



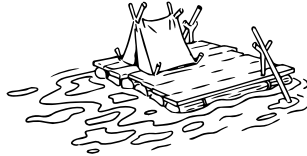
ADVENTURES *of*
HUCKLEBERRY FINN
(TOM SAWYER'S COMRADE)

Mark Twain

NOTICE

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

*By order of the author,
Per G.G., Chief of Ordnance.*



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INTRODUCTION

Douglas Wilson

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn is the best known book of Mark Twain, a preeminent American author. Fifty years after the publication of *Huck Finn*, the writer Earnest Hemingway declared that all distinctively American literature marks its descent from this story. It is the story of a boy named Huck escaping from “civilization” down the great Mississippi River with a runaway slave named Jim.

The World Around

Huckleberry Finn was published in the UK and Canada in 1884 (because of a publishing error, it came out in the U.S. the next year). What else was happening in the course of that year? A patent was given to John Kellogg for his new-fangled “flaked cereal.” The cornerstone for the Statue of Liberty was laid. Grover Cleveland was elected president for his first term. The first World Series was played, in which the Mets lost to a team called Providence. Queen Victoria had been on the throne for almost forty years. The telephone had just recently been invented (in 1876). A few years later, in 1900, when Winston Churchill was only 26 and beginning a lecture tour in America, he was introduced by none other than Mark Twain.

About the Author

Samuel Langhorne Clemens was born in Missouri in 1835. His pen name was Mark Twain, and was taken from his brief stint as a riverboat pilot as a young man. On the riverboats, *mark twain* (meaning “mark #2”) indicated they had sounded a depth of twelve feet, or two fathoms. This was deep enough for a steamboat—an important piece of information for those on steamboats.

Twain lived from 1835 to 1910. Both the year of his birth and the year of his death were marked by an appearance of Halley’s Comet, which moves in a seventy-five or seventy-six year orbit. Twain was born shortly after the comet appeared, and he predicted he “would go out with it” too. When the comet appeared again, Twain died the next day. A humorist has to understand the importance of timing.

Although he was known as a quintessential American humorist, he was also a deeply cynical man, and not least about himself. He would refer to the “damned human race,” but he was not criticizing from outside. He included himself fully as part of the problem. He was an unbeliever, and wrote about that unbelief in detail—but stipulated that it not be published until well after his death.

At the same time, he displayed remarkable honesty of character in some instances. He once went bankrupt as a result of some bad investments, and after he recovered his footing, he paid off all his creditors—even though he had no legal obligation to do so.

What Other Notables Said

H.L. Mencken had this to say about how American the book is: “But in *Huckleberry Finn*, in *A Connecticut Yankee* and in most of the short sketches there is a quality that is unmistakably and overwhelmingly national. They belong to our country and our time quite as obviously as the skyscraper or the quick lunch counter. They are

homeless aristocrats. The two scoundrels crown their misbehavior by selling Jim to a farmer, telling him that Jim is a runaway, for whom a significant reward was offered.

Things pick up. Huck resolves to rescue Jim. The family holding Jim were Tom Sawyer's uncle and aunt. They mistake Huck for Tom because Tom was due to visit. Huck plays along with the mistake, and catches Tom before he gets there to fill him in. Tom identifies himself as his own younger brother going by the name of Sid. Tom concocts a major adventure out of the relatively easy task of freeing Jim. As a result, Tom is shot in the leg and they are all taken into custody.

Tom then reveals that the whole thing was unnecessary because Miss Watson had died a few months before, and there was a provision in her will freeing Jim. Tom's Aunt Polly arrives and reveals that Tom and Sid are actually Huck and Tom. Huck is afraid his father will show up and ruin everything, and so Jim reveals to him that the dead man in the floating house had been Huck's father. Aunt Sally offers to adopt Huck, but he decides that he would rather head out West.

Worldview Analysis

You probably saw the "Notice" Mark Twain put at the start of his book: "Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot" (p. iv). If by this warning Twain meant that you should refrain from the allegory of woodenly turning Huck into "all humans" and the River into the River of Life or "God" (as some have done), then we can agree with him: don't do that. But if Twain was hinting that *Huck Finn* had no worldview or deeper meaning in it whatsoever, then he was trying to pull the wool over your eyes—because no great stories are shallow.

The great central climax of *Huck Finn* occurs after the duke and king double-cross Jim by selling him to the Phelps for \$40 (which

would be somewhere around \$1,160 today). Huck is trying to figure out what to do, and he begins to reflect on the lessons he had been taught on helping runaway slaves. A person who behaved the way he had been behaving “goes to everlasting fire.”

And so as a consequence Huck has a moral crisis, and he decides to write to Miss Watson, Jim’s original owner, to tell her where Jim is to be found. Once he made this decision, this is how it all played out.

I felt good and all washed clean of sin for the first time I had ever felt so in my life, and I knowed I could pray now. But I didn’t do it straight off, but laid the paper down and set there thinking— thinking how good it was all this happened so, and how near I come to being lost and going to hell. And went on thinking. And got to thinking over our trip down the river; and I see Jim before me, all the time; in the day, and in the night-time, sometimes moonlight, sometimes storms, and we a floating along, talking, and singing, and laughing. But somehow I couldn’t seem to strike no places to harden me against him, but only the other kind. I’d see him standing my watch on top of his’n, stead of calling me, so I could go on sleeping; and see him how glad he was when I come back out of the fog; and when I come to him agin in the swamp, up there where the feud was; and such-like times; and would always call me honey, and pet me, and do everything he could think of for me, and how good he always was; and at last I struck the time I saved him by telling the men we had smallpox aboard, and he was so grateful, and said I was the best friend old Jim ever had in the world, and the *only* one he’s got now; and then I happened to look around, and see that paper. (Ch. XXXI, p. 232–3)

This is the moment of truth in the novel, and Huck’s destiny rides on it.

It was a close place. I took it up, and held it in my hand. I was a trembling, because I’d got to decide, forever, betwixt two things, and I knowed it. I studied a minute, sort of holding my breath,



EXPLANATORY

HUCKLEBERRY FINN

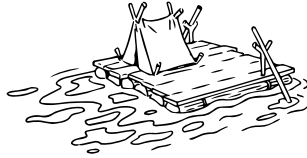
Scene: The Mississippi Valley

Time: Forty to fifty years ago

IN this book a number of dialects are used, to wit: the Missouri negro dialect; the extremest form of the backwoods Southwestern dialect; the ordinary "Pike County" dialect; and four modified varieties of this last. The shadings have not been done in a haphazard fashion, or by guesswork; but painstakingly, and with the trustworthy guidance and support of personal familiarity with these several forms of speech.

I make this explanation for the reason that without it many readers would suppose that all these characters were trying to talk alike and not succeeding.

THE AUTHOR [1884].



CHAPTER I

YOU don't know about me without you have read a book by the name of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*; but that ain't no matter. 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, or maybe Mary. Aunt Polly—Tom's Aunt Polly, she is—and Mary, and the Widow Douglas is all told about in that book, which is mostly a true book, with some stretchers, as I said before.

Now the way that the book winds up is this: Tom and me found the money that the robbers hid in the cave, and it made us rich. We got six thousand dollars apiece—all gold. It was an awful sight of money when it was piled up. Well, Judge Thatcher he took it and put it out at interest, and it fetched us a dollar a day apiece all the year round—more than a body could tell what to do with. The Widow Douglas she took me for her son, and allowed she would sivilize me; but it was rough living in the house all the time, considering how dismal regular and decent the widow was in all her ways; and so when I couldn't stand it no longer I lit out. I got into my old rags and my sugar-hogshead again, and was free and satisfied. But Tom Sawyer he hunted me up and said he was going to start a band of robbers, and

I might join if I would go back to the widow and be respectable. So I went back.

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. Well, then, the old thing commenced again. The widow rung a bell for supper, and you had to come to time. When you got to the table you couldn't go right to eating, but you had to wait for the widow to tuck down her head and grumble a little over the victuals, though there warn't really anything the matter with them,—that is, nothing only everything was cooked by itself. In a barrel of odds and ends it is different; things get mixed up, and the juice kind of swaps around, and the things go better.

After supper she got out her book and learned me about Moses and the Bulrushers, and I was in a sweat to find out all about him; but by and by she let it out that Moses had been dead a considerable long time; so then I didn't care no more about him, because I don't take no stock in dead people.

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. Here she was a-bothering about Moses, which was no kin to her, and no use to anybody, being gone, you see, yet finding a power of fault with me for doing a thing that had some good in 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 stood 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, “Don’t gap and stretch like that, Huckleberry—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 somewheres; 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.

Now she had got a start, and she went on and told me all about the good place. She said all a body would have to do there was to go around all day long with a harp and sing, forever and ever. So I didn’t think much of it. But I never said so. I asked her if she reckoned Tom Sawyer would go there, and she said not by a considerable sight. I was glad about that, because I wanted him and me to be together.

Miss Watson she kept pecking at me, and it got tiresome and lonesome. By and by they fetched the niggers in and had prayers, and then everybody was off to bed. I went up to my room with a piece of candle, and put it on the table. Then I set down in a chair by the window and tried to think of something cheerful, but it warn’t no use. I felt so lonesome I most wished I was dead. The stars were shining, and the leaves rustled in the woods ever so mournful; and I heard an owl, away off, who—whooping about somebody that was dead, and a whippowill and a dog crying about somebody that was going to die; and the wind was trying to whisper something to me, and I couldn’t make out what it was, and so it made the cold shivers run over me. Then away out in the woods I heard that kind of a sound that a ghost makes when it wants to tell about something that’s on its mind and can’t make itself understood, and so can’t rest easy in its grave, and has to go about that way every night grieving. I got so down-hearted and scared I did wish I had some company. Pretty soon a spider went



CHAPTER II

WE went tiptoeing along a path amongst the trees back towards the end of the widow's garden, stooping down so as the branches wouldn't scrape our heads. When we was passing by the kitchen I fell over a root and made a noise. We scrouched down and laid still. Miss Watson's big nigger, named Jim, was setting in the kitchen door; we could see him pretty clear, because there was a light behind him. He got up and stretched his neck out about a minute, listening. Then he says:

“Who dah?”

He listened some more; then he come tiptoeing down and stood right between us; we could a touched him, nearly. Well, likely it was minutes and minutes that there warn't a sound, and we all there so close together. There was a place on my ankle that got to itching, but I dasn't scratch it; and then my ear begun to itch; and next my back, right between my shoulders. Seemed like I'd die if I couldn't scratch. Well, I've noticed that thing plenty times since. If you are with the quality, or at a funeral, or trying to go to sleep when you ain't sleepy—if you are anywheres where it won't do for you to scratch, why you will itch all over in upwards of a thousand places. Pretty soon Jim says:

“Say, who is you? Whar is you? Dog my cats ef I didn' hear sumf'n. Well, I know what I's gwyne to do: I's gwyne to set down here and listen tell I hears it agin.”