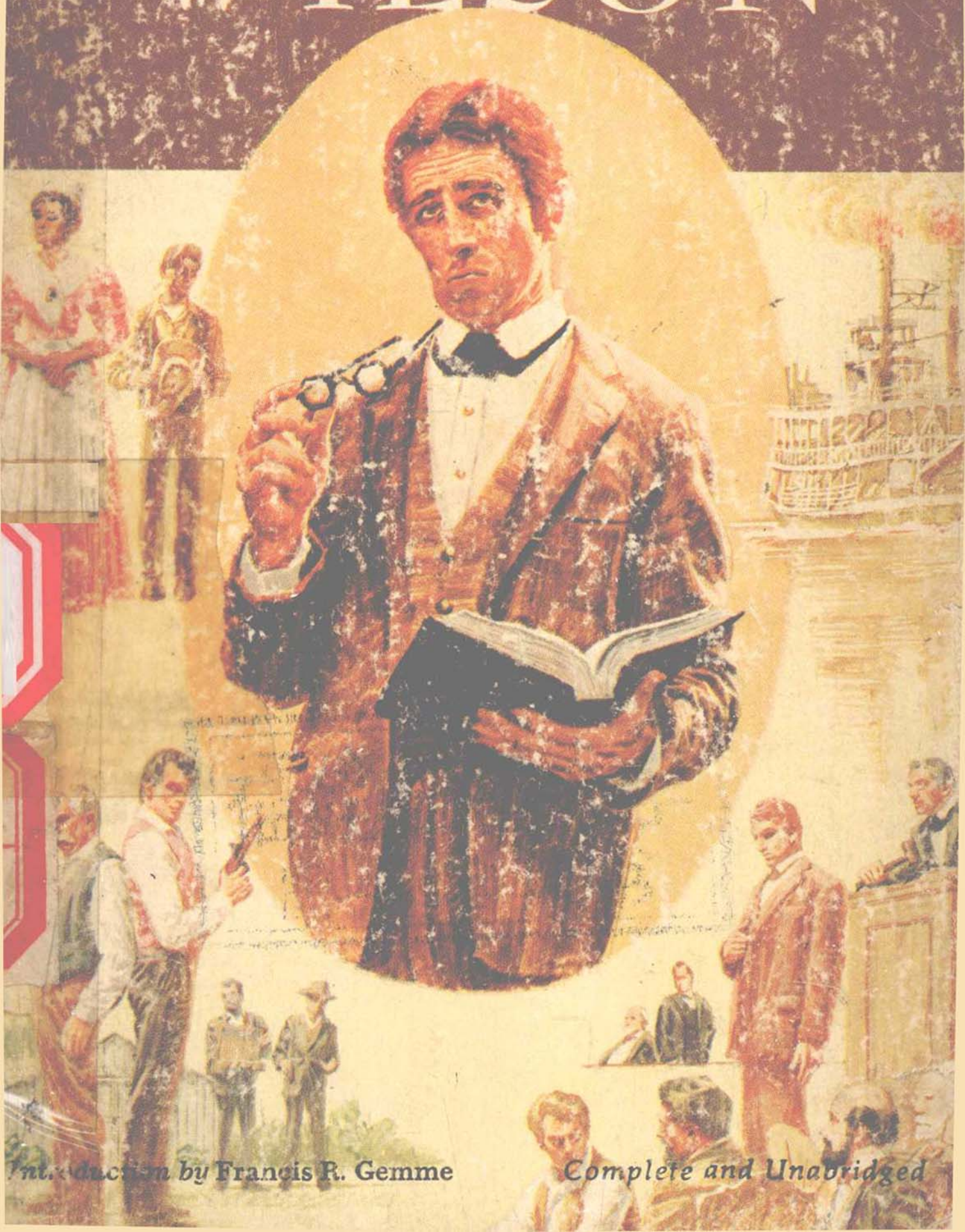


MARK TWAIN

Pudd'nhead
WILSON



Introduction by Francis R. Gemme

Complete and Unabridged

PUDD'NHEAD
WILSON

MARK TWAIN

(1835 - 1910)



AIRMONT PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC.
22 EAST 60TH STREET • NEW YORK 10022

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Introduction

On his visit to Oxford University in 1907, Samuel Langhorne Clemens, better known as Mark Twain, was greeted with enthusiastic cheers for "Mark Twain," "Tom Sawyer," "Huck Finn," and "Pudd'nhead Wilson." While the cheering students had discovered an admirable manner in which to express their own acceptance of the famous American literary figure, their choice of salutations also points up the three major periods of Sam Clemens' public life. The name Mark Twain, the most famous pen name in American literature, was first used by Clemens in 1863. Two years later, the pseudonym began to attract nationwide attention with the publication of "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County." During the next four decades Mark Twain published scores of stories, novels, and non-fiction works, all of which were characterized by his native American point of view. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885) are Twain's most famous novels and mark the beginning and end of his most creative decade. "Tom Sawyer" and "Huck Finn," who were featured first in the same novel and later in separate works, became classic American heroes in the author's own lifetime. *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894) represents the final third of Mark Twain's life, a period

marked by works recasting old themes and plots, sequels to *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, and writings of a philosophical proclivity resulting in various degrees of pessimism.

Pudd'nhead Wilson, as a result, tends to be a hybrid work, incorporating several conventions which Twain employed with greater success in other works. Among these conventions is the trial scene in which Pudd'nhead Wilson emerges as the hero of the novel, fulfilling Roxana's insight of twenty-three years before: "Dey ain't but one man dat I's afeard of, en dat's dat Pudd'nhead Wilson. Dey calls him pudd'nhead, en says he's a fool. My lan', dat man ain't no mo' fool den I is!" The setting of a Mississippi river town, several stereotype characterizations, and the fascination with the influence of heredity or environment upon individual are also standard Twain materials.

The setting of the story is Dawson's Landing, a small river town, "on the Missouri side of the Mississippi, half a day's journey, per steamboat, below St. Louis." Like "St. Petersburg" in *Tom Sawyer* and *Huck Finn*, Dawson's Landing is a fictional representation of Hannibal, Missouri, the town in which Mark Twain grew up in the 1840's. The action of the story covers twenty-three years, 1830-1853.

Several characters are familiar types in Twain's world. Pudd'nhead Wilson himself has been described as an adult Tom Sawyer; the maternal Roxana, a victim of the milieu of slavery, is the most powerful characterization in the novel. The honorable Judge York Leicester Driscoll, a stereotype Southern gentleman, is instinctively bound to the unwritten chivalric code, as are Pembroke Howard, Colonel Cecil Burleigh Essex, and Percy Northumberland Driscoll. Mark Twain's reflection of the typical American's fascination with royalty is seen when twin brothers, Count Luigi Capello and Count Angelo Capello, arrive in Dawson's Landing.

A serious theme of the novel, and one which is never fully overshadowed by the superficial action of the detective work and eventual success of Pudd'nhead Wilson, is the prince-and-the-pauper plot. This serious theme is accomplished when Valet de Chambre, Roxana's son, and Thomas à Becket Driscoll, Percy Driscoll's son, are switched at a young age. Such an event is plausible since "To all intents and purposes Roxy was as white as anybody, but the one-sixteenth of her

which was black outvoted the other fifteen parts and made her a negro." It is because he could not resolve the question of miscegenation that Twain removed Roxana and her son from the center of the action and concluded the novel with an emphasis on the legal wit of Pudd'nhead Wilson. Yet Twain did not lack the courage to address himself to some profound questions. For example, he does so when Tom discovers that he is really Valet de Chambre, the son of the slave Roxana and Colonel Cecil Burleigh Essex. Although Tom "was thirty-one parts white . . . he . . . was a slave, and by a fiction of law and custom a negro . . . Why were niggers and whites made? What crime did the first nigger commit that the curse of birth was decreed for him? And why this awful difference between white and black . . . ?" Such questions have a haunting contemporaneity.

Pudd'nhead Wilson is a fast-paced novel which can be read merely as an adventure story or can be read symbolically as a satire on slavery. The latter reading is underscored when the real Tom Driscoll is returned to his rightful station in life. Because he has been a slave for twenty-three years, he is unable to enjoy either wealth or freedom: "He could not read nor write, and his speech was the basest dialect of the negro quarter. His gait, his attitudes, his gestures, his bearing, his laff—all were vulgar and uncouth; his manners were the manners of a slave . . . The poor fellow could not endure the terrors of the white man's parlor, and felt at home and at peace nowhere but in the kitchen." It is not without irony that the real Valet de Chambre, thief and murderer, receives the sentence he attempted to give his mother; he is "sold down the river." It was the threat of a similar fate twenty-three years before which motivated Roxana to provide for her son by switching the clothes on the physically similar babies. As a story of crime and detection, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* is one of the first American works of fiction to make detailed use of the new science of fingerprinting. Pudd'nhead's lifelong avocation of taking sample fingerprints from the townsfolk helps him to solve the murder of his friend, the judge.

The maxims or aphorisms which begin each chapter provide for another dimension of the novel. These sayings are attributed to *Pudd'nhead Wilson's Calendar*: "a whimsical

almanac . . . with a little dab of ostensible philosophy, usually in ironical form appended to each date." These sayings range from hints on style, "As to the Adjective: when in doubt, strike it out," to what we consider typical examples of Twain's humor, "April 1. This is the day upon which we are reminded of what we are on the other three hundred and sixty-four," or "When angry, count four; when very angry, swear," and finally to those which foreshadow Twain's increasing pessimism, "October 12, the Discovery. It was wonderful to find America, but it would have been more wonderful to miss it," and "If you pick up a starving dog and make him prosperous, he will not bite you. This is the principal difference between a dog and a man," and "One of the most striking differences between a cat and a lie is that a cat has only nine lives."

Mark Twain wrote *Pudd'nhead Wilson* at a time in his life when he was in a volatile financial condition because of the failure of a publishing company in which he was a partner and the failure of a typesetting machine which would have revolutionized the printing industry. His life must have seemed to him analogous to the-prince-and-the-pauper theme. He had been born to humble conditions and succeeded to a series of financially insecure positions—journalist, miner, printer, river pilot, and lecturer. Finally, he found his security in profits from writing, only to become a victim of the Gilded Age, the very period he helped to name. His income had purchased a fine home in Hartford, Connecticut, where he wrote *Roughing It* (1872), *The Gilded Age* (1873), *Old Times on the Mississippi* (1875), *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), *A Tramp Abroad* (1880), *The Prince and the Pauper* (1881), *Life on the Mississippi* (1883), and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885).

As a result of writing and a world lecture tour, Mark Twain became financially solvent once again and settled in Redding, Connecticut, where he died in 1909. His last years were marked by personal bereavements: his daughter Susy died in 1896, his wife, Olivia Langdon Clemens, in 1904, and his other daughter, Jean, in 1909. His final works, *The Mysterious Stranger* (1898) and *The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg and Other Stories* (1900), indicate his increas-

ing pessimism. Writings issued posthumously have done little to alleviate the indication of that bleak mood.

Mark Twain's reputation has continued to grow as each generation identifies anew with Tom Sawyer, Huck Finn, and Pudd'nhead Wilson. Who can resist a character whom all the world considers a fool for more than twenty-three years, but who emerges as a hero? As the townspeople comment at the end of the novel: "And this is the man the likes of us have called a pudd'nhead for more than twenty years. He has resigned from that position, friends. Yes, but it isn't vacant—we're elected."

There is something in the art and honesty of Mark Twain which softens that pudd'nhead title and leaves "the likes of us" a little less inclined to use it too lightly.

FRANCIS R. GEMME, M.A.
Storrs, Connecticut

A Whisper to the Reader

There is no character, howsoever good and fine, but it can be destroyed by ridicule, howsoever poor and witless. Observe the ass, for instance: his character is about perfect, he is the choicest spirit among all the humbler animals, yet see what ridicule has brought him to. Instead of feeling complimented when we are called an ass, we are left in doubt.

—Pudd'nhead Wilson's Calendar

A person who is ignorant of legal matters is always liable to make mistakes when he tries to photograph a court scene with his pen; and so I was not willing to let the law chapters in this book go to press without first subjecting them to rigid and exhausting revision and correction by a trained barrister—if that is what they are called. These chapters are right, now, in every detail, for they were re-written under the immediate eye of William Hicks, who studied law part of a while in southwest Missouri thirty-five years ago and then came over here to Florence for his health and is still helping for exercise and board in Macaroni Vermicelli's horsefeed shed, which is up the back alley as you turn around the corner out of the Piazza del Duomo just beyond the house where that stone that Dante used to sit on six hundred years ago is let into the wall when he let on to be watching them build Giotto's campanile and yet always got tired looking as soon as Beatrice passed along on her way to get a chunk of chestnut cake to defend herself with in case of a Ghibelline outbreak before she got to school, at the same old stand where they sell the same old cake to this day and it is just as light and good as it was then, too, and this is not flattery, far from it. He was a little rusty on his law, but he rubbed up for this book, and those two or three legal chapters are right and straight, now. He told me so himself.

Given under my hand this second day of January, 1893, at the Villa Viviani, village of Settignano, three miles back of Florence, on the hills—the same certainly affording the most charming view to be found on this planet, and with it the most dreamlike and enchanting sunsets to be found in any planet or even in any solar system—and given, too, in the swell room of the house, with the busts of Cerretani senators and other grandees of this line looking approvingly down upon me, as they used to look down upon Dante, and mutely asking me to adopt them into my family, which I do with pleasure, for my remotest ancestors are but spring chickens compared with these robed and stately antiques, and it will be a great and satisfying lift for me, that six hundred years will.

Mark Twain

One

Tell the truth or trump—but get the trick.

—Pudd'nhead Wilson's Calendar

The scene of this chronicle is the town of Dawson's Landing, on the Missouri side of the Mississippi, half a day's journey, per steamboat, below St. Louis.

In 1830 it was a snug little collection of modest one- and two-story frame dwellings, whose whitewashed exteriors were almost concealed from sight by climbing tangles of rose vines, honeysuckles, and morning glories. Each of these pretty homes had a garden in front fenced with white palings and opulently stocked with hollyhocks, marigolds, touch-me-nots, prince's-feathers, and other old-fashioned flowers; while on the windowsills of the houses stood wooden boxes containing moss rose plants and terra-cotta pots in which grew a breed of geranium whose spread of intensely red blossoms accented the prevailing pink tint of the rose-clad housefront like an explosion of flame. When there was room on the ledge outside of the pots and boxes for a cat, the cat was there—in sunny weather—stretched at full length, asleep and blissful, with her furry belly to the sun and a paw curved over her nose. Then that house was complete, and its contentment and peace were made manifest to the world by this symbol, whose testimony is infallible. A home without a cat—and a well-fed, well-petted, and properly revered cat—may be a perfect home, perhaps, but how can it prove title?

All along the streets, on both sides, at the outer edge of the brick sidewalks, stood locust trees with trunks protected by wooden boxing, and these furnished shade for summer and a sweet fragrance in spring, when the clusters of buds

came forth. The main street, one block back from the river, and running parallel with it, was the sole business street. It was six blocks long, and in each block two or three brick stores, three stories high, towered above interjected bunches of little frame shops. Swinging signs creaked in the wind the street's whole length. The candy-striped pole, which indicates nobility proud and ancient along the palace-bordered canals of Venice, indicated merely the humble barbershop along the main street of Dawson's Landing. On a chief corner stood a lofty unpainted pole wreathed from top to bottom with tin pots and pans and cups, the chief tinmonger's noisy notice to the world (when the wind blew) that his shop was on hand for business at that corner.

The hamlet's front was washed by the clear waters of the great river; its body stretched itself rearward up a gentle incline; its most rearward border fringed itself out and scattered its houses about the base line of the hills; the hills rose high, enclosing the town in a half-moon curve, clothed with forests from foot to summit.

Steamboats passed up and down every hour or so. Those belonging to the little Cairo line and the little Memphis line always stopped; the big Orleans liners stopped for hails only, or to land passengers or freight; and this was the case also with the great flotilla of "transients." These latter came out of a dozen rivers—the Illinois, the Missouri, the Upper Mississippi, the Ohio, the Monongahela, the Tennessee, the Red River, the White River, and so on—and were bound every whither and stocked with every imaginable comfort or necessity, which the Mississippi's communities could want, from the frosty Falls of St. Anthony down through nine climates to torrid New Orleans.

Dawson's Landing was a slaveholding town, with a rich, slave-worked grain and pork country back of it. The town was sleepy and comfortable and contented. It was fifty years old, and was growing slowly—very slowly, in fact, but still it was growing.

The chief citizen was York Leicester Driscoll, about forty years old, judge of the county court. He was very proud of his old Virginian ancestry, and in his hospitalities and his rather formal and stately manners, he kept up its traditions. He was fine and just and generous. To be a gentleman—a

gentleman without stain or blemish—was his only religion, and to it he was always faithful. He was respected, esteemed, and beloved by all the community. He was well off, and was gradually adding to his store. He and his wife were very nearly happy, but not quite, for they had no children. The longing for the treasure of a child had grown stronger and stronger as the years slipped away, but the blessing never came—and was never to come.

With this pair lived the judge's widowed sister, Mrs. Rachel Pratt, and she also was childless—childless, and sorrowful for that reason, and not to be comforted. The women were good and commonplace people, and did their duty, and had their reward in clear consciences and the community's approbation. They were Presbyterians, the judge was a free-thinker.

Pembroke Howard, lawyer and bachelor, aged about forty, was another old Virginian grandee with proved descent from the First Families. He was a fine, brave, majestic creature, a gentleman according to the nicest requirements of the Virginia rule, a devoted Presbyterian, an authority on the "code," and a man always courteously ready to stand up before you in the field if any act or word of his had seemed doubtful or suspicious to you, and explain it with any weapon you might prefer from bradawls to artillery. He was very popular with the people, and was the judge's dearest friend.

Then there was Colonel Cecil Burleigh Essex, another F.F.V. of formidable caliber—however, with him we have no concern.

Percy Northumberland Driscoll, brother to the judge, and younger than he by five years, was a married man, and had had children around his hearthstone; but they were attacked in detail by measles, croup, and scarlet fever, and this had given the doctor a chance with his effective antediluvian methods; so the cradles were empty. He was a prosperous man, with a good head for speculations, and his fortune was growing. On the first of February, 1830, two boy babes were born in his house: one to him, the other to one of his slave girls, Roxana by name. Roxana was twenty years old. She was up and around the same day, with her hands full, for she was tending both babies.

Mrs. Percy Driscoll died within the week. Roxy remained in charge of the children. She had her own way, for Mr. Driscoll soon absorbed himself in his speculations and left her to her own devices.

In that same month of February, Dawson's Landing gained a new citizen. This was Mr. David Wilson, a young fellow of Scotch parentage. He had wandered to this remote region from his birthplace in the interior of the State of New York, to seek his fortune. He was twenty-five years old, college bred, and had finished a post-college course in an Eastern law school a couple of years before.

He was a homely, freckled, sandy-haired young fellow, with an intelligent blue eye that had frankness and comradeship in it and a covert twinkle of a pleasant sort. But for an unfortunate remark of his, he would no doubt have entered at once upon a successful career at Dawson's Landing. But he made his fatal remark the first day he spent in the village, and it "gaged" him. He had just made the acquaintance of a group of citizens when an invisible dog began to yelp and snarl and howl and make himself very comprehensively disagreeable, whereupon young Wilson said, much as one who is thinking aloud:

"I wish I owned half of that dog."

"Why?" somebody asked.

"Because I would kill my half."

The group searched his face with curiosity, with anxiety even, but found no light there, no expression that they could read. They fell away from him as from something uncanny, and went into privacy to discuss him. One said:

"'Pears to be a fool."

"'Pears?" said another. "Is, I reckon you better say."

"Said he wished he owned *half* of the dog, the idiot," said a third. "What did he reckon would become of the other half if he killed his half? Do you reckon he thought it would live?"

"Why, he must have thought it, unless he is the downrightest fool in the world; because if he hadn't thought it, he would have wanted to own the whole dog, knowing that if he killed his half and the other half died, he would be responsible for that half just the same as if he had killed that