

*The Prince
&
the Poor Boy*

MARK TWAIN



Collins English Library

Collins English Library

Series editors: K R Cripwell and Lewis Jones

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Second Impression 1979

Third Impression 1979

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Chapter One

Henry the Eighth was King of England from 1509 to 1547. This story is about life in London towards the end of this time. Perhaps it happened. Perhaps it is not true. But here is the story.

One day in London a poor family had a baby — Tom Canty. His father and mother did not want him. On the same day, a rich family in London also had a baby. They wanted him. And all England wanted him, too. This second baby boy was Edward Tudor. He was the son of King Henry the Eighth. He was the Prince. Edward Tudor wore beautiful clothes. But Tom Canty's clothes were always poor and old. He wore rags.

Years passed. The boys were now ten years old. Tom Canty lived in a poor part of London, near London Bridge. A lot of people lived in his street. Tom lived in Offal Street. The wood houses were very tall there. They were full of people, all poor. The street was full of poor families like the Cantys.

John Canty, Tom's father, was a thief. He



wanted Tom to be a thief too. But Tom would not take money from people. He asked them for money in the streets.

Tom's father drank too much. He sometimes hurt Tom, hit him and banged him hard on the head. But his mother was very kind. Tom also had two sisters, Bet and Nan. All the children slept on the floor at night.

Father Andrew, a friend, taught Tom to read and write. And he told Tom old stories about kings and princes. Tom's head became full of these things. He read stories about kings and princes in books. At night he slept and dreamed he lived in a palace, a king's house. He thought he wore beautiful clothes. Sometimes he thought he was a prince, a king's son. He began to speak like one.

His young friends liked to hear Tom. He was the king, and his friends were the great men of England. But after these games, Tom went out to ask people for money in the streets. Once or twice, Tom's friends laughed at his games.

Chapter Two

One day Tom went out early. His head was still full of kings and princes. He walked through the streets of London to Charing Village. Then he came to Westminster. And there stood the great palace, the palace of King Henry the Eighth of England.

Tom went up to the gates of the palace. People went in through the gates, but at each side a soldier stood. Each soldier held a bright sword. The people of London stood outside the gates and looked.

Poor little Tom Canty came nearer. He looked through the gates of gold. And suddenly his heart jumped. He saw the young Prince!

Prince Edward was very like Tom, and the same age. But *he* wore beautiful clothes. Poor Tom wore rags. Some men in rich clothes stood near the Prince. Tom's eyes grew big. He moved nearer. His face touched the gate.

Then one of the soldiers saw him and called:

"Go away, boy!" He hit Tom, and the people near the gates laughed.



But the young Prince ran to the gates. His eyes were on fire, and he cried:

“Open the gates! Let him in!”

The soldiers opened the gates. And so the little boy from the poorest part of London passed in to meet the prince of riches.

Prince Edward said:

“You are tired. You must have food.” He took Tom to a big room in the palace. He told his men to bring in a rich meal for Tom.

Prince Edward sat alone with Tom. He asked him questions while he ate.

“What is your name?”

“Tom Canty, please, sir.”

“What a strange name! And where do you live?”

“In the city, sir. In Offal Street.”

“Have you a father and mother?”

“Yes, sir. And two sisters, Nan and Bet. My father often hits me. But my mother and my sisters are very kind.”

“You speak well,” said the Prince.

“Yes, my friend Father Andrew taught me from his books.”

“Tell me about Offal Street. Do you have a happy life there?”

“Oh yes, sir. But not when I haven't any food. At other times I like London life. We boys in Offal Street fight with bits of wood.”

The Prince's eyes were bright.

"I'd like that," he said. "Tell me more."

"We run. And we swim in the river. We play in the water there. We enjoy that."

"I would like to play there, just once! I would give all my lands to do that!"

"And if *I* could dress just once in your rich clothes, sir. . . ."

"Oh, would you like to do that? You shall! Take off your old rags and put on my clothes. It is a small happiness for you!"

A few minutes later, Prince Edward stood in Tom's rags, and Tom wore his kingly clothes. The two boys went and stood in front of a looking-glass.

A strange thing! When Tom put on the Prince's clothes he was like the Prince. And when the Prince put on Tom's rags, he was like Tom. The Prince said:

"You have the same hair, the same eyes, and the same voice as I have. You are like me. And now I am like you. I can feel as you did when my soldier hit you. My soldier hurt your hand. Let me see it."

"It's nothing, sir. The poor soldier was"

"Stop. If my father, King Henry, hears about that — Stay here a minute."

The Prince quickly took up something from the table. He put it away — What was it? It was like a very big plate. The King used it at the end of letters, beside his name. It was the Great Seal

of England. Then the Prince opened the door, and ran out. His face was hot and his eyes on fire. He looked for his father, the King. But he could not find him.

He ran out to the gates and cried:

“Open the gates!”

The soldier who hurt Tom was there. He opened the gates, and the Prince went through. Then the soldier hit him very hard. He fell down in the road.

The soldier said:

“You son of a thief! I’ve seen you before! Don’t come back!”

The London people near the gates laughed. The Prince got up and cried loudly:

“I am the Prince. You will die for this!”

But the people closed round the Prince and moved him away from the Palace. They went down the road, laughing and crying:

“Make way for the Prince!”

And so the true Prince left his palace as a poor boy, Tom Canty. He didn’t wear his beautiful clothes. He wore rags.

Chapter Three

The Prince walked through the streets of London. He wore no shoes and there was blood on his feet. He told people he was the Prince, but they laughed at him. It got dark, and he was very tired. He was in a poor part of London.

Suddenly Tom Canty's father saw him. "Come here! Have you brought some money home?" cried John Canty.

"No. I am the Prince," answered the Prince. "Take me to my father, the King."

"My son must be mad," thought John Canty. "He's ill, and cannot think right." He took the Prince home with him to Offal Street.

While all this happened, Tom Canty was alone in the King's palace at Westminster. First he walked about in the Prince's clothes, and held up the beautiful sword in front of him.

But the Prince did not come back. Tom began to be afraid. He opened the door. Six men sat near the door. They wore rich clothes. They got up from their chairs, ready to help him.

Tom shut the door fast. He was afraid.



"They will kill me for this," he thought.

Then the door opened, and a small boy said:

"Lady Jane Grey."

A little girl in rich clothes came in.

"What is wrong?" she asked. "They say you are not well."

"I am only poor Tom Canty. Let me see the King! And let me go away unhurt!" cried Tom. And he fell to the ground before her.

The little girl ran away, afraid. She told the people outside that the Prince was ill. He was mad, he was wrong in the head.

Tom heard the sound of voices by the door. Then a deep voice called:

"No more of this. We must not say that the Prince is mad. In the name of the King!"

Tom waited for some time, afraid. Then he opened the door and walked out of the room. Great men walked on each side of him. And he came to the King's room.

King Henry the Eighth sat down with one foot on a chair. The famous King was now old and ill. His hair was grey. But great men fell to the ground in front of him. He spoke to Tom.

"My Prince," he said, "are you playing a game with me?"

Tom fell to the ground and said: "You are the King! Now I shall die!"

The King did not understand him.

"Come to your father, child," he said. "You

are ill. Don't you know your father, child? Don't break my old heart."

Tom answered:

"I'm the poorest of your people. But I'm young, I don't want to die."

"Die! Don't talk like that, my Prince. You shall not die."

"I want to go home, sir. Please let me go."

The King was quiet. Then he said:

"Perhaps there is hope. Perhaps he's only mad in some things. His head may be all right in others. We will see."

Then he asked Tom a question in French, but Tom could not answer this. The King fell back on his seat afraid. The Prince knew French very well.

Then the King turned towards his courtiers and cried:

"My son is mad but he will soon be well. He has worked too hard with his books. This must stop. He is my son, and the future King. If any person speaks of his illness he will die."

The old King had no other son. He was afraid about the future of England when he died.