THE ATHEISM OF MARK TWAIN:
THE EARLY YEARS

THESIS

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Many Twain scholars believe that his skepticism was based on personal tragedies of later years. Others find skepticism in Twain's work as early as The Innocents Abroad. This study determines that Twain's atheism is evident in his earliest writings.

Chapter One examines what critics have determined Twain's religious sense to be. These contentions are discussed in light of recent publications and older, often ignored, evidence of Twain's atheism. Chapter Two is a biographical look at Twain's literary, family, and community influences, and at events in Twain's life to show that his religious antipathy began when he was quite young. Chapter Three examines Twain's early sketches and journalistic squibs to prove that his voice, storytelling techniques, subject matter, and antipathy towards the church and other institutions are clearly manifested in his early writings.
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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate that from a very early age, Samuel Langhorn Clemens had no strong religious convictions, and that, indeed, for most of his life, he was an atheist. We will see the history of his early religious experiences, and we will see how this aspect of his character can be detected in his earliest writings.

It might seem to some readers of Mark Twain that the focus of this study is a restatement of the obvious, that Twain's religious attitudes are clearly seen in his writings. However, there are, in fact, critics who find Twain a religious man, though one with numerous doubts. William C. S. Pellow, for example, writes 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). One of the most exhaustive bibliographies of Twain studies, Roger Assilineau's The Literary Reputation of Mark Twain from 1910-1950, does not mention religious skepticism even with its listing of 1300 entries. And, as we shall see, Twain is seen by various critics as being an agnostic, a deist, but always as a man of doubts. I have found no study, previous to this one, where Twain is called an atheist, despite the fact that he himself on more than one occasion, said he did not have any religious belief.
Some recent Twainians, however, have seen at least part of the obvious, and have pointed to Twain's religious skepticism in published books and articles on the author that deal with Twain's life after 1876. These critics usually give only fleeting mention of evidence of Twain's early skepticism as one might assume. This study, in fact, is the first close examination of Twain's early drift from religion to atheism.

It is clear that many examinations of Twain's work are based on the theory that his skepticism and bitterness in his late posthumous "dark" writings, such as *What is Man?*, *The Mysterious Stranger*, and *Letters from the Earth*, were products of late-life personal tragedy. Only recently, in fact, do we have studies of Twain's early writings 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 Doyno's *Mark Twain: Selected Writings of an American Skeptic* and Allison Ensor's *Mark Twain and the Bible*, which deal with Twain's earliest journals and short fiction in the light of his religious feelings. These books, like most of the studies dealt with in Chapter One of this study, only briefly review the years before *The Innocents Abroad*. Their studies begin with Twain's major works and do not deal with his first thirty-five years as closely as I do, with a focus on his religious sense.
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, and one of these was published as recently as October, 1985, John Lauber's *The Making of Mark Twain*. The other, of course, is the renowned *Sam Clemens of Hannibal* by Dixon Wecter.

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 writing begins with the publication of that 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. It seems as though scholars have 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 studies of *Tom Sawyer*, to be dealt with later, were published only recently.)

This thesis completes the chain and 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 too overtly. His main reason in writing was to sell his work,
not deconvert Christians. He had a public, a family, and friends he was responsible to. However, there is no reason to think, as Albert Bigelow Paine pointed out, that Twain did not say exactly what he wanted to say (Paine Notebook i). Twain did write that "only dead men tell the truth" and had his harshest writings published posthumously when his responsibility would be no more. What I shall be trying to show 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 truth."

The sources for this study are collections of extant Twain journalism, letters, and early fiction, as well as a number of reputable biographies based on documents not readily available to students of Twain. I would like to mention that when one is studying the prolific output of a man like Samuel Clemens, contradictions are numerous and are natural things to expect from a multifaceted mind. Drawing from a number of sources, I hope to prove that although Twain's thoughts might have wavered and, especially in his formative years, he sometimes felt attracted to religion, the simple truth is that his personal philosophy was built on a disbelief in any of the tenets of the Judeo-Christian theologies, and that there is no evidence to point to his acceptance of any Deistic beliefs. "God," to Mark Twain, was a symbol, a concept understood by his neighbors and friends, so when he mentioned "the Deity" he was simply catering to his audience, and Sam Clemens was a man who knew his audience.
Twain's earliest books were based on his experiences with Sunday schools, preachers, tall tale story tellers--colored with his independent spirit that can be seen in his boyhood. In the following chapter, we shall explore critics who deal with this area. I will present a short biography focused on Sam Clemens's attitudes toward religion. The last chapter of this study will explore, in Twain's own writing, the earliest examples of his iconoclastic attitude toward "Presbyterianism."
CHAPTER BIBLIOGRAPHY


CHAPTER I

THE CRITICAL BACKGROUND

Because the focus of this study is on the early years of Samuel Clemens, 1835-1876, it is not necessary to review published materials that discuss Twain's religious thought and his use of the Bible in his writings after the publication of The Innocents Abroad in 1876. There are, for example, a great number of articles that deal only with Twain's attitudes towards religion and his use of the Bible in Huckleberry Finn. Examinations of critical writings on Twain's writings later than 1876 are certainly not needed here. There is no dearth of studies on The Mysterious Stranger and other posthumous writings, and re-examination of this area would be redundant. My focus is on the earliest of Twain's work; and, while secondary scholarship in this area is limited, I must acknowledge the contributions of a number of critics.

The four major critical works that require closest scrutiny include two recent dissertations—Jefferey 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). Two books, Allison Ensor's Mark Twain and The Bible (1969) and Victor Doyno's Mark Twain: Selected Writings of an American Skeptic (1983), are also important to a study of the early years. Other shorter,
critical studies will also be mentioned, but these four in-depth studies, being more extensive, provide the best of recent scholarly studies of the early Twain and of his religious sense.

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 early juvenalia and journalism (which will be discussed in the chapter on Early Writings), 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 explored often. Yet 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 I will incorporate 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. He cites Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., 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). This 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 that Doyno makes which is 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 preachers because of their common interest in oratory. Sam Clemens, having traveled throughout America, heard many preachers, many storytellers; and, practicing the oral arts himself, he was certainly aware that the gullible were prey to preachers. 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.

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

The next critic who requires our attention is Jefferey R. Holland, author of *Mark Twain's Religious Sense: The Viable Years 1835-1883*, published in 1973. Since he is the only critic whose focus completely overlaps my own, I shall treat his views more extensively.
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 a number of 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 referred to as a new mission field. "Frequently it seems that he had no other metaphors at his disposal" (2).

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 says Twain, like the mongrel pup in "A Dog's Tale," did not really care about clear theological distinctions (4).

"Sin, punishment, conscience, duty, the fear of God, death--these were the staples in his moral pantry" (5), Holland writes, and he 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 thought of becoming a minister, despite his well-known letter to his older brother Orion, in which young Sam said his career choice was limited and that he could not be a minister "because I lack the necessary prerequisite, 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 Vol. 1:84). I hasten to observe that Clemens was obviously jovial on this occasion and was not in literal fear of the Almighty. 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 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 that Twain was never serious about being "the Reverend Mr. Twain"—I shall not attempt to refute Holland here, but will be addressing his claims throughout this thesis. I can say that 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 into 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).

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 tragedy. Holland's perspective is valid, but, as I have implied, tends to strain on key points, such as the comments on Twain's desire to be a preacher. In Randy Cross's dissertation, Holland is dismissed in a two-paragraph statement, which is too cursory as a review. Of all the critics reviewed in this chapter, Jefferey Holland is the best at noting the key influences of the early years. Still, we differ in our conclusions.

Randy Cross claims, in his recent dissertation, Religious Skepticism in Selected Novels of Mark Twain, that most scholars tend to agree that Mark Twain did not believe in the Judeo-Christian God of the Bible, nor in the divinity of Jesus Christ (Cross 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" (Cross 1). This atheism, 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 be mostly concerned with the material in his introduction.

Cross begins his dissertation with a review of critical writing on Twain's skepticism, including his look at Allison Ensor's study. He then says that one of the reasons Twain hated religion was that it was, to him, only superstition (Cross 5). Cross contradicts many of the findings of E. Hudson Long, editor of *The Mark Twain Handbook*, who claimed that Twain never denied the resurrection of Christ nor the power of prayer. Cross correctly counters that assertion and points to the denial of the power of prayer in *Huckleberry Finn* (6). (I will deal with the prayer issue in the chapter on biography.)

Long, according to Cross, does not find Twain an atheist, 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" (Cross 6). Cross does nothing with Long's assertion, nor does he cite
the letters in which Twain refutes even a mechanistic deity. (We will note this in the chapter on biography.)

Cross's discussion of Twain's early years continues with his look at the Clemens-Langdon courtship period. 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" (Cross 10).

Cross surveys a number of other critical writings on Twain's use of the Bible, Twain's attitude toward Adam, and religious skepticism in his later writings, and he does briefly review Jefferey Holland's dissertation which I have already discussed. Since most of the criticism is not pertinent to this study, we can summarize Cross's own thesis, which is 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 than either Holland or Cross.

Allison Ensor, author of *Mark Twain and the Bible* (1969), is another writer who examines Twain's early disparaging of the Bible. Like Cross, Ensor begins his study with *The Innocents Abroad*. He begins there because, as he states in Chapter One of his book, 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. This point will be demonstrated in the next chapter.

Ensor notes that young Sam's early influences included his independent father and the near opposite views which were held by Sam's mother and sister, Pamela Moffett (14). He is less successful in his attempt to claim John Quarteles, Sam's uncle, and freemasonary, 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. Paine's influence has been noted earlier in this thesis.

Despite my disagreement with Ensor, his study must be mentioned because his book, along with the writings of Cross and Holland, clearly establishes the religious skepticism in Twain's first major book, *The Innocents Abroad*, and leaves my study free to take on the years before Sam Clemens became Mark Twain.

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 Macfarland; (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.

The pages that precede this list are not enough to establish fully the basis for these conclusions, yet the conclusions make for an interesting formula. The subject of the Scotsman, Macfarlane, cannot be ignored, and will be dealt with later. Smith's stressing of the guilt over Henry's death is not supported in his argument, and I feel that Clemens's guilt, which was certainly profound, was not great enough to stand alongside other major influences, such as Macfarlane, whose influence we can easily see in Twain's writings. The other points William Smith lists, excepting the much-noted Thomas Paine, clearly are interpretations of Twain's character based on his life on the river. It would be hard to argue those points and equally hard to prove them. Still, they are worth the brief attention I have given them, since Smith is attempting to set Twain's mental stage for the pilgrimage of the "Quaker City." He is one of the few writers we can mention who deal with the years on the river as having anything to do with Clemens's religious sense. He has to be interpretive because the only extant documents we
have of those piloting years are the notebooks that Horace Bixby commanded the young cub to keep of the Mississippi River's many landmarks and changes, and the letters Sam Clemens wrote home. A few of those letters will be discussed in my chapter on biography.

Smith discusses, as does Justin Kaplan, the fact that it was Olivia Langdon who 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 the courtship period, and we do not need to recount them here--they have already been dealt with by critics, including Justin Kaplan. It is worth noting that Smith says that by 1876, Twain had destroyed Livy's Presbyterian faith (Smith 50). This assertion can be supported by a quotation from Paine's Biography, where, upon an occasion of heavy bereavement, Clemens asked his wife if she couldn't 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).
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 said, I find it more supportable to find Twain an atheist. I do not argue that Twain was not a determinist, but I do not see his belief in a deity. He can be cited quite often for referring to "The Deity" in his works, but, as I claim in my introduction, Mark Twain knew his audience. The comment that Clemens made to Paine about a "master mind" seems to be the only time he said anything like that, especially in later years, except on the occasions Clemens was trying to impress women, especially Olivia. 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. He wrote for popular taste.

I shall conclude this critical overview by examining three short articles that all, by chance, were published in the Mark Twain Journal.

The first article, "Darkness at Morning: The Bitterness in Mark Twain's Early Novel Tom Sawyer," written by Joseph S. Feeney, and published in 1978, 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 Pudd'nhead Wilson (1894), and The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg (1900), can be seen in earlier
books. He claims that readers saw 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).

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 humourous moments" (Feeney 4).

This bitterness, Feeney says, is seen in Twain's portraying people as stupid; "stupidity prevails" (4). This unkind opinion is then 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).

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). Feeney concludes his article by seeing religion portrayed as a delusion because people are stupid. Feeney tries to demonstrate this in a brief examination of one paragraph 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 Doyno is right; the reader must be of a similar mind to see it.

In the summer of 1972, The Mark Twain Journal published Wendy A. Bie's "Mark Twain's Bitter Duality." Bie's discussion focuses on her assertion that Twain's duality--his views of good and evil, man and beast, and man's separation from God--are best recorded in Letters from the Earth, the closest thing we have, says Bie, to a philosophical treatise from Twain (14). In that work "he left the guise of crochety novelist and gave his increasing spleen full vent" (Bie 14).

Bie says that Twain's good-evil duality can be first seen "as early as 1882, in The Prince and The Pauper" (Bie 14). Her study reveals that she belongs to the tradition of critics who believe Twain's bitter feelings and skepticism were products of his later years; but despite this, she does inadvertently give some support for those who believe Twain's subversive nature was able to come out of the closet only when he wrote items not intended to be published until after his death. For example, she notes that the stylistic shift in Letters from the Earth turned from the narrative form to the epistolary, which meant writing in the first person (15). There is no reason, Bie says, not to think that Satan's voice was not Twain's own.

Bie's discussion of Twain's problems with God and his laws primarily focuses on Letters from the Earth and The
Mysterious Stranger, but it makes occasional references to works written as early as Tom Sawyer. Bie ends her article by pointing out that, before Clemens fell into his last coma, his last continuous talk was about the good/evil duality in Stevenson's Dr. Jekell and Mr. Hyde. I believe that if Wendy Bie had looked at Twain's early writings—say, the early stories "The Good Little Boy" and "The Bad Little Boy" (which I will discuss in my chapter on early writings)—she could have shown that Twain's duality in matters of good and evil was a lifeling concern and not one of later life frustrations. But I must mention her here because she helps demonstrate that some recent critics still see Twain's skepticism only in his last works as products of the events in his last years, and the critics have not viewed the early works the way that Doyno, Holland, Cross, and this study see them. It is also worth saying that for every idea critics see in Twain's last work, the germ of that idea can be identified much earlier, all the way to Clemens's boyhood. This point will be emphasized in a later chapter.

The last article to mention, Kenneth Andersen's "Mark Twain, W. D. Howells, and Henry James: Three Agnostics in Search of Salvation," may not seem, at first glance, to be pertinent to this study. In it, Andersen shows 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.

Andersen defines an agnostic simply as someone who believes that one cannot verify the existence of God by genetic or sensory means (Andersen 13). After he asserts that the three novelists were agnostics, he writes that the 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'" (Andersen 13).

In his discussion of Hank Morgan, Andersen says that the character is not allowed to grow as an individual because of his stubborn belief in nineteenth-century ways of progress (14). 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 Andersen is implying but does not explicitly state, is that agnostics, not convinced of an after life with the creator, must strive for perfection as simple, carnal men. This benevolent attitude, being part and parcel of Andersen's concept of an agnostic, is interesting. Whether Twain was an agnostic or not, he certainly is generally considered a great humanitarian: the inscription on the monument of Twain that overlooks the Mississippi River near Hannibal, Missouri, reads, "His Religion Was Humanity." It is worth noting that while
some critics find Twain an atheist, or an agnostic, or a deist, we all have the common knowledge that the man was very interested in the human race and did what he could for it. He supported Helen Keller, black law students, and other philanthropic enterprises. 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.

Moving on from a review of recorded concepts of Mark Twain's religious sense, I will now turn first to his biography and then to his early writings, to show how Samuel Clemens, and how those who knew him in his early years, saw religion in Clemens's formative years. My purpose is to demonstrate, in Clemens's own words, what he felt, and what he tried to say.
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CHAPTER II

BIOGRAPHY

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 the church of Henry Ward Beecher, a trip that became known as the "Quaker City" excursion immortalized in The Innocents Abroad. Sam Clemens wanted to go on this cruise, and when he called on Duncan that February morning, he had a plan to get himself a berth.

Having got 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 little anecdote is reported here because, as was noted in the last chapter, most critics find religious skepticism in Twain's work beginning with *The Innocents Abroad*. This passage from Kaplan's book which begins with the events just prior to the "Quaker City"'s sailing on June 8, 1867, (Kaplan 39), sets the stage for this biographical sketch by noting the jocular blasphemy of a man who was clearly not religiously oriented. Indeed, as we shall see, Twain underwent a mild "conversion" on board ship, under the influence of Mary 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, which we will return to at the end of this chapter, it is important that we quickly note Kaplan's opinion of Twain's religious sense in light of his attitude towards the clergy.

Kaplan points to the fact, which I have already mentioned, that Twain "... could get along well enough with the professional clergy." "He had in common with them an interest in oratory" (41). Kaplan notes the long friendship with Reverend Joseph Twitchell in Hartford as indicative of Twain's compatibility with professional speakers; a great deal of Twain's anger was directed at the mob-arousing amateurs. The point here is that Twain got along with liberal preachers--as Twitchell was--but dogmatic believers, as many of his "Quaker City" companions were--became subjects for his ridicule.
in print and in person. These views Twain already held before he boarded the "Quaker City" and were reflected in the letters he sent home, which became the basis for The Innocents Abroad.

Some primary sources must be considered when studying Sam Clemens's early years. There is no avoiding Twain's own Autobiography (dated 1917) which is often read with too many grains of salt. It is true that Clemens's memory was not always precise, and it is true that some events seem to have changed in his memory, but there really is no better record of what he thought was important in his early years as he remembered them in his mature days.

Alongside the Autobiography is Albert Bigelow Paine's four-volume Biography (dated 1912). While his chapter on Clemens's formative years does not yield much on Twain's religious sense, still there is information pertinent to this study, as demonstrated in the previous chapter. The first biography to deal exclusively with the early years, Dixon Wecter's Sam Clemens of Hannibal, also is relatively barren of information pertinent to this study, but it is indispensable to the Twain scholar who wants a close look at the young Sam Clemens. John Lauber, in his recent The Making of Mark Twain, does more with influences on Twain, such as school and church, than Wecter. I will point out here that I will not deal with Twain's frontier days until the next chapter because those "roughing it" years provided the background
for his early journalism, the main focus of our last chapter. We can now begin this chapter in earnest by looking at 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 article points to the fact that a father's influence on his children cannot be underestimated, and he shows a number of areas, particularly of personal independence, that John Clemens passed on to his son. John Clemens's lack of business acumen was apparently passed on to both Orion and Sam Clemens, and the hope for a rich life was left to his family in the legacy of the Tennessee land, which turned out to be one of the family's major disappointments. The only value this land ever came to was as material for one of Twain's early books—in fact, his first novel, The Gilded Age, which Twain co-wrote with Charles Dudley Warner, published in 1873.

More to our purpose, Coplin has this to say 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, but the stamp of John Clemens is clearly seen in Twain's later years. He took what he liked about his father into his own being and attempted not to repeat the aspects he did not like. As we shall see, this attempt was not always successful.

Coplin says that one of the greatest influences on Sam's life was his father's death, for it was on that occasion 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). 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. Coplin believes that, in his fiction, Twain struck back at his unemotional, unloving father by casting him either as Tom Canty or Pap Finn. But in the matter of religion, it is worth noting, as we shall shortly examine, that both John Clemens's surviving sons followed their father's footsteps by rejecting the religion that the women of the family clung to. 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. Moreover, Coplin could have added, John Clemens showed that a man could be seen as moral while keeping his religious heresy to himself.
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. She did change 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 was on Sam's lack of faith—which, I confess, we must take somewhat lightly. 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 attempting to acquire some coveted gingerbread. He wrote in 1906, "but this dream was like almost all the other dreams we indulge in 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).

Sam came to the conclusion 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 this particular memory is not followed anywhere in his Autobiography with a reconciliation of any kind with Christianity. There is no way of knowing how profound this event was—or if it even happened as recounted—but there is no reason not to believe that religious doubt began early, even in a young child's mind.

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 (dated 1962) was Twain's attempt to rehabilitate Satan, an idea he had long held in his imagination. 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. It was to her that most of Sam's lifelong correspondence was directed, and no one has recorded any instance where Twain criticized or rebuked his mother. Yet, as the years passed, we can see that Twain would not write to his mother about his religious feelings because he did not share her fundamental beliefs. To demonstrate this, we must examine four letters, four letters that are crucial to this study.

The first letter, written to Pamela and Jane 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 the death of Henry Clemens 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 the impact of this event has already been discussed. Yet, one line from this letter bears our perusal here. Sam wrote, "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" (Selected Letters 22).

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 he might be referring 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 was aware of his attitudes towards religion and to suggest that this line indicates that fact. It is the only letter to his mother and sister 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.

It was later in Twain's life that he revealed his religious sense outright to a member of his family in correspondence. It was to Orion that he wrote his often-quoted letter that he could not be a minister because he "lacked the necessary prerequisite: i.e., religion." He wrote to Orion in 1860, "Why a man needs religion in these breadless times surpasses my comprehension" (Letters 1:45).

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).
These letters are important because they state Mark Twain's lack of faith clearly and succinctly. In the last mentioned letter, it is clear that Twain advised his brother against mocking hell not for religious reasons, but for commercial realities. These three letters together are a clear cut 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. Orion himself 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 372-380). By going public, he upset the female members of his family and wrote to his mother and sister Pamela (known as Mollie) 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 uncertainties public, even at the expense of a family outcry. Sam would not do this openly--hence the religious subversion we have already noted--and Sam's own beliefs seemed never to wholly agree with his brother's. Still the surviving sons of John Marshall Clemens seem to have both inherited his religious skepticism, and so it was to each other they confided.
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. To show how Hannibal schools and churches led to Sam's antagonism toward religion, this study now turns to John Lauber's *The Making of Mark Twain*.

According to Lauber (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 was later to excommunicate his brother (21-23). The church—along with the school—were seen by the young boys of Hannibal, including Sam, to be cultural institutions that fostered fear and guilt (24). For example, religious services became 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 (23).

School was as moralistic as church, and young Sam hated it worse than anything else. These two main cultural institutions, writes Lauber, were remembered by Mark Twain in his boys' books *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn*, as vessels for fear and guilt, and taught Sam Clemens the natural depravity of man (23).
Hannibal, Missouri, 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 was witness to 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, and 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.

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). 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).

It is easy to see the symbolism in this event, 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.

To help underline the point that the early years were a strong influence on his later life and writings, I can here note that the fear of poverty—which was a constant threat to the Clemenses—never left Sam Clemens. He learned not to hope for wealth that was not earned by hard work, as in the example of the Tennessee land. He sometimes forget this lesson as in the late life failures of the Library of Humor and the Paige typesetting machine (Lauber 30). This point may not seem at first glance to be relevant to this study, but it is important to recall that part of the aim of this thesis is to show that the bulk of Twain's late life writings and actions can be traced back to his formative years. The "dark years" were direct results of Twain's actions based on his deepest fears, fears born in boyhood.

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 school (32). School, like church, had been punishment to Sam's young rebellious nature, and he had not shown any interest in books or religion. When he became an apprentice printer, however, he was able to find a craft he could deal with.
Lauber partially accounts for this by noting one of Sam's colleagues, 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 where 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 sort of irreverence was certainly something young Sam enjoyed, and one which he began to emulate as soon as he was able.

It was at this time that he first picked up a short biography of Joan of Arc. Lauber notes that Twain told Paine that this was the occasion that set in motion his fascination with that character which would result in his writing of The Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc fifty years later (37). This is yet another indication that Twain's later writings were based on experiences from his earliest years. It was at this point that "S. L. C." began to appear on the printed page, and these early writings belong in our study's next chapter.
First, it is important to note the influence of a McCormick-like character who had an even greater impact on Twain's attitude toward man. When Twain wrote about man being the product of a kind of "reverse evolution," that is, man being the lowest form of creation as expressed in "What is Man?," he was simply writing the ideas of a Scotsman named Macfarlane.

In 1856, when Twain worked at the Courier in Cincinnati (Autobiography 105), Macfarlane lived in the same boarding house with Twain, and they became friends. In his Autobiography, Twain devoted one full chapter, Chapter Nineteen, to Macfarlane's ideas. Twain wrote that fifteen years before Darwin's Descent of Man, Macfarlane had the same idea: "the same general idea, but with a difference." (Autobiography 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 Nineteen are a listing of man's foibles according to Macfarlane, the same ideas that were later expressed by Twain.

All the evidence presented in this chapter has pointed to two things, that the great majority of Twain's later writings, including his "dark writings," were based on early experiences. It is also clear that Twain's religious skepticism was manifested very early in life, and was recorded in
letters written before the "Quaker City" excursion and remembered by Twain in his *Autobiography*. With this in mind, we can turn to the early writings, after we 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). 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 Mr. Vesuvius (45). Clemens put himself into 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. First, that Twain had to be converted at all suggests that he was an atheist to begin with. And the fact that both conversions were temporary is an indication that neither one was deeply felt. On both occasions he was trying to impress a woman. Impressing Mary Fairbanks was a phase that wore off before The Innocents Abroad was written, when he returned to his irreverent attacks on Mrs. Fairbank's beloved Old Masters. In the case of Olivia, Twain had to convince her not only of his religious faith, but also her family—he was a man in love, wooing a woman he hoped to make his bride. 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 "willing suspension." And in time, Livy too would become a religious skeptic.

Thus, it is clear that Mark Twain was more than a religious skeptic—he was a nonbeliever. The evidence cited in this chapter leads to that conclusion. It remains to be seen how this atheism appeared in his early writings.
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CHAPTER III

THE EARLY WRITINGS

Edgar Branch wrote in his notes in *Early Tales and Sketches*, "In January, 1878, when Mark Twain had already 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 his journal, while he was part of the dreamy, reckless and adventurous throng whose tents were pitched almost a generation ago along the Comstock!'" (*Sketches* 387). One of the great pleasures in examining the early writings of Mark Twain is discovering that the above-quoted statement is correct. It is also clear that most of Twain's style, subject matter, and themes were first manifested in his frontier journalism. Branch was referring to the above-quoted 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). This important point underlines my thesis by demonstrating that so much of what Twain wrote about—as well as his attitudes towards religion and other institutions—is clearly seen in his early journalism.
One of the major assignments given to Sam Clemens while he worked at the Territorial Enterprise (where he worked from December 4, 1862, until 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" (Letters 831).

This is another interesting aspect of studying the early published writings of Samuel Clemens: 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. As we shall see, Clemens/Twain was not for some time to be able to 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. By examining a few of his earliest pieces, it will be obvious that Twain's youthful journalism was a definite harbinger of the Mark Twain to come. Before dealing directly with the early texts, however, some background material must be explored.
One of the problems we have when examining Clemens's early newspaper writings is the fact that so few of them are extant. During the years that he wrote for the Territorial Enterprise, Twain did not keep a scrapbook, and the bulk of what we have we have today was found in four scrapbooks, primarily kept by Orion (Enterprise 6). These four books were in the possession of Anita Moffett, Clemens's grandniece, until her death in 1952 (6). This lack of material may account for the lack of attention critics have given the early journalism, along with the fact that much of this material has in many cases been only recently discovered. And, as we shall see, there is still controversy over what we can actually say for sure Twain wrote.

Henry Nash Smith says, "During Sam Clemens's stint as a reporter for the Enterprise he must have written hundreds of column inches of copy," but "we still have only a small fraction of this work: (6). One of the principal reasons that so little material has survived 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 to fill it: "I burned up a small cartload of them lately--so they are forever cut out of my book" (Enterprise 7-8, 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.

It is also important to note that 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 was able to incorporate his humorous, satirical point of view, but reflective, personal writing was not possible. Most of the early material was written in short bursts, and most of the pieces that we have are not very long; many were shorter than one hundred words in length.

Consequently, it might seem to anyone examining these early writings that, due to the wide scope of subject matter and the quickly written observations that were so popular in frontier journalism, trying to define Twain's consistent point of view in them would be a ludicrous search. Yet, from his earliest writings in Hannibal to the humorous sketches we have copies of today, it is possible to cite and examine a number of 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 di-
rectly, and when he did he used covert techniques to disguise
his attitudes, as shall be demonstrated later. Twain's reli-
gious 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."

The best source for early writings of Samuel Clemens is
Early Tales and Sketches, edited by Edgar Branch and Robert
Hirst (1979). Victor Doyno collected a few selections from
that volume in his Mark Twain: Selected Writings of an Ameri-
can Skeptic, and some of his commentary is pertinent to this
discussion. Other sources, primarily collections of extant
journalism, such as Contributions to the Galaxy and Mark Twain
of the Enterprise also contain specimens of Twain's religious
attitudes, as shown below.

For example, on February 28, 1855, Sam Clemens wrote an
article in the Muscatine Tri-Weekly Journal, published in
Muscatine, Iowa. Headed "Eds. Journal," the entry reported
the plight of a poor woman with five children in obvious
need of charity.

The plight brought to mind the handsome sum our preacher
collected in church last Sunday to obtain food and
raiment for the poor, ignorant heathen in some far off
part of the world. (Journal 23).
Clemens noted that the poor family on the streets of Muscatine 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. Twain 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).

This little item about charity beginning at home could obviously have been written as easily by a conservative Christian or an atheist. But with what we have already noted about Sam Clemens's religious sense, this piece would seem to be motivated by Clemens's outrage against Christian hypocrisy. The incident was like many in Twain's frontier experience, and more than one institution was taken to task. In fact, many of his succinct editorial pieces were, like the above instance, an observation of a local event followed by a short question or observation that asked "Is this right?"

Possibly the earliest example of Twain's dealing with the credulity of man was written when he was seventeen. In a piece written for the Hannibal Journal of September 15, 1852, young Clemens's work "reveals how early the author was dealing with strains of deception and credulity" (Doyno 15). Written under the pseudonym "W. Epaminondas Adrastus Blab," the piece entitled "Historical Exhibition--A No. 1 Ruse" is worth our summary here because, as Doyno points out, the article shows
"the author's concern for the contrast between elaborate, stately, deceptive language and short, vivid, realistic lan-
guage" (Doyno 15). It is important to note that Clemens's early observations on man were a part of his overall beliefs, and his views on religion and mankind bear directly on each other. And, while examining these matters, we shall also be able to see that not only were his feelings manifested in the early writing, but also in a number of writing techniques--techniques that demonstrate his "covertness" in attacking religion. 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. It is also worth mentioning that the "Historical Exhibition" piece is written 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 the blame" (Early Tales and Sketches 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 he would use effectively in many of his short stories, notably The Celebrated Jumping Frog and My Grandfather's Old Ram.

The story involves a "historical exhibition" of "Napoleon Crossing the Rhine," which, accompanied by a lecture given by a local authority, was offered to the "natives" at a price of
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 comes 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 howls 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, while not revealing Clemens's religious sense does show his realization that man is credulous, and that flowery oratory is a technique of a swindler. This point of view became a constant thread in Twain's writing and would be commonly associated with false or insincere preachers, as in Huckleberry Finn. The story is, as Doyno notes, full of youthful faults and is drawn out too long, but for the student of Twain who is interested in the beginnings of Twain's writing the piece is indispensable.

"Cincinnati Boarding House," a sketch published November 8, 1856, is an anomaly in that it is attributed to Clemens, but no conclusive evidence is possible. 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 years discussed (387). It is worth noting that Branch and Hirst were able to find more authentic and likely items by Clemens than Henry Nash Smith had been able to gather when he published Mark Twain of the Enterprise in 1957. By the same token, Branch and Hirst did not publish a number of 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.

The "Cincinnati Boarding House" seems to be the work of Sam Clemens. The style is his, the narrative point of view
is his, and the diction and the chronology of where Twain was located support the thesis that Mark Twain wrote the piece. All the above manners, along with the subject matter, point to his authorship. 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). This is a reflection of the problem noted at the beginning of the chapter: if a piece was not collected by Sam or Orion Clemens in a scrapbook, or if it was not signed by one of Clemens's known pseudonyms, its attribution must be in some question. Still, since at least three Twain scholars--Branch, Hirst, and Doyno--are confident that the boarding house sketch is Twain's, a brief examination of it is worth space here. I am convinced that he wrote it, and would add in evidence that it was a Cincinnati boarding house at this time where he met and befriended the Scotsman, MacFarlane (see Chapter Two of this study).

The story is set in a parlor room of a Cincinnati boarding house on a Sunday morning after breakfast (Sketches 382). A number of characters are introduced, including Mr. Blathers and Mr. Toploftical. These residents of the boarding house 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 din'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 got 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, gentlemen. 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, known as "Cabbage No. 1 and No. 2" have joined the conversation. No. 2 spins off a reverie of nature's phenomena and finds himself 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 put 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 aforementioned ram 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, rambling conversations with no purpose, anecdotes that lead from one to another, and a dead pan ending. Pertinent to this study is the fact that the discussion of the existence of God is a humorous one, clearly irreverent. There is nothing theological about it, and it would be impossible to say which side won the argument because both groups leave the decision to Doodle, who has nothing to say about the subject except in a humorous story superfluous to the discussion. Doodle's "pointless anecdote" ends a pointless discussion--anyone who has ever argued about religion knows that few, if any, conclusions are ever reached.

The story is certainly Twainian, and Twain's irreverence is obvious once again. Religion is used in this story to set up Doodle's anecdotes: the serious discussion of "the infinite and the finite," occurring on a Sunday afternoon, becomes completely laughable. Twain is able to mock religion and the belief in God by his pose as a disinterested observer. He is, as Fiedler would put it, "subversive" by presenting his
religious skepticism behind his guise. Perhaps this is the reason the piece was unsigned—Twain did not want the story associated with his name. It is as sacrilegious as anything he wrote in the early years, and possibly he did not want his family's outcry to contend with.

It is clear that this sketch helps demonstrate that Twain's early writing reveals not only his early interest in storytelling techniques, dialects, and local color, but clearly his irreverence and non-belief in a Deity. Nothing could be more heretical than to turn a discussion of whether or not God exists into a "boarding house" farce.

There are many similar pieces in the early journalism, probably the shortest being "New Year's Day" published in the Enterprise on January 1, 1863. It is only about 130 words long, but it contains strains, as in his skepticism about reform and in his continuing distaste for hypocrisy, of the Twainian attitude toward mankind that would dominate much longer, greater works throughout his life. Because Twain was not able to believe in any religion or Deity, his focus was on mankind, what he would later call "The Damned Human Race."

On the first day of 1863, the following sentiments of Mark Twain appeared beneath another, sillier sketch by him entitled "More Ghosts." 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. To-day, we are a pious and exemplary community. 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 and Sketches 180).

In many ways, this short squib sums up Twain's attitude toward man in 1863, as well as 1903. The tone of this piece is not antagonistic, but resigned, accepting, as Doyno noted (15). Twain would attack institutions he could find harmful, such as monarchies, primogeniture, and religious icons, as well as the concept of a Deity. But 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." In all of the early Twain journalism I
have found and read, no other piece is as reflective or so obviously personal. There is no optimism in it, and we can infer his opinion of the importance of religion by noting that it is not mentioned, not hinted at, i.e., not important. His diction is certainly a precursor of his later, longer, reflective writings. Man was to become Mark Twain's great subject and theme, and religion only a mirror to reflect man in his own image, since man had created his own gods—this is one area he and Orion agreed on (see Chapter Two).

In May, 1870, a piece entitled "Disgraceful Persecution of a Boy" was printed in the Galaxy. It is worth noting that the next piece Twain was to publish would be "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 not 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 on 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 is not only one of Twain's most obvious blasts at hypocrisy—an issue he dealt with time and time again—but it points to a reason for bigotry. The teachings of the community, in the home, in the schools, and in Sunday school were, to Twain, all of one voice. When one begins reading this piece, it is with the expectation that the humorist Mark Twain will find some funny way to defend the boy for stoning the Chinaman. But the piece 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 presumably are to teach what is right.

Twain's message throughout this piece 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 cannot be blamed—justice was not done by jailing him. The real offenders are clearly the institutions that led him to think God would love him if he stoned the foreigner.

During Mark Twain's stint as a frontier reporter, he had a great deal of 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 list of targets. This piece demonstrates that Twain saw all those institutions as part of the same evil—the combined evil that teaches children to stone strangers. And most pertinent to this study, the institution of Sunday school, taught not only the concept of morality to the boy, but also the concept of God. "God will not love me if I do not stone the Chinaman." This is something that the God of Presbyterian morality might expect. It seems clear that this story, which, as we have noted, was written about the same time as "The Story of the Good Little Boy," reveals much about Twain's attitude towards Christian Sunday schools. And, God is precisely what we are taught him to be, therefore, a man-made creature.

Victor Doyno reprinted other sketches that he found indicative of a skeptic, including the "Petrified Man" sketch published in October, 1862, where Twain created a hoax of his own that fooled many readers. 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.

Two of Mark Twain's earliest short stories, "The Story of the Bad Little Boy" and "The Story of the Good Little Boy," are obvious slaps at the misleading Sunday school morality of
the nineteenth century. "The Bad Little Boy" story appeared in 1864, and was the second short story by Mark Twain to appear in print. These stories foreshadowed the dichotomy to be seen later in the characters of Tom Sawyer and the picaresque Huck Finn. 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). 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. 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, and the bad boy prospers, and becomes a famous politician.

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. Other earlier stories 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 new survey of critics who examine Twain as naturalist in his later years is part of Nelson R. Burr's New Eden and New Babylon: Religious Thoughts of American Authors, A Bibliography.) 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 a "realist" are clearly evident in the earliest works of Mark Twain. In all his career, Twain romanticized only the Mississippi River and his childhood--and 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. In religion, hypocrisy and credulity were made evident to anyone with insight to see it. Religion was only one institution that was the target of the satire of Mark Twain, and it was one of his first targets, as I have shown.

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 humourous 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 in his "Mark Twain in the Pulpit: The Theological
Comedy of *Huckleberry Finn* in One Hundred Years of *Huckleberry Finn* (371-89), of Twain's comment to Orion in 1860. "What a man wants with religion in these breadless times surpasses my comprehension" (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 the traditional sermons of Christian pastors--he never had the belief necessary.

It is interesting to note that all the pieces examined in this chapter were written before Olivia Langdon or William Dean Howells became censors. Yet, critics have found religious skepticism in abundance in the works written under these careful eyes, but not until now has anyone pointed to these early writings and said, "It's all here--the techniques, the narrative point of view, the framed story, the interest in dialect, the freewheeling realism, and, in particular, his atheism."

What this means is that the early writings of Mark Twain are an untapped gold mine for any critic interested in Mark Twain. There is no reason to say late-life strife took religion from Mark Twain--he never had any religion. Twain did not deduce from lifelong experience that man is a hypocritical, credulous animal--he developed this attitude before the onset of the Civil War, and his observations only developed and matured over the years. His later writings were certainly better written than the early work, but perhaps no more enjoyable.
It is time, perhaps, for Twain scholars to begin to evaluate the extant writings of the young Samuel Clemens. He 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; perhaps this thesis is a step in that exploration.
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CONCLUSION

In his biography of Mark Twain, Albert Bigelow Paine records a number of 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 is yet another instance of a major point of this study: Sam Clemens's irreverence and distaste for religion were not products of late-life suffering, but were manifestations of his rebellious nature seen all through his life. Less directly, the story also points to the fact that the writings of Mark Twain were based on ideas, concepts, and attitudes that he developed early in life, not only about religion, but also about other cultural institutions. It is 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.
One of the reasons that this study had to be written is to clear up a number of misunderstandings on the part of critics who look closely at the later writings of Mark Twain and who look only askance at his earliest attempts at writing. If critics had examined the material I have dealt with, there would be little doubt as to Samuel Clemens's personal religious beliefs, and the sources for them. If we can point to one reason for Mark Twain's atheism, if 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 writers such as 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.

It is surprising that most of the conclusions of this study are stated here for the first time; I have read few critics who agree with my major findings, as discussed in Chapter Two. Perhaps the fact that Early Tales and Sketches appeared only as recently as 1979 is part of the problem--before that collection, few students of Twain had relatively full access to the early journalism. Certainly the great interest in his major novels and late writings completely overshadowed looks at his early, comparatively minor writing.

Other reasons for Twain's disbelief in the Christian God are explored in Chapter Two of this study, but there is one
reason that bears re-emphasis here. As I noted in that chapter, 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, as I noted earlier; but the evidence of this study points to the fact that Twain was not a deist but a disbeliever.

As I stated in the introduction to this study, my thesis attempts to complete 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; one of my hopes is to see much more study of the early tales, journalism, sketches, and stories to see just how much of the late Twain can be seen in his earliest attempts.

Mark Twain waited many years to openly reveal his attitudes about God and man in his later, patently cynical
writings. I have shown that his feelings had been expressed privately, principally in letters to Orion. He was able to write to a devout Roman Catholic, Charles Warren Stoddard, that he had "perfect peace in unbelief" (Gross 260). His private beliefs were known to his friends, 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. For example, "What is Man?" was published anonymously during his lifetime. It was not until 1917, after his death, that it was published with the author's name. This is indicative of how Mark Twain dealt with possible controversy; he was a writer for the popular taste, a man who knew and thrived on his audience. He finally wrote what he thought was the truth, and let posterity link the ideas with the author. He did say in *Puddn'head Wilson* that only dead men can tell the truth--he knew that a living author had responsibilities. Seventy years after his responsibilities ended, our responsibility is to record, as faithfully as possible, the "truth" as Mark Twain saw it. This study has been an attempt to reveal little-known truths about Mark Twain, and it is certain there are still more to learn.
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