

Mark Twain

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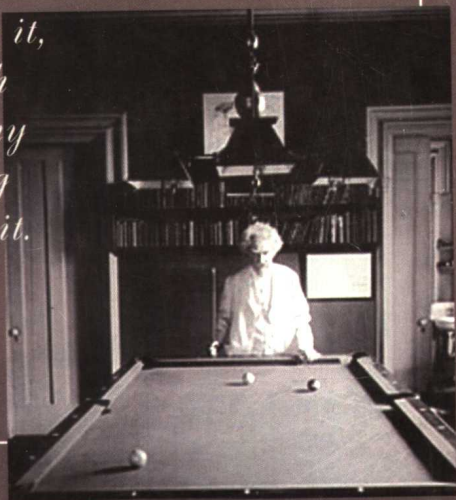
SELECTED STORIES

马克·吐温 作品选

★★★★★ 中英对照

玄以晶 译注
天津人民出版社

*My mouth
watered for it,
my stomach
craved it, my
whole being
begged for it.*



113/15-
255

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简 介

马克·吐温(Mark Twain, 1835~1910年),美国作家,原名塞缪尔·兰霍恩·克莱门斯(Samuel Langhorne Clements),1835年11月30日生于美国密苏里州佛罗里达。1839年他四岁时,全家迁居到位于密西西比河的港口城市汉尼拔尔。马克·吐温是他的笔名,原是行船人测量河水深度时使用的术语,意思是“水深两英寻”(十二英尺),即航船可以安全通过的深度。马克·吐温从十二岁起,就因父亲病故开始独立谋生,先后当过印刷所的学徒、排字工人、水手、引水员、矿工等。他的早期创作,如短篇小说《竞选州长》等,以幽默、诙谐的笔调嘲笑美国“民主选举”的荒谬和“民主天堂”的本质;中期作品代表作长篇小说《哈克贝利·费恩历险记》及《傻瓜威尔逊》等,则以深沉、辛辣的笔调讽刺和揭露像瘟疫般盛行于美国的投机、拜金狂热以及暗无天日的现实与惨无人道的种族歧视。19世纪末,随着美国进入帝国主义发展阶段,马克·吐温一些游记、杂文、政论的批判揭露意义也逐渐减弱,而绝望神秘情绪则有所上升。马克·吐温是美国文坛上一位杰出的幽默讽刺大师,在世界文学史上也有较高的地位。马克·吐温于1910年4月21日在家中逝世。

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A Curious Experience

[1] This is the story which the Major told me, as nearly as I can recall it:

In the winter of 1862-63 I was commandant of Fort Trumbull, at New London, Conn. Maybe our life there was not so brisk as life at "the front"; still it was brisk enough, in its way—one's brains didn't cake together there for lack of something to keep them stirring. For one thing, all the Northern atmosphere at that time was thick with mysterious rumors—rumors to the effect that¹ rebel spies were fitting everywhere, and getting ready to blow up our Northern forts, burn our hotels, send infected clothing into our towns, and all that sort of thing. You remember it. All this had a tendency to keep us awake, and knock the traditional dullness out of garrison life. Besides, ours was a recruiting station—which is the same as saying we hadn't any time to waste in dozing, or dreaming, or fooling around.² Why, with all our watchfulness, fifty per cent of a day's recruits would leak out of our hands and give us the slip³ the same night. The bounties were so prodigious that a recruit could pay a sentinel three or four hundred dollars to let him escape, and still have enough of his bounty-money left to constitute a fortune for a poor man. Yes, as I said before, our life was not drowsy.

[2] Well, one day I was in my quarters alone, doing some writing, when a pale and ragged lad of fourteen or fifteen entered, made a neat bow, and said:

"I believe recruits are received here?"

"Yes."

"Will you please enlist me, sir?"

"Dear me, no! You are too young, my boy, and too small."

[3] A disappointed look came into his face, and quickly deepened into an expression of despondency. He turned slowly away, as if to go; hesitated, then faced me again, and said, in a tone that went to my heart:⁴

"I have no home, and not a friend in the world. If you could only enlist me!"

But of course the thing was out of the question⁵, and I said so as gently as I could. Then I told him to sit down by the stove and warm himself, and added:

"You shall have something to eat, presently. You are hungry?"

[4] He did not answer; he did not need to; the gratitude in his big, soft eyes was more eloquent than any words could have been. He sat down by the stove, and I went on writing. Occasionally I took a furtive glance at him. I noticed that his clothes and shoes, although soiled and damaged, were of good style and material. This fact was suggestive. To it I added the facts that his voice was low and musical; his eyes deep and melancholy; his carriage and address gentlemanly; evidently the poor chap was in trouble. As a result⁶, I was interested.

However, I became absorbed in my work by and by, and forgot all about the boy. I don't know how long this lasted; but at length⁷ I happened to look up. The boy's back was toward me, but his face was turned in such a way that I could see one of his cheeks—and down that cheek a rill of noiseless tears was flowing.

"God bless my soul!" I said to myself; "I forgot the poor rat was starving." Then I made amends for my brutality by saying to him, "Come along, my lad; you shall dine with me; I am alone to-day."

[5] He gave me another of those grateful looks, and happy light broke in his face. At the table he stood with his hand on his chair-back until I was seated, then seated himself. I took up my knife and fork and—well, I simply held them, and kept still; for the boy had inclined his head and was saying a silent grace. A thousand hallowed memories of home and my childhood poured in upon me, and I sighed to think how far I had drifted from religion and its balm for hurt minds, its comfort and solace and support.

As our meal progressed I observed that young Wicklow—Robert Wicklow was his full name—knew what to do with his napkin; and—well, in a word, I observed that he was a boy of good breeding; never mind the details. He had a simple frankness, too, which won upon me. We talked mainly about himself, and I had no difficulty in getting his history out of him. When he spoke of his having been born and reared

in Louisiana, I warned to him decidedly, for I had spent some time down there. I knew all the "coast" region of the Mississippi, and loved it, and had not been long enough away from it for my interest in it to begin to pale. The very names that fell from his lips sounded good to me——so good that I steered the talk in directions that would bring them out: Baton Rouge, Plaquemine, Donaldsonville, Sixty-mile Point, Bonnet-Carré & the Stock Landing, Carrrollton, the Steamship Landing, the Steamboat Landing, New Orleans, Tchoupitoulas Street, the Esplanade, the Rue des Bons Enfants, the St. Charles Hotel, the Tivoli Circle, the Shell Road, Lake Pontchartrain; and it was particularly delightful to me to hear once more of the R. E. Lee, the Natchez, the Eclipse, the General Quitman, the Duncan F. Kenner, and other old familiar steamboats. It was almost as good as being back there, these names so vividly reproduced in my mind the look of the things they stood for⁸. Briefly, this was little Wicklow's history:

[6]When the war broke out, he and his invalid aunt and his father were living near Baton Rouge, on a great and rich plantation which had been in the family for fifty years. The father was a Union man. He was persecuted in all sorts of ways, but clung to his principles. At last one night masked men burned his mansion down, and the family had to fly for their lives. They were hunted from place to place, and learned all there was to know about poverty, hunger, and distress. The invalid aunt found relief at last: misery and exposure killed her; she died in an open field, like a tramp, the rain beating upon her and the thunder booming overhead. Not long afterward the father was captured by an armed band; and while the son begged and pleaded the victim was strung up before his face. [At this point a baleful light shone in the youth's eyes and he said with the manner of one who talks to himself: "If I cannot be enlisted, no matter——I shall find a way——I shall find a way."] As soon as the father was pronounced dead, the son was told that if he was not out of that region within twenty-four hours it would go hard with him⁹. That night he crept to the riverside and hid himself near a plantation landing. By and by¹⁰ the Duncan F. Kenner stopped there, and he swam out and concealed himself in the yawl that was dragging at her stern. Before daylight the boat reached the Stock Landing and he slipped ashore. He walked the three miles which lay between that point and the house of an

uncle of his in Good-Children Street, in New Orleans, and then his troubles were over for the time being¹¹. But this uncle was a Union man, too, and before very long he concluded that he had better leave the South. So he and young Wicklow slipped out of the country on board a sailing-vessel, and in due time reached New York. They put up at the Astor House. Young Wicklow had a good time of it for a while, strolling up and down Broadway, and observing the strange Northern sights; but in the end a change came—and not for the better. The uncle had been cheerful at first, but now he began to look troubled and despondent; moreover, he became moody and irritable; talked of money giving out, and no way to get more—“not enough left for one, let alone two.” Then, one morning, he was missing—did not come to breakfast. The boy inquired at the office, and was told that the uncle had paid his bill the night before and gone away—to Boston, the clerk believed, but was not certain.

[7] The lad was alone and friendless. He did not know what to do, but concluded he had better try to follow and find his uncle. He went down to the steamboat landing: learned that the trifle of money in his pocket would not carry him to Boston; however, it would carry him to New London; so he took passage for that port, resolving to trust to Providence to furnish him means to travel the rest of the way. He had now been wandering about the streets of New London three days and nights, getting a bite and a nap here and there for charity's sake. But he had given up at last; courage and hope were both gone. If he could enlist, nobody could be more thankful; if he could not get in as a soldier, couldn't he be a drummer-boy? Ah, he would work so hard to please, and would be so grateful!

[8] Well, there's the history of young Wicklow, just as he told it to me, barring details. I said:

“My boy, you are among friends now—don't you be troubled any more.” How his eyes glistened! I called in Sergeant John Rayburn—he was from Hartford; lives in Hartford yet; maybe you know him—and said, “Rayburn, quarter this boy with¹² the musicians. I am going to enroll him as a drummer-boy, and I want you to look after him and see that he is well treated.”

Well, of course, intercourse between the commandant of the post

and the drummer-boy came to an end now; but the poor little friendless chap lay heavy on my heart just the same. I kept on the lookout¹³, hoping to see him brighten up and begin to be cheery and gay; but no, the days went by, and there was no change. He associated with nobody; he was always absent-minded, always thinking; his face was always sad. One morning Rayburn asked leave to speak¹⁴ to me privately. Said he:

"I hope I don't offend, sir; but the truth is, the musicians are in such a sweat it seems as if somebody's got to speak."

"Why, what is the trouble?"

"It's the Wicklow boy, sir. The musicians are down on him to an extent you can't imagine."

"Well, go on, go on. What has he been doing?"

"Prayin', sir."

"Praying!"

[9] "Yes, sir; the musicians haven't any peace in their life for that boy's prayin'. First thing in the mornin' he's at it; noons he's at it; and nights—well, nights he just lays into 'em like all possessed! Sleep? Bless you, they can't sleep: he's got the floor, as the sayin' is, and then when he once gets his supplication-mill agoin' there just simply ain't any let-up to him. He starts in with the band-master, and he prays for him; next he takes the head bugler, and he prays for him; next the bass drum, and he scoops him in; and so on, right straight through the band, givin' them all a show, and takin' that amount of interest in it which would make you think he thought he warn't but a little while for this world, and believed he couldn't be happy in heaven without he had a brass-band along, and wanted to pick 'em out for himself, so he could depend on 'em to do up the national tunes in a style suitin' to the place. Well, sir, heavin' boots at him don't have no effect; it's drak in there; and, besides, he don't pray fair, anyway, but kneels down behind the big drum; so it don't make no difference if they rain boots at him, he don't give a dern—warbles right along, same as if it was applause. They sing out, 'Oh, dry up!' 'Give us a rest!' 'Shoot him!' 'Oh, take a walk!' and all sorts of such things. But what of it? It don't faze him. He don't mind it." After a pause: "Kind of a good little fool, too; gits up in the mornin' and carts all that stock of boots back, and sorts 'em ' out and sets each man's pair where they belong. And they've been thrown

at him so much now that he knows every boot in the band——can sort 'em ' out with his eyes shut.”

[10]After another pause, which I forebore to interrupt:

“But the roughest thing bout it is that when he's done prayin'——when he ever does get done——he pipes up and begins to sing. Well, you know what a honey kind of a voice he's got when he talks; you know how it would persuade a cast-iron dog to come down off of a door-step and lick his hand. Now if you'll take my word for it,¹⁵ sir, it ain't a circumstance to his singin'! Flute music is harsh to that boy's singin'. Oh, he just gurgles it out so soft and sweet and low, there in the dark, that it makes you think you are in heaven.”

“What is there 'rough' about that?”

“Ah, that's just it, sir. You hear him sing

'Just as I am——poor, wretched, blind'——

just you hear him sing that once, and see if you don't melt all up and the water come into your eyes! I don't care what he sings, it goes plum straight home to you——it goes deep down to where you live——and it fetches you every time! Just you hear him sing

'Child of sin and sorrow, filled with dismay,

Wait not till to-morrow, yield thee to-day;

'Grieve not that love

Which, from above'——

and so on. It makes a body feel like the wickedest, ungratefulest brute that walks. And when he sings them songs of his about home, and mother, and childhood, and old memories, and things that's vanished, and old friends dead and gone, it fetches everything before your face that you've ever loved and lost in all your life——and it's just beautiful, it's just divine to listen to, sir——but, Lord, Lord, the heartbreak of it! The hand——well, they all cry——every rascal of them blubbers, and don't try to hide it, either; and first you know, that very gang that's been slammin' boots at that boy will skip out of their bunks all of a sudden¹⁶, and rush over in the dark and hug him! Yes, they do——and slobber all over him, and call him pet names, and beg him to forgive them. And just at that time, if a regiment was to offer to hurt a hair of that cub's head, they'd go for that regiment, if it was a whole army corps!”

[11] Another pause.

"Is that all?" said I.

"Yes, sir."

"Well, dear me, what is the complaint? What do they want done?"

"Done? Why, bless you, sir, they want you to stop him from singin'."

"What an idea! You said his music was divine."

"That's just it. It's too divine. Mortal man can't stand it. It stirs a body up so; it turns a body inside out; it racks his feelin's all to rags; it makes him feel bad and wicked, and not fit for any place but perdition. It keeps a body in such an everlastin' state of repentin', that nothin' don't taste good and there ain't no comfort in life. And then the cryin', you see—every mornin' they are ashamed to look one another in the face."

"Well, this is an odd case, and a singular complaint. So they really want the singing stopped?"

"Yes, sir, that is the idea. They don't wish to ask too much; they would like powerful well to have the prayin' shut down on¹⁷, or leastways trimmed off around the edges; but the main thing's the singin'. If they can only get the singin' choked off, they think they can stand the prayin', rough as it is to be bullyragged so much that way."

[12] I told the sergeant I would take the matter under consideration. That night I crept into the musicians' quarters and listened. The sergeant had not overstated the case. I heard the praying voice pleading in the dark I heard the exerrcations of the harassed men; I heard the rain of boots whiz through the air, and bang and thump around the big drum. The thing touched me, but it amused me, too. By and by, after an impressive silence, came the singing. Lord, the pathos of it, the enchantment of it! Nothing in the world was ever so sweet, so gracious, so tender, so holy, so moving. I made my stay very brief; I was beginning to experience emotions of a sort not proper to the commandant of a fortress.

Next day I issued order which stopped the praying and singing. Then followed three or four days which were so full of bounty-jumping excitements and irritations that I never once thought of my drummer-boy. But now comes Sergeant Rayburn, one morning, and says:

"That new boy acts mighty strange, sir."

"How?"

"Well, sir, he's all the time writin'."

"Writing? What does he write—letters?"

"I don't know, sir; but whenever he's off duty, he is always pokin' and nosin' around the fort, all by himself—blest if I think there's a hole or corner in it he hasn't been into—and every little while he outs with pencil and paper and scribbles somethin' down."

[13] This gave me a most unpleasant sensation. I wanted to scoff at it, but it was not a time to scoff at anything that had the least suspicious tinge about it. Things were happening all around us in the North then that warned us to be always on the alert, and always suspecting. I recalled to mind the suggestive fact that this boy was from the South—the extreme South, Louisiana—and the thought was not of a reassuring nature, under the circumstances. Nevertheless, it cost me a pang to give the orders which I now gave to Rayburn. I felt like a father who plots to expose his own child to shame and injury. I told Rayburn to keep quiet, bide his time, and get me some of those writings whenever he could manage it without the boys' finding it out. And I charged him not to do anything which might let the boy discover that he was being watched. I also ordered that he allow the lad his usual liberties, but that he be followed at a distance when he went out into the town.

[14] During the next two days Rayburn reported to me several times. No success. The boy was still writing, but he always pocketed his paper with a careless air whenever Rayburn appeared in the vicinity¹⁸. He had gone twice to an old deserted stable in the town, remained a minute or two, and come out again. One could not pooh-pooh these things—they had an evil look. I was obliged to confess to myself that I was getting uneasy. I went into my private quarters and sent for my second in command—an officer of intelligence and judgment, son of General James Watson Webb. He was surprised and troubled. We had a long talk over the matter, and came to the conclusion that it would be worth while to institute a secret search. I determined to take charge of¹⁹ that myself. So I had myself called at two in the morning; and pretty soon after I was in the musicians' quarters, crawling along the floor on my stomach among the snorers. I reached my slumbering waif's bunk at

last, without disturbing anybody, captured his clothes and kit, and crawled stealthily back again. When I got to my own quarters, I found Webb there, waiting and eager to know the result. We made search immediately. The clothes were a disappointment. In the pockets we found blank paper and a pencil; nothing else, except a jackknife and such queer odds and ends and useless trifles as boys hoard and value. We turned to the kit hopefully. Nothing there but a rebuke for us! — a little Bible with this written on the fly-leaf: “Stranger, be kind to my boy, for his mother’s sake.”

[15] I looked at Webb—he dropped his eyes; he looked at me—I dropped mine. Neither spoke. I put the book reverently back in its place. Presently Webb got up and went away, without remark. After a little I nerved myself²⁰ up to my unpalatable job, and took the plunder back to where it belonged, crawling on my stomach as before. It seemed the peculiarly appropriate attitude for the business I was in.

I was most honestly glad when it was over and done with.

About noon next day Rayburn came, as usual, to report. I cut him short.²¹ I said:

“Let this nonsense be dropped. We are making a bugaboo out of a poor little cub who has got no more harm in him than a hymn-book.”

The sergeant looked surprised, and said:

“Well, you know it was your orders, sir, and I’ve got some of the writin’.”

“And what does it amount to? How did you get it?”

“I peeped through the keyhole, and see him writin’. So, when I judged he was about done, I made a sort of a little cough, and I see him crumple it up and throw it in the fire, and look all around to see if anybody was comin’. Then he settled back as comfortable and careless as anything. Then I comes in, and passes the time of day pleasantly, and sends him on an errand.²² He never looked uneasy, but went right along. It was a coal fire and new built; the writin’ had gone over behind a chunk, out of sight; but I got it out; there it is; it ain’t hardly scorched, you see.”

[16] I glanced at the paper and took in a sentence or two. Then I dismissed the sergeant and told him to send Webb to me. Here is the paper in full:

FORT TRUMBULL, the 8th.

COLONEL I was mistaken as to the caliber of the three guns I ended my list with. They are 18-pounders; all the rest of the armament is as I stated. The garrison remains as before reported, except that the two light infantry companies that were to be detached for service at the front are to stay here for the present——can't find out for how long, just now, but will soon. We are satisfied that, all things considered, matters had better be postponed un——

[17] There it broke off——there is where Rayburn coughed and interrupted the writer. All my affection for the boy, all my respect for him and charity for his forlorn condition, withered in a moment under the blight of this revelation of coldblooded baseness.

But never mind about that. Here was business——business that required profound and immediate attention, too. Webb and I turned the subject over and over, and examined it all around. Webb said:

“What a pity he was interrupted! Something is going to be postponed until——when? And what is the something? Possibly he would have mentioned it, the pious little reptile!”

“Yes,” I said, “we have missed a trick. And who is ‘we’ in the letter? Is it conspirators inside the fort or outside?”

[18] That “we” was uncomfortably suggestive. However, it was not worth while to be guessing around that, so we proceeded to matters more practical. In the first place, we decided to double the sentries and keep the strictest possible watch. Next, we thought of calling Wicklow in and making him divulge everything; but that did not seem wisest until other methods should fail. We must have some more of the writing; so we began to plan to that end. And now we had an idea: Wicklow never went to the post-office——perhaps the deserted stable was his post-office. We sent for my confidential clerk——a young German named Sterne, who was a sort of natural detective——and told him all about the case, and ordered him to go to work on it. Within the hour we got word that Wicklow was writing again. Shortly afterward word came that he had asked leave to go out into the town. He was detained awhile and meantime Sterne hurried off and concealed himself in the stable. By and by he saw Wicklow saunter in, look about him, then hide something under some rubbish in a corner, and take leisurely leave again. Sterne

pounced upon the hidden article—a letter—and brought it to us. It had no superscription and no signature. It repeated what we had already read, and then went on to say:

We think it best to postpone till the two companies are gone. I mean the four inside think so; have not communicated with the others—afraid of attracting attention. I say four because we have lost two; they had hardly enlisted and got inside when they were shipped off to the front. It will be absolutely necessary to have two in their places. The two that went were the brothers from Thirty-mile Point. I have something of the greatest importance to reveal, but must not trust it to this method of communication; will try the other.

[19]“The little scoundrel!” said Webb; “who could have supposed he was a spy? However, never mind about that; let us add up our particulars, such as they are, and see how the case stands to date. First, we’ve got a rebel spy in our midst, whom we know; secondly, we’ve got three more in our midst whom we don’t know; thirdly, these spies have been introduced among us through the simple and easy process of enlisting as soldiers in the Union army—and evidently two of them have not sold at it, and been shipped off to the front; fourthly, there are assistant spies ‘outside’—number indefinite; fifthly, Wicklow has very important matter which he is afraid to communicate by the ‘present method’—will ‘try the other.’ That is the case, as it now stands. Shall we collar Wicklow and make him confess? Or shall we catch the person who removes the letters from the stable and make him tell? Or shall we keep still and find out more?”

[20]We decided upon the last course. We judged that we did not need to proceed to summary measures now, since it was evident that the conspirators were likely to wait till those two light infantry companies were out of the way. We fortified Sterne with pretty ample powers, and told him to use his best endeavors to find out Wicklow’s “other method” of communication. We meant to play a bold game; and to this end we proposed to keep the spies in an unsuspecting state as long as possible. So we ordered Sterne to return to the stable immediately, and, if he found the coast clear²³, to conceal Wicklow’s letter where it was before, and leave it there for the conspirators to get.

[21]The night closed down without further event. It was cold and

dark and sleety, with a raw wind blowing; still I turned out of my warm bed several time; during the night, and went the rounds in person, to see that all was right and that every sentry was on the alert.²⁴ I always found them wide awake and watchful; evidently whispers of mysterious dangers had been floating about²⁵, and the doubling of the guards had been a kind of indorsement of those rumors. Once, toward morning, I encountered Webb, breasting his way against the bitter wind, and learned then that he, also, had been the rounds several times to see that all was going right.

[22] Next day's events hurried things up somewhat. Wicklow wrote another letter; Sterne preceded him to the stable and saw him deposit it; captured it as soon as Wicklow was out of the way, then slipped out and followed the little spy at a distance, with a detective in plain clothes at his own heels, for we thought it judicious to have the law's assistance handy in case of need. Wicklow went to the railway station, and waited around till the train from New York came in, then stood scanning the faces of the crowd as they poured out of the cars. Presently an aged gentleman, with green goggles and a cane, came limping along, stopped in Wicklow's neighborhood, and began to look about him expectantly. In an instant Wicklow darted forward, thrust an envelope into his hand, then glided away and disappeared in the throng. The next instant Sterne had snatched the letter; and as he hurried past the detective, he said: "Follow the old gentleman——don't lose sight of him." Then Sterne skurried out with the crowd, and came straight to the fort.

We sat with closed doors, and instructed the guard outside to allow no interruption.

[23] First we opened the letter captured at the stable. It read as follows:

HOLY ALLANCE Found, in the usual gun, commands from the Master, left there last night, which set aside²⁶ the instructions heretofore received from the subordinate quarter. Have left in the gun the usual indication that the commands reached the proper hand——

Webb, interrupting: "Isn't the boy under constant surveillance now?"

I said yes; he had been under strict surveillance ever since the capturing of his former letter.