/Mark Twain thought and what he wrote in those early years in the light of his religious and social musings.

One important reason this study is now possible is the appearance of the Mark Twain Papers’s recent publications of Early Tales and Sketches (Volume 1, 1979, Volume 2, 1981), the first volume of Mark Twain’s Notebooks and Journals (1975), and the first volume of Sam Clemens’s Letters (1988). These editions now make the primary sources readily accessible to scholars. Edgar Branch, principal editor of both the Sketches and Letters, said of the letters,

[they] evidence the ready humor, the sure command of colloquial speech, and the keen eye for detail that characterize Mark Twain’s best writing. In his mature work . . . Clemens returned to the material first recorded in these letters. (Letters xxii-xxiii)

Mark Twain dipped into the well of his early writings and thinking in many ways throughout his professional career; his religious background was part of this well.

It is also only recently that we have studies of Twain’s early writings, brief though they be, that deal with his
early religious skepticism. Two recent dissertations examine Twain's religious beliefs in writings as early as The Innocents Abroad (1869) and Tom Sawyer (1876). There have been a few books, including Victor Dyno's Mark Twain: Selected Writings of an American Skeptic (1983) and Allison Ensor's Mark Twain and the Bible (1960), that deal briefly with Twain's earliest journals and short fiction in the light of his religious feelings.

Much is written about Twain's early days but in the wealth of biographies available on Twain, only two full-length books deal exclusively with the years before Clemens turned thirty-five. One of these is John Lauber's The Making of Mark Twain (1985), the other being the renowned Sam Clemens of Hannibal (1952) by Dixon Wecter who says nothing about young Sam's thinking on religious matters. There are, of course, many focused biographies on Twain's western years, but these books are primarily strict biographies and shed little light on Twain's thinking. One thesis biography, Everett Emerson's excellent The Authentic Mark Twain (1984), has scattered but brief references to Twain's early skepticism, and Emerson's work will prove useful throughout this study. Emerson's book is a perfect example of my point; his look at Twain's development has a specific focus which looks only askance at Twain's religious views. My work contributes to the shelf of thesis biographies by focusing on an area previously neglected; further, the combination of
biography and explication will shed light on other areas of concern to Twain readers, particularly in the extended use of Clemens's letters to show how young Sam's perceptions grew from the early seeds of irreverence in both his personal and public life.

It is natural enough that the bulk of studies on Twain should deal with the years after the publication of *The Innocents Abroad*; all his important work begins with this first travel book. It is also natural that Twain's distaste for religion--so evident in the later writings--should be explored in the light of his later writings, the posthumous "dark works," and the seminal biographies of Brooks and DeVoto. It seems as though scholars traced this facet of Clemens's thought from the last book first, and, going backwards, finally explored Twain's religious doubt in *Tom Sawyer* and *The Innocents Abroad*, and the best exploration of the latter work was published only as recently as 1986. With the publication of Hays's work in 1989 and the further work of the present study, the cycle is complete.

This study also shows how much of what was contained in the "dark" writings was actually based on experiences, thoughts, and feelings of the boy called "young Sam" by his family. We shall see that religion, being only one of the many peeves of the satirist Mark Twain, was a subject that, for primarily commercial reasons, a popular author of the American nineteenth century could not attack overtly. His
main reason in writing was to sell his work, not deconvert or offend Christian bookbuyers. He had a public, a family, and friends to whom he was responsible. However, there is no reason to think, as Albert Bigelow Paine pointed out, that Twain did not say exactly what he wanted to (Paine Notebook i). As shall be noted later in this study, some critics believe Twain did "speak the whole truth" but that readers have not always seen the truth the author intended. Twain said, "Only dead men can tell the truth" and had his harshest writings published posthumously when his responsibilities would be no more. What I shall demonstrate is that these "Letters from the Earth" were based on ideas and concepts conceived long before he had the desire to write them down, and before he was in a position to "tell the whole truth."

Religion, while a major topic of our discussion, was not the only concern of Sam Clemens of Hannibal, Hartford, Elmira, and points west. Many matters of deep concern to Twain, expressed most potently in his last writings, can be traced to his early years before 1876, and many critics have noted numerous examples of these. For example, John D. Stark noted in his "Mark Twain and the Chinese" (1966) that Twain's 1881-1885 involvement with the Chinese Education Mission reflected his earlier interest in the plight of the Chinese. "Twain's respect and concern date back to his early days in the West. He spoke up in Roughing It, devoting chapter 54 to the Chinese in Virginia City and complaining about the
persecution that they suffered and extolling their virtues" (Stark 36). Stark's note is among the evidence useful for our purposes because a secondary purpose of this study is to show the importance of the events and influences on Mark Twain, including influences not directly bearing on religion; Twain's social sense and attitude towards man was part and parcel of his world view, and it is not always useful to extricate religion from his thoughts without examining other developing ideas. When appropriate, we will examine important early events for two purposes: to reinforce the thesis that the works of the later years can be traced to the early experiences, and to show how Clemens's philosophic leanings--however labelled--were always more humanitarian than religious.

Stark's note is also a good example of other observations in Twain scholarship. Useful points are scattered and buried in articles and books from Delancy Ferguson's 1943 *Mark Twain: Man and Myth* to Everett Emerson's brief statement at the end of chapter 1 of his 1984 *The Authentic Mark Twain*:

(His style] was derived from a rejection of artificiality, superficiality, the hypocritical cult of polite conformity. More specifically, Mark Twain was a skeptic in religion, and irreverent too. When there was an establish-
ment . . . he was anti-establishment. (20)
Emerson's point is well stated; yet the evidence is not explored. That is the primary purpose of this study.

Chapter 2 of this work reviews recent scholarship relating to my purposes, pointing to the strengths and weaknesses in the current streams of critical thought. Chapter 3 explores biographical materials emphasizing the importance (and critical misconceptions) regarding young Sam's family and home town on his religious and social views. Chapter 4 then examines philosophical influences on Twain's religious thinking, particularly MacFarlane (John J. MacFarland), Thomas Paine, and the literary comedians. Chapter 5 closely examines the primary texts, the letters, tales and sketches themselves to demonstrate that, despite claims to the contrary, skepticism and atheism can clearly be detected in the texts.
CHAPTER II

THE CRITICAL BACKGROUND: MARK TWAIN AND RELIGION

Mark Twain has perhaps received more causal analysis than any other American writer. Regional and economic factors, guilt and frustrations imposed by his family life, several kinds of sexual motives—all these have served to explain the man and his works. (Baender 187)

Critic Paul Baender's comment is an appropriate reminder that contemporary critics are always responsible to the critics of the past who cumulatively have assembled evidence that has shaped our interpretations of Mark Twain's work. Major studies on Twain's religious sense have covered different aspects of this topic, proposing varying influences on this dimension of Twain's thought. Shorter studies have proposed specific readings, mentors, or events as significant in this area.

This chapter is an overview of much of this criticism, followed by discussions in Chapters 3 and 4 of major religious influences generally agreed upon in Twain scholarship. Below, we will examine the critical mainstream of the last twenty years as well as notable dissenters in the critical dialogue.
I. Major Studies

Before I can make a convincing case establishing Samuel Clemens's antipathy for religion before 1876, I must emphasize that the critical mainstream agrees that these feelings are clearly manifested in Twain's first major work, *The Innocents Abroad*, published in 1876. There is more than enough evidence in articles and books dealing with Twain's attitudes towards religion and his use of the Bible in *Huckleberry Finn* and his other major fiction, and there are many excellent full-length studies of his late-life interest in social reform and criticism of American hypocrisy in cultural morality. There is no lack of studies on *The Mysterious Stranger*, *Letters from the Earth*, and other posthumous writings; review of this material would be superfluous here.

However, it will suit my purpose to note some of the critics who have traced Twain's irreverence and skepticism back to *The Innocents Abroad* and before, especially discussing those who allude to the matters developed in this study. My purpose is to deal with critics who provide a setting for later discussions, focusing on more general overviews of Twain's early thinking, writing, and influences. This chapter is not exhaustive or all-inclusive. Many important writers will be noted in later chapters when particular influences, family members, or writings are discussed.
The six major critical works requiring closest scrutiny here include two recent dissertations—Jeffrey R. Holland's *Mark Twain's Religious Sense: The Viable Years 1835-1883* (1973) and Randy Cross's *Religious Skepticism in Selected Novels of Mark Twain* (1979). Four books, Allison Ensor's excellent *Mark Twain and the Bible* (1969), Victor Doyno's useful *Mark Twain: Selected Writings of an American Skeptic* (1983), Edgar Branch's *The Literary Apprenticeship of Mark Twain* (1950) and John Q. Hays's *Mark Twain and Religion: A Mirror of American Eclecticism* (1988) are also important to any study of the early years. Other shorter critical studies will also be mentioned, but these six in-depth studies, being more extensive, provide the best of recent scholarship on the thinking of the young Samuel Clemens.

Victor Doyno's collection, *Mark Twain: Selected Writings of an American Skeptic*, is primarily an anthology of excerpts from the Twain canon that show, as Doyno writes in his introduction, that "Twain was, though not a systematic philosopher, a skeptic for most of his lifetime" (1). Doyno's selections begin with Twain's juvenalia and early journalism (discussed in detail in Chapter 5 of this study), and include passages from such unlikely works as *A Tramp Abroad, The Prince and the Pauper, and Life on the Mississippi*. Passages from other Twain writings, such as *Huckleberry Finn* and *Letters from the Earth*, should surprise no one by their inclusion in this anthology. These later
works contain adverse criticism of Judeo-Christian belief and have been often explored.

But the early passages are enlightening. They demonstrate, as Leslie Fiedler says in his foreword to the book, that Doyno has shown the "subversive" side of Twain, the Mark Twain who cleverly disguised his antagonism toward Christianity throughout his literary career (Doyno xi.).

Doyno sketches a brief biography of Clemens's early years, which is incorporated into my chapter on biography. A quick summation is that, due to the influences of his parents' varied religious experiences, young Sam "was encouraged to become a cultural amphibian, able to become immersed and successful in a culture while also remaining objective and critical of it" (5). Doyno indicates that perhaps one of the reasons few critics have noted skepticism in Mark Twain's early writings is that it takes someone with similar views to spot it. Doyno cites Kurt Vonnegut as seeing Twain's skepticism as a mirror of his own (6). Then Doyno, after a short history of Sam Clemens's apprentice-printer career, says that, due to this "poor boy's university . . . the printed word held, for Sam, little mystical authority" (Doyno 7).

What Sam read in the printing house, Doyno writes, influenced not only his writing style but also his attitudes toward society. "Irony and social criticism permeate this form [frontier journalism], which can vary from the objective
reporting of information to imaginative invention" (Doyno 7). His working environment, Doyno correctly deduces, not only fostered Clemens's religious skepticism but also his jaundiced eye at any number of other socially and culturally accepted notions. Experience, Doyno implies, creates religious skeptics and individuals who are less credulous than those who, like Sam Clemens, have traveled and seen a great deal of the world.

The last point Doyno makes pertinent to our purposes is that the areas Twain would next explore—in both his written and oral practices—were influenced by creators of the tall tale. He says that, especially in the oral tradition of the tall tale, the speaker works on the credulity of his audience. This working on the emotions of readers and listeners can be linked with the sermons of nineteenth-century ministers. As we shall see later, Justin Kaplan notes in his Mr. Clemens and Mark Twain that Clemens loved the society of liberal preachers because of their common interest in oratory.

Sam Clemens had traveled throughout America, had heard many preachers and storytellers, and had practiced the oral arts himself. He was certainly aware that the gullible were prey to preachers and used this point for comic effect in, among other works, Huckleberry Finn. Victor Doyno does not make this connection: he merely points out that the storyteller Mark Twain was learning just how man’s credulity
could be worked on and exploited. This is a key point and will be addressed throughout this study.

Victor Doyno, like Randy Cross and Jeffrey Holland, is important because he is among the first to explore and develop the idea that accounting for Twain's late life bitterness and skepticism in light of personal disappointment is an uninformed and misleading opinion. What Sam Clemens learned at home, at school, in the print shop, and on the road accounts for much of his training in social criticism.

Jeffrey R. Holland, author of *Mark Twain's Religious Sense: The Viable Years 1835-1883* (1973), is one critic--along with John Q. Hays--whose focus completely overlaps my own, so I shall treat his views extensively here. In his introduction, Holland states that one of his basic premises is "that there was a dim religious light about virtually everything Mark Twain wrote," that religion was Twain's burden, and that Twain created "one of the most explicitly religious modes in all of American literature" (Holland 1-2).

Holland lists many examples of Twain's biblical metaphors in his personal life--naming his cats Famine, Pestilence, Satan, and Sin--and in his business talk (a new business opportunity was referred to as "a new mission field"). "Frequently it seems that he had no other metaphors at his disposal" (2). It is worth noting, as shall be shown shortly, that while religious, these allusions typically have negative connotations, not those of a practicing devotee of
Christianity. In fact, these allusions are more often satirical than not. Further, it should be emphasized that Twain had to use the language of his reading audience, a language rich in religious vocabulary. As Susan Gillman notes in her 1989 *Dark Twins: Imposture and Identity in Mark Twain's America*, Twain had to create a language of his own identity "using the cultural vocabularies available to him" (3).

Gillman's comments on the relationship between language and culture bear special note here. While trying to reconstruct Twain's personal obsessions in light of their cultural contexts, Gillman links topical issues of journalism, science, and law to the themes and vocabulary in Twain's fiction. She notes that Twain's influences were varied due especially [to] the proliferation of conceptual systems . . . that applied self-consciously and self-critically the scientific, classificatory analysis in which so much modern faith was put. (5)

She claims that the preoccupations of Twain's culture provided "vocabularies he alternately appropriated and quibbled with, exploited and subverted, inhabited and ironized, but which were always enabling" (8). In short, Twain used identifiable vocabulary for his own purposes, and reverence was rarely his goal. Further, we can see that
Clemens's search for identity in a useful system or culture was as much scientific as religious.

Before we discuss the issue of science further, there are still key points in Holland's discussion worthy of our attention here. In his discussion of the burden of religion, Holland writes that Twain frequently called his religious adversary "Presbyterianism" (3), but Holland believes that this term was generic and was meant to encompass all Christian faith (3). Holland maintains that Twain, like the mongrel pup in "A Dog's Tale," did not really care about clear theological distinctions (4). This point is extremely useful and will be explored in the next chapter. Briefly, it seems clear that Holland is correct in his claim that "Presbyterianism" refers to the Judeo-Christian faith in general, and that Twain saw theological distinctions more as opportunities for hypocrisy and strife than useful definitions of belief.

"Sin, punishment, conscience, duty, the fear of God, death--these were the staples in his moral pantry," Holland writes (5), and then discusses his view that guilt and the fear of the Puritan God were obsessions to Twain. Holland's view of a guilt-ridden Twain is supported by his look at Clemens's guilt over the deaths of a brother, son, and daughter, and he is perhaps the first to note the theme of the early stories "The Good Little Boy" and "The Bad Little Boy" as a forerunner to Twain's late life "reflections on religion" (6).
Holland believes that Clemens seriously considered becoming a minister despite his well known "My Dear Bro" letter to his older brother Orion. In that letter of September 1865, Sam said his career choices were limited but that he could not be a minister "because I lack the necessary stock in trade, i.e., religion" (Holland 7). In Paine's Biography, Twain is quoted as saying that he once toyed with the idea of being a minister, not out of piety, but because he needed a secure job. "It never occurred to me that a minister could be damned" (Paine Biography 1:84). I hasten to observe that Clemens was obviously jovial on these occasions and was never in literal fear of the Almighty.

To quickly demonstrate this point, Hamlin Hill noted in 1988 that the "My Dear Bro" letter was written the day after Twain completed the "Jumping Frog" story, one day after the San Francisco Dramatic Chronicle reprinted an article from the New York Round Table saying that Mark Twain would become one "of our brightest wits" if he "doesn't kill" his "mental golden goose" with overwork. Later in the "Dear Bro" letter, Twain stated simply, "[Humor] is my strongest suit" (Hill 24). A serious "Call" to the ministry was clearly not on Twain's mind--referring to literature as a Calling was probably hyperbole. As Hamlin Hill has said, "Clemens felt compelled, perhaps, to camouflage a highly secular decision with the whitewash of theology and to strike a melodramatic pose of bowing to the verdict of a Higher Court" (Hill 25).
Holland takes a peculiar stand by saying Twain was rather serious about being a Presbyterian minister, noting that he once said, "I couldn't and Orion wouldn't" (7). But as I shall touch on this point further in more detail in my examination of Kaplan's biography--Kaplan and I agree that Twain's look at the ministry was based on an interest in oratory, and Twain was never serious about being "the Reverend Mr. Twain"--I will not refute Holland's claims in greater detail here. For the record, Holland seems to be alone in his perspective.

Holland then turns to his second major premise, that a study of Clemens's early years allows students of Twain to see that the formative years are really a study of culture, and that, for Mark Twain, religion and civilization were synonymous (9). Holland's introduction then veers off in his overall focus of showing that Twain's "varied . . . religious odyssey" can be seen in "the pages of his fiction" and that his odyssey was a mirror of the religious currents of "nineteenth-century America" (10). This point will be discussed below in our look into Hays's book.

The remaining chapters of Holland's study do not concern us here; what he says that is pertinent to my study is echoed in the works of the critics in the rest of the chapter. And, to this reader, his interesting work strains when he tries to make Twain an almost perfect one-man incorporation of nineteenth-century religious trends. Holland never concludes
that Twain was a skeptic, a doubter, or a deist, but that religion was a constant burden to the man and that Clemens's natural piety was not enough to stand up to the late-life personal setbacks and tragedies. Holland's perspective is valid, but as I have implied, tends to strain on key points.

Of all the critics reviewed in this chapter, Jeffrey Holland is the best at pointing the way to my study and that of John Hays, whose work undergoes some serious attention here.

The most recent examination of *Mark Twain and Religion: A Mirror of American Eclecticism* was published by John Q. Hays in 1988 (based in part on his earlier 1973 article, "Mark Twain's Rebellion Against God: Origins"). As the title implies, Hays supports Holland's notion that Twain's religious concerns reflected those of his culture, and that Sam Clemens "unconsciously absorbed deep-rooted spiritual contradictions which illuminate the man's life-long rebellion against God" (*Rebellion* 27).

Hays writes in his longer study an appropriate appreciation of Bernard DeVoto's *Mark Twain's America* (1932) which refuted Van Wyck Brook's psychological assessment of Mark Twain's later years, especially Brooks's claim that the frontier years were sterile soil "for the seed of genius to fall in" (*Religion* 2). Hays notes how DeVoto too found Twain's pessimism and despair to be a result of experience and disappointment, in particular that of the Western call of Manifest Destiny by which "young Sam Clemens and his
generation were imbued with the hope of a New Jerusalem" (3). It was a generation that moved from simple, rural life through a scientific, technological world too complex for Sam Clemens to understand (3). And Christianity became "a sham by acting as a full-time partner [in materialism]" (3).

After noting the opinions of other critics, which we will examine more thoroughly later, Hays makes his own claim:

Perhaps it is now possible to understand where the welter of critical opinion and evidence has left us and to see that early and late Clemens was a man of immensely eclectic religious views.

(Religion 4)

His related article discusses how this came about, noting two major influences on the early Clemens and how they contributed to this varied view:

(1) his community's stern orthodox Calvinism--the only "true Christianity" characterized by its Big-Brother-like Master of a depraved human race, that would be scared into him by the terrifying superstitions of the slave and
(2) his own family's equally extreme heterodoxy, in the guise of his deist-minded father and uncle who planted into the sensitive lad's imagination the seeds of doubt and a will to disbelieve. (Rebellion 27)

Further, Hays believes Twain's flight from orthodoxy was lifelong.
Thus began his unresolved conflict on the nature of God and man that led the mature Twain to keep rebelling against his boyhood Presbyterianism long after he was 'emancipated' from it, fashioning his own grim substitute faith. (Rebellion 27)

Hays believes Twain "preached a 'gospel of despair'" and practiced "a religion of humanity by writing moral satires" (27-8). Twain remained "unresolved to the end on life's basic issues, much as he had been on leaving Hannibal in 1853" (28). Hays presents an interesting theory that the "voodoo" of John Quarles's slaves put terror into Sam when they told him stories "overlaying Biblical mythology" with African lore (31). While it is true that Jim is an "encyclopedia" of voodoo in Huckleberry Finn, it seems likelier that fear and terror were implanted in Sam in other ways, most notably in church and school.

It is worth noting that Hays's short article focuses on the influences of Hannibal, voodoo, John Clemens, and John Quarles, a formula that again shows critics agree that Clemens's religious sense grew from a variety of influences. Many differences are on matters of degree and determining priority. No one formula is definitive or conclusive; Hays himself expands on his formula in his longer work.

Hays notes that critics' distorted views of Jane Clemens as a fire-and-brimstone Calvinist need correction (discussed
in detail in Chapter 3), and he discusses community experiences Sam certainly shared, including the Campbellite crusades in Hannibal in the fall of 1845 and October-November 1852. Sam was certainly aware of the Millerite doctrine that the world would end on October 22, 1844 (Religion 4). "No church was big enough to take all comers so the evangelists preached outdoors" (4).

Hays reviews Twain's memories of the "wildcat" religion of spiritualism in "Villagers of 1840-1841" where "a particularly violent case of insanity was yoked to 'religion'" because a young man cut off his hand which had committed "a mortal sin" (6-7). The variety of such religious stimulants, says Hays, "caused confusion in an intellectually active youngster like Sam Clemens" (7). This confusion made Clemens "a divided Mark Twain-Mr. Clemens."

Further:

One side of him knew; the other side hoped. Sometimes one voice was louder than the other, but both voices were always present. Though this division is evident from Clemens's earliest experiences to his later writing, it does not . . . add up to a final negation of life, of the damned human race, of the universe, or of God. (Religion 11-12)

"One side of him knew." Knew what? No final negation of God? These are interesting ideas but Hays's addition and
conclusions may be as suspect as Brooks's and Devoto's on some key points. Others compute quite well, such as the idea that Clemens sought alternatives for orthodoxy but failed, especially scientific determinism which Hays believes Twain could not finally accept (Religion 12). "He floundered through the options, confused, angry, pained at and in a secular world" (12). This "spiritual confusion," says Hays, is appropriate for "someone spiritually alive" persistently "asking the big questions of the universe" (12).

Hays claims the reason for this confusion was Clemens's "chronological" mirroring of America's own spiritual confusion of the age. As discussed below, Clemens's personal spiritual biography can be construed to fit many patterns or pigeonholed to follow a critic's thesis, but the simple truth is that Sam Clemens's quest was his own and the proper focus is on the writer himself and only secondarily on his culture. For, as Susan Gillman implies, Twain used culture and its language for his own purposes as much as it molded him.

Obviously, as Hays and others know, when young Sam left home, "he took with him Hannibal and its moral imperatives, its prejudices, its religious teachings and their consequences--heavy gear for life's journey . . . but it didn't take him long to unload the excess baggage for the rest of the trip" (Religion 17). In short, Twain's religious odyssey was personal and individual, no mere mirror
of the American culture. While a Puritan past dominated America's religious thought, Mark Twain was able to move away from his cultural roots.

It is true, as Hays notes, that as a late teenager, Clemens wrote derogatory remarks about Catholics and blacks, reflecting the popular mood of Hannibal in the late 1850s, but as Clemens himself noted later, "Ignorance, intolerance, egotism, self-assertion, opaque reception, dense and pitiful chuckleheadness--and almost pathetic unconsciousness of it all. That is what I was at 19 or 20" (Letters 1: 289). In short, simple immaturity can account for much of Twain's early use of cultural slurs.

Hays then discusses briefly some of the early journalism, noting some of the sketches discussed in greater detail later in this study. Hays, among others, finds the earliest attack on orthodoxy in 1855 in the sketch on the widow with five children in need of Christian charity (analyzed in Chapter 4) and notes the oft-mentioned Thomas Paine as a "pivotal influence" on Twain's thinking (Religion 20-21). Hays peculiarly finds Sam's agonized letter on Henry's death (also discussed later)

quite literary and the emotion a little strained . . . the emotion rings somewhat hollow because Clemens's faith has been damaged by a reading of Paine . . . Clemens is striving for a consolation he needs from a source in which he does not believe. (Religion 21-2)
This claim negates Hays's earlier view that Twain never "finally negated" a belief in God, and to conclude that Sam's agony over Henry's death was less than sincere and "rings hollow" is an opinion that is Hays's alone and not supported by this author or any other known to him. Any hollowness on this matter is not in Sam Clemens; indeed, the impact of this event is so important that we will address this matter in detail later.

Hays briefly reviews the correspondence with Orion on religion, including the 1860 letter written to Orion, "I can not see how a man of any large degree of humorous perception can ever be religious—except he purposely shut the eyes of his mind and keep them shut by force" (Religion 23, Fonor 132). Hays's broad interpretation of this quotation finds "a clear reliance upon reason to come to grips with reality and truth, a consequence of the reading of The Age of Reason" (Religion 24). This notion supports the idea of Twain's anti-Romantic feelings, of his antipathy towards overly emotional religious outflowings typical of camp meetings and "wildcat" services. This use of reason, says Hays, might leave us with the possibility of Twain's being a Deist except that Twain's own claim excludes all religion (Religion 24). This argument is useful because it helps show that Sam Clemens very early in life was moving away from Deistic determinism, not toward it, in spite of his brief flirtation with Freemasonry in 1860-1861.
Hays's notes on the frontier years contain useful insights, including the idea that Thomas Paine's line "My religion is to do good" was reflected in Clemens's interest in moral reform (26). Hays discusses two sketches, "The Dutch Nick Massacre" on a stock-rigging scheme in October 1863 and one on Bill Stewart who, in Clemens's opinion, "construed" the Nevada constitution for his own selfish ends, as examples of Clemens's early moralistic writings (26).

These pieces provide evidence of Clemens's growing awareness of the evil in the world, and implied inadequacy of the church to do anything but evil, the indifference of the church to evil, and the cloaking of evil in the garb of religion.

These observations support my claim, among others, that there was more than frontier high jinks in the early journalism of the Enterprise era; as Hays notes, "such a stance earned Clemens the description of 'moral phenomenon'" (26).

Hays says nothing about the years Clemens spent in the East or any experiences there (but we will explore this period in light of Sam's letters home later) but spends some time discussing Clemens's attacks on institutions in his short stay in San Francisco where he attacked inefficiency in the police department. More importantly, says Hays: .. for the first time he is overtly critical of the clergy and posed as having
offered three prominent Eastern ministers a chance for a "call" in San Francisco with each turning him down because he was making more money in his home pastorate investing in cotton, petroleum, or grain markets. (27)

As we shall see later, these attacks were based on earlier sketches that dealt with hypocrisy and anti-clerical attitudes. More usefully, Hays writes one of the few interesting analyses of "The Story of The Good Little Boy," believing the tale resulted from Twain's offended feelings regarding overly simplistic solutions to problems as well as his reaction to "Emerson's two laws, one for man and one for things" (28). The church must "decide which side it is on . . . [and] teach virtue, but it must not . . . advise that virtue is easy, a point made explicit in the later story 'The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg' and the companion story to the 'Bad Little Boy'" (28). This assertion reinforces my thesis that the ideas in the dark writings can easily be traced to the early work of Mark Twain.

Before we leave Hays's discussion of "wildcat" spiritualism and frontier Presbyterianism, his comments on the sketches "Sabbath Reflections" and "Reflections on the Sabbath" can point us to key conclusion Hays offers about Twain's religion in the early years. His notion that lofty ideals, here Twain's reflections on the nature of the sabbath, lose out to distractions like Brown's barking dog.
Twain's ridicule and criticism of most institutions and people seem to constantly go back to the failure of the institution for the individual to face reality or truth and the insistence on hiding truth or reality behind some religious sham or political verbiage passing for uprightness. (33)

I will underline and support the idea that Twain's antagonism towards shams and disguises was one of his first creative drives.

Further, the pieces on the Sabbath, says Hays, "are prophetic in that Twain would continue to employ reason to explain 'man's origin, nature, and destiny' throughout his career" (33). Hays concludes that, as Twain set sail for the Sandwich Islands:

He had been exposed to a variety of religious beliefs and seems, at that time, to be on the side of a secular religion of reason. He had left behind the trappings of Calvinist dogma and other unreasoning religious sects. He had not abandoned belief in a Creator and seems to have equated that Creator with natural laws that include barking dogs and fighting cats. Whatever he believed, it was not what he had been taught in the Sunday Schools. (33-4)

As we have seen, many of Hays's conclusions point in unusual directions that will be refuted or explored further
in this study; here we must note that his conclusion that Twain was a Deist is supported more by a real syllogism than genuine, "reasonable" evidence. Other, more helpful, insights indicate that Hays has a unique perspective worth some attention. But it is now time to add the opinions of other critics on Twain's early years.

Randy Cross claims, in his dissertation Religious Skepticism in Selected Novels of Mark Twain (1982), that most scholars tend to agree that Mark Twain did not believe in the Judeo-Christian God of the Bible or in the divinity of Jesus Christ (1). This is due, Cross says, to the studies of Twain's posthumous publications, including most notably The Mysterious Stranger (1917), Letters From the Earth (1962), and Mark Twain's Notebook (1935). Cross's thesis is that this disbelief can be seen as early as The Innocents Abroad (1869) and when Twain "denounced the authenticity of the Bible and the belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ" (1). This skepticism, Cross shows, can be seen in Tom Sawyer, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, and The Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc. Since the bulk of his study deals with works written between 1870-1893, we will deal here with the material in his Introduction.

Cross's dissertation begins by reviewing critical writings on Twain's skepticism, including a look at Allison Ensor's book. He then says that one of the reasons Twain hated religion was that it was, to him, only superstition
Cross contradicts many of the findings of E. Hudson Long, the editor of *The Mark Twain Handbook*, who claimed Twain never denied the resurrection of Christ or the power of prayer. Cross correctly counters that assertion by pointing to the denial of the power of prayer in *Huckleberry Finn* (6). (I will deal with the prayer issue in my chapter on biography.)

Long, according to Cross, does not find Twain a skeptic but a Deist because of one comment Twain made to Albert Bigelow Paine: "There is, of course, a great master mind, but it cares nothing for our happiness or our unhappiness" (6). Cross does nothing with Long's assertion, nor does he cite the letters in which Twain refutes even a mechanistic deity.

Cross's look at Twain's early years examines the Clemens-Langdon courtship period where he briefly reviews the relationship by noting that Twain claimed to be a Christian in order to be acceptable to the Langdon household. But after the marriage, "Twain refused to participate in Bible readings and devotions on the grounds that he considered it would be hypocritical for him to do so" (10). Then Cross surveys other critical writings on Twain's use of the Bible, Twain's attitude toward Adam, and religious skepticism in his later writings. He briefly reviews Jeffrey Holland's dissertation, but since most of the criticism is not pertinent to this study, we can summarize Cross's own thesis here: he claims that the religious skepticism found in
Twain's last writings can be seen in his "most popular novels" (31). Another critic, also examined by Randy Cross, makes more insightful assertions on this point, and an examination of Allison Ensor's contribution to the area of Twain's religious sense deserves careful attention here.

Allison Ensor, author of Mark Twain and the Bible (1969), examines Twain's early disparaging of the Bible. Like Cross, Ensor's study begins with The Innocents Abroad because, as he states in his first chapter, Twain, while being somewhat flippant with Bible passages in his early journalism, still spoke of Christ reverently and had respect for the Bible and its ideals until 1867 when he took the "Quaker City" excursion (Ensor 3-5). I maintain that Sam Clemens usually spoke reverently of the deity for two primary reasons: to impress someone, usually women (see my discussion of Kaplan's biography) or because he knew his audiences and what they would expect. And, as we shall see, there is enough irreverence in young Sam's early correspondence to weigh against claims of overt reverence when it does appear. This point will be demonstrated in detail in the next chapter.

Ensor notes that young Sam's early influences included his independent father and the near opposite views of Sam's mother and his sister, Pamela Moffett (14). He is less successful in attempting to claim John Quarles (Sam's uncle) and Freemasonic as principal influences on Sam's early
religious thought. But he correctly cites the writings of Thomas Paine as a strong influence on Clemens's young mind. (The influence of Paine on Clemens's religious and social sensibilities is such a dominant factor that it deserves a detailed examination, and will be dealt with carefully in the next chapter.)

Despite this one disagreement with Ensor, his study is important because his book, along with the work of Hays, Cross, Doyno, and Holland, clearly establishes the religious skepticism in Twain's first major book, The Innocents Abroad, and leaves my study free to delve into the years before Sam Clemens became Mark Twain. First, some time must be given to the ideas and insights of Edgar Branch, the most important living scholar on Twain's early years, as he discusses religion in his The Literary Apprenticeship of Mark Twain (1950). His work on the early years, along with the studies of the late Henry Nash Smith, cannot be overestimated; this study would be impossible without the editions of Twain's sketches and letters edited by Branch; and Henry Nash Smith's Mark Twain: Development of a Writer (1962) was the first important book on the early years. Because Branch's work is the more recent (including his editorship of the primary sources), his observations on Clemens's religious sensibilities cannot be examined in more detail here; other important notions by both scholars will be discussed later, particularly when we look specifically at the early texts.
Branch agrees that Twain had outgrown fundamentalism by 1866, and says the following regarding Twain’s influences and Calvinism in particular:

John Clemens, John Quarries, Tom Paine and Macfarlane had done their work well. But all his life long, as Paul Carter has said, ‘the blacker tenets of Calvinism hovered like shadowy spectres in the background of his mind.’ Those tenets fed his insistent iconoclasm; he always ridiculed literal interpretations of the Bible and orthodox conceptions of God. Also they affected his seasoned estimate of man as a free agent and as a responsible member of society. (147)

Branch believes that Twain’s religious explorations were based first on his need to explain personal tragedies and the ‘blunders and injustices of man’ (147). “He inevitably had to extend that explanation to cover man’s origin, nature, and destiny, for nothing less would suffice. His rationalization was best constructed from key symbols in the Christian cosmology he had absorbed as a child in Florida and Hannibal” (147).

These are key insights because they rely primarily on examining the mind of Sam Clemens more than placing him in a broad, cultural context. Branch also underlines the notion that, to Mark Twain, the use of religious words and concepts
was more symbolic than heartfelt. These symbols included
"God and Satan, heaven and hell, Adam and Eve, the Garden of
Eden and cursed ground" (147). These symbols, according to
Branch, took on "empirical significance"—representing the
good and evil Clemens observed without as well as his
concerns with evil within (147). Branch believes that The
Mysterious Stranger was Twain's ultimate "theoretical
resolution." Moreover,

That book is worlds away from the feeble jests
at the expense of fundamentalism made in San
Francisco. The doubts and the fluid symbols,
even in the sixties, were finding expression.
(148)

Branch observes that Twain's frontier writings were
critical of individual conduct, dealing with the good-evil
duality of man. "He condemned the imperfections of man's
heart and mind and was drawn irresistibly to man's goodness"
(148). Although Twain admired the innate goodness of friends
like Jim Gillis and Captain Ed Montgomery, he found himself
examining man's ethical flaws, "man's selfish motivation, his
addiction to lying, his cowardice, his easy susceptibility to
temptation and self-deception, and his socially harmful
reliance upon petty moral prohibitions and conventions"
(148). These were concerns expressed in 1865-1866, and "They
were ideas he retained all his life" (148).

Branch notes other aspects of Twain's early years that
persisted in his later thinking. Branch says Clemens saw man
as a hopeless and pathetic thing in later years, but "In San Francisco he was not so hopeless about man's state, but essentially the same conception of the irrational in man made him a satirist of individual manners and morals" (149). It is interesting that Branch emphasizes Twain's thinking in terms of men, not deities. It is individual men that Twain accuses of wrongdoing, even while agreeing that institutions mold the ideas of individuals (148-49). Branch notes that individual courage against lynch mobs or individual evil, as in Twain's attacks on King Leopold and the Czar of Russia, is the real core of Twain's beliefs. Again, Twain is seen as a humanist, not a believer in a god or divinity but is still, to use another's phase, "asking the big questions." Other big questions dealt with science and religion, an area of interest to critic Sherwood Cummings.

As Cummings's Mark Twain and Science (1988) points out, Mark Twain's relationship with scientific thought went far beyond mere interest in technology. "Persistently philosophical, he was after bigger game. He looked to science for such meanings as it could give in answering social, moral, and cosmological questions" (xi). Because of this, no explanation of Twain's religious sense can ignore Twain's early musings about science as they certainly contributed to his world view.

As with his interest in Paine, Twain's reading of scientific works was a lifelong interest. Albert Bigelow Paine
said Twain's interest in science "amounted to passion" (Biography 1: 512). Twain owned over one hundred titles in his personal library covering topics from astronomy, geology, anthropology, and evolution, a range appropriate for "someone seeking a world view" (xi). Cummings believes this search led to two loyalties, "first to a theistic world view and later to a deistic one . . . the result [was] the conflict between the cosmology of Genesis and science’s disclosures about the antiquity of the universe and the evolution of life" (xi).

The major early influence, according to Cummings, was Hippolyte Taine, "the French philosopher who applied science to the arts and humanities . . . who gave American realism its theoretical foundations" (xi). Cummings says that from Taine Twain learned the realist's methods--as did Howells--"and the clinical approach to personality and society" (xi).

It should be noted that we can document only Twain's reading of Taine and Darwin in the 1870s, though Clemens surely knew of Darwin's theories much earlier. Alan Gribben shows that both Twain and Livy read Taine in the 1870s. In a letter to Mollie Fairbanks, "Clemens referred to The Ancient Regime, along with works by Carlyle and Dumas, as histories which cleared up his confusion about French events" (683). As Twain noted in 1882, "Mr. Darwin's Descent of Man had been in print five or six years and the storm of indignation raised by it was still raging in pulpits and periodicals"
("Monument to Adam" Notebook 20, Gribben 174). New scientific ideas were, if you will, in the air.

Twain's iconoclastic eye, of course, never found science sacrosanct. His "Prehistoric Man" sketch, an early example of Twain's skepticism, was also a precursor to later burlesques on scientific writing. The satire of the sketch was mirrored in September and October 1871's "A Brace of Brief Lectures on Science," published in Orion's American Publisher. The "Lectures" were a response to "Our Earliest Ancestors," a work which aroused Twain's doubts about paleontologists' abilities to understand prehistory. As Cummings noted, in the "Lectures," Twain took on the guise of a scientist "but one who used the common sense lacking in his 'brother paleontologists'" (Cummings 12; Hamlin Hill, "Mark Twain's 'Brace of Brief Lectures on Science'" 236-39). Many later writings followed this theme including "Some Learned Fables, for Good Old Boys and Girls" (1874) which also continued Twain's early use of animal imagery with Professor Snail, Professor Woodhouse, Engineer Herr Spider, and Professor Field-Mouse. (Chapter 5 examines this point in detail).

Cummings also notes that Thomas Paine's scientific views affected Twain's religious sense. Paine contrasts "the foolish Biblical notion of a geocentric universe with a modern 'belief of a plurality of worlds'" (22). Paine "declares that our earth is 'infinitely less in proportion
than the smallest grain of sand is to the size of the world'" (22). Clemens, as Cummings notes, concurs saying "the modern universe consists of countless worlds . . . that in comparison ours is grotesquely insignificant" (22). In many instances, Twain's philosophical views were mirror images of Paine's (22-3).

Paine's influence is discussed in detail in Chapter 4 below. Paine's Neoclassic views on science helped shape Clemens's literary realism as well as his opinions on religious matters.

Cummings's study on Twain's religious growth then discusses Twain, Livy, Joe Twitchell and other relationships of the 1870s and later, matters which need not distract us here. Before moving on to shorter studies, it should be noted that Cummings's new study is likely to prove one of the most useful works on Twain's thinking. He is not as successful showing Clemens's early influences before 1870, outside of Tom Paine, as other studies, but his insightful overview is likely to influence critical thinking for some time to come.

II. Shorter Studies

In Mark Twain: Rebel Pilgrim (1973), J. Harold Smith points to the early influences on Samuel Clemens and lists them as follows:

(1) a budding evolutionary determinism initiated

by Macfarlane
(2) a sense of guilt-despair induced by the death of brother Henry
(3) a daring independence generated by success in piloting
(4) a habit of brooding speculations fostered by the pilot's way of life
(5) a variant concept of Deity drawn from the Deism of Paine
(6) a spirit of reckless bravado--never unprincipled, always controlled--grown out of the speculative adventures of the mining frontier. (25)

The pages that precede this list are not enough to establish fully the basis for these conclusions, yet the conclusion makes for an interesting formula. The somewhat mysterious subject of the Scotsman, Macfarlane, cannot be ignored, and will be dealt with carefully later. Smith's stressing of the guilt over Henry's death is not supported in his argument, but other critics have indeed shown that guilt was obviously a major aspect of Clemens's feelings and was a decidedly influential part of his conscience.

The other points Smith lists, excepting the much-noted Thomas Paine, clearly are interpretations of Twain's character based on his life on the river and his westward travels. It would be hard to argue those points and equally hard to prove; still, they are worth the brief attention
have given them here since Smith is attempting to set Twain's mental stage for the pilgrimage of the "Quaker City," and he is clearly not describing a man of orthodox belief. Smith is one of the few writers who indicate that the years on the river had anything to do with Clemens's religious sense beyond the fact that it was as a cub pilot that Twain read Thomas Paine.

It must be admitted that Smith, or any other writer dealing with the river years, must be interpretive because these years are so poorly documented; the only extant documents we have of the piloting period are the notebooks that Horace Bixby commanded the young cub to keep of the Mississippi River's many landmarks and changes, the letters Sam Clemens wrote home, and the three brief sketches attributed to him. Some of those letters and sketches are central to this study and will be discussed in detail in the following chapters.

Smith is one critic, along with Justin Kaplan, who discusses the idea that Olivia Langdon provided a "pull toward Christianity" (Smith 36). As we shall see in our look at Kaplan's work, this pull was never deep and was rooted in the love Samuel Clemens had for his future wife. When we read *The Love Letters of Mark Twain* (edited by Dixon Wecter in 1949), we can easily see the pull Livy had on Twain during their courtship period, and we do not need to recount them here; they have already been dealt with by noted critics,
including Justin Kaplan. Smith says that by 1876, Twain had destroyed Livy's Presbyterian faith (Smith 50). This claim is well established and often noted, based on a quotation from Paine's Biography where, upon an occasion of heavy bereavement, Clemens asked his wife if she could not find any comfort in Christian faith. She responded, "I can't, Youth, I haven't any" (Paine 650). ("Youth" was one of Livy's pet names for her husband.) Twain told Paine that he felt a great sense of guilt at having been the instrument of creating Livy's skepticism, and would have changed that if he had had the chance (Paine Biography 653). In short, Sam Clemens's pull against orthodoxy seems as strong as any Livy had; but this matter is too complex for quick conclusions here. More in-depth analysis will follow.

Smith concludes his discussion by finding Twain "tortured by religious skepticism which culminated in a Deistic determinism" (157). He is not alone in this conclusion, but, as I have shown, other interpretations have been proffered and I find it more supportable to find Twain an atheist, or, at least, a naturalistic determinist without any "tortures" from disbelief in a symbolic deity.

As noted earlier, I find no evidence for Twain's belief in deism; the misconception occurs when we take certain comments out of context. Twain often referred to "The Deity" in his works, but, as Holland and Branch claim, Mark Twain knew his symbols and Kaplan and I emphasize that Twain knew
his audience and used these symbols accordingly. The comment that Clemens made to Paine about a "master mind" likely occurred on one of those occasions when a questioning Twain was working with an important symbol but believed in it no more firmly than he did time travel. There were also the occasions when Clemens was trying to impress women, especially Olivia, and there were the times of tragedy where any icon of comfort would be welcome even to the most hard bitten of cynics. And we should remember the point that Leslie Fiedler recorded in his foreword to Doyno's book--Twain was "subversive" when he slipped his religious skepticism into his published books. Simple answers did not satisfy Twain; simplifying Twain by critical distortion is equally unsatisfying.

Twain's autobiographical notations are often contradictory, the old man making comments depending on his mood. For any sense of consistency, we need to have an overview of his life's work and not merely quotations pulled out of context. Again, Twain wrote for popular tastes, and his comments were as much part of his "pose" as they were reflections of his thinking. But before I make my major claims in earnest, there are still some pertinent critical articles to acknowledge here.

James D. Wilson's 1986 "Religious and Esthetic Vision in Mark Twain's Early Career" is a recent in-depth article to look at religious matters in Twain's thinking before the
publication of *Innocents Abroad*, and, while I will disagree with some of Wilson's conclusions, his arguments and ideas are well thought out and deserve attention.

Wilson believes that the time of the Clemens/Langdon courtship was the period when "his religious and artistic concerns fused to form at the outset of his professional career an esthetic credo that Mark Twain neither fully satisfied nor completely abandoned" (156). Twain was:

a man already alienated from the comfortable religious homilies of his childhood. His early training in the Hannibal Presbyterian church and the support and example of his parents had left him a conscience keen to humanitarian concerns and personal moral responsibility, and a knowledge of, if not a belief in, the basic tenets of Protestant faith. He had by this time become disenchanted with religious orthodoxy, distrustful of the emotionalism and sentimentality characteristic of superficial or false piety, and impatient with any hint of religious chicanery . . . [but] he nevertheless exhibited little disposition to blasphemy. (156)

As I shall show later in this study, blasphemy was a stock-in-trade characteristic of Twain's thinking and writing from the very outset of his publishing career. I must also take issue with Wilson's claim that Clemens "was capable of
sensitive expression of pious sentiments" (158): this piety was expressed only in love letters at a specific time in his life, and these expressions were, as Wilson admits, made in frustration. Clemens may have cried "I will be a Christian" in his 1868 correspondence to Livy, but a consummation of this short-lived ideal never occurred. Wilson's examples of this desire are found only in the letters to Livy and Mary Fairbanks during an admittedly passionate phase of his life, and his sentiments cannot be considered anything less than sincere, as Wilson clearly and justly demonstrates (166-68).

And Wilson notes another key issue in Clemens's grappling with faith; Mark Twain was unable to sustain faith (170). The lovelorn Mark Twain desired the "peace of belief" but simply could not believe. In short, no sincere "conversion" took place. We will return to this point again below.

Wilson also sees what many other critics have observed, that Clemens was indeed quite interested in the ministry and in liberal ministers who expressed humanitarian concerns (156-57). As this point will be explored in detail later, I will only say here that Wilson stresses the impact of ministers on Twain's esthetic sense, that there was "a call" of a higher order that Twain looked for in his own work, particularly to the beauty in the expression of ministers like Beecher, Twitchell, Burton, Bushnell and Parker (156-57). I concur on this point: there seems no doubt that Twain observed many
ministers to learn writing and oratorical styles, and further, that he learned much from all of them. There is no discrepancy in finding techniques from those you fundamentally disagree with, and Mark Twain had long been a student of the world and its practitioners of rhetoric. It would be odd to come to any other conclusion than that one skilled artisan would learn from and appreciate the accomplishments of his peers.

Wilson's article then turns to its major subject, an exploration of the composition of The Innocents Abroad, asserting that Twain's "five year battle" with religious concerns can be seen in the first travel book of the author's career, particularly in the use of the persona and the revisions between the Alta letters and the finished volume (which demonstrate conflicting points of view), and that in this book we can begin to chart Twain's "esthetic philosophy" (157). Because the remainder of this detailed article focuses on The Innocents Abroad, a book beyond the scope of this study, let me quickly observe here that Wilson's discussion of the love letters brings out some points we must address before moving on to other critics. Wilson shows how Twain's interest in conversion was undoubtedly profound; as Twain himself wrote in 1868, as quoted by Wilson:

Piety is the right performance of a common duty as well as the experience of a special moral emotion. I now perform all my duties as well as
I can but see what I lack!—I lack the chief ingredient of piety for I lack (almost always) the "special moral emotion"—that inner sense that tells me what I do I am doing for love of the Savior. (Wilson 168; 27 December 1868)

This letter not only invites comparison to his "My Dear Bro" statement that "I lack the necessary prerequisite, i.e. religion," but it also seems an echo of the tale young Sam told his mother about rejecting God on the grounds that he could not do good except for selfish reasons. In several letters quoted by Wilson, Clemens could not accept Christianity for any reason beyond gaining the love of Livy and the hope of easing the pain of his mother's last years (169). In short, even when Samuel Clemens most yearned to become a Christian, he was honest enough to realize that, intellectually if not spiritually, he could not be converted. Unquestionably, this was an intense and powerful battle, but the outcome was that Mark Twain remained the "cradle skeptic" of his youth.

The next article, "Darkness at Morning: The Bitterness in Mark Twain's Early Novel Tom Sawyer," published by Joseph S. Feeney in 1978, must be discussed in tandem with Forrest G. Robinson's 1986 In Bad Faith: The Dynamics of Deception in Mark Twain's America. Feeney's study is an attempt to show that the bitterness and cynicism readers found in The Mysterious Stranger (1917), A Connecticut Yankee in King
Arthur's Court (1889), The Tragedy of Puddn'head Wilson (1894), and "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" (1900) can be seen in earlier books. He claims that readers see cynicism in the later books, "yet Twain's early, funny books--The Innocents Abroad (1869) or The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (1876)--seemed unaffected by this shadow of cynicism" (Feeney 4). Robinson's discussion focuses on Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn showing "bad faith," a faith which includes self-deception which "functions as a bridge between codes and actual day-to-day behavior" (2). "Bad faith . . . may act to conceal problems of grave consequences," and we can see how this deception works, says Robinson, in Twain's most famous boy-books (2).

Feeney does not deal with Twain's first travel book but claims that in Tom Sawyer, "under its bright surface runs a current of dark bitterness, a bitterness often present in its most humorous moments" (4). This bitterness, Feeney says, is seen in Twain's portraying people as stupid; "stupidity prevails" (4). This unkind opinion is supported by citing passages from the novel, and Feeney focuses his discussion on one type of stupidity, religion. "Religion is seen as another of man's mistakes, for religion is found ineffective in the scenes where everyone goes to the mandatory Sunday services but "people don't change" (5).

Robinson supports Feeney's ideas. "St. Petersburg society is a complex fabric of lies: of half-truths, of
simulation, dissimulation, broken promises, exaggerations, and outright falsehoods" (26). The women "are easy marks" for quackery and "exotic religions" (26). Villagers are blind to their own hypocrisy (27), and Tom knows "his neighbors are perpetually deceived" (29). And "the villagers will swallow almost anything" including allowing Tom, whom they all know did not learn his Bible verses, to be ceremoniously decorated for his non-achievement (29). Social codes are linked to "shows," showing mastery in spelling or memorizing verses or sermons (20). This strain for public acceptance leads to the example of the young Biblical enthusiast who vaingloriously "spread himself before the congregation by reciting from memory 3,000 verses without stopping. . . . Unfortunately the strain upon his mental faculties was too great. He was little better than an idiot from that date forth" (20). The search for public acclaim is inevitably the church, "where rituals of devotion and edification readily give way to an orgy of showing off" (20-1).

Feeney goes further:

religion, . . . is found ineffective, destroys happiness and boyish joy, brings fear and repression, and is the butt of jokes and situation comedy. (5)

While this point may seem beyond the scope of this study--Tom Sawyer not appearing until 1876--there are points here that reflect on the biography of Sam Clemens's early years to be
examined in the next chapter. The St. Petersburg setting, as well as Tom's actions, are certainly reflections of Twain's own memories and impressions. Tom learns to deceive the public; Mark Twain repeatedly creates characters who are capable of deceits in many ways on many levels. Tom's pranks would, in a sense, become Mark Twain's profession; both learned the meaning of gullibility as young children. (Chapter 5 examines how this view of man was demonstrated in the early writings.)

Robinson also points to a notion we will explore later, that of Twain's attitude towards preachers. As discussed by Kaplan and other critics, Mark Twain's attitude towards preachers often depended less on their theology than on their oratorical skills. If Tom Sawyer is patterned on Hannibal, the following idea may be telling:

Our assessment of his style notwithstanding, the Reverend Mr. Sprague was regarded as a wonderful reader. At church "sociables" he was always called upon to read poetry; and when he was through, the ladies would lift up their hands and let them fall helplessly in their laps, and "wall" their eyes, and shake their heads, as much as to say, "words cannot express it; it is too beautiful. Too beautiful for this mortal earth." (Tom Sawyer 67)
Feeney would conclude that people fall for such sermons because he believes Twain portrays people as stupid, particularly churchgoers. Feeney demonstrates this delusion in a brief paragraph from *Tom Sawyer* about the funeral of Injun Joe which he believes shows Twain's attitude that religion is only delusion and hypocrisy.

After reading Feeney's roll call of bitter aspects in *Tom Sawyer*, a reader wonders why Twain's religious skepticism in this "book for boys" was not recognized earlier. Again, I refer to Fiedler's claim that Twain was subversive in presenting his religious skepticism. Perhaps Victor Doino is right; the reader must be of a similar mind to see it. At any rate, Feeney's work helps establish the chain of critics who find skepticism in the early novels before the dark years.

Worthy of mention, finally, are Kenneth Anderson's "Mark Twain, W. D. Howells, and Henry James: Three Agnostics in Search of Salvation," and Pascal Covici's noted "Mark Twain and the Puritan Legacy"; these may not seem, at first glance, to be pertinent to this study. Covici makes one point worth mentioning here; he believes we can see Twain's humor with "special clarity" if we examine "Puritan determinism, rather than God's chosen community and personal guilt" and, in particular, if we look at three of Twain's predecessors, Benjamin Franklin, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Nathaniel Ward to see this pattern (3). His main point is:
Mark Twain, in the 1916 "Mysterious Stranger," presents a naturalistic analog to Calvinism. Satan explicates a deterministic theory of human behavior... The Puritan's theological strait-jacket has been replaced by a naturalistic one very like it. (12)

Simply stated, by looking to the past, Covici decides that Twain's later determinism—a debated point—grew naturally from Puritan seeds. William Anderson sees another angle, and shows in his article parallels in the main characters of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, and *The Ambassadors* to demonstrate that the three authors—Twain, Howells, and James—could, as agnostics, try to find salvation only on earth rather than in an unlikely heaven.

Anderson defines an agnostic simply as someone who believes that one cannot verify the existence of God by genetic or sensory means (Anderson 13). After he asserts that the three novelists were agnostics, he writes that attainment of heaven was "at best dubious" but they believed "that the attainment of an earthly salvation was, however, within grasp and was, as it were, 'the real thing'" (Anderson 13).

In his discussion of Hank Morgan, Anderson says that the character is not allowed to grow as an individual because of his stubborn belief in nineteenth-century ways of progress.
Morgan does not strive for heaven: he defies the medieval church which supported heredity and tries to make a heaven on earth. Morgan dies, but he is not worthy of salvation. "For Mark Twain, Morgan could have only attained earthly salvation through, with, and for society" (14).

What Anderson is implying, but does not explicitly state is that agnostics not convinced of an afterlife with the creator must strive for perfection as simple, carnal men. This benevolent attitude, being part and parcel of Anderson's concept of an agnostic, is interesting. Whether Twain was an agnostic or not, he certainly is generally considered a humanitarian: the inscription on the monument of Twain that overlooks the Mississippi River near Hannibal, Missouri, reads "His Religion was Humanity." While some critics find Twain an atheist, an agnostic, or a deist, we all share the common belief that the man was very interested in the human race and did what he could to benefit it even his barbed attacks of human frailities. He supported Helen Keller, black law students, the Congo Reform Movement, and other philanthropic enterprises throughout his life, all interests begun in his formative years. It is one thing to point to his bitter last years and another to demonstrate his lifelong religious skepticism, but we must remember that his religious sense was only one aspect of the total man. None of us would stand on safe ground showing that one shadow—in this case religion—was so long and so great as to completely dominate
the life and works and ideas of a man as complex and varied as Mark Twain.

Moving on from a review of recorded concepts of Mark Twain's religious sense, I will now turn first to a focused biography of Twain's earliest years and then examine his influences and experiences from 1835-1867, detailing both primary and secondary sources on each matter with occasional looks into matters from later years pertinent to this study to show that the chain of skepticism can be easily traced from cradle to grave. This skepticism was both a blessing and a curse; he was forced to be a social maverick because of his views, but the role of outsider is one extremely useful to Twain the writer.

There were occasions when to accept orthodoxy might have been socially, emotionally, and perhaps spiritually helpful to Samuel Clemens, but the integrity of his spirit precluded any such easy resolutions to his problems. In short, any conclusions drawn in this study can result in double-edged interpretations of Sam Clemens's early years; this duality in criticism seems perfectly appropriate to a study of Sam Clemens/Mark Twain. His skeptical view, it seems to me, did not put dogmatic blinders on his world view but rather allowed him to experience and write about a wide concentric circle of the world, a range possible only when the strictures of religion are removed. But, when looking at the early years we are looking at the seeds of thought and only the most rudimentary initial expression.
One late February morning in 1867, according to Justin Kaplan in *Mr. Clemens and Mark Twain*, Samuel Clemens and his friend Edward House paid a call on Captain Charles C. Duncan. Duncan had conceived the idea of a private party to tour Europe with the congregational backing of Henry Ward Beecher. This journey was later to be the "Quaker City" excursion recounted in *Innocents Abroad*. Sam Clemens wanted to go on this cruise, and he had a plan when he called on Duncan that February morning.

Being somewhat drunk that morning, House and Clemens were in a "gay mood" (Kaplan 28). House approached Captain Duncan and announced, "Let me introduce the Reverend Mark Twain, a clergyman of some note, lately arrived from San Francisco" (28). Clemens picked up the story by telling Duncan of his missionary work in the Sandwich Islands, and he told Duncan his church wanted to send him on the upcoming excursion for his health. He had a question for Duncan: since Mr. Beecher was to be on board, would he allow Reverend Twain, a Baptist, to conduct services once in a while? Duncan assured Reverend Twain that this was certainly possible.
This anecdote helps frame this chapter's discussion because *The Innocents Abroad* stands as Twain's first major work, a work generally considered to be irreverent, sacrilegious, and manifesting all of the moral indignation typical of Mark Twain. It also serves as a time-reference point for separating literary criticism because little critical examination of the earlier work has been put to the "skepticism" microscope. The above passage from Kaplan's book, which begins with the events just prior to the Quaker City's sailing on June 8, 1867, also sets the stage for this biographical sketch by noting the jocular blasphemy of a man who was clearly not religiously oriented. Indeed, Twain underwent a mild "conversion" on board ship under the influence of Mary Mason Fairbanks. If a man needs conversion at all, it must be that he has been a disbeliever previously or that he was at least "indifferent."

Before we temporarily leave Kaplan's biography, it is worthwhile to note Kaplan's opinion of Twain's religious sense in light of his attitude towards the clergy. Kaplan notes that Twain "could get along well enough with the professional clergy. . . . He had in common with them an interest in oratory" (41). Maxwell Geismar also noted this point, saying Twain attended Henry Ward Beecher's Plymouth Church in New York "less for religious reasons than to observe the platform style of the famous minister" (9).

Kaplan notes the long friendship with Reverend Joseph Twitchell in Hartford as indicative of Twain's compatibility
with professional speakers; much of Twain's anger, says Kaplan, was directed at the mob-arousing amateurs such as the antics of the Duke at the camp meeting in *Huckleberry Finn*. Twain got along well with liberal preachers like Twichell and the Beecher brothers (Henry Ward and Thomas K., discussed below), but dogmatic believers—as many of his "Quaker City" companions were—became subjects for his ridicule.

This point underlines the notion that Twain's already held skepticism contributed to his dual vision, allowing him to separate, if you will, the sheep from the goats. Mark Sexton's 1987 dissertation, "Vernacular Religious Figures in Nineteenth-Century Southern Fiction: A Study in Literary Tradition," adds dimension to this idea in its full-length discussion of preachers in American culture and literature. Sexton shows that "folk" preachers, particularly those of the "fundamentalist" stripe, were stock comic figures in American fiction.

Character stereotyping, exaggeration, use of a trickster figure who is often the preacher himself, and a predominantly ironic narrative perspective [were part of the Old Southwest humorists' tools to remove] social and religious respectability. (1)

Sexton claims that Twain's attack on religious characters in *Huckleberry Finn* was in the Old Southwest tradition of Johnson Jones Hooper and George Washington
Harris (1). In Chapter 4 of this study, we will examine the tradition of literary comedians and emphasize their influence on Clemens's religious sensibilities. We should note that Sexton is certainly correct in his thesis; Mark Twain operated in literary traditions that preceded him in both form and substance, irreverence and social attitudes.

The most important sources for studying Sam Clemens's early years are clearly the primary texts, the letters, sketches, stories and the recollections of family members. There is no avoiding Twain's own Autobiography (1917) which is often taken with too many grains of salt. It is true that Clemens's memory was not always precise and often quite selective depending on his purposes. Some events seem to have changed in his memory, but he clearly chose events he found significant.

Alongside the Autobiography is Albert Bigelow Paine's four-volume Biography (1912), although his chapter on Clemens's formative years does not yield much on Twain's religious sense. Still there is information pertinent to this study.

The first biography to deal exclusively with the early years, Dixon Wecter's Sam Clemens of Hannibal, is also relatively barren of information pertinent to this study, but it is indispensable to the Twain scholar looking closely at the young Sam Clemens. John Lauber's The Making of Mark Twain does more with influences on Twain than Wecter,
especially those of school, church, and Tom Paine. Lauber will prove most useful in our examination below.

Most of what I note below comes from the 1988 volume of *Letters* edited by Edgar Branch and others. Many of Clemens’s late-life concerns can clearly be seen in his early correspondence. For example, in 1859 (when Clemens was twenty-three years old) he wrote a letter to his friend John Moore in which he first used Adam as a comic figure; this was twelve years before "The Tomb of Adam" in *Innocents Abroad*, and forty years before "The Diaries of Adam and Eve." In colorful river talk, Sam introduced his subject: "I have been wondering lately what in the name of Mexican cultivation and flatboat morality is to become of people, anyhow?" (91). The source of the problem, he concludes, was Adam:

> What a fool old Adam was. Had everything his own way; had succeeded in gaining the love of the best looking girl in the neighborhood, but yet unsatisfied with his conquest he had to eat a miserable little apple. (*Letters* 91)

This brief irreverence is but one of many uses of the Bible in Clemens’s youthful correspondence. In his letters, Sam wrote the people he loved expressing his interests and concerns, so it is no surprise that many of these letters were addressed to those who helped shape Mark Twain, "cradle skeptic." So we now turn to the first influences on Samuel Clemens--his family.
Perhaps the best look at the relationship between John Marshall Clemens and his son is Keith Coplin’s article “John and Sam Clemens: A Father’s Influence” (1970). His main point is that a father’s influence on his children cannot be underestimated, and Coplin discusses many areas, particularly of personal independence, that John Clemens passed on to his children.

John Clemens’s well-known lack of business acumen was passed on to both Orion and Sam, and the hope for a rich life was left to the family in the legacy of the Tennessee land, a major disappointment. Sam used the experience as material for his first novel, The Gilded Age. John Q. Hays believes Sam “never quite forgave his father for committing the cardinal sin of the Gilded Age by failing in business” (Rebellion 31). As we shall see, Sam’s feelings about his father may be considered ambivalent, but they were certainly always cold.

Sam’s own recollections are recorded in Following the Equator. Because John Hays discusses this matter in detail in his “Rebellion” article (31-32), I will not repeat his work here, but one quote from Twain summarizing his father’s religious thought bears attention here:

[My father] attended no church, and never spoke of religious matters, and had no part or lot in the pious joys of his Presbyterian family, nor
ever seemed to suffer from this deprivation.

(Equator 18)

It seems comforting to note that Sam Clemens differed from his father in three important ways. (1) He certainly did, at times, suffer from the loss of faith. (2) But Twain never ceased speaking about religion, however, unlike his grim father, which, in a sense, defused some of the cold Puritanical grip that silent Calvinism had put on John Clemens. Mark Twain, by constantly examining religion, was at least able to distance himself from the fire-and-brimstone by treating it with irreverence and jocular ire. And it is clear that Twain and Livy's views and practice of family life were much warmer than in Sam's Hannibal home. And (3) Mark Twain clearly participated in his family's "pious joys": John Clemens's influence was strong, but Sam freed himself of some of his father's weakness.

More to our purpose, Coplin says this about the father's influence on his son's religious sense:

Sam respected his father's intellectual independence, especially in religion, for in later life he was to maintain a personal religious doctrine quite similar to that held by his father. He respected his father's impeccable integrity and his authority, but at the same time he hated his father's unyielding austerity. (2)

Father and son were never close. As John Hays notes, Sam Clemens identified his father as a Calvinist-deity
figure, "the image of this parochial Jehovah, the upright judge, the austere law-giver, the father who dealt strongly with his son but softly with his daughters" (Wecter 66, Rebellion 33). But the stamp of John Clemens is clearly seen in Twain’s later years. He incorporated what he liked about his father into his own being and attempted not to repeat the aspects he disapproved of, an attempt not always successful. As John Frederick puts it, "this unloved but deeply respected parent was a free-thinker, a representative of a restricted but important minority in the religious pattern of frontier towns" (128). Twain’s view on religion was clearly shaped by this independent man.

This free-thinking of John Clemens, according to John Hays, was based on a Kentuckian-pioneer spirit "under the shadow of the Enlightenment . . . of the Jefferson type" (Rebellion 32). This free-thinking, to return to Coplin’s ideas, probably included doubting the divinity of Christ, "a frontier echo of Unitarianism" (128). And Hays adds that John Marshall Clemens’s Puritan sense of morality led him to strip himself of all possessions to repay his creditors when bankruptcy struck--an act clearly foreshadowing his son’s later response to his own loss of solvency (Rebellion 32).

Coplin says that one of the greatest influences on Sam’s life was his father’s death, for it was on that occasion that Sam had to go to work. "His father’s death ended Sam’s childhood, and I believe he never forgave his father for
dying" (3). John Clemens's death was certainly significant; in an 1861 letter to Orion recounting the hits and misses of a New Orleans fortune teller, Sam admitted "And Pa's death in '47-8, as the turning point in my life, was very good" Letters 111).

Whether Twain forgave his father for anything or not, Coplin makes a strong case for the idea that John Clemens was a partial model for all of the fathers in Twain's fiction, seen either as ineffective failures or tyrannical, overpowering figures (3-5). This point is echoed in Leslie Fiedler's What Was Literature? As Fielder puts it, "Fathers do not fare well in Twain." As in the case of the Grangerfords in Huckleberry Finn, the "stark macho code" is not "nurture but death . . . kill or be killed" (240). This is a cold philosophy.

Coplin agrees and says that in his fiction Twain struck back at his unemotional, unloving father by casting him either as Tom Canty or Pap Finn (3-4). But in the matter of religion, both of John Clemens's surviving sons followed their father's footsteps closely by rejecting the religion to which the family's women clung. Allison Ensor goes further by noting that John Clemens's irreligious feelings helped contribute to "the intensity of his son's religious doubts," (13), an intensity beyond indifference.

The model John Clemens presented his sons, while not being completely admirable, did give them the realization
that a man could be moral and upright without the dictates of formal religion (Coplin 6). Moreover, Coplin could have added, John Clemens showed that a man could be seen as moral while keeping his religious heresy to himself. John Clemens's silence on religion may have contributed to Clemens's "subversive" skepticism, as Fiedler would put it, by demonstrating that overt anti-religious sentiment may result in an uncomfortable distancing from the family, a situation Twain would have dreaded. But before coming to any conclusions on this matter, we need to look at the other primary family members of the Hannibal Clemenses.

Jane Lampton Clemens and the Clemens Women--Pam and Mollie

Clara Clemens, Mark Twain's only surviving daughter, noted in her book My Father, Mark Twain, that her father and aunt, Susan Langdon Crane (or "Saint Sue," as Twain called her), loved to argue during morning walks when the Clemens family visited the Cranes in Elmira, New York. Clara wrote:

Father often joined my aunt in her morning walk by the flowers, and I am certain now that the subject of their talk was frequently the undying topic of religion. My aunt lived by her strong faith in God and all His acts. Father loved to fight her on this subject, and she was big enough to be greatly amused by his original way of putting his questions and objections, instead of resenting his attitude. (Elmira 47)
Mark Twain was fortunate to have such an understanding sister-in-law; Susan Crane built him his favorite octagonal study for writing in spite of his poking "attacks with more and more vehemence" (Elmira 47). Such a relationship mirrored that of young Sam Clemens with his mother and sister in the early years. Some critics have claimed that Twain was a "good bad boy"—Leslie Fiedler's term—meaning that Twain's nature led him to flee the repressive Calvinism of his youth. As Fiedler and Trygve Thoreson have noted, the theme of escape from female-dominated society is apparent in Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, the theme of expressing a strong desire to avoid being reformed (Fiedler Love and Death 270, Thoreson 17).

The image of woman as civilizer and man the untamed rough remains undeniably a part of our natural mythos . . . Mark Twain's Aunt Polly has long been associated with this civilizing role. (Thoreson 17)

But there is more to the "myth" than this.

While Aunt Polly has always been associated with her real-life model, Jane Lampton Clemens, we must emphasize here that Jane Clemens was not as "repressed or repressive" (Frederick 129) as sometimes portrayed or perceived by earlier critics. There are as many contrasts as comparisons between the real and the fictional woman.

For example, John Frederick corrects Van Wyck Brooks's idea that Jane Clemens was a cold, Calvinistic disciplinarian
(Frederick 125-27). There was more depth to the real woman than granted by Brooks or Fiedler; still, their seminal ideas do merit our consideration because Twain did indeed have a dual vision of women, and there can be little doubt that Twain's mother had a strong influence on his religious, moral, and philosophical thinking. It is true that Jane Clemens later confided, "Religion is a jugful; I hold a dipperfull," and that she lost any convictions she had held about Presbyterianism in her later years. As a mother and authority figure, it is equally clear that she was a strong influence on her son's religious, social, and moral senses. (See Alexander E. Jones, "Heterodox Thought in Mark Twain's Hannibal," for a fuller discussion of Jane Clemens's later views.)

Jane Lampton Clemens, as has often been noted, was her husband's opposite in virtually every way. Where he was stern, she was vivacious; where he was aloof, she liked to dance and be involved with people. Her granddaughter, who lived with Jane for twenty-five years in St. Louis, noted:

She loved every kind of excitement . . .
I have known her to dance when she was seventy-five . . . Grandma's room was always a riot of red: carpets, chairs, ornaments were always red . . . she was modern in her ideas and insisted on wearing her skirts shorter than what was conventional. (Webster 40)
Jane Clemens changed her "religion" by switching denominations after moving to Hannibal, and this was for purely social reasons. She simply chose the congregation she felt most at home in. All her children and most of the Hannibal community had a high regard for Mrs. Clemens, and it is clear that her children would confide in her rather than in her husband.

One of these first confidences that must be examined carefully was on Sam's lack of faith. As Twain remembered the incident in his Autobiography, he was in his earliest school years. One of his school teachers had taught him about prayer, and the youngster put this process to work in an attempt to acquire some coveted gingerbread. He wrote in 1906:

... but this dream was like almost all the other dreams we indulge in this life, there was nothing in it [prayer]. I did as much praying in the next two or three days as anyone in that town, I suppose, and I was very sincere and earnest about it too, but nothing came of it.

(Autobiography 35)

This scene was a harbinger of things to come. The failure of prayer was echoed both in Sam's letter regarding his brother Henry's death and in his love letters to Livy. In this first instance, Sam concluded that "if a person remains faithful to his gingerbread and keeps his eye on it
he need not trouble himself about your prayers" (35). He then told his mother that he had "ceased to be a Christian," and when she asked why, he told her he had been a Christian "for revenue only and I could not bear the thought of that, it was so ignoble" (35).

It would be easy to dismiss this remembrance if it were not for the fact that Twain himself noted elsewhere the seriousness of the occasion:

Why should one laugh at my praying for gingerbread when I was a child? What would a child naturally pray for?—and a child who had been lied to by preachers and teachers and a lying Bible-text? My prayer failed. It was 65 years ago. I remember the shock yet. I was as astonished as if I had caught my own mother breaking a promise to me. Was the doubt planted then, which in fifty years grew to a certainty: that the X and all other religions are lies and swindles. (Cummings 19)

In Twain's late-life story, "Little Bessie," a precocious girl not yet three years old asks "What's it [life] all for?" (More on this story in Chapter 6.) Twain clearly felt that events of very young children have profound effects on the later mature persons. The gingerbread event must have been profound to be recorded twice in his later dictations and thus we cannot take his confessions lightly, even if we
cannot answer his question about when the doubt was planted. But, as we are demonstrating, these doubts began at quite an early age.

Another incident involving Jane Clemens, remembered by her son in his *Autobiography*, may shed some light on Sam's preoccupation with a more humane view of Satan, and certainly helps illustrate Jane Clemens's humanitarian bent. *Letters from the Earth* (1962) was Twain's attempt to rehabilitate Satan, an idea he had long held in his imagination. (Joan of Arc too "defends the devil" at her inquisition in Twain's novel. See Spengemann 116.)

Perhaps this idea was born when friends and neighbors of the Clemenses, knowing Mrs. Clemens's sympathy for the underdog, set her up to see if she would defend the ultimate underdog, Satan. The conspirators gathered together, and one by one, damned Satan more and more ferociously. "Sure enough," Twain recalled, "the unsuspecting victim of the trick walked into the trap* (Autobiography 28). Mrs. Clemens built a case that Satan was a sinner, yes, but had he been treated fairly? All men are sinners, she said, and all deserving of forgiveness. No one, she asserted in her son's words, is saved by his own efforts, and we all depend on each other's prayers. "Who prays for Satan?" she asked. "Who in eighteen centuries has had the common humanity to pray for the one sinner who needed it most?" (28).

This pitying and gentle "friend of Satan" was clearly a strong influence on her son and also certainly on her
daughter Pamela and daughter-in-law Mollie, Orion's wife. It was to her and the younger Clemens women that most of Sam's lifelong correspondence was directed. No one has recorded any instance where Twain criticized or rebuked his mother or sisters, unlike his constant poking fun of and at Orion and his father. Yet, as the years passed, we can see that Sam would not write to the women of his family about his religious feelings because he did not share their fundamental beliefs and did not want their approbation. Or he would do so only briefly and teasingly.

In a letter to Jane Clemens dated October 1861, Sam answered her questions about his behavior in Nevada. "'Do I go to church?' Answer: 'Scasley'[sic]" (Letters 138). While it is true that Jane Clemens was not the fire-and-brimstone ironclad character of Aunt Polly, it is also true that she did have clear notions about how far to go with religious heresy. As Minnie Brashear notes in her Mark Twain: Son of Missouri, Jane strongly objected to the views of her brother-in-law, John Quarles, who was a Universalist (54). A Universalist denied the Calvinistic doctrine of the Elect and believed that all men were automatically saved. Even the open-minded "friend of Satan" could not go that far, at least in the years her children were growing up. Brashear surmizes that Jane warned her children about Quarles's views but that he, unlike the stern John Clemens, was much loved by his nieces and nephews (54).
We need to look at how Sam dealt with his mother, feeling—rightly or wrongly—that she would censure his beliefs and opinions. To demonstrate this, we must examine four letters that are crucial to this study.

The first letter, written to Mollie Clemens on June 18, 1858, must be dealt with carefully. It is one of the most painful letters Sam ever wrote, telling his family the tragic circumstances of Henry Clemens's death as a result of a boiler explosion on the steam packet, the Pennsylvania. Sam was present when his younger brother died of the burns received when the Pennsylvania burst into flames, and he long believed that the aid he gave Henry hastened the boy's death. The impact of this event has already been discussed, yet one line from this letter bears our perusal here. Sam wrote:

O God! this is hard to bear. Hardened, hopeless, --aye, lost—lost—lost and ruined sinner as I am--I, even I, have humbled myself to the ground and prayed as never a man prayed before that the great God might let this cup pass from me.

(Letters 80-81)

The question raised here is what did Clemens mean when he wrote "I, even I humbled myself." He might be referring to his pride or to his lack of faith, or perhaps a combination of both. With all the other evidence we have, it is not too far afield to suggest that his family knew of his
attitudes towards religion and to suggest that this line indicates that fact. It is the only letter to his family that deals with prayer in a serious way, and we cannot doubt his heartfelt reactions to this tragedy. This letter suggests that in 1858 Sam Clemens was a religious skeptic and that only under unusual circumstances was this matter brought before the women of his family. A recent study of the impact of Henry's death on Sam concludes that the event and its psychological aftermath led to Twain's use of dreams and death in A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court (Allmendinger 13-24).

It is also useful to suggest that the feelings expressed in this letter may have led to Sam's declaration in 1869 that his favorite hymn was "Even Me," a three-verse plea to the trinity asking for forgiveness for a sinner. As Allison Ensor notes, Twain claimed "Even Me" was his favorite hymn when he was courting Livy, and "If ever there was a period of piety in Clemens's life, this was it, as is manifested by any number of letters he wrote to her and others during this time" (21-22). It is interesting to see that the correlation between the words of the letter and those of the hymn were words close to Sam's heart at times of his closest affinity with Christian comfort.

Sam rarely wrote of religion in letters home in such a conciliatory way. The simple reason for this was the Clemens women's tendency to "nettle" Sam if he wrote offensive
material. "Ma and Pamela seem to be down on my last to the
Gate City," was one rueful comment Sam wrote in 1862 to Orion
after one of his irreligious letters was printed in Keokuk
(Letters 201). (The letter in question will be discussed in
detail in Chapter 5 below.) Two months later, Sam had still
not written home after the outcry. "I half intended writing
east to-night, but I hardly think I will. Tell Mollie I
shall not offend again" (221). Sam finally wrote east in
August, five months after the offence, and once again had to
get a dig in.

We didn't luxuriate then . . . we said wise
and severe things about the vanity and wickedness
of high living. We preached our doctrine and
practised it. Which of course I respectfully
recommend to the clergymen of St. Louis. (237)

His sister Pamela--to whom Sam wrote in 1859 about
Catholic gluttony in pre-feasting for Mardi Gras--would also
have her religious problems in later years (87). Samuel
Webster noted:

As I remember my grandmother . . . it seems
to me that she was always searching for absolute
truth . . . in religion Pamela never did seem
to reach a satisfactory goal. (226)

Orion also had his problems with orthodox religion. The
point here is that the critics who point to Pamela and Jane
Clemens as unflinching dogmatists are overstating and
oversimplifying the case. Questioning religion was a family tradition, even among the more conservative women of the family.

Before we move on to the relationship of the Clemens brothers, we need to express a few more thoughts on Twain's use of his family's women in his fiction, in particular, Aunt Polly. Some critics have drawn close parallels between the character and Sam's mother. As Thoreson says in his "Aunt Polly's Predicament" in Studies in American Humor, women served as social enforcers in Twain's fiction. Aunt Polly is an archetype. "She is a representative of the community and all that it involves: communal hypocrisies, vanities, prejudices, customs, values, and dreams" (17). Her job is to tame "her bad boy" into an acceptable initiation into society.

"Aunt Polly relies on her Christian teachings and her sense of duty for guidance" (Thoreson 18-19). This "sense of guidance" was to curtail Tom's youthful high jinks, and punishment was the tool to solve moral problems (18-9). As Thompson implies, Tom's role sounds suspiciously autobiographical, as in the aftermath to the funeral scene. "Tom can recall with pride the duping of Polly, Mary, and Sid as 'a good joke' and 'very ingenious'" (21-22). Tom has a regret about the pain he puts Aunt Polly through, "but his regret quickly passes" (22). As we shall see in our next chapters, Mark Twain's love of "duping" his readers seems
directly based on his desire to have "a good joke" at society's expense. Institutions are never sacrosanct, including the reforming role of women. Indeed it seems likely that, like Tom, his first pranks would have involved rebelling against his mother.

Even so, let me emphasize that this insight does not necessarily imply that Jane Clemens was a strict Calvinist but rather a typical mother with a rebellious boy who would consider any disciplining authority as repressive. Sam Clemens's perceptions, like Tom's, are those of a boy with "escape" in mind. This point, addressed before, will return again in our discussion of Olivia Langdon Clemens.

Twain's view, of course, is not one-sided. It is interesting to note that the mother figure is split into two characters in Huckleberry Finn.

the kind and loving Widow Douglas and the single-mindedly punitive Miss Watson [who are] the two poles of maternal guidance [with] communally and Biblically inspired rod wielding. (Thompson 23)

This social structure is what Huck seeks to escape as did Twain, on at least one level. Much has been written on Twain's being a "good bad boy," the humorist who can attack while still being embraced into the fold, but it is worth noting that Twain had difficulty with the role of women in his fiction. Joan of Arc was his favorite book, but it is
also his least successful project because his view of women was more mythological than realistic. His image of women and his dealings with them would require more treatment than is suitable here, but the idea of women as reformers and punishers was common in the nineteenth century. Twain was again working within a traditional milieu and not thinking or creating anything out of the ordinary in his views on women. The one exception is Roxy (in *Pudd'n'head Wilson*), a character quite distant from Twain's own experience.

We will see how Twain's views on women are related to the church and school institutions below, but first we need to complete our look into Sam Clemens's family relationships by reviewing the relationship between Orion and young Sam in the light of religious skepticism.

**Orion Clemens**

Sam Clemens wrote several letters to his brother Orion regarding his antipathy towards religion, including the often quoted "My Dear Bro" letter in which he stated that he could not be a minister because he "lacked the necessary stock in trade: i.e. religion." In an earlier letter to Orion in March, 1861, Sam wrote, "What a man wants with religion in these breadless times surpasses my comprehension" (Paine, *Letters* 1:45; Branch, *Letters* 117). And, on March 23, 1878, Twain wrote the following advice to his brother:

> And mind you, in my opinion you will find that you can't write on hell so it will stand printing.
Neither Howells nor I believe in hell or the divinity of the Savior, but no matter, the Savior is none the less a sacred Personage, and a man should have no desire or disposition to refer to him lightly, profanely or otherwise than with the profoundest reverence. (Selected Letters 103)

This passage is important because it states Mark Twain's lack of faith simply and then shows his awareness of what his reading audience expects. This letter was in response to one of Orion's abortive attempts at fiction, and the letter was intended to give Orion useful editorial advice. Twain is clearly advising his brother against mocking hell, not for religious reasons, but for commercial realities: again, Twain was a man who knew his audience and would be subversive rather than overt in his published work. These three letters together are a plain statement of atheism, statements he could write to no one else in his family but Orion.

It was only to Orion that Sam could write about religion without expecting a female outcry because Orion himself had no strong religious feelings. He changed denominations frequently enough to amuse his brother, resulting in the 1877 "Autobiography of a Damned Fool" fragment and the other denomination-hopping satirical fragments Twain wrote based on Orion over several decades. (See Mark Twain's Satires and Burlesques where these fragments are collected).

As companions in Nevada during Orion's career as state secretary, the Clemens brothers attended the same church, the
newly established First Presbyterian Church of Carson City. Orion joined the church in 1862; Sam did not. In a March 1862 letter to William Claggert, Sam described a sermon by Rev. A. F. White—the preacher who inspired the comic controversy in Chapter 25 of *Roughing It* (Letters 174):

> SUNDAY.—I intended to finish this letter to-day but I went to church—and busted! For a man who can listen to an hour to Mr. White, the whining, nasal, Whangdoodle preacher, and then sit down and write, without shedding melancholy from his pen as water slides from a duck’s back, is more than mortal. Or less. I fear I shall not feel cheerful until the beans I had for dinner begin to operate. (Letters 171)

But Orion, probably for political reasons—along with the fact that his wife and daughter Jennie were with him—continued regular church service of one kind or another for a decade. But he was Sam’s accomplice in keeping some of the *Enterprise* sketches out of the disparaging eyes of the Clemens women. After the fracas over the *Gate City* letter (discussed later), Sam wrote to Orion in May 1862 regarding his letters to the *Enterprise*, "I hope Barstow will leave the 'S. L. C.' off the Gate City letters in case he publishes them. Put my Enterprise letters in the scrapbook—but send no extracts from them EAST" (Letters 214). As Edgar Branch notes, avoiding "nettling" from Jane and Pamela was the probable reason for this request (Letters 215).
But Orion too had trouble with denominational orthodoxy, and in 1876 he decided to go public with his views and gave speeches on "Man: The Architect of Our Religion" that resulted in his excommunication from the Presbyterian church (Lorch 372-80). By going public, he upset Jane and Pamela and wrote to Pamela on August 10, 1876:

It grieves me to see you and Mollie so distressed over a matter of opinion. . . . But if I profess to believe certain facts to have taken place when I do not believe it--this is religious hypocrisy. (Lorch 173)

This letter, written from Keokuk, shows that, unlike his younger brother, Orion took steps to make his religious skepticism public, even at the expense of a family outcry. Sam would not do this openly--hence the religious subversion we have already noted. Orion could, in a sense, be more open than his brother because Twain depended on a wide audience for his income. Orion, although the older of the two, did not have the political "savvy" or sense of diplomacy Twain used so well throughout his adult life, and was invariably scolded by Sam for his actions. Still, the two brothers were more alike than Sam would like to have admitted. Both clearly reflected their parents: while they shared their father's denials of Protestant Christianity, they also practiced his Calvinist morality. Orion followed his mother's path from simple Presbyterianism to ultimate
disbelief; Sam, the more rebellious, followed this path much sooner.

The Clemens family, of course, were each affected by the others and, logically enough, the family unit was shaped by the institutions of the community. To put these matters in a larger perspective, it is appropriate at this point to see how Hannibal's institutions helped push Sam and Orion from more traditional heterodoxy into full-blown disbelief.

Hannibal

The Clemens family was fully integrated into the stream of Hannibal society, and young Sam was as influenced by his home town as he was by his family and its role in the river town. As Twain put it, "all that goes to make the me in me was in a Missouri village" (Equator 18). Bernard DeVoto wrote that "Hannibal is the most important single fact in the life of Samuel Clemens the man or Mark Twain the writer" (Portable 6). These claims are irrefutable; it is our purpose here to examine why this is so as it applies to Twain's religious sense.

According to John Lauber in The Making of Mark Twain (and many other critics and biographers), one of the most important influences on Sam Clemens was the institution of the Presbyterian church, the same Christian denomination that later excommunicated his brother (21-3). "In Hannibal, revivalism was strong, and there was a good deal of spiritualism as well" (Emerson 3). As Henry Nash Smith put
it, Clemens "never entirely rid himself of his deference for fundamentalist Protestant culture of Hannibal, Missouri" ("How True the Dream?" 8).

Other critics see a less profound impact of the church on young Sam: John T. Frederick says in The Darkened Sky that the burlesques of sermons in Twain's autobio-graphical writings, most notably Tom Sawyer, were only of a light vein. "So far as the published writings show," says Frederick, "Twain's only clear recollections of church services in his boyhood were farcically humorous" (125). Frederick's view ignores much evidence showing how deeply the "limitless fire and brimstone" sermons of Tom Sawyer and Hannibal influenced young Sam Clemens.

John Hays, for example, recalled that "Howells once wrote that young Clemens, like Tom Sawyer, was 'bred to fear God and dread the Sunday school'--language which Mark Twain admitted 'exactly describes that old feeling I used to have but I couldn't have formulated it" (Hays 30, My Mark Twain 125).

The church, along with the school, was seen by the young boys of Hannibal, including the rebellious Sam Clemens, to be cultural institutions that fostered fear and guilt (Lauber 24). In April 1869, Twain praised the new and unorthodox Thomas K. Beecher "Park Church" in Elmira because "The idea is to make a child look upon a church as only another home, and a sunny one, rather than as a dismal exile or prison"
(Elmira 125). Twain approved of Park Church because this "sunny" environment had not been his youthful experience in Hannibal. For young Sam Clemens, religious services were a literal punishment:

Besides the weekly ritual of family worship, Sunday School, and sermon, with an evening service occasionally added as punishment for any extraordinary crime that Sam might have committed, there was the frenzy of the camp meetings . . . and of the periodic revivals in town. (Lauber 23)

This was no "sunny home" for children. An 1853 letter from Clemens in Philadelphia to Orion records his "squint at" the "'House of Refuge' . . . which we used to read about in Sunday School" (Letters 22). The House of Refuge was a reform school for white juveniles, undoubtedly used in "Sunday School literature" as a threat to wayward Hannibal youth (Branch, Letters 27). The Sunday School books were later mocked by Twain not only for their superficial morality, but because they were part of the Presbyterian conscience, a faith that ruled by fear and guilt, at least in Twain's opinion.

This point on religion as punishment bears special emphasis. As the late, eminent John Tuckey noted in his introduction to The Devil's Race Track: Mark Twain's Great Dark Writings (1966), the hellish Devil's Race-Track was "an
immense circular region" (xii). He also wrote:

Once caught in its maelstrom forces there is no escape, only the possibility of further entrapment into the 'Everlasting Sunday,' an area of eternal and deathly stillness that lies at the center of the region in the storm belt. It is a Sargasso of the Antarctic, a graveyard for derelicts. (xii)

The errant sea captain in "The Passenger's Story," "The Enchanted Sea-Wilderness," and "Which Was the Dream?" (composed in 1895-96) is punished for his treacherous burning of a dog, a dog that had saved human lives, by being becalmed in the "Everlasting Sunday" (xi-xii).

It is interesting to note this image because, as Tuckey points out, the sea captain was psychologically Twain's alter ego. Tuckey believes the fragments represent Twain punishing himself for leaving his daughter Suzy alone to die in the Hartford house. Tuckey cites the captain saying the dog was as cumbersome as children, eating as much as children; the dog is burned alive as Suzy was, in fevered deleriums of meningitis (xi-xii). If we combine the biographical awareness of Lauber's "literal punishment" idea with Tuckey's psychological "literary punishment in these fragments, the "Everlasting Sunday" is another instance in which youthful fears became old age fiction in the life of Mark Twain.

Sundays composed of Sunday school and church were hell for Sam Clemens on several levels.
Further, it is possible that this image was reinforced during Clemens's Philadelphia printshop months in 1853 where he worked long and late hours every Sunday, the shop's biggest day. "Sunday is a long day...I only set 10,000 [ems] yesterday. However, I will shake this laziness off soon" (Letters 29). While this is only a passing conjecture, it may contain insights into the enigmatic late life fragments and further demonstrate that the core of Twain's literature, even in the hallucinogenic later fragments, can be traced to the early years.

School, in Hannibal, was as moralistic as church, and young Sam hated it as much as anything else. These two main cultural institutions, writes Lauber, were remembered by Mark Twain in his boys' books Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, as twin vessels of fear and guilt, teaching Sam Clemens the Calvinistic doctrine of the natural depravity of man, a doctrine he would restate later in another guise (23). But, as we have addressed Puritan influences on Clemens elsewhere, here we simply need to state that family, church and school were the three major cultural influences on any American in the nineteenth century. All three parts of this triangle worked cooperatively, one reinforcing the other.

This point needs some emphasis because the power of words Sam Clemens knew so well was the same medium by which he learned Christian morality and dogma, one reason, perhaps, he had little reverence for the printed word in the early,
carefree frontier journalism before his mature, more polished works were crafted. Writing can be seen as part of his rebellion against his early reading, especially writing direct and "subversive" attacks on Sunday School literature and didactic school texts. And one of the reasons Sam quickly became aware of the thin substance of religious teachings was the difference in what was printed and what he actually observed in Hannibal.

Hannibal, Lauber notes, had its share of violence and death, even if it was a relatively peaceful town. Most people died at home, without benefit of drugs, and were usually conscious to the end (27). Besides the deaths of John and Henry Clemens, Sam witnessed the deaths of the nine-year-old Margaret Clemens, who died of fever just before the move to Hannibal, and the death of ten-year-old Benjamin Clemens, who died in 1847, five years before his father. Death was a fact that Sam grew up with; critics who point to the deaths of Clemens's daughters and wife as being influences on his distaste for religion need to remember the events of the early years. These years taught Sam that death made no distinction between "Good" or "Bad Little Boys."

Sam witnessed the violence of death, notes Lauber, who recounts the incident of the corpse that frightened Sam in the backroom of his father's law office and Sam's witnessing his father's autopsy. Sam witnessed the murder of Sam Smarr by townsman William Owsley, which probably became the basis
for the murder of Boggs in *Huckleberry Finn* (Lauber 27 and a critical commonplace). Lauber notes:

Sam Clemens saw "the grotesque final scenes--the great family Bible spread open on the profane old man's chest." In his nightmares he himself "gasped and struggled" for breath under the crush of that vast book for many a year. (Lauber 27)

The symbolism of this event is apparent, and it seems clear that Twain saw it too. The weight of that Bible was more than a physical choker; it became a symbol of religious oppression to a mind rebellious by nature. This has been noted by many critics before--including Holland and Cross--and we need not belabor the point here.

The fear of poverty--a constant threat to the Clemenses--never left Sam Clemens, and it was another strong influence on his thinking from his youth. He learned not to hope for wealth that was not earned by hard work, as in the example of the Tennessee land. He sometimes forgot this lesson, says Lauber, as in the late life failures of the Library of Humor and the Paige typesetting machine (30). Again, these notions are not new but bear repeating to underline the point that most late-life nightmares in the "dark years" can be traced to the formative era.

After the death of his father, Sam was apprenticed to Joseph Ament, publisher of the weekly Hannibal *Courier* (Lauber 34). Sam had hated school, and after his father's
death he had told his mother he could promise her anything except to go back to the punishment of school (32). While the printshop was an escape from one type of tedium, the printshop would offer him both a new freedom and a new burden.

But the printshop offered Sam a new voice to express his beliefs: Lauber notes one early mentor as that of Sam's colleague, the bulky Wales McCormick. McCormick, who according to Lauber was to become the character of Daongivadam in one of Twain's last fragments. "I don't give a damn," was apparently McCormick's favorite exclamation (35). Sam admired McCormick's "limitless and adorable irreverence" (35). This quality, Lauber believes, was a harbinger of the spirit of *The Innocents Abroad*. He recounts the incident in which McCormick, trying to save space in a *Courier* issue, took a visiting preacher's notice and condensed the name "Jesus Christ" to the initials "J. C." The preacher objected to this, and informed McCormick that he expected the savior's name to be printed in full. McCormick took heed: the next notice was published with the savior's name in full in every instance--"Jesus H. Christ" (35). This oft-mentioned incident was the sort of irreverence young Sam enjoyed and quickly emulated.

It was at this time that he first picked up a short biography of Joan of Arc. Twain told Paine that this was the occasion that set in motion his fascination with that
character which resulted in his writing The Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc fifty years later. This is yet another well-known indication that shows Twain's later writings were based on experiences from his earliest years. It was a heady, active time in a young man's life when his first inclinations towards writing took form. The initials "S. L. C." began to appear on the printed page, and these early writings belong in our last chapter's analysis of the first expressions of skepticism and disbelief.

But before we delve deeply into S. L. C.'s first published texts, we must still examine another important layer of influence on the young Sam Clemens--his reading, including his philosophical and literary predecessors. These matters are the concern of the next chapter.
CHAPTER IV

PHILOSOPHICAL AND LITERARY INFLUENCES

As discussed in Chapter 2, critics have proposed various formulas of influence on Sam Clemens, all of which take into account, more or less, the experiences of Hannibal and the attitudes of Clemens family members. The ideas of "MacFarlane" and Thomas Paine are other influences often repeated in these formulas, and a full discussion of the impact of these men on Mark Twain is worthy of some space here. Attention is especially appropriate to "MacFarlane" as recent critics have completely disavowed the importance of Clemens's Cincinnati friend and claim Twain's account of their meeting was fiction and not autobiography. And, while the works of Thomas Paine have long been acknowledged as seminal influences on Twain's religious and political views, no one to date has fully explored the life-long literary relationship between Twain and Paine. The first two sections of this chapter are re-examinations of how the ideas of these men were reflected in the philosophical and political attitudes and writings of Mark Twain, demonstrating that their notions helped shape a young mind eager to accept their iconoclastic and irreverent concepts.

Twain's iconoclasm and irreverence is also tied to the influence of Artemus Ward and the literary comedians. The
comic tradition of Josh Billings, Orpheus C. Kerr and other American humorists also certainly contributed to Twain's religious and social ideas. In this chapter, I will demonstrate how Twain's literary apprenticeship in the genre of the literary comedians not only helped develop his literary toolbox, but how this school augmented, supported, and fostered his frontier irreverence and skepticism.

MacFarlane

Discussing the Scotsman MacFarlane is one matter likely to surprise many contemporary Twain critics. After the publication of Paul Baender's "Alias Macfarlane" in the May 1966 American Literature, many critics have taken it for granted that Baender's claim forever discredits Paine's account of Macfarlane's influence in the Biography and Twain's own reminiscences in the Autobiography. One typical footnote on the subject, this one by John Hays, states:

A long accepted error regarding Clemens's religious origins has been corrected. Paine said that in Cincinnati, in 1855-56, Clemens picked up such ideas as his later ones on determinism from an older, self-taught, fellow lodger named Macfarlane.

According to Baender, the sole manuscript extant on the episode is not autobiography but one of Twain's late fictional experiences about an off-beat character used to
project his own views (Hays Rebellion 38; also see Religion 22).

But the present critic is not so willing to accept this "correction" as established doctrine. There is more evidence to support Twain's own account, first in the form of the "Cincinnati Boarding House" sketch (analyzed in the next chapter). Other critics believe that Twain simply "disremembered" the spelling of John J. MacFarland, a fellow boarder and printer at Wrightson's, the printing house where the twenty-one year old Clemens labored (Baker 302-3, Kaplan World 204). Further, Baender's reasoning needs re-examination because of certain positions no longer credible. Therefore, before discussing the influence of MacFarlane on Sam Clemens, or whether Macfarlane only reinforced opinions already held by Sam, we must re-examine Paul Baender's highly influential "Alias Macfarlane."

Baender's case begins with the critic's "surprise" that anyone would accept Paine's conclusions about Macfarlane because

one would not expect it to last in the climate of theory fostered by Brooks, DeVoto, and others with a psychoanalytical orientation. In that climate one would expect the idea of Twain's indebtedness to a chance acquaintance . . . to be discarded as a relic. (188)

This claim itself seems suspect. Much of the "Brooks, DeVoto tradition," to use Baender's phrase, has itself been
"corrected." Nor can we accept without question Baender’s doubts that an older man could influence a young Sam Clemens "so crucially in so short a time" or that the elder Twain could "isolate such an influence" (188). Clearly, Twain’s reading of Tom Paine and Carlyle, to choose but two examples, took relatively short periods of time and no one denies their influence for their brevity. Nor should it be surprising that the older Twain could recall such an event; seminal events tend to be memorable, and the Autobiography, among other documents, is full of such recollections, notably, as elaborated below, of his first reading of the Age of Reason.

Further, Baender’s claim is laden with the bias he accuses others of harboring:

... critics repeat the story and enjoy repeating it, with an air of superiority and condescension quite foreign to [Albert] Paine. They appear to believe in the influence because it helps put Mark Twain in his place as one of those writers whose 'ideas' need not be taken seriously. (188)

It is one thing to scold specific critics’ views: it is another to make blanket, undocumented charges that add nothing to the case at hand. Why, for example, would early influences cheapen Twain’s pessimism? Does profundity depend on old-age angst? Because of these issues, one has to grant Baender’s reasoning less authority than is currently in fashion.
The heart of Baender's case contains useful insights; it seems clear that A. B. Paine's effusive commentary on Macfarlane's influence on Twain was built on only one document--discussed below--and that Paine let his own imagination build on Twain's one dictation on the subject (189). And Baender's statement that it is not important whether Paine was right or wrong but rather "irrelevant" leads to an interesting point: "The question should not be how much Twain owed MacFarlane, or whether such indebtedness affected his stature as a philosopher," but rather for what polemic purpose did Twain invent Macfarlane, his own alter-ego? (190). Such questions set the stage for Baender's useful rhetorical reading of the text. They, however, ignore the possibility that Sam Clemens of Connecticut could easily have met a philosophical mentor in Cincinnati, as other evidence suggests.

Baender claims there are good reasons why Paine thought the manuscript describing Macfarlane was autobiographical and not a fictive exercise. The handwriting matches sketches of a similar nature written in the '80s, fragments describing interesting personalities "like James Lampton, Jane Clemens, Petroleum V. Nasby" (191). "Macfarlane has eccentricities which apparently evoke nostalgia, amusement, pity and respect in the author" (191). Baender says Paine knew Macfarlane's ideas were shared by Twain, which led him to the conclusion that an influence had occurred (191). According to Baender, Paine missed the boat completely on all counts.
Baender then analyzes the text of Twain's manuscript, concluding that Twain used the Macfarlane character to make his "pessimism" more palatable to the public by putting it in a third-person voice, diluting the negativity of first-person invective as in "He said that man's heart was the only bad heart" (192). Baender then groups the manuscript not with autobiographical dictations but with The Mysterious Stranger, "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg," "Corn-Pone Opinions," and "The War Prayer," all stories using an "outsider" to express Twain's personal opinions (192). Further, Baender claims that Twain used fragments with a dog and an ant to express similar opinions to those in "What is Man?" and the Macfarlane manuscript. It is here that his article is most useful because, accurate or not, the discussion adds to our awareness of Twain's use of the outsider in his later fiction (although this technique can be seen as early as the Snodgrass letters written in Cincinnati). But before we can reach any useful conclusions on this matter, we should examine the manuscript itself.

MacFarlane or "McFarland," a character much like Sam's Hannibal printer colleague McCormick, may have provided an alternative system of philosophy that piqued Clemens's interest. As Paine recounts:

Twain recalled . . . in 1856 when he worked at the Courier in Cincinnati, Macfarlane lived in the same boarding house as Twain, and the two became friends. (Autobiography 105)
In Twain's words:

Our boarding house crew was made up of commonplace people of various ages and both sexes. They were full of bustle, frivolity, chatter and the joy of living and were good-natured, clean-minded and well-meaning but they were oppressively uninteresting, for all that--with one exception.
This was Macfarlane, a Scotsman. (104)

This description seems more autobiographical than fictive: an artistic use of the same material is part of the important "Boarding House" sketch in which religious discussion digresses and disintegrates because of "well-meaning" and "good-natured" banter. The Thomas Jefferson Snodgrass letters were also written at this time, themselves refutations of Baender's idea that you can't look to the early years to study Twain's pessimistic view of man. The "Boarding House" sketch is perhaps the first literary evidence of Twain's early interest in determinism, and the Snodgrass letters also show his interest in the mockery of religion. In short, Baender's conclusion that the sketch is fiction does not line up with the literary and biographical scraps we do have regarding this relatively undocumented period of Clemens's life.

Twain described Macfarlane:

He was forty years old--just double my age--but we were opposites in most ways and comrades from the
start. I always spent my evenings by the wood fire in his room listening in comfort to his tireless talk and to the dulled complainings of the winter storms until the clock struck ten . . . He had no humor or any comprehension of it . . . he had two or three dozen weighty books . . . he always read two or three hours in bed. (Auobiography 104)

Twain wrote that fifteen years before Darwin's Descent of Man, Macfarlane had the same idea: "the same general idea, but with a difference" (105). The Scotsman told young Clemens that life began with a "few microscopic seed germs" (106) and life progressed until man was created, "and that then the progressive scheme broke pitifully down and went to wreck and ruin!" (106). The last two paragraphs of Chapter 19 are a listing of man's foibles according to Macfarlane, the same ideas that were later expressed by Twain in the "dark writings."

To summarize what Macfarlane told Twain in 1856:

1. He said that man's heart was the only bad heart in the animal kingdom: that man was the only animal capable of malice, envy, vindictiveness, revengefulness, selfishness . . . the sole animal that developed the base instinct called PATRIOTISM. . . the sole animal to murder, steal from, and enslave its own tribe.

2. He claimed that man's intellect was a brutal addition to him and degraded him to a rank far
below that of the other animals . . . The
divinest divine reduced his domestics to humble
sevitude under him by advantage of his superior
intellect. (Autobiography 106)

William Baker notes:
The meeting with MacFarlane/MacFarland was
significant, for it was in his presence . . .
that he first explored the deterministic pessimism
of "the damned human race." He also learned from
him, perhaps unconsciously, that a self-educated
man could be respected for his strong—even
contrary opinions. (Baker 308)

While Clemens had probably already learned the latter
lesson from his father and uncle, he heard the deterministic
ideas at a pivotal time in his life. William Baker says that
Twain's six month stint in Cincinnati finally "turned him
against the printer's trade," and that Twain's ill-fated late-
life interest in the Paige typesetter was a direct result of
his loathing of the ten years of typesetting drudgery, a
trade he abandoned in early 1857. It was in Cincinnati that
Twain "first tried his literary wings," according to Baker,
writing the Snodgrass letters in a persona using dialect just
before becoming a cub pilot on the Paul Jones (308). It was
certainly a pivotal moment in Clemens's life and worthy of
late-life nostalgia.

In January 1857, two thousand copies of James River
Guide, the Mississippi "river pilot's bible," compiled by U.
P. James were "put up" in Wrightson's printing shop; there is no doubt that Sam Clemens, soon to be a pilot, was aware of it and may have been one of its compositors (Baker 305). Indeed, the book may have influenced his decision finally to take up the river. In short, the meeting with Macfarlane occurred at "The Turning Point of My Life," as Twain himself called the events of late 1856, early 1857.

It is a pity that Twain simply set out, in some detail, what Macfarlane told him without recording what he felt about these ideas when he first heard them. William Baker implies that Macfarlane was clearly, in Twain's opinion, the first influence of pessimistic determinism on his thinking; but nowhere does Twain say this categorically. He never says that he either agreed with or was influenced by Macfarlane. This is where both Paine and Baker have to be interpretative about this influence. Clearly, it seems to me, Mark Twain's philosophy was strongly influenced by the deterministic ideals of his fellow boarder/printer. But Baker is too emphatic in his claim that Twain acknowledged this in his published recollections save in the fact that he wrote the chapter at all. It is, however, extremely likely, as Baker notes, that Macfarlane served as model for "Mr. Blathers" in the "Boarding House Sketch." If so, we know little more about him than the possibility that he had discussions of his opinions with others in the boarding house and that Twain used Macfarlane's ideas to write one of his first attacks on
religion. I will discuss this matter in considerable detail in my next chapter. If the sketch is indeed Twain's, then Macfarlane's concepts were immediately recorded by Twain in one of his earliest creative efforts.

Paul Baender's notions, in short, are not sacrosanct. He makes a useful point by implying we cannot measure Macfarlane's influence; but this is also true of any other influence on Twain's thinking. Our purpose is never to weigh the scales to see what influence is more important than another, but rather to demonstrate the wide variety of sources Sam Clemens chose from to establish his early world views. It seems evident that a real person gave Sam Clemens his first alternative concepts of determinism, and there is no real evidence to discount Macfarlane.

Thomas Paine

There is little question that Thomas Paine was a major influence on Mark Twain's religious sense as well as his late life political and social concerns. It is equally obvious that Paine was a lifelong interest of Twain's. As Clemens told another Paine--Albert Bigelow--in 1909 about The Age of Reason:

I read it first when I was a cub pilot, read it with fear and hesitation, but marvelling at its fearlessness and power. I read it again a year or two ago . . . and was amazed to see how tame it had become. (Paine Biography 1445)
There is considerable evidence demonstrating that Thomas Paine's ideas and works kept Mark Twain's interest for most of his life (Britton "War Prayer" 13-19). In Alan Gribben's Mark Twain's Library: A Reconstruction (1980), eight listings indicate this interest and the span of years over which it existed.

Twain signed a copy of *The Age of Reason* for his personal library which is still extant (Gribben 524). In his copy of *The Rubiyat of Omar Khyyam*, Twain made marginal notes to Edward Fitzgerald's biographical introduction, writing comments comparing Khayyam's poor reception in his country to Thomas Paine's unpopularity in America. In brown ink, Twain noted "apparently the same reason which makes it a sin to respect Tom Paine or know of his great service to his race." When Fitzgerald compared Khayyam to the Roman rebel Lucretius, Twain commented that Protestant and Catholic churches "turn upon Thomas Paine and charge him with irreverence" (524). It is clear from these short comments that Mark Twain was not only aware of Paine's work and public reaction to it, but that he had strong feelings about Paine and his ideas.

Paine appeared as a symbol of contrast in Twain's fiction. In chapter 1 of *Those Extraordinary Twins* (1994), the two primary characters were juxtaposed by a number of contrasting characteristics including their reading. "Luigi, with Paine's *Age of Reason* in his hand, sat down in the chair
. . while Angelo took his "Whole Duty of Man" (a devotional work by Richard Allestree) and both began to read" (524). Twain had earlier made jibes at the seventeenth century standard work, "Whole Duty of Man," in an 1862 letter to his mother (Letters 174-79). And, as Gribben notes, Twain knew the line "These are the times that try men's souls" from The Crisis by 1853 (524). Clemens used the expression in a letter to Orion from Philadelphia dated October, 1853 (Letters 23). In short, Thomas Paine was a figure of interest to Sam Clemens from the time he was eighteen to the years of his "dark writings."

There is a community of critics who agree that Paine was a major influence on Twain's religious sense. E. Hudson Long is certainly correct when he notes that Twain had read The Age of Reason and Carlyle's French Revolution, "both exerting a permanent influence on his thinking" (Handbook 131). As noted earlier, Allison Ensor's Mark Twain and the Bible noted several influences on Twain's religious sense including the works of Thomas Paine (13). J. Harold Smith (discussed in chapter 2 of this study) and Philip S. Foner in Mark Twain: Social Critic both pair Macfarlane and Paine as co-contributors to Twain's "Deistic determinism" (Smith 13, Foner 169-70). Paine's influence on Twain's determinism is also noted in Delancy Ferguson's 1943 Mark Twain: Man and Myth (152). And Everett Emerson noted in 1984 that Twain's early reading included
Laurence Sterne, Thomas Hood, and George W. Curtis, whose *Potiphar Papers* (1853) burlesques religious hypocrisy and snobbery . . . he read Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason* . . . it influenced his penchant for skepticism. (7)

Biographer John Lauber made useful insights on the importance of Tom Paine to Twain in his *The Making of Mark Twain*. He notes that Twain read *The Age of Reason* "probably in 1859 or 1860" (81). Lauber notes that, when young Sam Clemens read Paine for the first time, he was "amazed and terrified" because "these heresies could still frighten or shock a reader in the Mississippi Valley of the 1850's, but reading *The Age of Reason* again in his old age, Mark Twain had gone far beyond Paine's 'infidelity' by then, denying all Christian doctrine." Lauber says that young Sam Clemens, not yet knowing about Darwinism or Higher Criticism of the Bible, got his first taste of attacks on orthodoxy from Thomas Paine (81). Lauber does not mention Macfarlane's Cincinnati discussions of 1856-57 preceding Twain's first reading of *The Age of Reason*. Still, as noted above, Twain was certainly aware of *The Crisis* by 1853, so Lauber may be right in general if not in particular.

The influence of Tom Paine upon Samuel Clemens went beyond their common religious sensibilities; at the turn of the century, Mark Twain's interest in political causes followed in the footsteps of Tom Paine. Louis Budd notes in
Mark Twain: Social Philosopher that Twain mused about "The Great Yellow Peril" and the Boer War and "dashed off essays" denouncing America's power politics. "A polished result of such musings was 'The War Prayer' (181). In the tradition of Thomas Paine's "Common Sense," Mark Twain repeatedly denounced the institution of kings, most notably in A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court (1889) and "King Leopold's Soliloquy."

It was during this period of Twain's life that he re-read The Age of Reason; it was probably during his last decade when he made the notes in The Rubiyat of Omar Khyyam commenting on Paine's unpopularity. For it was then when Twain wrote "King Leopold's Soliloquy," "so blistering that it was not thought suitable for magazine publication but was issued as a pamphlet instead . . . most scathing of all, however, was 'The War Prayer' which Twain did not publish in his lifetime" (Long 240).

I make the above points briefly because I believe part of the reason Twain withheld publication of "The War Prayer" until after his death was that Twain was a popular writer, and he did not want the unpopularity he knew Tom Paine had suffered. It was in reference to "The War Prayer" that Twain told his friend Dan Beard, "In this story I have told the whole truth and only dead men can tell the truth." His daughter Jean vetoed publication of the story because she felt it would be considered "sacrilegious"—just as Twain
believed Paine had been "charged with irreverence." More importantly, I believe "The War Prayer"'s structure is directly based on Tom Paine's "Common Sense"; they share the same diction, tone, rhetorical devices, theme and narrative framework (Britton 12). Both contain passages told from the point of view of commissioned ministers of God instructed to reveal the unexpected and undesirable results of public prayer to show the hidden, private prayers unspoken by congregations set on unconsidered courses of action (16). Both stories are told in biblical diction with the same results—the plea of God's messenger is rejected (16).

This study’s purpose is not to compare "The War Prayer" and "Common Sense" in detail—the reader is referred to my CCTE Studies for a complete analysis—but simply to emphasize that the ideas of Tom Paine influenced the writing of Mark Twain all through his life, even into the works published posthumously. Paine's ideas were not only seminal influences on the young Sam Clemens, they were reinforced by Twain at various times in his life. As he did with Macfarlane, Twain recalled the impact of his first contact with the ideas of Paine and told his biographer just how important the influence was. So, again, we can clearly see a chain of early influences remaining part of Twain's lifelong religious thought.
Artemus Ward and the Literary Comedians

There is no need here to marshal evidence proving the importance of Artemus Ward and the literary comedians on Mark Twain's career. David E. E. Sloane's *Mark Twain As A Literary Comedian* (1979), among other studies, has conclusively noted Twain's place in this literary tradition. But it is worth demonstrating here the importance of this school of humor on Twain's view of skepticism, politics, and irreverence for all institutions in his fiction. The literary comedians—satirists, burlesquers, exaggerators, tall tale tellers—were almost defined by their continual social commentary, and religion was no rare target. Henry Nash Smith observed that "The humorists, of course, were justly accused of irreverence; and it was generally recognized that the contrast of rhetorical styles embodied a basic conflict of values," that is, the conflict between conservative, traditional Christianity and the "cheerful vagueness of a Protestant liberalism" (Smith, "How True Are Dreams?" 6).

In religion, as in other matters, "Mark Twain borrowed freely from the tradition of literary comedy" (Sloane 97). Mark Twain was a product of the American comic tradition. His first published sketch, "The Dandy Frightening the Squatter," appeared in the May 1st, 1852, *Carpet-Bag*, a Boston based magazine for American humorists. The *Carpet-Bag*’s publisher, B. P. Shillaber, was creator of Mrs.
Partington, a partial model for the later Aunt Polly in *Tom Sawyer* (Emerson 3). And this tradition was one that went beyond merely telling entertaining jokes.

For example, David E. E. Sloane notes that Orheus C. Kerr, Petroleum V. Nasby, and other pre-Civil War humorists used the pen to harangue on political matters, notably abolition (25). Josh Billings was a precursor of Twain’s attacks on “formulaic Christianity”; Billings’s 1865 sketch on horses, saying no horse was safe in the hands of a Christian, predates Twain’s *Innocents Abroad* where Twain used the same idea (102).

Sloane makes special mention that the sketch, whether in the Northeast or Southwest tradition, was a device for moral and ethical preaching, as in Mrs. Partington and Simon Suggs, especially when “euphemistic’ aphorisms” are employed (17). Regarding Artemus Ward in particular, Sloane notes, “He wanted his voice to be meaningful” (25). This idea would be echoed in Twain’s *Autobiography* when he erroneously distinguished himself from the earlier writers by claiming “I preached”; in fact, he learned no small part of his written and oral rhetoric from Ward and his other frontier predecessors:

> Most of Ward’s letters have an ethical dimension. Public figures should have enlightened concern; his showman, a transparent fraud to a skeptical public, is nonetheless capable of detecting other
Fabrications by virtue of his own skepticism.

(25-26).

In fact, many of Twain's early religious jabs were echoes of Ward's work. Twain burlesqued the Mormons in *Roughing It*: Ward had already traveled this territory in his 1885 *Among The Mormons*, poking fun not only at Brigham Young, but also the Shakers, free lovers and "other enthusiasts" (26). Ward, the showman, drives away potential customers—a group of free lovers—by preaching a sermon. He elsewhere delivers "moral rebukes to spiritualists, women's rights fanatics, and the spoilsmen surrounding Lincoln" (25). "Ward exceeded [P. T.] Barnum in attacking religious sectarianism, political venality, 'big' business in the form of railroads, banks, and the government" (37). "Both writers (Ward and Twain) drew comic relationships between religious quackery and the Constitution" (97). Artemus Ward and the literary comedian tradition clearly had a strong impact on Twain's writing and clearly gave him the literary framework to allow his skepticism to flourish.

Another example of this tradition, noted by Sloane, was by Albert Smith, creator of "Phineas Cutecraft," a Yankee version of P. T. Barnum and Ward. Before the *Innocents Abroad*, before the "Napoleon Crossing the Rhine" sketch (discussed in detail in our next chapter), literary irreverence was penned by Twain's literary cousins:

[Smith] introduced Phineas in the Cologne church, and made him say at the end of the sexton's story
about the virgin's bones: "Old fellow, what will you take for the hull lot of bones? I want them for my museum in America." When the question had been interpreted to the old German, he exclaimed in horror, according to Albert Smith:

"Mein Gott! It is impossible! We will never sell the virgin's bones!"

"Never mind," said Phineas Cutecraft, "I'll send another lot of bones to my museum, swear mine are the real bones of the Virgin of Cologne and burst up your show!" (Sloane 34)

This story supposedly took place in 1844; Ward was to use it in his repertoire of jokes as did Twain in *Innocents Abroad* (34). And this borrowing strongly affected Twain's slant on religion:

The circus motif, which Barnum and Ward had developed as a literary tradition, influences Twain's pose significantly, particularly in the crucial area of religion. In the opening sequence of the book [*Innocents Abroad*], he masquerades as a minister with claims to 'the missionary business' looking for 'a show,' a sort of Simon Suggs-Artemus Ward compound. (97)

"Priests run little sideshows"; the gilt script inside the dome of St. Sophia is as "glairing as a circus bill"; shows, sideshows and carnival imagery throughout *The
Innocents Abroad allows Twain to exaggerate, through ironic diction, to attack the European "corporate church" (97-99). In the tradition of Barnum and Ward, Twain takes on the persona of "the innocent American," at tension with the European milieu, aiming barbed shots at institutions and the "Old Masters." Actually, the guise of the "innocent" can be seen much earlier in Twain's work, in the "Dandy Frightening the Squatter" (1852) sketch and the Thomas Jefferson Snodgrass letters where the bumpkin goes to the city. The circus imagery can also be seen in Clemens's 1852 Hannibal sketches, as in "Historical Exhibition-No. 1 Ruse." This thread will continue in my explication of that sketch in the next chapter.

It must be reemphasized that the influence of the literary comedians cannot be overstated. Twain had studied them intimately. As Walter Blair notes, when Twain worked on his Library of Humor between 1870 and 1885, he jotted down the names of humorists he planned to include in the anthology.

These show he recalled all the names of the pre-Civil War Yankee and Southwestern humorists well enough to specify specific sketches and that he could also name the most popular anonymous hits. . . . he recalled in detail some of the humor which he could have only seen in newspapers and magazines. (Selected Shorter Writings ix)
This fact should surprise no one: Sam Clemens the journeyman printer would not only have read the sketches, but set them in type and discussed them with fellow printers in New York, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Muscatine and, of course, Hannibal. Blair's note also calls Paul Baender's earlier claims into question; if Twain was not likely to remember one chance acquaintance, why would he be any more likely to remember all the names and authors of short frontier sketches? The answer seems simple enough; Twain's memory was better than Baender would have us believe.

These sketches were Twain's literary education. "Twain was largely schooled by these native humorists, his training was in writing short pieces" (Sloane ix). The sketches by Twain that will be examined in the next chapter, then, are "lessons" in Twain's art and, among other attributes, contain attacks on religion and cultural institutions. As we have seen, Sam Clemens was no pioneer in these attitudes; if it is easy to note skepticism in the simple sketches of his predecessors, the search should be doubly rewarding when looking at the first works of a "cradle skeptic."

The "Quaker City": The Skeptic Abroad

All the evidence presented in the preceding two chapters point to two matters: (1) that the major ideas in Twain's later writings, particularly his "dark writings," were based on early influences, particularly his reading of Paine and
the literary comedians; (2) and that Twain's religious skepticism was reinforced rather than challenged in his frontier experiences so that his skepticism was well imbedded by the time of the "Quaker City" excursion. Further, it is clear that Sam Clemens remembered his sources and recorded them in his *Autobiography* and other personal writings.

Further, the "deterministic" elements in Twain's later writings have been traced to such influences as Macfarlane and Thomas Paine, influences on the thinking of Sam Clemens before he made the westward voyage later recorded in *Roughing It*, at least seven years before the "Quaker City" excursion. With this in mind, we can now turn to the early writings (Chapter 5) after we briefly return to Justin Kaplan's biography for one more pertinent piece of evidence.

It is important that I re-emphasize that at the time the "Quaker City" set sail for the Holy Land, the "Reverend Mark Twain" was, by anyone's standards, an atheist. Justin Kaplan points to the two occasions when Sam Clemens had a religious "conversion." The first was on board the "Quaker City," where Twain came under the matronly influence of Mrs. Mary Fairbanks (Kaplan 44-46).

Mary Fairbanks, seven years older than Clemens, an accomplished woman in her own right, became Twain's mentor in manners, morals, and art. She scolded him for his writing about what a man's view would be if he looked up the hoopskirt of a woman climbing up Mt. Vesuvius (45). Clemens
put himself in her hands "with a certain willing suspension of identity" (45). This relationship on board the "Quaker City," Kaplan writes, foreshadowed some of the scenes of Clemens's life with Olivia Langdon and their children (46).

Under the tutelage of Mary Fairbanks, Clemens temporarily found himself "civilized." "One afternoon he had a serious conversion with the Reverend Mr. Bullard. . . a week later the prodigal himself, a fresh convert, led the evening devotions" (46). This conversion, while temporary, helped seal Twain's friendship with Mary Fairbanks, a friendship which lasted thirty-two years until her death.

It was not until a year later, when Twain was wooing Olivia Langdon that "he underwent a parallel conversion, more fervid, but no more permanent" (46). It was during this second "reformation" that Twain's former editor of the Territorial Enterprise "was dumbfounded to find his ex-reporter saying grace at Livy's table" (46).

There are two reasons why we are dealing with these two conversions here. First, that Twain had to be converted at all suggests that he was a nonbeliever to begin with. And the fact that both conversions, his "willing suspensions of disbelief," were temporary, indicating that neither one was deeply felt. On both occasions, Sam Clemens was trying to impress a woman by allowing her to guide him. The guidance could not supplant the earlier, deeper influences.

In the case of Olivia, Twain had to convince not only her of his religious faith, but also her family. He was a
man in love, wooing a woman he hoped to marry. His
"religious" feelings at that time, expressed in love letters
to Olivia, disappeared as soon as the nuptials were over. He
had won her approval; his identity no longer had to be held
in its "willing suspension of disbelief." And in time, Livy
too would become a religious skeptic.

Thus, it is clear that Mark Twain was more than a
"cradle skeptic"--he was a nonbeliever in any concept of God
recognizable to nineteenth-century America. The evidence
cited so far leads to this conclusion. To nail this point
down authoritatively, we must now turn our attention to the
primary sources--the early tales and sketches in which Twain
himself states his case.
CHAPTER V

THE EARLY WRITINGS

Edgar Branch noted in *Early Tales and Sketches* that in January, 1878, after Twain had published *The Innocents Abroad*, *Roughing It*, *The Gilded Age*, *Tom Sawyer*, and many shorter works, a former colleague of his on the *Enterprise* observed that

the brightest paragraphs "Mark" ever penned were for the local columns of this journal, while he was part of the dreamy, reckless and adventurous throng whose tents were pitched almost a generation ago along the Comstock. (*Sketches* 1: 387)

One of the great pleasures in examining the early writings of Mark Twain is discovering that the above-quoted claim is true. It is also clear that most of Twain's style, subject matter, and themes were first manifested in his frontier journalism.

Branch referred to the above-mentioned colleague of Twain, and to Henry Nash Smith, editor of *Mark Twain of the Enterprise*, when he wrote, "we share the interest implied by both writers in Mark Twain's routine journalism, precisely because this kind of work eventually gave rise to his tales
...and sketches" (Sketches 387). Everett Emerson underscores this point in his comments about two brief 1852 entries in Hannibal, the first a short poem called "Oh, She Has a Red Head!" written under the pseudonym "A Son of Adam."

Here the future public personality acknowledges his love of display, which was to be lifelong. A satire on the Democratic governor and legislature, "Blabbing Government Secrets," anticipates another of his future interests, public affairs. (Emerson 5)

In short, the early work contains much that is often overlooked by some critics.

Emerson also notes the early appearance of another aspect of Mark Twain, his oratorical skills. Twain's first appearance as a lecturer was in Keokuk, Iowa, on January 19th, 1856, celebrating the 150th birthday of Benjamin Franklin. His speech was "replete with wit and humor," a harbinger of things to come (Emerson 7). So much of what Twain wrote about, including his attitudes towards religion and other institutions, is clearly seen in his early works.

But before we can look closely at these publications, we need to explore the scene and the milieu in which the budding Twain lived and worked.

A major assignment given to Sam Clemens while he worked at the Territorial Enterprise (December, 1862-May, 1864) was as a co-reporter at the Nevada Constitutional Convention.
The convention, which took place from November 2 to December 11, 1863, was covered by the team of "A. J. Marsh and Sam Clemens" as well as the satirist "Mark Twain." Sam Clemens reported the factual matter of the convention, in collaboration with Marsh, "in Phonographic Short-Hand" (Enterprise 9). Accompanying these letters were letters considerably less formal, letters of political satire signed by Mark Twain. As he later wrote in a personal letter, the difference between the Twain letters and the Clemens-Marsh columns was that in the Twain writing "I put no end of seasoning in it" (Selected Letters 831). Another difference was that this seasoning was more than just spice: it had a kick to it, a message in the tradition of the literary comedians.

It was during these years that the persona of Mark Twain began to develop. Even when an item was signed by Clemens, the characteristic voice of Mark Twain began to dominate all of Sam Clemens's writings. Clemens/Twain could not for some time write reflective, thought-out stories and books, but the attitudes and ideas already in his mind were to become "seasoning" to his observations of frontier life.

Early Literary Remains

On May 3, 1863, the Territorial Enterprise published a column of verse and prose noting Mark Twain's departure from Virginia City for San Francisco. The editors wrote
Mark Twain has abdicated the local column of the Enterprise, where by the grace of Cheek, he so long reigned Monarch of Mining Items, Detailer of Events, Prince of Platitudes, Chief of Biographers, Expounder of Unwritten Law, Puffer of Wildcat, Profaner of Divinity, Detractor of Merit, Flatterer of Power, Recorder of Stage Arrivals, Pack Trains, Hay Wagons and Things in General. ...

(Letters 253)

Allowing for frontier exaggeration, the above list still indicates that the "Profaner of Divinity" contributed much to the Enterprise in his years in Virginia City. Unfortunately, so few of these early writings still exist (Enterprise 6).

During the years that he wrote for the Territorial Enterprise Twain did not keep a scrapbook, and the bulk of what we have today was found in four scrapbooks primarily kept by Orion (Enterprise 6). A letter written in 1862 to Orion had a typical request and shows Twain's reliance on his brother to collect his frontier writings for him, "Put all of Josh's letters in my scrapbook. I may have need for them later" (Letters 221). The Josh letters, unfortunately, did not survive, but Twainians today owe a great debt to Orion for keeping these scrapbooks and for his publishing virtually every scrap, letter or sketch Sam sent to him in Hannibal and Muscatine from 1853 to 1861. In later years the scrapbooks
were in the possession of Anita Moffett, Clemens's granddaughter, until her death in 1952 when Henry Nash Smith began work on editing and publishing them (Enterprise 6, Selected Letters 51).

Smith notes that Clemens must have written "hundreds of column inches of copy" while he was a reporter for the Enterprise; however, "we have only a small fraction of this work" (6). One of the principal reasons for this is that young Sam Clemens destroyed a great deal of it. On January 20, 1866, Sam wrote to his mother and sister about the possibility that he and Bret Harte might compile a book of sketches and he was concerned about where he might get old material: "I burned up a small cartload of them lately--so they are forever cut out of my book" (Enterprise 7-8, Selected Letters 51).

Smith also thinks that the book The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County and Other Sketches, published by Charles H. Webb in 1867, was compiled from notebooks that have not survived (Enterprise 8). With one or two exceptions, says Smith, the pieces in the Jumping Frog book were written after Twain's stay in Nevada. Thus we know of a great deal that was written--a chronological guide is available in Contributions to the Galaxy--even though we do not have surviving copies to examine.

Twain's frontier journalism was a daily stream of commentary on a myriad of subjects. His subject matter was
usually political, with comments on local life in the saloons, mining camps, coroner's office, town meetings, police stations, and bars. All this was cranked out rapidly. Clemens could incorporate his humorous, satirical point-of-view, but reflective, personal writing was rarely possible. Most of the early material was written in short bursts, and most of the pieces that we have are extremely short. Many contain fewer than one hundred words. Yet important points were made. Indeed, the brevity of some of these short works makes the message quite powerful and glaringly apparent.

Nevertheless, it might seem to some readers examining these early writings that, due to the wide scope of subject matter and the dashed-off observations so popular in frontier journalism, the attempt to define a consistent point-of-view in them might be asking too much. Yet, from his earliest writings in Hannibal to the humorous sketches extant today, it is possible to cite and examine many representative sketches that show Twain's lack of reverence for Christianity and his observations of man's credulity and hypocrisy. Rarely did he attack religion directly, and when he did he used covert techniques to disguise his attitudes, as shall be demonstrated later. Twain's religious sense can be found in what might at first glance appear to be only innocuous frontier tales. Each of the pieces examined here should point to Twain's early ease in attacking "Presbyterianism" as well as other organized religious groups of every stripe.
The best source for early writings of Samuel Clemens is *Early Tales and Sketches*, Volumes I and II, edited by Edgar Branch and Robert Hirst (1979 and 1981). Many of Twain's early travel letters that appeared in the Hannibal *Journal* and the Muscatine *Journal* (both edited by Orion) appear in the first volume of Twain's *Letters*, (1988). Victor Dovno selected a few sketches appropriate for our purposes in his *Mark Twain: Selected Writings of an American Skeptic*, and some of his commentary is pertinent and helpful here. Other sources, primarily collections of extant journalism, such as *Contributions to the Galaxy* and *Mark Twain or the Enterprise* also contain specimens of Twain's religious attitudes, as shown in the following sections.

Squibs, Notes, Sketches

On February 16, 1855, Sam Clemens wrote an item for the *Muscatine Tri-Weekly Journal*, published in Muscatine, Iowa, by Orion. The brief squib in the "Eds. Journal" department was the first publication by Sam in almost a year and was, as John Frederick noted in his *The Darkened Sky*, "distinctly suggestive of views which were to be powerfully expressed fifty years later" (131).

From spring 1853 through February 1854, Clemens had been a journeyman printer in New York, Philadelphia, visiting briefly in Washington D. C., then returning to New York. Sam had contributed several letters for Orion before the quiet
months, all brief letters about touring the East, visiting historical sites, reporting local events for the Journal. These letters were straightforward accounts of what he saw and observed with little editorial comment or humor. Then, a year later, he was writing again, and his voice changed, like a young man whose vocal register had deepened.

His "Eds. Department" entry reported the plight of a poor woman "almost naked" with five children in obvious need of Christian charity and getting none.

The plight brought to mind the handsome sum our preacher collected in church last Sunday to obtain food and rainment for the poor, ignorant heathen in some far off part of the world. (Journal 23, Letters 47)

Clemens noted that the poor family on the streets of St. Louis (where he was living) was simply trying to go from a destitute home in Arkansas to live with relatives in Illinois, and no one was interested in that family's plight. Sam added to his above-quoted sentence, "I thought, too, of the passage in the Bible instructing the disciples to carry their works into all the world"--and the concluding phrase was italicized--"beginning with Jerusalem" (Journal 23, Letters 47).

This short item about charity beginning at home could obviously have been written as easily by a concerned Christian or an atheist. But, as we shall see, this item is
but one instance where Mark Twain bitterly noted the hypocritical actions of churchgoers.

Mark Twain, nineteen years old, was demonstrating his growing awareness of the human condition. In the same "Eds. Journal" column, Clemens later noted, "A new Catholic paper (bad luck to it) is ... to be established," and, witnessing a nightly wife beating, "wished with all my heart that Providence would remove him [the beater] from his troubles by putting it in the sheriff's head to hang the scoundrel before morning" (Letters 48). There is clearly more going on here than youthful irreverence; a clear attitude and growing social conscience is apparent. On March 5th, Sam reported the following about a recent murder:

To tell the truth, few people expect justice to be done. I doubt if there are a hundred people in St. Louis who do not think O'Blennis ought to be hung, and the number is still less who expect him to be punished at all. Since Jackson and Ward escaped hanging, people seem to have very little confidence in courts of justice. (Letters 56)

It is clear that the young Sam Clemens was no longer merely making simple, youthful jibes in print. He was "preaching" against institutions both social and religious with heartfelt convictions. His observations are still simple and personal; he had yet to combine literary
techniques with his own experiences. It is at this point in his writing life that the two begin to congeal.

In the earlier sketches, we can see the irreverent sacrilege he first employed to entertain readers. The above noted items are perhaps the first instances where Clemens penned thoughtful social criticism. The incidents were like many to follow in Twain's frontier experience. Many of his succinct editorial pieces to come were, like the above instance, an observation of a local event followed by a short question or observation that asked "Is this right?" But the sentiment was to be more powerful because it was delivered by means of Clemens's primary talents--language and humor.

One of the earliest examples of Twain's dealing with the credulity of man was written when he was seventeen. Published in the Hannibal Journal on September 15, 1852, the sketch "reveals how early the author was dealing with strains of deception and credulity" (Doyno 15). Using the pseudonym "W. Epaminondas Adrastus Blab," Clemens's "Historical Exhibition--A No. 1 Ruse" is worth our summary here because, as Doyno noted, it shows "the author's concern for the contrast between elaborate, stately, deceptive language and short, vivid, realistic language" (Doyno 15). It demonstrates the circus imagery discussed in our last chapter: the ruse is "a show." This early concern for language was to reappear often in Twain's more mature work, perhaps most notably in "Buck Fanshaw's Funeral" from Roughing It. As
Everett Emerson has noted, the sketch is also "an anticipation of the confidence games played by the Duke and the King in *Huckleberry Finn*" (4-5). According to Emerson, the sketch is the first example of Twain’s use of the "innocent," the "victim," a voice Twain would use throughout his writing career (5).

The "Historical Exhibition" piece also shows how Clemens fell into the tall tale tradition with the typical frame used by frontier tall tale storytellers: "a young friend gives me the following yarn as fact, and if it should turn out to be a double joke (that is, that he imagined the story to fool me with) on his head be the blame" (*Early Tales* 1: 78). This shows how early Twain used the device to distance himself from a story, as if he were retelling someone else’s story from a point-of-view not his own. This technique was used effectively in many of his short stories, notably "The Celebrated Jumping Frog" and "My Grandfather’s Old Ram." This technique allowed him a pose, a character and as Doyno says, a way to be "subversive."

The story involves a "historical exhibition" of "Napoleon Crossing the Rhine" with a lecture by a local authority, offered to the "natives" for a dime per head. The first night of the exhibit, a young boy "sees the elephant," leaves, "but the uninitiated could get nothing out of him on the subject; he was mum" (78).

Everyone who sees the exhibit is stricken with melancholy. Citizen after citizen becomes morbidly silent.
Finally, a group of boys come down from the country, led by Jim C--, and asks to see the show. The lecturer collects their money and, with elaborate showmanship, shows the boys the first part of the show, "You now see the 'Bonapart--bony-part,' you understand, the bony-part' of a hog's leg" (79).

Most of the boys anticipate the joke that is coming, but "poor Jim C--" only wants to know "is-that-all?" It isn't. The lecturer then presents a piece of meat skin the size of a dollar and pronounces, "This is the Rhine--properly speaking, the hog's rind--a piece of hog's rind" (80). The lecturer then passes the "bony-part" back and forth across the "Rhine." While the group of boys howl in bursts of laughter at the sputtering, muttering Jim C--, Jim calls the lecturer a swindler but gets only more laughter for his pains.

The lecturer informs Jim, in flowery and ornate phrases that "if the young gentleman finds fault with his show that he must have missed the finer points, and if he did not like it, would he be so good as to tell all his friends?" (80). Jim, a now perpetually gloomy boy, leaves the exhibition. Anytime anyone asks him a question, his response is always "Bonaparte Crossing--sold!"

This tale does not directly reveal Clemens's religious or social sense. "But the tale reveals how early the author was dealing with deception and credulity" and "shows the author's concern with the contrast between elaborate, stately, deceptive language and short, vivid, realistic
language" (Doyrio 15). This point-of-view becomes a constant thread in Twain's writing and would be commonly associated with false or insincere preachers, as in the chicanery of the Duke and Dauphin in *Huckleberry Finn*. In short, Clemens has shown an early awareness that flowery oratory is not to be trusted, and this oratory would always be associated with orthodox preachers.

"Cincinnati Boarding House," a sketch published November 8, 1856— the only piece outside of the three Snodgrass letters likely written by Twain that year (Letters 70)— is an anomaly in that it is attributed to Clemens, but no conclusive evidence is possible to ascertain this. Edgar Branch, chief editor of *Early Tales and Sketches*, included this piece in a section of attributed pieces because of "stylistic features" and because the dates for this piece match the chronology of where and when Clemens and Dan de Quille were during the year in question (387). Branch and Hirst found more authentic and likely items by Clemens than Henry Nash Smith gathered when he published *Mark Twain of the Enterprise* in 1957. By the same token, Branch and Hirst did not publish some items Smith had attributed to Clemens and omitted items not of literary interest. The truth of the matter is that a great deal more study is needed in locating and authenticating early writings by Twain, but the "Boarding House Sketch" seems certainly to be Twain's.

The "Boarding House" seems to be the work of Sam Clemens because the style is his, the narrative point-of-view is his,
and the diction and the chronology of where Twain was at the
time are evidence that Twain wrote the piece. He was in a
boarding house at the time; it was in a Cincinnati boarding
house that he met Macfarlane. Victor Doyno concurs: "We
cannot prove conclusively in the conventional ways that the
story is Twain's, but a thorough knowledge of Twain's works
convinces one that, though imperfect, it is indeed his"
(15). William Baker in his "Mark Twain in Cincinnati" notes
that the sketch is very different from the Snodgrass letters
(the sketch is dated one week before the first Snodgrass
letter mailed from Cincinnati appeared), that it is not
written in dialect but that Mr. Blathers in the sketch is
very much a Macfarlane-like character (303-04). Since four
Twain scholars--Branch, Hirst, Doyno, and Baker--are
confident that the sketch is Twain's, a brief examination of
it is worth space here.

The story is set in a parlor room of a Cincinnati
boarding house on a Sunday morning after breakfast (Sketches
362). Several characters are introduced, including Mr.
Blathers and Mr. Toploftical. These boarding house residents
get involved in a discussion about a Philadelphia man who
murdered his wife and her lover. The discussion leads to the
question of whether murder can be desirable, and the
following dialogue ensues:

Blather. Did serve him right. A man who would
treat a dependent in such a manner, has no more
soul than a horse.
D. Hold on. I spose you think a horse has
got no soul.
B. I know it hasn't.
T. Wait a moment, Mr. B. Human beings, poor
worms, can't know of the existence of anything
which they cannot see, and you cannot see
the soul.
B. Tut, tut. I'm not obliged to see a thing
in order to know it. Now there's that bloody
murder sometime ago. I know that deed was done,
but I didn't see it, and I know the man that done
it richly deserved hanging, but was cleared and
left the country, but I didn't see him.

(Sketches 383)

The discussion digresses into talk of genetic and
cultural differences between "Injuns" and the "United
States," and whether or not murderers are bad because of
their wrong upbringing. As an exclamation, Mr. Blathers says
"Well, if I've a soul to be saved," and the following
discussion ensues:

T. Soul, again? How do you know you've got
a soul?
B. How do I know I've go a soul? Why, how do
I know there is a God?
C. No. 1. Well, how do you know there is a
God? You can't see him, you can't feel him,
you can't hear him. Come--don't hesitate.
Everybody. Out with it! Out with it!

B. Well, upon my soul. Now you are confounding
finite matters with the infinite. Listen, gentle-
men. I know that there is a God, by the works of
his hands--the gorgeous sun--the gentle moon--the
twinkling stars that bespangle the blue dome above
our heads. Yea, the vast rivers and the trackless--
No. 1. Oh! dam nonsense. That is nothing but the
belief, the faith imparted by imagination. There
is a great difference between knowledge and belief.

(Sketches 384-85)

A father and son, "Cabbage No. 1 and No. 2," have joined
the conversation. No. 2 loses himself in a reverie of
nature's phenomena, quickly forgetting his point. He asks
his father, "What were we trying to prove?" No. 1 responds,
"the existence of a Deity, my boy. Don't exert yourself"
(385).

The fruitless discussion is finally placed in the hands
of the local wise man, Mr. Doodle. The entire company relies
on him to resolve the great question, and he is willing. He
tells the story of a farmer who has problems with an old ram,
who batters him time and time again. No point is made by
this story. Doodle tells a second story about a family who
believes the devil is in their basement. A parson is called
in, he kneels to pray, and the aforementioend ram from the
other story appears and knocks the parson across the cellar.
The boarding house group is stunned, mystified, and confused. One by one the company deserts the room, and the last line reads, "Finally the room is deserted--another conversation murdered by a pointless anecdote" (386).

The central purpose of this story is clear: Twain is using a number of his favorite techniques to amuse his readers. The story includes dialects (to a limited degree), rambling digressions with no purpose, anecdotes that lead from one to another, and a dead pan ending. Discussing the existence of God is treated humorously, clearly irreverently--belief is seen as silly. The discussion begins with the idea that animals, a horse, may have a soul; this is a joke Clemens used elsewhere in the same year in the "Bugs" letter to his friend, Annie Taylor. A short look at this letter will be helpful here.

As Walter Blair summarized the "Bugs" yarn, the insects swarming over Clemens's campsite are first described with "inventive comic detail" in their "varieties . . . he gives them more and more exclusively human attributes until as a fitting climax they achieve immortal souls capable of 'passing away to heavenly rewards'" (Blair xi).

The scene was, as Sam wrote. "A religious mass meeting of several millions . . . perhaps a great bug jubilee commemorating the triumph of the locusts over Pharaoh's crops in Egypt many centuries ago." The leader, a "venerable leader," conducts his "flock," his "congregation" in a chorus
of "Let Every Bug Rejoice and Sing!" (Blair 4: Letters 60). 
("Let Every Heart Rejoice and Sing" was a hymn by Henry 
Washington. Letters 62). The young Twain clearly thought 
the soul was safe comic territory. The original audience, 
Annie Taylor, noted that Sam was "very irregular at prayers" 
(Lorch Iowa 423). In "The Boarding House Sketch," Clemens 
allowed the argument to come to a comic rather than 
affirmative conclusion; the "Bugs" letter ended on a similar 
note. The use of animal imagery and the same irreverent or 
"irregular" eye in both writings adds to the evidence that 
Clemens wrote the latter sketch and that thoughts of 
religion, although of a light nature, were clearly on his 
mind. Nothing of heavy theology is evident but rather an 
exercise in skeptical buffoonery.

The use of animal imagery, as in the "Bugs" letter, 
demeans the notion of the soul as a sacred identity, and 
discussions of "the finite and the infinite" are both equally 
susceptible to comic attack. Twain mocks religion and the 
belief in God by his pose as disinterested observer, which, 
as in "The Celebrated Jumping Frog," distances the narrator 
from the words and ideas of the characters. He is, as Leslie 
Fiedler would put it, "subversive" by presenting his 
religious skepticism behind his narrative guise, one step in 
the process of making a persona.

This piece was unsigned; one reason for this may be 
young Sam's way of avoiding family female ire. The Clemens
women were known to chastise Sam for his writing about
certain subjects: one useful and interesting example was an
irreverent letter to his mother.

In many of Clemens’s letters, he used biblical diction
to exaggerate his tales and descriptions, using the
transitions "behold," "verily," "thus," and "Lo" frequently.
One of these letters was revised for publication, and after
its appearance, Sam wrote Orion. "Ma and Pamela seem to be
down on my last to the Gate City. Well, what’r they going to
do about it?--be Je-s?--(though I would hate to ask them the
question, you bet)" (Letters 200). As noted earlier, several
months went by before Sam wrote home again (Letters 221).

The sketch in question appeared in the January 30, 1882,
letter to Jane Clemens published in the Keokuk Gate City in
March of that year. It is an example of Sam’s biblical
burlesques and helps demonstrate his bent of thinking in his
Carson City mining days before he formally began writing as a
career.

It was a time, as he told his mother, for campfires on
the prairie, "smoking our pipes, singing songs, and spinning
yarns, and telling lies, and quoting scripture, and all that
sort of thing" (Letters 148). Sam recounted this brief
anecdote about prairie living:

But Mr. Tillou’s dog, "Curney," we utterly
despised . . . And we made Tom pester him;
and bite his tail; and his ears; and stumble
over him; and we heaped trouble and humiliation upon the brute to the degree that his life became a burden to him. And Billy, hating the dog . . . prophesied that Curney would come to grief. And Gus and I said Amen. And it came to pass according to the words of the prophet. Thus . . . we struck the Big Alkali Flat--And Curney came to grief; for the poor devil got ALKALIED--in the seat of honor. [He got] immensely tired . . . and sat himself in the wayside to rest. And lo! the iron entereded his soul (poetical figure, Ma). (Letters 148-49)

This "short tail," if you will, illustrates that Sam knew biblical syntax and was not adverse to using it for comic purposes. The juxtaposition of high diction and syntax with a less honorable subject, more animal imagery, was a common comic device which Sam Clemens would use again. This juxtaposition of language became a major aspect of his style. Again, we can see the origins of style, subject matter, and tone in the earlist writings of Mark Twain.

But another side to Sam’s thinking was developing, a serious reflective side. While frontier journalism never gave him full outlet for these musings, there are many pieces showing a more serious eye, probably the shortest and most pointed being "New Year's Day" published in the Enterprise on January 1, 1863. It is only about 130 words long, but it
contains strains of his skepticism and social criticism and shows his continuing distaste for hypocrisy. It shows the Twainian attitude toward mankind that would dominate much longer, greater works throughout his life.

Because Twain could not believe in any religion or Deity, his focus was on mankind, what he would later call "The Damned Human Race." His early comments were less vitriolic but no less honest. On the first day of 1863, the following sentiments of Mark Twain appeared beneath another, sillier sketch by him entitled "More Ghosts," a sketch dealing with a local spiritualist. The sentiments in the "New Year's Day" squib were more serious. Because the piece is so short, it is reprinted here in full:

Now is the accepted time to make your regular annual good resolutions. Next week you can begin paving hell with them as usual. Yesterday, everybody smoked his last cigar, took his last drink, and swore his last oath. Thirty days from now, we shall have cast our reformation to the winds and gone to cutting our ancient shortcomings considerably shorter than ever. We shall also reflect pleasantly upon how we did the same old thing last year about this time. However, go in, community. New Year’s is a harmless annual institution, of no particular use to anybody save as a scapegoat for
promiscuous drunks, and friendly calls, and humbug resolutions, and we wish you to enjoy it with a looseness suited to the greatness of the occasion. (Early Tales 180)

In many ways, this short squib sums up Twain’s attitude toward man in 1863 as well as 1903. As Victor Doino put it, with this sketch “We begin to see the tolerant acceptance of humanity balanced by the sharp attention to hypocrisy” (15). As Doino hints briefly, it was Twain’s eye for hypocrisy, combined with his eye for sham, as evidenced in 1862’s “Petrified Man” sketch, that gave Twain his dual but skeptical gaze at man as well as religion. New Year’s Day was a “harmless annual institution, of no particular value to anybody where man’s “ancient shortcomings” can be dealt with in “humbug resolutions.” Beneath the jokes, a distinct attitude was clear and visible. There is no optimism in “New Year’s Day”; his diction and tone are certainly precursors of his later, longer, reflective writings. Man became Mark Twain’s great subject and theme, and religion and rituals only a mirror to reflect man in his own image. Man had created and then ignored his own promises and beliefs, just as he did annually on New Year’s Day.

This skeptical eye was fostered during the frontier years by events reporter Clemens observed in Nevada. As Ivan Benson notes in his Mark Twain’s Western Years, during the winter months of 1865-66, Twain satirized both spiritualism
and orthodox religion in his journalism. He attended many seances, particularly those at Mrs. Ada Hoyt Foye's in San Francisco. "At Mrs. Foye's seances, Mark was appointed a member of the investigating committee. This made the ghosts a bit nervous, according to the Golden Era's 'Feuilleton' column" (157). (Benson's work provides a great service to scholars of Twain's western years because it contains not only an item-by-item bibliography of the publications of the frontier years but also a section of reprinted sketches not in any other readily accessible source. It is from these reprintings that the quotes in this discussion were drawn.)

Both the Era and the Enterprise published these "investigations" into the supernatural as well as the conclusions made by Twain:

Very well, the Bulletin may abuse spiritualism as much as it pleases, but whenever I can get a chance to take a dead and damned Smith by the hand and pass a joke or swap a lie with him, I am going to do it. I am not afraid of such pleasant corpses as these running me crazy. I find them better company than a good many live people. (Golden Era March 11, 1866. Qtd. by Benson 137)

Edgar Branch discussed this sketch in his The Literary Apprenticeship of Mark Twain, and made this telling point:

Despite a lifelong interest in psychic phenomena, he was temperamentally inclined to discredit the
claims of successful mediums . . . Late in life he believed that men have been wrongly and un courteous and contemptuously left in total ignorance of the other world. In 1901 he wrote that he never had had an experience which led him to think that the living could communicate with the dead. (Branch 144)

Again, here is an instance where the barbs of frontier squibs are echoed in the later years. As Branch notes, the interest Twain held in spiritualism, or "wildcat religion" as Twain called it, was lifelong, Twain ultimately reasoning that "men no more than monkeys were able to draw valid conclusions from religious experience" (Branch 145). And Branch notes another comparison of youth with age: Twain admired Mrs. Foye's capabilities in the same way he admired the capabilities of Mary Baker Eddy forty years later. In both cases, though, the beliefs of the women were found wanting. "It is mighty hard to fully believe what you do not know" (Branch 145).

In the same spirit as his attacks on spiritualism, according to Benson,

The last of Mark Twain's contributions to the Golden Era was a sketch entitled "Reflections on the Sabbath," published March 18, 1866. It expresses in a facetious way the religious skepticism that was to be the subject matter of
much of Twain's writing in his later years.

(Benson 137)

Benson's summation of the item leads to an interesting idea, that Twain liked concrete rather than abstract subjects for satire and that orthodox religion was an easy target while matters of guilt and conscience were not.

Like ghosts, hell was a typical image for frontier jests while concepts of guilt and conscience were less appealing. In the "Sabbath" sketch, says Benson, Twain wrote that he had not attended church for some time because he could not get a pew and had to sit in the gallery "among the sinners" (137). "This he objects to as he considers himself a brevet member of the Presbyterian church, having been sprinkled in infancy" (137). Then Twain claimed he preferred the fire-and-brimstone Presbyterian hell to the "heterodox hell of remorse of conscience of these blamed wildcat religions" (137). As Branch observed, Twain's frontier hell was populated by "Smiths" who then renamed the place the "Smithsonian Institution" (145). It seems clear that matters of Protestant doctrine were matters of fun, matters of guilt and conscience were of deeper concern.

His comments, made lightly, should not provoke too serious a commentary here except to note the curious fact that Mark Twain's personal hell, as has often been noted by a host of scholars and biographers, was that of remorse and guilt. The mythological hell of fire and brimstone, like the
psuedoscientific seances of Mrs. Foye, would indeed be preferable and palpable comic material for a skeptic because they were so obviously susceptible to attack and burlesque; the pain of guilt would be too serious and probably a bit too close to home for the budding writer who had already demonstrated his sensitive nature in terms of guilt over family deaths in Hannibal. Benson has a different perspective: "Whereas the heaven and hell of the wildcat religions are vague and ill-defined, there is nothing mixed about the Presbyterian variety" (137). Twain wrote.

The Presbyterian hell is all misery; the heaven is all happiness—nothing to do. But when a man dies on a wildcat basis, he will never rightly know hereafter which department he is in—but he will think he is in hell anyhow, no matter which place he goes to; because in the good place they pro-gress, pro-gress, pro-gress—study, study, study all the time—and if this isn't hell I don't know what is; and in the bad place he will be worried by remorse of conscience. (Qtd. by Benson 137-38)

Edgar Branch too found interesting points about the 1866 writings on religion, noting that the old and the new religions—orthodox Calvinism and the "wildcat" varieties—caused "insanity" in both farcical and real ways. "The 'old legitimate regular stock religions' like the Disciples of
Christ and the Methodists used to stock the asylums with religious lunatics" (146). This is due, said Twain, to the hyper-emotionalism and "ranting" of the pastors in the church services. The insanity of religion is a matter we will return to in the conclusion of this study.

We cannot move on from the above comments without taking this opportunity to compare the ideas about hell expressed in the 1866 "Reflections on the Sabbath" with the 1906 "Reflections on Religion" because the second work mirrors the first, albeit less playful in spirit. As Edgar Branch noted regarding the former piece,

In light of subsequent writing, moreover, the piece is prophetic. Serious undertones suggest his later concern with ideas on immortality, determinism, and divine justice. By 1866, it is true, he had outgrown fundamentalism. A corroding heterodoxy had eaten away the theological foundation of intense boyhood fears. (147)

"Boyhood fears" had much to do with Twain's concepts of punishment and guilt; hell became something far too serious for simple, youthful gibes by 1906:

There is one notable thing about our Christianity; bad, bloody, merciless, money-grabbing, predatory as it is--in our country particularly, and in all other Christian countries in a somewhat modified degree--it is
a hundred times better than the Christianity of
the Bible with its prodigious crime—the
invention of Hell. Measured with the
Christianity of today, bad as it is, hypo-
critical as it is, empty and hollow as it is,
neither the Deity nor His Son is a Christian
nor qualifies for that moderately high place.
(Neider Outrageous 36)

Here again we can see that the late life notions on
religion have their origins in early work. The concept of
hell is still "an invention" of a fictional God—"What's-his-
name begat Krishna, Krishna begat Buddha, Buddha begat
Osiris, Osiris begat the Babylonian deities, they begat God.
He begat Jesus, Jesus begat Mrs. Eddy" (Outrageous 358). But
the playfulness has gone; this is the real difference in the
works of the early and later years. The ideas have evolved
and deepened, but the skepticism was there all along. The
passing years would add dimensions of disappointments, world-
wisdom, but the disbelieving eye remained fundamentally
unchanged.

Another case in point is an item written in May, 1870, a
piece entitled "Disgraceful Persecution of a Boy" printed in
the Galaxy. The next piece Twain published was "The Story of
the Good Little Boy," which appeared in the Galaxy the same
month. The piece is an ironical attack on hypocrisy, a
tongue-in-cheek defense of a boy who was put in jail for
stoning a Chinaman (Galaxy 42). Twain wrote that this was no justice; the boy was "well-dressed," "a Sunday school scholar," with good parents, "so this boy had opportunities to learn all through the week how to do right, as well as Sunday" (42).

Twain then writes at length how "John the Foreigner" is unfairly taxed, given no rights, and viewed by white society as "nothing" (42). The boy who stoned the Chinaman was taught that foreign religious beliefs, as in the teachings of Confucius, were part of the natural inferiority of any foreigner:

And, therefore, what could have been more natural than for this sunny-hearted boy, tripping along to Sunday School, his mind teeming with freshly-learned incentives to high and virtuous action to say to himself: "Ah, there goes a Chinaman! God will not love me if I do not stone him!" (83)

This piece shows Twain's belief that the Christian religion produced more bigotry than love on both social and religious levels. Again, from "Reflections on Religion":

For two years now Christianity has been repeating in Russia the sort of industries in the way of massacre and mutilation with which it has been successfully persuading Christiandom in every century for nineteen
hundred years that it is the only right and true religion—the one and only true religion of peace and love. (Outrageous 37)

Twain goes on to discuss the Russian Christians' persecution of the Jews. "Here are some of the particulars in the latest efforts of these humble Twentieth Century disciples to persuade the nonbeliever to come into the fold of the meek and gentle Savior" (37). We need not recount the atrocities listed by Twain to emphasize the obvious, that he was bitterly disturbed by high-handed Christian notions of religious superiority, a superiority that bred violence and persecution. It is also obvious that the Galaxy piece was a harbinger of things to come.

Twain's message throughout these pieces is that it is institutions, such as legislatures and other governing bodies, that enact what its citizens believe, and they believe what they are taught. Hypocrisy is a result of those teachings, but it is only Twain who seems to see it. The boy who stones the Chinaman cannot be blamed—justice was not done by jailing him. The real offenders are clearly the institutions, their doctrines, and cultural acceptance of them that led him to think God would love him if he stoned the foreigner. Or, as Twain said in 1306:

There has never been a Protestant boy or a Protestant girl whose mind the Bible has not soiled. No Protestant child ever comes
clean from association with the Bible . . . .
the Bible does its baleful work in the
propagation of vice among children.

(Outrageous 40)

But this "unclean" influence on children was not only
from the Bible, "the pulpit and optimists," but also from
other social institutions, including government and
politics. During Twain's stint as a frontier reporter, he
had considerable experience with legislatures and local law
enforcement officers. We have already mentioned his
antipathy towards church and school that began in his
earliest years; the frontier years added more institutions to
his stable of targets. Twain saw organized institutions as
part of the same evil, the combined evil that teaches
children to stone Chinamen.

Again, the persecution squib is serious; no comic, light-
hearted conclusion ends the piece. It is not funny, and
Twain's point is hammered home by a full two columns of
evidence to show that bigotry is learned, taught by those who
教 what is right, those who teach the concept of God. It
seems clear that this column, written about the same time as
"The Story of the Good Little Boy," reveals much about
Twain's world view regarding organized institutions. God is
precisely what we are taught; therefore, a man-made creature.

Victor Doyno reprinted other sketches that he found
indicative of a skeptic, including the "Petrified Man" sketch
published October 4, 1862, two weeks after Sam Clemens went to work on the Enterprise. This story, one of Twain's most famous hoaxes, was written in a "straight faced" fashion (Fatout 16) and was accepted by many readers as fact in syndicated reprintings of the tale. This response included publication in a "serious" English medical journal which did not notice the nose-thumbing pose of the supposed petrified man or its wooden leg, clues Twain thought would alert any reader to the intention of the story. Twain had to write a follow-up to the sketch to show that it was all a hoax to attack "the growing evil of the mania for digging up petrifications" (For a full discussion of this sketch and its aftermath, see Fatout Virginia City 16-18).

Religion, as well as science, is lampooned in the sketch. The Reverend Sewall "or Sowall of Humbolt County" held the inquest for the petrified figure, and decried efforts to blow up the remains as "little less than sacrilege" (Fatout 18). Doyno notes that this sketch is yet another example of Twain's use of hoaxes to point out man's credulity; Paul Fatout supports this idea by saying, "Preferring the out-of-the-way, he liked to adorn a tale by embellishments upon it or by editorializing" (Fatout 15). In short, Sam Clemens is evolving from a rebellious young boy, an irreverent imitator, a light-hearted burlesquer into a moral philosopher. This philosophy has a constant thread throughout his life, a dislike for hypocrisy, bigotry,
institutional constants, and a complete antipathy for religion and its teachings, if not its teachers.

I have found many other pieces like the "Eds. Journal" selection that, put together, would make it obvious that Mark Twain made his religious attitude quite plain to anyone reading the journalism with the idea that the later Twain was writing with the same techniques and attitudes he manifested before he became a book writer. These techniques and attitudes evolved with Twain's literary and personal growth, and both were reflected in Twain's early work in the more polished form of the short story.

Short Stories

Two of Mark Twain's earliest short stories, "The Story of the Good Little Boy" and "The Story of the Bad Little Boy," are obvious slaps at the misleading Sunday School morality of the nineteenth century. As John Q. Hays noted in Mark Twain and Religion, the stories first germinated in The Golden Era on May 15, 1864, when "Twain had begun his campaign against unrealistic Sunday School literature in a Nevada piece entitled 'Stories for Good Little Boys and Girls' which ridiculed the success at any price formula" (28-29).

As Edgar Branch has noted, "as early as 1863 Mark Twain was anticipating a theme in Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn by burlesquing their pious Sunday School concepts of morality
that were found in the flacid literature written for young people” (Apprenticeship 150). While these stories are deliberately light and humorous, "their humor depends on a frank acceptance of the selfish and the conventional in man's nature" (150). It is interesting to note that the early draft of Tom Sawyer contained many more attacks on Sunday School morality which Howells advised Twain to delete (Wecter Literary History 929). "The Bad Little Boy" story appeared in 1864, the second short story by Mark Twain to appear in print. So these stories are worth some exploration here, both as foreshadowings of later major works and as examples of Sam Clemens's already well-established antipathy for religion.

Critic Minoru Okayashi in "Mark Twain and His Pessimism" notes that the stories were precursors of Twain's concept of the Moral Sense as described in The Mysterious Stranger (85-86). Okayashi very briefly traces the idea of the Moral Sense--that man can choose between right and wrong but invariably chooses the wrong--through The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, Tom Sawyer, and Roughing It (85-86). He then observes that Twain's view is that man determines what is moral, that there is no supernatural basis:

suggestions of this Moral Sense can be seen in the sketch "My Watch" (1870), "The Story of the Good Little Boy," and "The Story of The Bad Little Boy" but Twain only represents various
sorts of moral senses and does not suggest any active role for Satan behind them .... this vision is very close to that of his later period. (86)

This point, briefly noted by Okayashi, deserves further development.

Simply summarized, these stories show how, according to all the "Sunday School books" of the era, if a young man followed a prescribed path, all manner of good things would come his way, even a young martyr's death. Bad boys who did not follow the right path would have calamities of shame, poverty, and other evils as rewards for their ill-advised deeds, including election to the legislature. Twain's stories, of course, put the lie to such romantic nonsense. The young paragon of virtue does not become the example to others he thought he would; instead, he is the subject of derision and ridicule. The bad boy prospers, and becomes a famous politician. Twain reverses the Romanticized sentiments into his characteristic realist irony, poking fun at the culture that produced the emblematic boys. What he had been writing in the dashed-off frontier essays was now the subject of his fiction, and his first published fiction at that.

As Edgar Branch observed, these stories reflect Twain as the realist, the debunker of romanticism that would be equally apparent in the ending to Huckleberry Finn, and the
later novels *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* and *No. 44: The Mysterious Stranger*. "These fables were the work of the realist who hated moral shams and soft minded constrictions put upon life," says Branch. "In them he coupled his knowledge of gullible, perverse man to his ironic sense of circumstances not acceptable to moral law—a conception used for comedy" (*Apprenticeship* 150). In other words, Twain was combining the elements we have been discussing in this chapter in his early fiction, elements born and nurtured in his apprenticeship years. The romanticism and idealism of fiction was to be turned inside-out with Twain's inclinations for a more realistic point of view.

Other early fictional works are also a skeptic's poke at romantic ideals: "A Day at Niagara" (1869), "Legend of the Capitoline Venus" (1869), and "A Medieval Romance" (1870), to cite but a few. There is nothing new in calling Mark Twain a realist; indeed he is one of the major figures of American realism. It would be nothing new to call him a naturalist; a survey of critics who examine Twain's naturalism is part of Nelson R. Burr's "New Eden and New Babylon" (129-32). But the critics who label him thus are usually discussing his later works, those written just before or just after the turn of the century. But, as the examples in this chapter have shown, the themes and subject matter of the "realist" are clearly evident in the earliest works of Mark Twain; indeed,
his apprentice works are all schoolboy exercises in the matters he would address in his mature years.

Twain did, of course, romanticize the Mississippi River and his childhood, yet we have noted critics who find bitterness and skepticism in his "boys' books." His attacks on romanticism included the romanticized Protestant religion that pervaded the Sunday School books, the emotionally frenzied camp meetings, and the Protestant dogma that irritated the free-spirited Sam Clemens. Religion, hypocrisy, credulity and bigotry were made evident to anyone with insight to see it these themes in the early writing. Religion was only one institution blasted, both lightly and caustically, by Twain, and it was one of his first targets.

Mark Twain's rebellion against God and Christianity was, in part, due to his comic genius. He wrote in 1887, "I cannot see how a man of any large degree of humorous perception can ever be religious--except he purposely shut the eyes of his mind and keep them shut by force" (Notebooks and Journals 3: 389). This quotation should remind us, as Stanley Brodwin notes (371-89), of Twain's comment to Orion in 1860. "What a man wants with religion in these breadless times surpasses my comprehension" (Selected Letters 1: 45). Brodwin, like Justin Kaplan, points to Twain's affinity with preachers, but notes, "a preacher-artist is a contradiction in terms" (372). Mark Twain, having the desire to preach, could not preach sermons of Christian pastors or sermons
espousing religion on any level; indeed, he was far more likely to be on the offensive. He never had the belief necessary to support religion as he found it. But his comic eye and verbal talent did make him an artist, an artist with considerable command of his subject matter; this command was born in some certainty of purpose. This certainty negated belief in a God or gods of any kind.

It is time, perhaps, for Twain scholars to begin evaluating the extant writings of the young Samuel Clemens in a more critical and scholarly manner to find the important themes evident there. Twain always pointed back to Hannibal and the river, and later to the "wild west." as the roots of who he was and what he wrote about. More exploration of these years is required.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

John Tuckey makes an interesting point in his discussion of "The Great Dark" (xiii), a point worth reviewing here. He quotes the closing paragraph from the story, a speech by the captain of the besieged sea vessel after calming his angry mutineers:

Are we rational men, manly men, men who can stand up and face hard luck and a big difficulty that has been brought about by nobody's fault, and say live or die, survive or perish, we are in for it, for good or bad, and we'll stand by the ship if she goes to hell! . . . If it is God's will that we pull through, we pull through--otherwise not. We haven't had an observation for four months, but we are going ahead, and do our best to fetch up somewhere.

(xiii)

This "moving speech" of "high courage" is reminiscent of Huck's "I'll go to hell" speech. Tuckey then writes that "the last part of 'The Great Dark' expresses strength and resoluteness rather than futility and despair" (xiii). Further, "Mark Twain had perhaps failed to reckon with his
own capacity for rebound and affirmation (xiv). Tuckey sees the ending of "Which Was It?", another incomplete fragment, as another example of strength over weakness. He concludes that, in the last years, Twain had to examine both his sides, the positive and the negative, abandoning one manuscript when the mood changed, returning to it when the mood returned.

Mark Twain was unable to stay for very long in the company of one-sided views and half-truths, especially when they were his own. It is his insistent seeking of the twofold, the duplicitous view that keeps him so interesting. (xiv)

It is interesting that Tuckey sees the duality in short sketches set on "phantom ships." Henry Nash Smith observed "phantom ships" in Twain's description of the Sea of Galilee in *The Innocents Abroad*: "phantom ships are on the sea, the dead of twenty centuries come forth from the tombs, and in the dirges of the night wind the songs of old forgotten ages find utterance again" (qtd. by Smith 10). Smith sees this description as an example of Twain's early duality. Twain could not merely be a clown but is also a sometimes awed spectator of beauty and romance. There are "'vague and unreal' reveries" that were part of his dreams, the other side to his jaded realism ("How True Are Dreams?" 10). Beneath the realism, says Tuckey, there is something more.

Yes, Mark Twain is interesting because he is difficult to nail down, to label, to cast in any one light. Tuckey
noted in his discussion of "Three Thousand Years among the Microbes" (composed, perhaps, during 1905-1906) that Isabel Lyon, Twain's literary secretary, wrote in her diary about the story, "I asked Mr. Clemens how long he'd been turning these marvellous imaginings over in his mind, and he said that the idea had been there for many years" (Race Track xv).

Tuckey notes, "It is most interesting to find in this bizarre narrative that he was still attempting to use his early recollections of Hannibal and the Mississippi that had served as the matrix of his best creative work . . . however curiously disguised or transformed" (xv). Tuckey notes that the "Bishop" of the microbe story is based on Tom Blankenship, model for Huckleberry Finn, a Hannibal friend. The veins and arteries in which the microbes travel are rivers that make "the Mississippi . . . trifling . . . by comparison"--Twain's words (xvii). In other words, Twain's last concerns were also his first.

Tuckey was not referring to skepticism or determinism in his notes; however, the point underlines my main thrust in this study--to ascribe Mark Twain's philosophical thoughts to late life bitterness and disappointment is a notion that cheapens Twain's work, belittling the thinking processes that led to his world view. Tuckey found affirmation in the last writings, a revision of attitudes such as V. S. Pritchitt's 1941 "The Cruelty in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn":

When Mark Twain turned on the religion of his childhood because it was intolerable,
he was unaware that it would destroy him
by turning him into a money grubber of the
most Puritan kind . . . amid the mess he
made of his life, amid the awful pile of
tripe that he wrote . . . one book
arises . . . one lucky break. (113)

This sort of thinking implies that the lack of religion
led to a failure of epic proportions. There are, however,
other ways, less coldhearted ways, to see the impact of
religion on Mark Twain’s life and work. A revision of such
attitudes has been underway for many years; this study is
hopefully another challenge to such ideas.

In his biography of Mark Twain, Albert Bigelow Paine
records a few youthful incidents that Twain recalled from the
remembrances of his family. Twain told Paine that his
brothers and sisters remembered that, in his earliest years,
young Sam disrupted the evening bedside prayers of his
siblings. Instead of doing his devotions, he would tell
"amazing stories" that entertained and diverted the young
members of his family (Biography 36).

This story notes, once again, that irreverence was born
early in Sam Clemens; it also points to the future in that
these feelings became part of his creative bank. He could
create his own "amazing stories" equal to the religion that
inspired his deepest thinking and his best work. Certainly
he had need to wrestle with spiritual issues; otherwise, mere
"tripe" would have been the result. And religion was not alone in this matrix; other cultural institutions went under the scrutiny of you Sam Clemens and all were found equally wanting, equally human— not divine—in their makeup.

It is also clear that for nearly every piece of major writing by Mark Twain, we can point back to his first thirty years and find where the idea came from, and in some cases see why he was intrigued with the subject matter. It is equally clear that the style, storytelling techniques, the narrative point of view and other distinct elements of the fiction of Mark Twain can be seen in his earliest writings, as early as his journalism in his boyhood town of Hannibal, Missouri. This point may not be original, but it is herein stated anew in a new light, that of seeing both the techniques and the material together. Humorous techniques require comic material; Twain saw religion as comic material. He believed in no god; God was one of the concepts routinely tossed about in Twain's artistic incubator.

It is time for critics to cease looking askance at the early writings and rather explore them carefully. A close examination of these pieces shows, without a doubt, Samuel Clemens's personal religious beliefs, and the sources for them. If we can point to one reason for Mark Twain's atheism, it would seem most likely to have grown from his independent nature, his rebellion towards all things that smothered his unfettered spirit. Mark Twain was not as much
a symbolist as the Romantics Hawthorne or Melville, but perhaps the incident in *Huckleberry Finn* where the oversized Bible, spread on the chest of the dying Boggs, crushing the life out of him, is as symbolic of Twain's religious attitude as anything he ever wrote. Religion by its construction puts blinders and limits on thinking and actions; Mark Twain could not happily participate without "bucking the system."

Before the 1970 publication of *Early Tales and Sketches*, few students of Twain had ready access to the early journalism. Certainly the great interest in his major novels and late writings completely overshadowed early, comparatively minor writings. But now we can flesh out the story, more or less, from beginning to end.

One last point bears re-emphasis here. As I noted in Chapter 4, Twain was influenced by the deism of Thomas Paine and the scientific determinism of MacFarlane. Twain also found affinity with the "eloquent atheist" Robert Ingersoll (Burr 147). "Twain was affected by Ingersoll's 'anti-clerical rationalism' derived from Voltaire, Paine, and the French Encyclopaedists" (148). Burr notes that the two men were friends and correspondents, but unlike Ingersoll, Twain rarely attacked Christianity openly. Burr says Twain did not do so because, as I have stressed, he was writing to a popular audience to entertain, not to be didactic. Some critics have noted these influences--Ingersoll, Paine, Voltaire---and have said that Twain's religious sense was
that of a deist, the most common critical assertion. But the evidence of this study points to the fact that Twain was not a deist but a disbeliever.

As stated in Chapter 1, my study expands, strengthens, and extends the chain of studies that show Mark Twain’s religious skepticism. Once critics found religious doubt in his last works, they found evidence of this attitude in all his major writing beginning with *The Innocents Abroad*. The years before this first travel work are now no longer ignored.

It is also time to dismiss the notion that atheism destroyed Twain’s mental and spiritual being. As Twain wrote to a devout Roman Catholic, Charles Warren Stoddard, he had "perfect peace in unbelief" (Gross 260). His private beliefs were known to his friends and family, but the reading public would not know them until after his death. The attitudes he had as a young man were revealed in his early writings covertly, as we have seen. Over the years as his reputation and popularity grew, he became freer to write what he wanted, saving his most savage attacks for posthumous publication. He had to use caution.

Even then, his first literary guardians, notably Albert Paine and daughter Clara, sought to keep the more unpopular attitudes buried; this is why *Letters from the Earth* was not published until 1964. Clearly, Clara still thought his anti-religious works were too dangerous for his public image.
Another example, "What is Man?" was published anonymously during Twain's lifetime. It was not until 1917, after his death, that it was published under his own name. Perhaps modern readers are better equipped to deal with Twain's ideas than Sam Clemens was himself. Perhaps he was more prophet than he knew, but a prophet with a clear profit motive. He knew his responsibilities; seventy years after his responsibilities ended, our responsibility is to record, as faithfully as possible, the "truth" as Mark Twain saw it.

Perhaps the most useful contribution of this study is the idea that antipathy for religion need not be viewed as negative, an attitude based on disappointment or anger. Disbelief is an alternative philosophy with as many positive aspects as iconoclastic: much of Mark Twain's flavor, humor, clear sightedness, and sympathy for the human condition derived from his unorthodox world view. His originality was certainly strengthened by his ability to dispense with what he considered "wishful thinking" in favor of a more realistic philosophy.

Labels such as "heretic," "skeptic," or "secular humanist" are perhaps only useful to those wishing to cast a disparaging eye on those not sharing their particular bias, using such terms to limit less narrow ways of thinking. Mark Twain, uneasy about simple categorization, learned early that doctrine was no substitute for substance, that the human heart changed more from within than without; works were more
revealing than words. The ideas he "preached" and the values he practiced were, in the long run, far more affirmative than negative. Twain's world view, based on his personal education, was more creative than destructive. The search for truth is a quest that necessitates discarding the unbelievable, and Mark Twain found many religions suspect and wanting. Because of his careful and probing eye, the reader is now rewarded with works clearly honest, refreshing, and subversively instructive. Much of the "meat" in Mark Twain's fiction depends on his wary explorations of human behavior, and so by understanding Mark Twain's religious sensibilities, we understand more of what Mark Twain was saying throughout his literary career.

It is rewarding to know that old age angst was not the source for Twain's "dark writings" but that Mark Twain developed his views from a variety of sources, influences, and experiences. By looking to the early years, it is clear that Twain's seedbed was not only early in formation but was also broad in scope. Only in a very narrow context can he be branded a "heretic," but in a wider view the term "skeptic" seems appropriate. For skepticism allows for a wider field of vision, and this vision was a gift Twain shared in his literary efforts. In short, skepticism gave Twain the philosophical base suitable for his temperament and literary gifts, and further, that this base helped give his fiction a depth and breadth missing in the work of many of his
contemporaries. It is one thing to assert specific dogma, quite another to examine the varieties and complexities of the human condition. Skepticism seems clearly to be not only the impetus to much of his writing but also allowed for the richness of the canvas he created.

It is for these reasons that this study contributes more than a scholarly overview of the development of Mark Twain's antipathy for religion; it contributes to the idea that this skepticism gave Twain his freedom of thought to fully explore both the best and the worst of the human heart. Skepticism, then, is more than of passing interest to readers of Mark Twain: it is germane to an understanding of his work, early, middle, and late. This study then shows that skepticism was not only clearly apparent throughout Twain's life, but that this world view benefited and strengthened the work of Mark Twain. We no longer need cast religion as Twain's "ordeal" or "burden" but can see that disbelief was one of Twain's literary if not personal strengths.

With this insight, criticism can look anew at the works of Mark Twain and see not only the obvious attacks on religion but also his alternative philosophy--the human heart is independent and can make its own choices. This idea, it seems to me, is the most important message Twain conveyed regarding religion, that responsibility for the "damned human race" lies within the abilities of that race. For this reason, the fiction of Mark Twain still reaches and teaches.
and will likely do so as long as readers share the same human impulses Sam Clemens observed in ante-bellum Hannibal. This is one reason why the fiction of Mark Twain is so universally appealing; he preaches "about" humanity, not "to" it. And, as long as there are readers, we cannot fail to benefit from the views of Mark Twain.
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