



# The Complete Short Stories of Mark Twain

Mark Twain

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THE COMPLETE  
SHORT STORIES  
OF MARK TWAIN

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MARK TWAIN

*Edited with an Introduction*

*by Charles Neider*



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BANTAM CLASSIC

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*For Hanna and Colin Palmerston*

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I wish to express my gratitude to Harper & Brothers and to the Mark Twain Estate, without whose cooperation it would not have been possible to publish this volume. I owe particular thanks to Mr. Frank MacGregor of Harpers and to Mr. Henry Nash Smith of the University of California (Berkeley) for courtesies extended to me.

C.N.

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## A NOTE ON THE TEXT

The present volume contains a total of sixty stories, thirteen of them gathered from works of non-fiction. They cover the entire span of Twain's published works, from 1865 to 1916, six years after his death. The text is that of the Stormfield Edition of Twain's Works, published in 1929 by Harper & Brothers in thirty-seven volumes. The stories are arranged chronologically according to the year of first publication, and alphabetically within a given year whenever more than one story was published within that year.

"A Cure for the Blues" is an example of a short piece which I did not include. It is a sort of burlesque book review, with none of the usual attributes of a story. "The Private History of a Campaign That Failed" is another example. It is a piece of reminiscence which comes close to being an autobiography and again is clearly something other than a short story.

C.N.

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## INTRODUCTION

NOT LONG ago I happened to be reading Mark Twain's *Roughing It*, when I was piqued by his habit of inserting yarns of pure fiction in a non-fictional work, yarns tossed in just because they were good ones which he had in his head at the time. I counted five yarns or stories in *Roughing It* and wondered if there were others in some of his other non-fictional books. Sure enough, there were: two in *A Tramp Abroad*, three in *Life on the Mississippi*, and three in *Following the Equator*. "What a curious habit!" I thought. But Twain is full of curious habits, both personal and literary, and you either love him or you don't, regardless. I do. It is just his unconventionality, as a literary figure as well as a man, which makes him so appealing to those who like him.

"Strictly speaking, however, these yarns don't belong in the books which house them," I thought. "They belong with his other tales, the stories which are plainly recognized as such. They ought to be included in his collected stories. Let's see if they are." And so I went across the street to the Columbia University library, where I discovered, to my surprise, that his stories had never been put together apart from essays, anecdotes, and the like.

Here is a man, a very great man, a national monument, you might say, who has been dead these forty-odd years without having had his stories collected, when lesser men, just recently dead, or still living, have had that mark of honor offered them by the publishing world and the public. Why? Is it because he is not a good writer of stories? But he is acknowledged to have written some great stories and I believe it is generally conceded that as a story writer he is among our best. Is it because his output was so large, varied, and popular that his stories have been overshadowed—by the novels and travel books? Or is it because he is not a formalist and did not himself publish his short stories pure and as such?

During his lifetime his stories appeared in volumes which I can only call hodgepodge, containing what they did anecdotes, jokes, letters, essays—all sorts of serious and humorous non-fiction along with the fiction. Twain was a man who was very easy-going about border lines. Some of his short pieces fluctuate between fiction and fact. And he was a fellow who had very definite notions about the appeal of the grab bag. When he was a publisher himself he got William Dean Howells, his friend, to edit a collection of accounts of true adventure. Howells put the pieces together according to a scheme, and after Twain had looked at it he gently advised Howells to mix the things up, give them variety, so that the reader might be surprised. A formal scheme was about as appealing to him as a tight collar. This differed considerably from the French notions popular at the time and popular today. Perhaps it is his unconventionality, his insistence on formlessness, which has left his stories in the lurch.

Twain was not unconscious of his formlessness. Whether he was rationalizing some literary defe

or not when he was defending it, I do not know. I know he had a philosophy about it. Six years before his death, when he was dictating fragments of his autobiography, he felt impelled to explain the practice of dictation. His explanation illuminates his general writing beliefs.

*Within the last eight or ten years I have made several attempts to do the autobiography in one way or another with a pen, but the result was not satisfactory; it was too literary. With the pen in one's hand, narrative is a difficult art; narrative should flow as flows the brook down through the hills and the leafy woodlands, its course changed by every boulder it comes across and by every grass-clad gravelly spur that projects into its path; its surface broken, but its course not stayed by rocks and gravel on the bottom in the shoal places; a brook that never goes straight for a minute, but goes, and goes briskly, sometimes ungrammatically, and sometimes fetching a horseshoe three-quarters of a mile around, and at the end of the circuit flowing within a yard of the path it traversed an hour before; but always going, and always following at least one law, always loyal to that law, the law of narrative, which has no law. Nothing to do but make the trip; the how of it is not important, so that the trip is made.*

*With a pen in the hand the narrative stream is a canal; it moves slowly, smoothly, decorously, sleepily, it has no blemish except that it is all blemish. It is too literary, too prim, too nice; the gait and style and movement are not suited to narrative. That canal stream is always reflecting; it is its nature, it can't help it. Its slick shiny surface is interested in everything it passes along the banks—cows, foliage, flowers, everything. And so it wastes a lot of time in reflections.*

In almost any other writer's work it is easy to say, "This is a short story, whereas that is not." Take the cases of Joyce, Mann, James, Hemingway, Kafka, Lawrence. There is no hesitation about it: a short story belongs to a particular genre and has a relation to the whole of fictional writing in the same way that a water color has to the whole of painting, or a song to the whole of composition. Even Chekhov it is easy to say what is a short story and what is not. I say "even" because his stories are so gentle in their shading, so clearly lacking in formalism (although not in form), that he of all the writers mentioned might cause some trouble in this respect. But in Twain's case it is quite another matter. I have the sense that Twain wrote primarily to satisfy an audience rather than the requirements of a genre. Whatever came to mind that aided his cause was grist for his mill. This is why we find sketches in which it is not possible to distinguish between fiction and fact.

He rarely bothered about the niceties of fiction. Fiction has a tone all its own, which the literary artist reveres. For him it is in a special sense greater than reality; it shapes reality, controls it. It is inconceivable to think of a James or a Flaubert inserting raw material, untransmuted, unmodulated into his fictions. For Mark Twain such problems were beside the point. He simply disregarded them, although he was quite aware of them, a great deal more aware than he was accustomed to admit. Twain had enough of the frontier spirit to dislike "form." Form was likely to be something eastern; if not eastern then something worse: European. Henry James went to Europe to seek form, to saturate himself in it, the form of old societies, old art, old manners and buildings. Twain went to Europe

poke fun at it and to make us laugh. The product of the frontier thought he could see where form was growing hollow and becoming a fraud.

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Whatever a short story may be—and this is not the place to attempt to say exactly what it is should be—we can say with some assurance what it is not. It is not a fragment of autobiography; it is not a report, unalloyed, of a historical event; it is not a joke or a hoax pure and simple; it is not a moral sermon, whether taken down from the pulpit or not; it is not, in short, any of the small bits of writing which used to be produced in the old West for newspaper and magazine fillers and which Twain turned out a healthy share. A short story is something which, through the long process of evolution, has come to exist in and for itself. It has laws of its own, it is sovereign in its field. And it was already sovereign when Twain began to write.

Twain had the artistic temperament without too much of the artistic conscience. His genius was essentially western, its strength the land, the people, their language and their humor. What he lacked was a studied eastern conscience to refine the great ore he mined. Perhaps such a conscience would have inhibited and eventually ruined him. Probably he knew best what was necessary for *him*. What he *had*, he had in great measure: the naked power of the man with the gift of gab. He knew what a yarn was, and what it was for, and what to do with it. He did not think that a good yarn needs prettifying and he told it straight, without trimmings. His high jinks are remarkable—his love of mugging, monologue, dialect, caricature. He is a great proponent of the tall story, piling details on until the story comes crashing down. At his best he is uproarious, and he is often at his best in his stories, as you will see.

It has been said that his stories are an important part of our literary heritage. It would be difficult, not impossible, to dispute this statement successfully, presuming one cared to try. They are also part of our folklore. Twain is our writer closest to folklore, our teller of fairy tales. The Jumping Frog story is a living American fairy tale, acted out annually in Calaveras County. Whatever may be its distant origins (it has been claimed to be close kin to an old Greek tale; but the latter probably descended from a Hindu one, and so on), it is now *our* story, mirroring something in us. “The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg” is part of our moral heritage. A rebel American of the creative kind, Frank Lloyd Wright, has written to me that it is his favorite of all short stories. These tales, together with several others, among them “The \$30,000 Bequest” and “The £1,000,000 Bank-Note,” have been anthologized many times. Others—tales of moral indignation such as “A Horse’s Tale,” and tales meant to shock, for example, “Captain Stormfield’s Visit to Heaven,” are no less powerful and important for being less popular. Who are our short-story writers? Irving, Hawthorne, Poe, James Melville, O. Henry, Bret Harte, Hemingway, Faulkner, Porter—these are names which come to my mind without reflection, although my taste does not run to O. Henry and Harte, and finds much to quarrel with in Faulkner. Twain’s ranks high among them.

Twain is a dangerous man to write about. Unless you approach him with a sense of humor you are lost. You cannot dissect a humorist upon a table. Your first stroke will kill him and make him a tragedian. You must come to Twain with a smile. That is his prerogative: that he can make you do so or fail. A great American critic wrote a study of Twain which was brilliant. The only trouble with it was he thought he was describing Twain, when all along he was describing somebody else—himself probably. The critic did not have a sense of humor, and his error was comparable to that of the tone-deaf critic who wrote on Beethoven. God forbid that I should try to dissect Mark Twain. In Twain it

not the line-by-line detail which is great, nor the day-by-day life—it is the mass, the contour, and the fragrance of a personality. Who would want, here in this place, to try to dissect that? I shall just pursue a few thoughts briefly, and if I seem to be critical at times, let the reader remember I love the man this side of honesty.

Twain poured his writing out in a stream, showering upon it all his gifts. Sometimes it carried everything before it but at others it failed naïvely. He was not the sort of versatile writer who is equally good at everything he puts his hand to. It is difficult to believe that he could have written the fastidious travel essays like Hawthorne's or the delicate, subtle criticism of James; yet at times he appeared to be attempting both. He carried a broadsword which he sometimes tried to use on butterflies. He wrote very rapidly and was as proud as a boy of his daily turnout. He did not strive for the polished effect—or, rather, he strived for it too seldom. When his mood changed he stopped writing and put a manuscript away, sometimes for years. He was not a good judge of his work. Being essentially a man of humor, he was rarely humorless regarding himself in relation to his work. He was unlike Flaubert and Proust and James in this respect. To be humorless regarding oneself—or at least regarding one's work—can sometimes be a great advantage. To be well balanced does not guarantee better-grade work.

There is, in a good deal of Twain's writing—in the Hadleyburg story, for example—a kind of naïveté which one feels is literary, a sort of refusal to infuse prose with the sophistication of the mature man. This no doubt reflects in some measure an attitude Twain had to the act of writing and to the nature of his audience. Writing was not the whole man. It may have even been at times the lesser man; and the audience, one seems to perceive, like his family, was largely composed of women: naïve women, sheltered from the painful realities of a man's world. The moral pressure in Twain's work is generally considerable; but the purely literary, the aesthetic pressure is occasionally so low as to form only a trickle. This aesthetic pressure, impossible to define, is what is necessary to the creation of work of art. In some cases it stems from moments of transcendent well-being, in others from the depths of frustration or despair; but whatever the causes, the pressure must be there, inside one, for the effect to be made. Too great a pressure may be as devastating to a work as too little, although writers like Twain are more likely to suffer from too little.

In Twain's case there is often something pleasant in even the lesser pages, precisely because of the low pressure: he is relaxed and his mood is infectious. Twain rarely tries to overreach himself, to strain after an effect of greatness. This lesson of being relaxed while writing, although a dangerous one for young writers, is an invaluable one for the mature ones. The right balance of pressure when one is about to sit down to work—one's health, one's relation to the material, one's linguistic resilience at the moment, the play of one's mind—is really what is called inspiration: the balance of everything: the container, which is one's own complex state, must exactly suit the thing contained which is the raw material about to be transfigured into art. It is a pity that Twain did not often take the pains to find the just balance for himself. But if he did not, he at least substituted another virtue. He says somewhere, wryly, that he had the habit of doing and of reflecting afterward. One contrasts this habit with an opposite one, the habit of reflecting to the point of disease, often found in the later works of Melville and James, as well as in portions of the works of Thomas Mann and Marcel Proust.

Twain does not strive to be an artist—*artiste*, he probably would have called it with a grin. He would have felt more comfortable wearing the term journalist. He grew up a journalist, like Dickens.

and was one of those hearty nineteenth-century scribblers who strayed into literature almost without realizing it. He had the journalist's instinct, in the way Defoe had, and in the way Hawthorne and James did not. This is not necessarily a handicap in the creation of literature. In so far as it stimulates a sense of audience, a sense of common scene, and the use of native speech and lore—in so far, that is, that it inspires one to attempt a colloquy in common terms but with uncommon genius, it is a definite and rare gift. Its limitations are likely to be great also, the limitations of the known, and especially what is known to the particular group. Twain's writing was almost always a means to an end. He had a few impersonal objectives in mind in the way of form, experiment, texture, design. He had the common touch and knew it was a blessing. He was enriched by it and made world-famous.

He possessed in a limited degree the craft discipline of the writer who sees his prose, who carefully examines it, watching for design and effect, while at the same time listening to its music. Flaubert and Joyce were writers who intensely saw, and it is by no accident that we find in their work a brilliance of visual images. The visual intelligence can act as a tight check on the aural one; the latter may run wild, like a weed, until one is writing sound for its own sweet sake. James in his later phase dictated much of his fiction, and as a result his work of that period is marked by prolixity, dilution, and sometimes a vagueness of meaning. Of course, it can be argued that he adopted dictation to satisfy the requirements of a genius which was declining. The trouble here is that it would be a difficult task to chart and to prove the actual falling off of his genius apart from the mannerisms which had begun to afflict it. One wonders if the visual sense in literature, especially in terms of formal design, has not overreached itself in our century with the production of works like Joyce's *Ulysses*, Mann's *Joseph and his Brethren*, and parts of the great Proust novel, and if the impetus to their excesses was not at least partly the excesses of the aural sense, as witnessed in a writer like Dickens.

It is a large part of Twain's greatness that he heard so well. His dialogue is extraordinary. One sometimes wonders if he had a phonographic memory. His ability to imitate styles of speech, with a vast array of accurate detail, is truly remarkable. His biographer, Albert Bigelow Paine, has written: "At dinner, too, it was his habit, between the courses, to rise from the table and walk up and down the room, waving his napkin and talking—talking in a strain and with a charm that he could never quite equal with his pen. It is the opinion of most people who knew Mark Twain personally that his impromptu utterances, delivered with that ineffable quality of speech, manifested the culmination of his genius." Twain and the oral tradition: both are related to the frontier. Yet some of his chief faults stem directly from this side of his genius—an occasional looseness of texture, a kind of stage vaudeville timing for effect, an overindulgence in burlesque, a sense as if he were lecturing from a platform. Early in his public career he achieved success as a lecturer and as a maker of speeches, and no doubt this success, this practice, this buttressed confidence in a talent he long must have known he possessed, had a crucial influence upon his work.

There is a certain transparency in Twain's work, like that to be found in fairy tales. One senses the machinery behind the silken screen. But in this very transparency there is a kind of potency also found in the fairy tales, a foreknowledge of events, a delight in repetition, in the spelling out of the known, a sort of tribal incantation. There is also something abstract in certain of his fictions, some sort of geometric approach to the art of narrative which, to the modern reader, is not quite satisfying. I refer to pieces like *The American Claimant* and *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson*. The latter is a very imperfect work whose imperfections are traceable to its conception, or rather misconception, a fa-

which Twain himself has revealed at some length. But when he speaks out of his own mouth, with the drawl and idiom and dialect, as he does in so many of his stories, he is unique, inspired, and wonderful.

This man loved a gimmick the way the frontier loved a practical joke. He claimed to be the first private user of the telephone; the first author to use a typewriter; the first author to dictate into a phonograph recording machine. He fooled around with inventions with the passion of an inveterate gambler, and lost his shirt. A literary gimmick sometimes caused him to lose his literary shirt. His favorite of his own books was his *Joan of Arc*, which purports to be the recollections of a friend of Joan's. It is sentimental and dull, as it was likely to be, not being done in Twain's own voice and style.

It is a fact that Twain, like many other nineteenth-century novelists, is sometimes guilty of padding. This is often due to the economics of book production of his day. The two-volume work, often sold by subscription, often serialized, was as much the thing in those days as it is not now. If a man had only a book and a half in him, that was too bad; he had to get up the half somehow or throw in the towel. The effect of this can be seen all the way from Dickens to James. Forgetting this, we are likely to recall the size of nineteenth-century novels and think, "There were giants in those days." There were giants, but the fact remains that many of the novels of the previous century can stand pruning, from our point of view.

There is a new kind of padding which has come to flower in our own century, a kind not due to the economics of book production, a kind which almost deliberately flies in the face of economics—the padding of Joyce, Proust, Mann, Faulkner. I suspect this sort has as its motive a gentle and harmless variety of megalomania, the desire to fill up culs-de-sac in such a way that no one can add a pound to them. It is time that the novel of elegant proportions returned to fashion and worth—the novel which by its intensity, elasticity, form and overtones achieves what the older ones have achieved through bulk. A whale is not by definition superior to a shark.

It is almost needless to add that in the story the impulse or the need to pad was at a minimum, and that consequently there is more economy of effect in Twain's stories than in most of his book-size works. One might even say that Twain felt most at home in the story, that it was the form most congenial to him, lover as he was of the yarn. It was the form which most effectively brought out his particular "voice." Some of his full-size books are more like a series of yarns strung together, than works with an indigenous structure.

Despite his great successes he remained an unfulfilled, unintegrated writer of uncertain taste. In *Tramp Abroad*, for example, his desire was often for serious description of scene, influenced by the beauty of the landscape and the fact he had kept accurate notes. This conflicted with a desire to be funny, or a nervousness because he feared his reader's attention was flagging. He broke up his descriptions with unfunny insertions of outlandish foreign words and phrases, creating a hodgepodge that was in poor taste, dull, and an affront to his considerable descriptive talents. His autobiography is a good example, although a late one, of his uncertain taste. He did not—he could not—write it in sequence, but drifted here and there, wherever idle memory (not always dependable) and a wandering stream of associations led him, at times lingering over minor events and hurrying past important ones. It is an important and neglected American document, justly neglected inasmuch as it is almost unreadable in its present form, the sequence of events garbled, and bits of daily journalism thrown

from the period in which he was composing it. And yet at its best it is remarkable and needs only a skilled hand to put it together properly. It is ready to emerge as a classic of its kind, although at present it is in the stage of being raw material. Twain did not always recognize the difference between raw material and the polished product, just as Henry James, inversely, sometimes mistook the polish of his prose for the material of life itself.

Twain at his most balanced is likely to be found in his letters, where he could be himself, without having to please what he believed to be his audience and to satisfy his audience's demand (whether real or imaginary) for more of the Twain brand of humor. He was in a sense the slave of his audience, or, more justly, the slave of what he conceived to be his duty toward his audience. When Twain is truly himself he is magnificent. How beautifully, how truly, how movingly he can write in the midst of deep emotion, as when he set down his thoughts immediately after the death of his daughter Jean. There is no false tone, no striving in his prose then. You sense he is a *man*, unique and great, honest and noble, in some ways sublime.

His best books, with the exception of his travel books, are those with a western scene; and his travel books largely owe their humor, their geniality, and their wisdom to his western orientation. The sentimentality of the frontier, which ranged all the way from an exaggerated regard for females to the most deadly sort of sadism; the lack of form in social behavior, together with certain codes of behavior which smack of juvenile delinquents; the relative contempt for the written as against the spoken word; the racy language; the attitudes toward dudes and the East, the two being almost synonymous; the impatience with the ways and principles of law—all these characteristics of the American frontier are to be found in Twain's best work, and they are the motor of that work. They are also to be found, in somewhat more disguised form, in the work of Twain's star descendant, Ernest Hemingway.

A man from Missouri, Twain said "Show me" skeptically to Europe and the world. This was a novel concept to the East, where reverence for Europe among literary men was in vogue, as it is today. Paris, Rome, London are still considered the seats of literary learning; or if not learning, of literary practice, or if not practice, of literary conscience. Twain knew better. To the westerner Europe seems remote and its concerns—its stale, very stale concerns—seem almost perversely imagined, or at any rate like a long-forgotten but still-remembered dream, a bitterness on the tongue, a haunting disquiet in some dim corner of the mind. The climate and the great spaces speak eloquently of today and tomorrow. Europe, like the East, is a pallid yesterday.

Twain could be sardonic in turning the tables and exposing a bluff. It had been fashionable, up to his time, for Europeans, some of them prominent literary figures like Dickens, to write sarcastic reports on the "raw" United States. Twain, a self-appointed ambassador, returned the compliment with interest, offering a tongue-in-cheek view of the American as progressive, the European as a piece of baroque humanity. The salt in the wound was that there was much truth in this view, as Hawthorne had already hinted in his *English Notebooks*. Twain never struck upon a happier symbol than the German language, which he satirized so penetratingly and with such wit that even many Germans laughed and appreciated the truth of what he implied. Twain has a wonderful wisdom. He is so essentially sane that it is exhilarating to be in his company. By his way of life he seemed to say, "I am of the tribe of writers but I am saner than they. I know how to savor life." You expect a man like that to live a long life. Twain did, like Tolstoy, and like Tolstoy he managed very often to write without contrivance.

effects.

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It has happened in other countries that what was once looked upon condescendingly as being unworthy of art became, almost overnight, the body and soul of the highest art. It happened in Germany and in Russia early in the last century. I believe it will happen in our own country when western legends and myths, western folklore, become the basis of a sophisticated art. There is no lack of snobbism among eastern intellectuals toward western materials. Some academic writers and critics who enjoy western films, deride the notion that in the more serious realm of the novel the same materials can be used to good and true effect. The frontier may be closed, finished; no doubt it is—the geographical one. But there are other frontiers—the frontier of a cultural *tone*, for example. These are important also. They contain elements which the geographical frontier created or inspired. The frontier has gone underground, and if this is a calamity to the adventurer it is not necessarily so to the artist, in particular the writer. There is a free-swinging sense of things in the West which has long been missing in the East. The ghost of Europe hovers over the East.

It seems to me that the West will produce a great and fertile literature and that this literature, although it will be free in tone and speech in a way the New England literature could not be, will nevertheless be sophisticated, will know what it is about, will understand the meaning of heritage and tradition as well as of rebellion, and of its place in the great stream of literature and the arts. That which has not come into its own during the last half century need not be held against it. Its practitioners are unfortunately parochial, and either unnecessarily resentful of the East or afraid of it. Perhaps the greatest and most successful users of western materials will not be westerners at all. They need not be. They may very well be easterners, for that matter.

Twain's personal influence during his lifetime was very great. His literary influence has also been considerable, not only among humorists but also among American novelists. Hemingway's prose of action and his language of speech are direct descendants of Twain's. Hemingway himself has said that American literature begins with one book, *Huckleberry Finn*—an obvious exaggeration in his fashion but indicative of his regard for Twain. Twain is a muscular writer, he is par excellence the writer who calls a spade a spade, the writer who is intent on making an accurate correspondence between reality as he has experienced it and reality as it emerges in his books. This too is what Hemingway is after. It is Hemingway's real passion. What makes him great is that he has had the vision to sense where in this complex world he can come to grips with what, for him, is a real experience; the courage to seek these places out and, in James's term, saturate himself in them; and the passion to find the words—the fresh words, in his own style—to fit his experience. Like Twain, Hemingway gives the impression of being only incidentally a great writer. The writing follows upon his life. This is far from the example of James and Flaubert, who seemed to live only for their work and whose passion, morality, intelligence, and religion were dissolved and sacrificed in their work.

Twain's fashion has dimmed in the last forty years. He is seen to belong to another era, the era of chromos and linsey-woolsey, of an extraordinary optimism, of a degree of national self-criticism rarely now enjoyed. Despite his frontier manliness he is too frilly, too juvenile, too surrounded by females to entirely please the national taste. But he is a solid monument in American letters and an invaluable lesson for our young novelists. That lesson is: do not neglect your native sources; remember that yesterday's journalism may become tomorrow's literature; steep yourself in the living speech; and do not forget that the life of humor is long and that the Muse does not insist you wear

frown when you work.

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CHARLES NEIDER  
*Pacific Palisades*  
*California*

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## THE NOTORIOUS JUMPING FROG OF CALAVERAS COUNTY

**I**N COMPLIANCE with the request of a friend of mine, who wrote me from the East, I called on a good-natured, garrulous old Simon Wheeler, and inquired after my friend's friend, Leonidas W. Smiley, as requested to do, and I hereunto append the result. I have a lurking suspicion that *Leonidas W. Smiley* is a myth; that my friend never knew such a personage; and that he only conjectured that I asked old Wheeler about him, it would remind him of his infamous *Jim Smiley*, and he would go to work and bore me to death with some exasperating reminiscence of him as long and as tedious as it should be useless to me. If that was the design, it succeeded.

I found Simon Wheeler dozing comfortably by the barroom stove of the dilapidated tavern in the decayed mining camp of Angel's, and I noticed that he was fat and baldheaded, and had an expression of winning gentleness and simplicity upon his tranquil countenance. He roused up, and gave me good day. I told him that a friend of mine had commissioned me to make some inquiries about a cherished companion of his boyhood named *Leonidas W. Smiley*—*Rev. Leonidas W. Smiley*, a young minister of the Gospel, who he had heard was at one time a resident of Angel's Camp. I added that if Mr. Wheeler could tell me anything about this *Rev. Leonidas W. Smiley*, I would feel under many obligations to him.

Simon Wheeler backed me into a corner and blockaded me there with his chair, and then sat down and reeled off the monotonous narrative which follows this paragraph. He never smiled, he never frowned, he never changed his voice from the gentle-flowing key to which he tuned his initial sentence, he never betrayed the slightest suspicion of enthusiasm; but all through the interminable narrative there ran a vein of impressive earnestness and sincerity, which showed me plainly that, so far from his imagining that there was anything ridiculous or funny about his story, he regarded it as a really important matter, and admired its two heroes as men of transcendent genius in *finesse*. I let him go on in his own way, and never interrupted him once.

"*Rev. Leonidas W. H'm, Reverend Le—well*, there was a feller here once by the name of *Jim Smiley*, in the winter of '49—or maybe it was the spring of '50—I don't recollect exactly, somehow though what makes me think it was one or the other is because I remember the big flume war finished when he first come to the camp; but anyway, he was the curiousest man about always betting on anything that turned up you ever see, if he could get anybody to bet on the other side; and if he couldn't he'd change sides. Any way that suited the other man would suit *him*—any way just so's he got a bet, *he* was satisfied. But still he was lucky, uncommon lucky; he most always come out winner. He was always ready and laying for a chance; there couldn't be no solit'ry thing mentioned but the

feller'd offer to bet on it, and take ary side you please, as I was just telling you. If there was a horse race, you'd find him flush or you'd find him busted at the end of it; if there was a dog-fight, he'd bet on it; if there was a cat-fight, he'd bet on it; if there was a chicken-fight, he'd bet on it; why, if there was two birds setting on a fence, he would bet you which one would fly first; or if there was a cam meeting, he would be there reg'lar to bet on Parson Walker, which he judged to be the best exhorter about here, and so he was too, and a good man. If he even see a straddle-bug start to go anywheres, he would bet you how long it would take him to get to—to wherever he was going to, and if you took him up, he would foller that straddle-bug to Mexico but what he would find out where he was bound for and how long he was on the road. Lots of the boys here has seen that Smiley, and can tell you about him. Why, it never made no difference to *him*—he'd bet on *any* thing—the dangdest feller. Parson Walker's wife laid very sick once, for a good while, and it seemed as if they warn't going to save her, but one morning he come in, and Smiley up and asked him how she was, and he said she was considerable better—thank the Lord for his inf'nite mercy—and coming on so smart that with the blessing of Prov'dence she'd get well yet; and Smiley, before he thought, says, 'Well, I'll resk two and-a-half she don't anyway.'

“Thish-yer Smiley had a mare—the boys called her the fifteen-minute nag, but that was only in fun, you know, because of course she was faster than that—and he used to win money on that horse, for as she was so slow and always had the asthma, or the distemper, or the consumption, or something of the kind. They used to give her two or three hundred yards' start, and then pass her under way; but always at the fag end of the race she'd get excited and desperate like, and come cavorting and straddling up and scattering her legs around limber, sometimes in the air, and sometimes out to one side among the fences, and kicking up m-o-r-e dust and raising m-o-r-e racket with her coughing and sneezing and blowing her nose—and always fetch up at the stand just about a neck ahead, as near as you could cipher it down.

“And he had a little small bull-pup, that to look at him you'd think he warn't worth a cent but to s around and look ornery and lay for a chance to steal something. But as soon as money was up on him he was a different dog; his under-jaw'd begin to stick out like the fo'castle of a steamboat, and his teeth would uncover and shine like the furnaces. And a dog might tackle him and bully-rag him, and bite him, and throw him over his shoulder two or three times, and Andrew Jackson—which was the name of the pup—Andrew Jackson would never let on but what *he* was satisfied, and hadn't expected nothing else—and the bets being doubled and doubled on the other side all the time, till the money was all up; and then all of a sudden he would grab that other dog jest by the j'int of his hind leg and freeze to it—not chaw, you understand, but only just grip and hang on till they throwed up the sponge if it was a year. Smiley always come out winner on that pup, till he harnessed a dog once that didn't have no hind legs, because they'd been sawed off in a circular saw, and when the thing had gone along far enough, and the money was all up, and he come to make a snatch for his pet holt, he see in a minute how he'd been imposed on, and how the other dog had him in the door, so to speak, and he 'peared surprised, and then he looked sorter discouraged-like, and didn't try no more to win the fight, and so he got shucked out bad. He give Smiley a look, as much as to say his heart was broke, and it was *his* fault, for putting up a dog that hadn't no hind legs for him to take holt of, which was his main dependence in a fight, and then he limped off a piece and laid down and died. It was a good pup, worth that Andrew Jackson, and would have made a name for hisself if he'd lived, for the stuff was in him, and he had genius—I know it, because he hadn't no opportunities to speak of, and it don't stand

reason that a dog could make such a fight as he could under them circumstances if he hadn't no talent. It always makes me feel sorry when I think of that last fight of his'n, and the way it turned out.

“Well, thish-yer Smiley had rat-tarriers, and chicken cocks, and tomcats and all them kind o' things, till you couldn't rest, and you couldn't fetch nothing for him to bet on but he'd match you. He ketched a frog one day, and took him home, and said he cal'lated to educate him; and so he never done nothing for three months but set in his back yard and learn that frog to jump. And you bet you he *do* learn him, too. He'd give him a little punch behind, and the next minute you'd see that frog whirlin' in the air like a doughnut—see him turn one summerset, or maybe a couple, if he got a good start, and come down flat-footed and all right, like a cat. He got him up so in the matter of ketching flies, and kep' him in practice so constant, that he'd nail a fly every time as fur as he could see him. Smiley said all a frog wanted was education, and he could do 'most anything—and I believe him. Why, I've seen him set Dan'l Webster down here on this floor—Dan'l Webster was the name of the frog—and sin' out, ‘Flies, Dan'l, flies!’ and quicker'n you could wink he'd spring straight up and snake a fly off the counter there, and flop down on the floor ag'in as solid as a gob of mud, and fall to scratching the side of his head with his hind foot as indifferent as if he hadn't no idea he'd been doin' any more any frog might do. You never see a frog so modest and straightfor'ard as he was, for all he was so gifted. And when it come to fair and square jumping on a dead level, he could get over more ground in one straddle than any animal of his breed you ever see. Jumping on a dead level was his strong suit, you understand; and when it come to that, Smiley would ante up money on him as long as he had red. Smiley was monstrous proud of his frog, and well he might be, for fellers that had traveled and been everywheres all said he laid over any frog that ever *they* see.

“Well, Smiley kep' the beast in a little lattice box, and he used to fetch him down-town sometime and lay for a bet. One day a feller—a stranger in the camp, he was—come acrost him with his box, and says:

“‘What might it be that you've got in the box?’

“And Smiley says, sorter indifferent-like, ‘It might be a parrot, or it might be a canary, maybe, but it ain't—it's only just a frog.’

“And the feller took it, and looked at it careful, and turned it round this way and that, and says, ‘H'm—so 'tis. Well, what's *he* good for?’

“‘Well,’ Smiley says, easy and careless, ‘he's good enough for *one* thing, I should judge—he can outjump any frog in Calaveras County.’

“The feller took the box again, and took another long, particular look, and give it back to Smiley and says, very deliberate, ‘Well,’ he says, ‘I don't see no p'int about that frog that's any better'n any other frog.’

“‘Maybe you don't,’ Smiley says. ‘Maybe you understand frogs and maybe you don't understand 'em; maybe you've had experience, and maybe you ain't only a amateur, as it were. Anyways, I've got *my* opinion, and I'll resk forty dollars that he can outjump any frog in Calaveras County.’

“And the feller studied a minute, and then says, kinder sad-like, ‘Well, I’m only a stranger here, and I ain’t got no frog; but if I had a frog, I’d bet you.’”

“And then Smiley says, ‘That’s all right—that’s all right—if you’ll hold my box a minute, I’ll give you a frog.’ And so the feller took the box, and put up his forty dollars along with Smiley’s and set down to wait.

“So he set there a good while thinking and thinking to himself, and then he got the frog out and prized his mouth open and took a teaspoon and filled him full of quail-shot—filled him pretty near to his chin—and set him on the floor. Smiley he went to the swamp and slopped around in the mud for a long time, and finally he ketched a frog, and fetched him in, and give him to this feller, and says:

“‘Now, if you’re ready, set him alongside of Dan’l, with his fore paws just even with Dan’l’s, and I’ll give the word.’ Then he says, ‘One—two—three—*git!*’ and him and the feller touched up the frog from behind, and the new frog hopped off lively, but Dan’l give a heave, and hysted up his shoulder—so—like a Frenchman, but it warn’t no use—he couldn’t budge; he was planted as solid as a church and he couldn’t no more stir than if he was anchored out. Smiley was a good deal surprised, and he was disgusted too, but he didn’t have no idea what the matter was, of course.

“The feller took the money and started away; and when he was going out at the door, he sort of jerked his thumb over his shoulder—so—at Dan’l, and says again, very deliberate, ‘Well,’ he says, ‘don’t see no p’int about that frog that’s any better’n any other frog.’”

“Smiley he stood scratching his head and looking down at Dan’l a long time, and at last he says, ‘I do wonder what in the nation that frog throw’d off for—I wonder if there ain’t something the matter with him—he ’pears to look mighty baggy, somehow.’ And he ketched Dan’l by the nap of the neck and hefted him, and says, ‘Why blame my cats if he don’t weigh five pound!’ and turned him upside down and he belched out a double handful of shot. And then he see how it was, and he was the maddest man—he set the frog down and took out after the feller, but he never ketched him. And—”

[Here Simon Wheeler heard his name called from the front yard, and got up to see what was wanted.] And turning to me as he moved away, he said: “Just set where you are, stranger, and rest easy—I ain’t going to be gone a second.”

But, by your leave, I did not think that a continuation of the history of the enterprising vagabond *Jim Smiley* would be likely to afford me much information concerning the Rev. *Leonidas W. Smiley*, and so I started away.

At the door I met the sociable Wheeler returning, and he buttonholed me and recommenced:

“Well, thish-yer Smiley had a yaller one-eyed cow that didn’t have no tail, only just a short stump like a bannanner, and—”

However, lacking both time and inclination, I did not wait to hear about the afflicted cow, but took my leave.



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## THE STORY OF THE BAD LITTLE BOY

ONCE THERE was a bad little boy whose name was Jim—though, if you will notice, you will find that bad little boys are nearly always called James in your Sunday-school books. It was strange, but still it was true, that this one was called Jim.

He didn't have any sick mother, either—a sick mother who was pious and had the consumption, and would be glad to lie down in the grave and be at rest but for the strong love she bore her boy, and the anxiety she felt that the world might be harsh and cold toward him when she was gone. Most bad boys in the Sunday books are named James, and have sick mothers, who teach them to say, "Now, I lay me down," etc., and sing them to sleep with sweet, plaintive voices, and then kiss them good night, and kneel down by the bedside and weep. But it was different with this fellow. He was named Jim, and there wasn't anything the matter with his mother—no consumption, nor anything of that kind. She was rather stout than otherwise, and she was not pious; moreover, she was not anxious on Jim's account. She said if he were to break his neck it wouldn't be much loss. She always spanked Jim to sleep, and she never kissed him good night; on the contrary, she boxed his ears when she was ready to leave him.

Once this little bad boy stole the key of the pantry, and slipped in there and helped himself to some jam, and filled up the vessel with tar, so that his mother would never know the difference; but all at once a terrible feeling didn't come over him, and something didn't seem to whisper to him, "Is it right to disobey my mother? Isn't it sinful to do this? Where do bad little boys go who gobble up their good kind mother's jam?" and then he didn't kneel down all alone and promise never to be wicked any more, and rise up with a light, happy heart, and go and tell his mother all about it, and beg her forgiveness, and be blessed by her with tears of pride and thankfulness in her eyes. No; that is the way with all other bad boys in the books; but it happened otherwise with this Jim, strangely enough. He ate that jam, and said it was bully, in his sinful, vulgar way; and he put in the tar, and said that was bully also, and laughed, and observed "that the old woman would get up and snort" when she found it out, and when she did find it out, he denied knowing anything about it, and she whipped him severely, and he did the crying himself. Everything about this boy was curious—everything turned out different with him from the way it does to the bad Jameses in the books.

Once he climbed up in Farmer Acorn's apple trees to steal apples, and the limb didn't break, and he didn't fall and break his arm, and get torn by the farmer's great dog, and then languish on a sickbed for weeks, and repent and become good. Oh, no; he stole as many apples as he wanted and came down all right; and he was all ready for the dog, too, and knocked him endways with a brick when he came to tear him. It was very strange—nothing like it ever happened in those mild little books with marble

backs, and with pictures in them of men with swallow-tailed coats and bell-crowned hats, and pantaloons that are short in the legs, and women with the waists of their dresses under their arms, and no hoops on. Nothing like it in any of the Sunday-school books.

Once he stole the teacher's penknife, and, when he was afraid it would be found out and he would get whipped, he slipped it into George Wilson's cap—poor Widow Wilson's son, the moral boy, the good little boy of the village, who always obeyed his mother, and never told an untruth, and was fond of his lessons, and infatuated with Sunday-school. And when the knife dropped from the cap, and poor George hung his head and blushed, as if in conscious guilt, and the grieved teacher charged the teacher upon him, and was just in the very act of bringing the switch down upon his trembling shoulders, a white-haired, improbable justice of the peace did not suddenly appear in their midst, and strike a dignified attitude and say, "Spare this noble boy—there stands the cowering culprit! I was passing the school door at recess, and, unseen myself, I saw the theft committed!" And then Jim didn't get whaled, and the venerable justice didn't read the tearful school a homily, and take George by the hand and say such a boy deserved to be exalted, and then tell him to come and make his home with him, and sweep out the office, and make fires, and run errands, and chop wood, and study law, and help his wife with her household labors, and have all the balance of the time to play, and get forty cents a month, and be as happy. No; it would have happened that way in the books, but it didn't happen that way to Jim. No meddling old clam of a justice dropped in to make trouble, and so the model boy George got thrashed, and Jim was glad of it because, you know, Jim hated moral boys. Jim said he was "down on the milksops." Such was the coarse language of this bad, neglected boy.

But the strangest thing that ever happened to Jim was the time he went boating on Sunday, and didn't get drowned, and that other time that he got caught out in the storm when he was fishing on Sunday, and didn't get struck by lightning. Why, you might look, and look, all through the Sunday-school books from now till next Christmas, and you would never come across anything like this. Oh no; you would find that all the bad boys who go boating on Sunday invariably get drowned; and all the bad boys who get caught out in storms when they are fishing on Sunday infallibly get struck by lightning. Boats with bad boys in them always upset on Sunday, and it always storms when bad boys go fishing on the Sabbath. How this Jim ever escaped is a mystery to me.

This Jim bore a charmed life—that must have been the way of it. Nothing could hurt him. He even gave the elephant in the menagerie a plug of tobacco, and the elephant didn't knock the top of his head off with his trunk. He browsed around the cupboard after essence of peppermint, and didn't make the mistake and drink *aqua fortis*. He stole his father's gun and went hunting on the Sabbath, and didn't shoot three or four of his fingers off. He struck his little sister on the temple with his fist when he was angry, and she didn't linger in pain through long summer days, and die with sweet words of forgiveness upon her lips that redoubled the anguish of his breaking heart. No; she got over it. He ran off and went to sea at last, and didn't come back and find himself sad and alone in the world, his loved ones sleeping in the quiet churchyard, and the vine-embowered home of his boyhood tumbled down and gone to decay. Ah, no; he came home as drunk as a piper, and got into the station-house the first thing.

And he grew up and married, and raised a large family, and brained them all with an ax one night, and got wealthy by all manner of cheating and rascality; and now he is the infernalst wickedest scoundrel in his native village, and is universally respected, and belongs to the legislature.

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