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Opening Voiceover (378)

House lights down. Theater is dark.

Sounds of the night and the river come up slowly. (sounds: crickets)

Starlight appears overhead.

(voiceover)

He was born on the 30th of November, 1835 in Florida, Missouri, just a few months after the appearance of Halley's Comet. Samuel was the sixth child of John Marshall and Jane Clemens. When he was four years old, his family moved to Hannibal, Missouri on the west bank of the Mississippi River. He lived an idyllic boy's life, pretty much the one you read about in The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, until he was 12. That was the year his father died and Samuel left school to work as an errand boy and apprentice typesetter, remaining in Hannibal until he was 18. Then for the next four years he worked as a journeyman typesetter in New York, St. Louis, Philadelphia, and Cincinnati.

In February of 1857, Samuel left Cincinnati on the steamboat Paul Jones, and convinced the captain to train him as a Mississippi river pilot. Just a year later he was officially licensed to pilot steamboats to and from St. Louis and New Orleans. He worked on that 1245 miles of river until he knew every bend and every island, serving on a dozen boats until the outbreak of the Civil War. He joined the Marion Rangers, a volunteer unit with Confederate sympathies, but quit two weeks later to accompany his brother Orion to the Nevada Territory where Orion served as the territorial secretary. Shortly thereafter he decided to prospect for silver in California.

Clearly, Samuel Clemens was better at letters than he was at prospecting, and within a few months he found work as a reporter for the Virginia City Territorial Enterprise, where he first used the pen name, Mark Twain. He also served as the Nevada correspondent for the San Francisco Morning Call. From that time on he made his living writing and lecturing, publishing his first book, The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County in May of 1867.

I suppose now that I have mentioned Mark Twain, he will be anxious to present himself and handle his own introduction. That IS his habit. So if you will turn your attention to the stage, I'm certain he will appear shortly.

Introduction and Compliments (334)

Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish to present to you a man whose great learning and veneration for truth are only exceeded by his high moral character, and majestic presence. I refer in these vague, general terms to myself. I consider introductions unnecessary, but if it's the custom to have them, I prefer to do the act myself, so I can rely on getting in all the facts. I was born modest, but it wore off.

I was once presented to an audience by a local attorney who stood onstage with his hands in his pockets. He introduced me as Mr. Mark Twain, a humorist who is really funny, and a rare creature indeed. I was nearly struck speechless by this complimentary thunderbolt. I had rarely heard a compliment so beautifully phrased, or so richly deserved. But it occurred to me that we had a much rarer creature in our midst than a humorist who was really funny. I had just been introduced by a lawyer who kept his hands in his own pockets. But we do like compliments, don't we? All of us. Humorists. Burglars. Congressmen. All of us in the trade. And if you can't get a compliment in any other way, you can always pay one to yourself. I do that often. In fact, I can do it right now. I can state unequivocally that there are two men in the world who are most remarkable; Kipling is one, and I am the other. He knows all that can be known, and I know the rest.

I once received a compliment from a young girl in Montana which came to me indirectly. She was in a room in which there was a large photograph of me on the wall. After staring at it intently for a long period of time, she is reported to have said "We have a picture of John the Baptist, too! Only ours has more trimmin's". I suppose she was referring to the halo.

Smoking and Moderation (524)

Well now ladies and gentlemen, I hope you won't mind if I smoke. I believe there is some commandment against smoking during insurrections of this dignified nature. But I'm working to get it removed. Mind you, I have no objection to abstinence, so long as it does not harm anybody. I've practiced it myself on occasion. I make it a rule never to smoke when asleep. Not that I care about moderation myself, but I do it as an example to others, and to prove that I am not a slave to the habit. Why I can give it up whenever I want to. I've done it a thousand times.

The first time I gave it up was when I was a boy, about ten or eleven. They told me I would shorten my life by ten years by smoking, so I got scared and gave it up one day. For about two or three hours. Then I finally decided that decade wouldn't hardly be worth living if it didn't have any smoking in it, so that was the end of that.

Another time I gave it up on the advice of my doctor. I'd been confined to my bed for several days with the lumbago. My doctor finally said to me, "Look here, my remedies haven't got a chance, considering what they have to fight besides the lumbago: You smoke extravagantly. You eat all manner of things that don't agree with each others' company. You drink two scotches every night, don't you?"

"Well yes, I do, but I only drink them as a preventative of toothache. I've never had the toothache. I don't ever INTEND to have it".

"Well" he said, "that's alright, but we can't make any progress that way. You've got to moderate those things."

I said, "I can't do it, Doctor."

He says, "Why can't you?"

"Why," I said, "Because I lack the willpower. I can cut 'em off entirely, but I can't moderate 'em".

Well he said that would answer so I cut off all those things for two days and two nights. At the end of that time the lumbago was discouraged and left me. I was a well man again. So I gave thanks and took to these delicacies again.

Well then I had occasion to recommend this remedy to an elderly lady friend of mine. She'd gone down and down to the point where medicines no longer had any helpful effect on her. I told her I could cure her in a week. I said she must give up smoking, and drinking, and swearing, and eating all manner of foods which don't agree with each others' company and by the end of the week the medicines would take affect again and she'd be back on her feet.

"Why " she said "I can't give up all those things because I've never done any of them."

So there it was. She'd neglected her habits. She was a sinking ship with no freight to throw overboard.

I guess one or two little bad habits might have saved her. She was just a moral pauper.

Horses (656)

When I was a young man I went west on the overland stage, to seek my fortune in the silver land of the Nevada Territory. I eventually settled down in Virginia City, which is a good place for a man to lose his religion, if he had any left by the time he got there. There were wide open gambling places. Murders. Street fights. Riots. A whiskey mill every sixteen steps. Half a dozen jails and some talk of building a church. It was no place for a presbyterian, and I did not remain one very long. I eventually left Virginia City for San Francisco, where I became unemployed. But then lady luck smiled on me and I was given a post on the Sacramento Union as their special correspondent to the Sandwich Islands. Our first stop was Honolulu, and I was naturally anxious to fully explore this dreamy and enchanted place. They told me the best way to do this was to hire a horse.

Well, I had had some experience with these unpredictable creatures before. In Carson City I had one time made the mistake of buying a genuine Mexican plug, on the advice of a man I later found out was the auctioneer's brother. As soon as I mounted that horse, he put all his feet together. In a bunch. Lowered his back and shot me straight into the air, four or five feet. I came down and lit in the saddle, and shot up again. This time when I came down, I landed nearly on the high pommel, which was far too much variety for me. I decided to get off. But I was in the air again before I could decide which way to go. Well while I was up there this time, someone shouted out "WHOA. Sin tranzado!" I was in no position to argue that point. So I came down and when I arrived, the genuine Mexican plug was gone. I dug myself out of the ground, and made up my mind that if the auctioneer's brother's funeral occurred while I in Carson City, I would postpone all other recreations and attend.

Well experiences like these will increase a man's respect for dumb animals. So in Honolulu I told them I would prefer a safe horse to a fast one. I asked for an excessively gentle horse. One with no spirit whatsoever. A lame one if they had such. Well they showed me an animal that looked as if it wanted to lean up against something. So I chose him. And he went along peaceably enough. But so absorbed in meditation! It began to worry me. I thought to myself, "This horse is planning some outrage. No horse ever thought over a subject so profoundly as this one." Well the more the thing preyed on my mind, the more uneasy I got. So finally I dismounted to see if there was anything wild in his eyes. I can't tell you what a relief it was to find he was only asleep.

So about noon I spurred my animated trance along a stretch of sandy beach, where I had noticed a bevy of nude young native ladies, bathing in the sea. This was the sort of local color I was after. For my newspaper. So I went down there and sat on their clothes. To keep them from being stolen. And begged them to come out, for it seemed to me that the sea was rising, and I was satisfied that they were running some risk. But they went right on with their sport, swimming races and splashing about. It was a heart-warming spectacle. When I decided it was time to leave, I turned around and discovered that the horse was asleep again. Which just goes to show that there is some difference between the man and the horse. You cannot rely on a horse to gather news.

An Excerpt from Huckleberry Finn (2104)

I imagine some of you are familiar with the stories of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn. I think the most important of all of those events is the parallel escape of Huck and Jim on their raft. I could read some of it to you, but I think it would be better if Huck himself told you his own story, or at least the one I've asked him to share.

YOU don't know about me without you have read a book by the name of The Adventures of Tom Sawyer. That book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mainly. There was things which he stretched, but mainly he told the truth. That is nothing. I never seen anybody but lied one time or another, without it was Aunt Polly, or the Widow Douglas.

The Widow Douglas she took me for her son, and allowed she would sivilize me; The widow she cried over me, and called me a poor lost lamb, and she called me a lot of other names, too, but she never meant no harm by it. She put me in them new clothes again, and I couldn't do nothing but sweat and sweat, and feel all cramped up.

Pretty soon I wanted to smoke, and asked the widow to let me. But she wouldn't. She said it was a mean practice and wasn't clean, and I must try to not do it any more. That is just the way with some people. They get down on a thing when they don't know nothing about it. And she took snuff, too; of course that was all right, because she done it herself.

Her sister, Miss Watson, a tolerable slim old maid, with goggles on, had just come to live with her, and took a set at me now with a spelling-book. She worked me middling hard for about an hour, and then the widow made her ease up. I couldn't stand it much longer. Then for an hour it was deadly dull, and I was fidgety. Miss Watson would say, "Don't put your feet up there, Huckleberry;" and "Don't scrunch up like that, Huckleberry--set up straight;" and pretty soon she would say, "Why don't you try to behave?" Then she told me all about the bad place, and I said I wished I was there. She got mad then, but I didn't mean no harm. All I wanted was to go somewhere; all I wanted was a change, I warn't particular. She said it was wicked to say what I said; said she wouldn't say it for the whole world; she was going to live so as to go to the good place. Well, I couldn't see no advantage in going where she was going, so I made up my mind I wouldn't try for it. But I never said so, because it would only make trouble, and wouldn't do no good.

One night I lit my candle and went up to my room and that night there sat pap--his own self! He tore into me something awful for dressin up and putting on airs and goin to school.

Then he took a dollar offa me and went down town to get some whisky; Along in the spring he catched me one day, and took me up the river about three mile to a little log cabin over on the Illinois shore and I never got no chance to run off.

By and by pap got too handy with his hick'ry, and I couldn't stand it. I was all over welts. He was meanest when he got to drinkin, which was most of the time. Once after he'd been drunk over in town, and laid in the gutter all night, he come back and says how folks was saying there was gonna be a trial to get me away from him and give me to the Widow for my guardian. Then he got to cussin and saying he'd like to see the widow get me. And then he took a swig or two and got sorta warmed up. Whenever his liquor begun to work he most always went for the govement, this time he says:

"Call this a govement! why, just look at it and see what it's like. Here's the law a-standing ready to take a man's son away from him--a man's own son, which he has had all the trouble and all the anxiety and all the expense of raising. Yes, just as that man has got that son raised at last, and ready to go to work and begin to do sumthin' for HIM and give him a rest, the law up and goes for him. And they call THAT govement! That ain't all, nuther.

"Oh, yes, this is a wonderful govement, wonderful. Why, looky here. There was a freed slave there from Ohio--a mulatter, most as white as a white man. He had the whitest shirt on you ever see, too, and the shiniest hat; and there ain't a man in that town that's got as fine clothes as what he had; and he had a gold watch and chain, and a silver-headed cane. And what do you think? They said he was a p'fessor in a college, and could talk all kinds of languages, and knowed everything. And that ain't the wust. They said he could VOTE when he was at home. Well, that let me out. Thinks I, what is the country a-coming to? It was 'lection day, and I was just about to go and vote myself if I warn't too drunk to get there; but when they told me there was a State in this country where they'd let that freed slave vote, I drawed out. I says I'll never vote agin. Them's the very words I said; they all heard me; and the country may rot for all me--I'll never vote agin as long as I live."

Pap was agoing on so he never noticed where his old limber legs was taking him to, so he went head over heels over the tub of salt pork and barked both shins, and the rest of his speech was all the hottest kind of language-- He hopped around the cabin considerable, first on one leg and then on the other, holding first one shin and then the other one, and at last he let out with his left foot all of a sudden and fetched the tub a rattling kick. But it warn't good judgment, because that was the boot that had a couple of his toes leaking out of the front end of it. But by and by, I found my chance and run off. And it warn't long before I run into Miss Watson's Jim!

"How do you come to be here, Jim, and how'd you get here?"

He looked pretty uneasy, and didn't say nothing for a minute. Then he says:

"Maybe I better not tell."

"Why, Jim?"

"Well, dey's reasons. But you wouldn't tell on me ef I uz to tell you, would you, Huck?"

"Blamed if I would, Jim."

"Well, I b'lieve you, Huck. I--I RUN OFF."

"Jim!"

"But mind, you said you wouldn't tell--you know you said you wouldn't tell, Huck."

"Well, I did. I said I wouldn't, and I'll stick to it. Honest I will. People would call me a low-down Abolitionist and despise me for keeping mum--but that don't make no difference. I ain't a-going to tell, and I ain't a-going back there, anyways."

Jim and me we found us a section of log raft, and we went off floatin down that river. We'd run nights and laid up daytimes. We just let that raft float wherever the current wanted it to. It's lovely to live on a raft. We'd lay on our backs and smoke our pipes, looking way into the sky. Not a cloud in it. Sky looks ever so deep when you lay on your back in the moon shine. I never knowed it before. And how far a body can hear on the water on such nights. And once or maybe twice a night we'd see a steamboat slipping along in the dark, and every now and again she'd belch a whole world of sparks up outta her chimney, and they would rain down in the river. It'd look awful pretty. Then she'd turn a corner and her lights would wink out, and she'd leave the river still again.

I'd go to sleep and sometimes Jim wouldn't wake me when it was my turn to stand watch. He often done that. Then when I woke up along about daybreak, he'd be settin there with his head down betwixt his knees moanin and mournin. I never took no notice, nor let on, but I knowed what it was for. He was thinkin about his wife and children way up yonder, and he was feelin low and homesick, cuz ya see he had never been away from home before in his life, and I do reckon he cared just as much for his people as white folks does for their'n. It don't seem natural, but I reckon it's so.

We kept lookin for Cairo, down at the foot of Illinois where the Ohio river comes in. We said we'd sell the raft and get on a steamboat, and go way up the Ohio amongst the free states and then be outta trouble. Jim he said it made him feel all trembly and feverish to be so close to freedom. He said how the first thing he'd do when he got to a free state was he would go to work saving up money and never spend a single cent, and when he got enough he would buy his wife, which was owned on a farm close to where Miss Watson lived; and then they would both work to buy the two children, and if their master wouldn't sell them, he'd get an Ab'litionist to go and steal them.

It most froze me to hear such talk. Why Jim he wouldn't ever dared to talk such talk in his life before, coming right out flat-footed and saying he would steal his children--children that belonged to a man I didn't even know; a man that hadn't ever done me no harm. You see, I'd begun to get it in my head that he was 'most free. And who was to blame for it? Well, me. It hadn't ever come down to me before -- what this thing was that I was doin. My conscience got to stirrin me up hotter n hotter. Finally I says to it, "Aw let up on me, will ya? I'll paddle ashore at the first light and tell." I went to looking out sharp for light, and by and by one showed.

Pretty soon Jim sings out: "We's safe, Huck, we's safe! Dat's de good ole Cairo at las', I jis knows it!"

I says "I'll take the canoe and go and see, Jim. It mightn't be, you know."

He jumped and got the canoe ready, and put his old coat in the bottom for me to set on, and give me the paddle; and I shoved off. When I was bout fifty yards off, Jim says:

"Dah you goes, de ole true Huck; de on'y white genlman dat ever kep' his promise to ole Jim."

Well, I just felt sick. There I was paddlin off all in a sweat to tell on him, but when he says that it just kinda seemed to take the tuck right outta me. And I warn't right down certain whether I was glad I started, or whether I weren't.

But I says, I GOT to do it--I can't get OUT of it. Right then along comes a skiff with two men in it with guns, and they stopped and I stopped. One of them says:

"What's that yonder?"

"A piece of a raft," I says.

"Do you belong on it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Any men on it?"

"Only one, sir."

"Well, there's five slaves run off to-night up yonder, above the head of the bend. Is your man white or black?"

"He's white."

They went off. I knowed I done wrong, and I seen it warn't no use for me to try to learn to do right; a body that don't get STARTED right when he's little just ain't got no show. Then I thought a minute, and says to myself, hold on; s'pose I'd a done right and give Jim up, would I feel better than what I do now? No, says I, I'd feel bad--I'd feel just the same way I do right now. Well, then, says I, what's the use in learning to do right when it's troublesome to do right and it ain't no trouble to do wrong, and the wages is just the same?

I was stuck. I couldn't answer that.

Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven (2150)

It was just about 25 years after the Adventures of Huckleberry Finn was published that Halley's comet made its elliptical curtain call. I calculated that there was little chance I could wait for the next one, and so took my place aboard. I had written an anticipatory piece about that expected journey, which I published in 1905. It is called Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven, and I'll share a bit of it with you now to wrap up the first part of our evening together:

When I had been dead about thirty years I begun to get a little anxious. Mind you, I had been whizzing through space all that time, like a comet. LIKE a comet! Why, Peters, I laid over the lot of them! Of course there warn't any of them going my way, as a steady thing, you know, because they travel in a long circle like the loop of a lasso, whereas I was pointed as straight as a dart for the Hereafter; but I happened on one every now and then that was going my way for an hour or so, and then we had a bit of a brush together.

Well, some of you may remember my encounter with one of Satan's finest and largest transport ships. It started well enough, and I gained on him for a bit. But then I took it upon myself to thumb my nose at the captain and crew, and they jettisoned the cargo of brimstone they were carrying for their Boss, and left me like I was standing still. I regretted teasing that captain, because right up until that moment I had bragging rights around having defeated the bully of the firmament. They left me like I was lashed to the pier. My journey continued for quite some time. Time which was hard to reckon, it always being night out there.

But then one night as I was sailing along, I discovered a tremendous, long row of blinking lights away on the horizon ahead. As I approached, they begun to tower and swell and look like mighty furnaces. Says I to myself –

"By George, I've arrived at last - and at the wrong place, just as I expected!"

Then I fainted. I don't know how long I was insensible, but it must have been a good while, for, when I came to, the darkness was all gone and there was the loveliest sunshine and the balmiest, fragrantest air in its place. And there was such a marvelous world spread out before me - such a glowing, beautiful, bewitching country. The things I took for furnaces were gates, miles high, made all of flashing jewels, and they pierced a wall of solid gold that you couldn't see the top of, nor yet the end of, in either direction. I was pointed straight for one of these gates, and a-coming like a house afire. Now I noticed that the skies were black with millions of people, pointed for those gates. What a roar they made, rushing through the air! The ground was as thick as ants with people, too - billions of them, I judge.

I lit. I drifted up to a gate with a swarm of people, and when it was my turn the head clerk says, in a business-like way

"Well, quick! Where are you from?"

I started with San Francisco, and got no light of recognition. I proceeded to make it easier for this clerk to recognize me and my former home by offering up California, and you can believe me or not, but he'd never heard of the great state. So I gave up accuracy and told him I was from America – The United States of America. His face was still a blank. So I finally told him I was from the world.

"WHICH world?" he demanded, as if.

"Well, THE world, of course!" I countered.

It took some time but by the time I got to explaining about the Sun and Mars and Jupiter, he recollect ed that a fellow from Jupiter had arrived at this gate by mistake eight or nine hundred years ago.

"Did you come straight here?" he asked. I thought I might try to fool him, but then I blushed.

The truth of the matter was discovered soon enough, and the clerk ventured that I had missed the proper gate for people from my little planet, an obscure place they referred to as Wart, by at least a million leagues

He called the under clerk that had examined the map, and he gave me general directions. I thanked him and started; but he says -

"Wait a minute; it is millions of leagues from here. Go outside and stand on that red wishing-carpet; shut your eyes, hold your breath, and wish yourself there."

I hopped onto the carpet and held my breath and shut my eyes and wished I was in the booking-office of my own section. The very next instant a voice I knew sung out in a business kind of a way -

"A harp and a hymn-book, pair of wings and a halo, size 13, for Cap'n Eli Stormfield, of San Francisco! - make him out a clean bill of health, and let him in."

I opened my eyes. Sure enough, it was a Pi yute Indian I used to know in Tulare County; mighty good fellow - I remembered being at his funeral. He was powerful glad to see me, and you may make up your mind I was just as glad to see him, and feel that I was in the right kind of a heaven at last.

Just as far as your eye could reach, there was swarms of clerks, running and bustling around, tricking out thousands of Yanks and Mexicans and English and Arabs, and all sorts of people in their new outfits; and when they gave me my kit and I put on my halo and took a look in the glass, I could have jumped over a house for joy, I was so happy. "Now THIS is something like!" says I. "Now," says I, "I'm all right - show me a cloud."

When I found myself perched on a cloud, with a million other people, I never felt so good in my life. Says I, "Now this is according to the promises; I've been having my doubts, but now I am in heaven, sure enough." I gave my palm branch a wave or two, for luck, and then I tautened up my harp-strings and struck in. Well, Peters, you can't imagine anything like the row we made. It was grand to listen to, and made a body thrill all over, but there was considerable many tunes going on at once, and that was a drawback to the harmony. By and by I quit performing, and judged I'd take a rest. I noticed an old fellow who had been sitting next to me through the entire experiment. He had been waiting for me to stop my strumming to ask me a question.

"Are you glad to be here?"

Says I, "Old man, I'll be frank with you. This AIN'T just as near my idea of bliss as I thought it was going to be, when I used to go to church."

Says he, "What do you say to knocking off and calling it half a day?"

"That's me," says I. "I never wanted to get off watch so bad in my life."

So we started. Millions were coming to the cloud-bank all the time, happy and hosannahing; millions were leaving it all the time, looking mighty quiet, I tell you. We laid for the new-comers, and pretty soon I'd got them to hold all my things a minute, and then I was a free man again and most outrageously happy. It warn't long before I ran across another familiar face, old Sandy McWilliams, who had been dead a fair while, and stopped to have a talk with him. Says I -

"Now tell me - is this to go on forever? Ain't there anything else for a change?"

Says he -

"Now you just remember this - heaven is as blissful and lovely as it can be; but it's just the busiest place you ever heard of. There ain't any idle people here after the first day. Singing hymns and waving palm branches through all eternity is pretty when you hear about it in the pulpit, but it's as poor a way to put in valuable time as a body could contrive. It would just make a heaven of warbling ignoramuses, don't you see? Eternal Rest sounds comforting in the pulpit, too. Well, you try it once, and see how heavy time will hang on your hands. Why, Stormfield, a man like you, that had been active and stirring all his life, would go mad in six months in a heaven where he hadn't anything to do. Heaven is the very last place to come to REST in, - and don't you be afraid to bet on that!"

"Sandy, I'm as glad to hear it as I thought I'd be sorry. I'm glad I come, now."

Says he - "Cap'n, ain't you pretty physically tired?"

Says I - "Sandy, it ain't any name for it! I'm dog-tired."

"Just so - just so. You've earned a good sleep, and you'll get it. You've earned a good appetite, and you'll enjoy your dinner. It's the same here as it is on earth - you've got to earn a thing, square and honest, before you enjoy it. You can't enjoy first and earn afterwards. But there's this difference, here: you can choose your own occupation, and all the powers of heaven will be put forth to help you make a success of it, if you do your level best. The shoe-maker on earth that had the soul of a poet in him won't have to make shoes here."

Says I, "It's the sensiblest heaven I've heard of yet, Sandy, though it's about as different from the one I was brought up on as a live princess is different from her own wax figger."

Along in the first months I knocked around about the Kingdom, making friends and looking at the country, and finally settled down in a pretty likely region, to have a rest before taking another start. I went on making acquaintances and gathering up information.

I had settled myself into a modest but comfortable cottage alongside a great slow-moving river. I'm not sure how that river appeared to my neighbors, but to me it was an idealized version of my old home in Hannibal. After a period of time during which I just enjoyed the scenery, and met a few neighbors, and spent my evenings smoking by the river, I began to consider what I might choose as my heavenly occupation. I suppose if I had wished it, I could have conjured a proper steamboat, and returned to my former life as a riverboat captain. But here in Heaven, travel was as simple as wishing you were somewhere, and suddenly there you were. I don't suspect there was too much trade on the river. Just as being a grocer or a shopkeeper would only suffice if your joy was in the being, more than the doing. I

suppose there were folks here who still went to market and cooked their own meals, that being their form of pleasure. But for me, sitting by the river, smoking my cigar and imagining a fine roast supper waiting for me inside was all that was required. Presently I would catch the smell of beef, all plated and waiting for me on my own table, and with all the trimmings, too. The more occupations I thought of, the more it occurred to me that most of them had been rendered unnecessary.

As I reflected on my mortal life, I recognized that the thing that came to me most easily, and which gave me the most pleasure, was observing my fellow man, marveling at his inventions and his amazing collection of foibles, and documenting his successes and his misadventures. In fact, that effort has consumed the majority of my last century. Those of you who have attained your graying years have recognized the acceleration of time as it flows around you. A child's summer seems a lifetime, whereas a senior citizen's seasons seem to pass as a madly accelerating revolving door. Here I must report that this phenomenon not only continues, but that the acceleration seems exponential. My last few decades have passed like seasons, until I no longer have much idea what month it is, much less the day of the week. Fortunately that particular certainty is of little use in the scope of eternity, and I have let worrying about it go.

Well, my throat is dry, and I feel inclined to call for an intermission. I thank you for your attendance and your attention. I hope you feel that your time has been well spent. I'll return in a quarter of an hour if all goes well, and I hope to find you have chosen to return to your seats. I can tell you that the second part of our evening will be somewhat shorter than the first, and pray that gives you hope.

Act II Introduction (227)

The authorities have assured me that only a few individuals have taken the opportunity of our brief respite to escape. Here's hoping that your perseverance will be rewarded. I can't speak to it, as I have never sat on that side of the equation. Suffice it to say that I feel responsible for your temporary entrapment, and can only relieve myself of that burden by assuring you that if you feel you must depart you are within your rights to do so. At the same time I am obliged to inform you that there is a no-refund policy once half the entertainment has been consumed, and that time has passed.

Those of you who are familiar with my history will be aware that I was, for a very short time, a soldier of sorts. At the outbreak of the war, I was a Southerner, and in many ways I thought like a Southerner. My initial involvement in that most un-civil war was to join a self-styled confederate regiment, although that definition feels optimistic, if not grandiose in retrospect. We were a hastily assembled group with no experience, no training, and no clear vision of our mission other than to somehow resist the northern invasion. I served for two entire weeks before abandoning that misguided effort for other sorts of adventures in the West.

Abbreviated History of a Campaign that Failed

I was 24 years old and piloting on the Mississippi when the news came that South Carolina had left the Union on the 20th of December, 1860. By the summer of 1861 the first wave of war broke upon the shores of Missouri. Our state was invaded by the Union forces. They took possession of St. Louis, Jefferson Barracks, and some other points. The governor, Caleb Jackson, issued his proclamation calling out fifty thousand militia to repel the invader.

I was visiting in the small town where my boyhood had been spent, Hannibal, Marion County. Several of us got together in a secret place by night and formed ourselves into a military company. There were fifteen of us. By the advice of an innocent connected with the organization we called ourselves the Marion County Rangers. The young fellow who proposed this title was perhaps a fair sample of the kind of stuff we were made of. He was young, ignorant, good natured, well meaning, trivial, full of romance, and given to reading chivalric novels and singing forlorn love ditties.

That is one sample of us. Another was Ed Stevens, son of the town jeweler, trim built, handsome, graceful, neat as a cat, bright, educated, but given over entirely to fun. There was nothing serious in life to him. As far as he was concerned, this military expedition of ours was simply a holiday. I should say about half of us looked upon it in much the same way, not consciously perhaps, but unconsciously. We did not think, we were not capable of it.

As for myself, I was full of unreasoning joy to be done with turning out of bed at midnight and four in the morning, for a while grateful to have a change, new scenes, new occupations, a new interest. In my thoughts that was as far as I went. I did not go into the details; as a rule, one doesn't at twenty four.

Joe Bowers, another sample, was a huge, good natured, flax headed lubber, lazy, sentimental, full of harmless brag, a grumbler by nature, an experienced, industrious, ambitious and often quite picturesque liar, and yet not a successful one for he had no intelligent training. He was a good fellow anyway and the boys all liked him. He was made orderly sergeant, Stevens was made corporal. Well, this herd of cattle started for the war.

We set out together on foot. Our objective was the hamlet of New London, ten miles away in Ralls County. The first hour was all fun, all idle nonsense and laughter. But that could not be kept up. The steady drudging became like work, the play had somehow oozed out of it, the stillness of the woods and the somberness of the night began to throw a depressing influence over the spirits of the boys and presently the talking died out and each person shut himself up in his own thoughts. During the last half of the second hour nobody said a word.

Now we approached a log farmhouse where, according to reports, there was a guard of five Union soldiers. Lyman called a halt, and there, in the deep gloom of the overhanging branches, he began to whisper a plan of assault upon the house, which made the gloom more depressing than it was before. We realized with a cold suddenness that here was no jest--we were standing face to face with actual war. In our response there was no hesitation, no indecision. We said that if Lyman wanted to meddle with those soldiers he could go ahead and do it, but if he waited for us to follow him he would wait a long time. Lyman urged, pleaded, tried to shame us into it, but it had no effect. Our course was plain in

our minds, our minds were made up. We would flank the farmhouse, go out around. And that was what we did.

We struck into the woods and entered upon a rough time, stumbling over roots, getting tangled in vines and torn by briars. At last we reached an open place in a safe region and we sat down, blown and hot, to cool off and nurse our scratches and bruises. Lyman was annoyed but the rest of us were cheerful. We had flanked the farmhouse. We had made our first military movement and it was a success. We had nothing to fret about, we were feeling just the other way. Horse play and laughing began again. The expedition had become a holiday frolic once more.

Then we had two more hours of dull trudging and ultimate silence and depression. About dawn we straggled into New London, soiled, heel blistered, fagged out, and all of us except Stevens in a sour and raspy humor and privately down on the war. We stacked our shabby old shotguns in Colonel Ralls's barn and then went in a body and breakfasted with that veteran of the Mexican war. Afterward he took us to a distant meadow, and there, in the shade of a tree, we listened to an old fashioned speech from him, full of gunpowder and glory, full of that adjective piling, mixed metaphor and windy declamation which was regarded as eloquence in that ancient time and region and then he swore on a bible to be faithful to the State of Missouri and drive all invaders from her soil no matter whence they may come or under what flag they might march.

Then we formed in line of battle and marched four hours to a shady and pleasant piece of woods on the border of a far reaching expanse of a flowery prairie. It was an enchanting region for war, our kind of war. We pierced the forest about half a mile and took up a strong position with some low and rocky hills behind us, and a purling limpid creek in front. Straightaway half the command was in swimming and the other half fishing.

Nobody would take orders to feed the horses, and no one would cook. It was considered a degradation so we had no dinner. We lazed the rest of the pleasant afternoon away, some dozing under trees, some smoking cob pipes and talking sweethearts and war, others playing games. By late supper time all hands were famished and to meet the difficulty, all hands turned to on an equal footing, and gathered wood, built fires, and cooked the evening meal.

We had some horsemanship drill every forenoon, then, afternoons, we rode off here and there in squads a few miles and visited the farmer's girls and had a youthful good time and got an honest dinner or supper, and then home again to camp, happy and content. For a time, life was idly delicious. It was perfect. There was no war to mar it.

Our scares were frequent. Every few days rumors would come that the enemy were approaching. In these cases we always fell back on some other camp of ours; we never stayed where we were. But the rumors always turned out to be false, so at last we even began to grow indifferent to them. One night a slave was sent to our corn crib with the same old warning, the enemy was hovering in our neighborhood. We all said let him hover. We resolved to stay still and be comfortable. It was a fine warlike resolution, and no doubt we all felt the stir of it in our veins--for a moment. We had been having a very jolly time, that was full of horseplay and schoolboy hilarity, but that cooled down and presently the fast waning fire of forced jokes and forced laughs died out altogether and the company became silent. Silent and nervous. And soon uneasy--worried and apprehensive.

An almost noiseless movement began in the dark by a general but unvoiced impulse. When the movement was completed, each man knew that he was not the only person who had crept to the front wall and had his eye at a crack between the logs. No, we were all there, all there with our hearts in our throats and staring out towards the sugar-troughs where the forest footpath came through. It was late and there was a deep woodsy stillness everywhere. There was a veiled moonlight which was only just strong enough to enable us to mark the general shapes of objects.

Presently a muffled sound caught our ears and we recognized the hoof-beats of a horse. And right away, a figure appeared in the forest path. It was a man on horseback, and it seemed to me that there were others behind him. I got a hold of a gun in the dark, and pushed it through a crack between the logs, hardly knowing what I was doing, I was so dazed with fright. Somebody said "Fire!" I pulled the trigger, I seemed to see a hundred flashes and a hundred reports, then I saw the man fall down out of the saddle. My first feeling was of surprised gratification; my first impulse was an apprentice-sportsman's impulse to run and pick up his game. Somebody said, hardly audibly, "Good, we've got him. Wait for the rest!" But the rest did not come.

There was not a sound, not the whisper of a leaf; just the perfect stillness, an uncanny kind of stillness. Then, wondering, we crept out stealthily and approached the man. When we got to him, the moon revealed him distinctly. He was laying on his back with his arms abroad, his mouth was open and his chest was heaving with long gasps, and his white shirt front was splashed with blood. The thought shot through me that I was a murderer, that I had killed a man, a man who had never done me any harm. That was the coldest sensation that ever went through my marrow. I was down by him in a moment, helplessly stroking his forehead, and I would have given anything then, my own life freely, to make him again what he had been five minutes before.

Once my imagination persuaded me that the dying man gave me a reproachful look out of the shadow of his eyes, and it seemed to me that I could rather that he had stabbed me than he had done that. He muttered and mumbled like a dreamer in his sleep about his wife and his child, and, I thought with a new despair, "This thing that I have done does not end with him; it falls upon them too, and they never did me any harm, any more than he."

In a little while the man was dead. He was killed in war, killed in fair and legitimate war, and yet he was as sincerely mourned by the opposing force as if he had been their brother. The boys stood there a half-hour sorrowing over him and recalling the details of the tragedy, and wondering who he might be and if he was a spy, and saying if they had it to do over again, they would not hurt him unless he attacked them first. It soon turned out that mine was not the only shot fired; there were five others, a division of the guilt which was a great relief to me since it in some degree lightened and diminished the burden I was carrying. There were six shots fired at once but I was not in my right mind at the time, and my heated imagination had magnified my one shot into a volley.

The man was not in uniform and was not armed. He was a stranger in the country, that was all we ever found out about him. The thought of him got to preying on me every night, I could not get rid of it. I could not drive it away, the taking of that unoffending life seemed such a wanton thing. And it seemed an epitome of war, that all war must just be the killing of strangers against whom you feel no personal

animosity, strangers who in other circumstances you would help if you found them in trouble, and who would help you if you needed it. My campaign was spoiled. It seemed to me that I was not rightly equipped for this awful business. I resolved to retire from this avocation of sham soldiership while I could retain some remnant of my self-respect.

The horror of this experience stayed with me, as you might imagine. I carried the weight of it for the rest of my days, finding what little peace I could in framing it in the context of having been a participant in a war. I deeply regret that I never met Mr. Lincoln. I think that simply being in his presence might have been healing.

Blue and Gray Pay Tribute to Lincoln – 1901

It was forty years later that I was invited to speak at the celebration of the ninety-second anniversary of the birthday of Abraham Lincoln, which took place in Carnegie Hall in February 1901. On that occasion I offered these words:

"The hearts of this whole nation, North and South, were in the war. We of the South were not ashamed of the part we took. We believed in those days we were fighting for the right - and it was a noble fight, for we were fighting for our sweethearts, our homes, and our lives. Today we no longer regret the result, today we are glad that it came out as it did, but we of the South are not ashamed that we made an endeavor. And you, too, are proud of the record we made.

"We are here to honor the noblest and the best man after Washington that this land, or any other land, has yet produced. When the great conflict began the soldiers from the North and South swung into line to the tune of that same old melody, 'We are coming. Father Abraham, three hundred thousand strong.' The choicest of the young and brave went forth to fight and shed their blood under the flag and for what they thought was right. They endured hardships equivalent to circumnavigating the globe four or five times in the olden days. They suffered untold hardships and fought battles night and day.

"The old wounds are healed, and you of the North and we of the South are brothers yet. We consider it to be an honor to be of the soldiers who fought for the Lost Cause, and now we consider it a high privilege to be here tonight and assist in laying our humble homage at the feet of Abraham Lincoln. And we do not forget that you of the North and we of the South, one-time enemies, can now unite in singing that great hymn, 'America.'

And we did. Hundreds of us. Our voices joined together in a celebration of survival and healing. We lifted that hopeful anthem in homage to Abraham Lincoln, that humble servant who gave us all hope in the midst of the darkness of war.

Twain on Lincoln's Unique Qualifications – 1907

It was no accident that planted Lincoln on a Kentucky farm, half way between the lakes and the Gulf. The association there had substance in it. Lincoln belonged just where he was put. If the Union was to be saved, it had to be a man of such an origin that should save it. No wintry New England Brahmin could have done it, or any torrid cotton planter, regarding the distant Yankee as a species of obnoxious foreigner. It needed a man of the border, where civil war meant the grapple of brother and brother and disunion a raw and gaping wound. It needed one who knew slavery not from books only, but as a living thing. It needed one who knew how human all the parties to the quarrel were, how much alike they were at bottom, who saw them all reflected in himself, and felt their dissensions like the tearing apart of his own soul. When the war came Georgia sent an army in gray and Massachusetts an army in blue, but Kentucky raised armies for both sides. And this man, sprung from Southern poor whites, born on a Kentucky farm and transplanted to an Illinois village, this man, in whose heart knowledge and charity had left no room for malice, was marked by Providence as the one to "bind up the Nation's wounds."

Lincoln on Prayer 1865 – Twain's War Prayer 1905

In his second inaugural address, Lincoln addressed the subject of prayer in the context of war, noting the inherent dilemma in that *both* sides prayed for victory. He said

“Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces; but let us judge not that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered; that of neither has been answered fully.”

Forty years later, I felt inspired to address that same dilemma, and I wrote a short story called The War Prayer. I never did publish the story. It did not appear until it was excerpted in a biography about me that was published in 1912. I'll share a portion of it with you now. The story is set in a small church where the local preacher has eloquently asked for God's blessing on the soldiers going off to war.

None could remember the like of it for passionate pleading and moving and beautiful language. The burden of its supplication was, that an ever-merciful and benign Father of us all would watch over our noble young soldiers, and aid, comfort, and encourage them in their patriotic work; bless them, shield them in the day of battle and the hour of peril, bear them in His mighty hand, make them strong and confident, invincible in the bloody onset; help them to crush the foe, grant to them and to their flag and country imperishable honor and glory

During this prayer a stranger entered the church and stood beside the minister and addressed the congregation:

Is it one prayer? No, it is two - one uttered, the other not. Both have reached the ear of Him Who heareth all supplications, the spoken and the unspoken. Ponder this - keep it in mind. If you would beseech a blessing upon yourself, beware! lest without intent you invoke a curse upon a neighbor at the same time.

You have heard your servant's prayer - the uttered part of it. I am commissioned of God to put into words the other part of it - that part which the pastor - and also you in your hearts - fervently prayed silently. And ignorantly and unthinkingly? God grant that it was so! You heard these words: 'Grant us the victory, O Lord our God!' That is sufficient. the whole of the uttered prayer is compact into those pregnant words. Elaborations were not necessary. When you have prayed for victory you have prayed for many

unmentioned results which follow victory - must follow it, cannot help but follow it. Upon the listening spirit of God fell also the unspoken part of the prayer. He commandeth me to put it into words. Listen!

"O Lord our Father, our young patriots, idols of our hearts, go forth to battle -- be Thou near them! With them - in spirit - we also go forth from the sweet peace of our beloved firesides to smite the foe. O Lord our God, help us to tear their soldiers to bloody shreds with our shells; help us to cover their smiling fields with the pale forms of their patriot dead; help us to drown the thunder of the guns with the shrieks of their wounded, writhing in pain; help us to lay waste their humble homes with a hurricane of fire; help us to wring the hearts of their unoffending widows with unavailing grief; help us to turn them out roofless with little children to wander unfriended the wastes of their desolated land in rags and hunger and thirst, sports of the sun-flames of summer and the icy winds of winter, broken in spirit, worn with travail, imploring Thee for the refuge of the grave and denied it - for our sakes who adore Thee, Lord, blast their hopes, blight their lives, protract their bitter pilgrimage, make heavy their steps, water their way with their tears, stain the white snow with the blood of their wounded feet! We ask it, in the spirit of love, of Him Who is the Source of Love, and Who is the ever-faithful refuge and friend of all that are sore beset and seek His aid with humble and contrite hearts.

Amen."

In Closing (944)

I want to thank you all for coming. It's been marvelous to sit and reminisce. But after *talking* for more than an hour, my voice is tired. And after *sitting* for more than an hour, I imagine that your...well....YOU are tired. It's a terrible death to be talked to death. And yet the temptation to try to share what little wisdom I acquired in my first 70 years pales when compared to the luxury of having had another 113 years to continue visiting this human zoo of ours.

You may have suspected this all along. You may even have said the words in a figurative way. But I can assure you that there is *literally* no substitute for experience. You can speculate that carrying a cat by the tail might be problematic, but the man who has tried it has gained valuable information in a very real way.

Young Huck was a progressive and forward-thinking boy when seen through a 19th century lens. He instinctively knew that it was wrong to treat Jim as a piece of property. But he was also conflicted about his participation in helping Jim escape. He agonized over violating the rights of Jim's rightful owner. Those words clang like a firehouse bell against a modern sensibility, and yet they would have been shouted from the rooftops in righteous indignation by many of Huck's friends and family. Most citizens of the modern age scoff at the blatant racism and ignorance of that era, and yet I observe that it took another 140 years for us to see a black man in our previously exclusively White House.

By the time we reach 70, or whatever may be the 21st century equivalent of that statute of limitations, we tend to believe that the ship of our hard-earned wisdom has arrived at the port of its intellectual apex. It is true that we've come a long way. But I would remind you that women, who presumably are among the people the constitution grants the rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, have only been allowed to vote in our elections since 1919. I regret not being more active in that struggle. And yet I cannot fail to notice that over 100 years later, no woman in our great nation has taken the presidential oath.

I imagine in a progressive community such as yours, many of you are impatient with the lethargic pace of progress. And yet, at the risk of offending, I will point out that nearly everyone in the room laughed heartily at the image of yours truly leering at young women in the nude, assuming unrighteous power by sitting on their clothes, and encouraging them to improve his view of their innocent nakedness. Time has not dulled the embarrassment of that experience for me, but instead has honed it to a point that pierces more deeply. I have also had time to reflect on the fact that had those women been white, and bathing in some eddy of the Mississippi, I would have reacted very differently. It's an experiential one-two punch that stuns me with the revelation of my own bigotry, and I have had to own it.

As to the lunacy of war, well... My own brief experience of it was life-changing, and yet I have observed that as a species we have learned little. This much I know: Fear does not facilitate clear thinking. The great war of the 19th century in America was known as the Civil War to Northerners. They saw it as a divisive force that would rend their relatively new nation, and that fear drove them to physically attack their fellow Americans whose states embraced slavery. That same war was known to Southerners as the War Between the States, or the War of Northern Aggression. They saw the North as invaders who threatened their economic engine and their very survival. There is no doubt that many Southerners knew that slavery was inherently wrong, but they were afraid that their farms and their plantations and

their families would not survive its abolition. Both sides were motivated by fear and chose to demonize others with whom they had far more in common than in opposition. In my experience, anyone who encourages you to embrace your fears and offers you a readily identifiable enemy is seeking control over you for their own purposes. Their proffered enemy is a distraction from their true objective.

We are none of us a finished product. But we are all good people. In my experience, those who take an interest in the theater are among the most thoughtful, intelligent, and well-intended of my fellow humans, and I invariably enjoy your company. If I have facilitated an ambush by your own conscience, I can only say that I understand. Mine has stabbed me a thousand times. With the benefit of what I once perceived as long experience, I have come to see it as a kindness, and tried to welcome it. I hope that you will allow yourself that same luxury.

And so goodnight. Godspeed to your homes and your families and what remains to you of this precious mortal life. And when the time comes, and your comet returns, go with confidence and fear not. I daresay the best is yet to be.

Lights down on Twain – projections of “common human” images starts slowly and accelerates until final black background with Lincoln’s quote is all that remains:

“With malice toward none; with charity for all”