

WENTIETH CENTURY AMERICAN BEST SELLERS



MARK TWAIN

# MARK TWAIN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

## 马克·吐温自传

[美] 马克·吐温 著

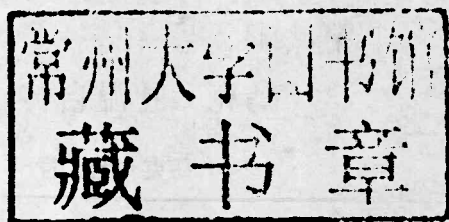
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## 序

从 1895 年美国《书商》杂志开启“按销量排序的图书目录”，美国的“畅销书”至今已有百年发展史，其间荣登年度榜的图书达上千册。阅读这些畅销书，可以学习各时代美国最畅销图书中的语言，了解当时的阅读旨趣，领略当时的社会习俗和风土人情，何乐而不为？

不过，阅读畅销书也需精选。畅销书只是显现读者的阅读旨趣，并不区分它的高下，读者真实的阅读旨趣是雅俗共存的；登上畅销书排行榜的并不总经得起时间的冲刷，许多名噪一时的畅销书早已销声匿迹，尘封在历史的沟壑中。

然而畅销书中自然也有大量经典得以长久流传。我们今天重读美国百年畅销图书，有着以往不曾有的优势。一是，时间的冲刷保证了今日重读之畅销书的经典。能留存至今的多是能够让人细细品读出些许感悟的，而不仅是出于猎奇心理、名人效应。二是，时空的距离感让我们能更好地反思畅销书中所折射出的社会现象。多了一分思考的冷峻，少了一分身处当局的迷惑，我们能以一个旁观者的角色更加清醒地审视。

鉴于以上宗旨，本系列所选的畅销书都历经淘洗，至今光彩斐然，甚具代表性。成功类的书籍诸如《白手起家的商人给儿子的信》、《罗斯福总统给子女的信》和《如何度过一天的 24 小时》；文学类的书籍众多，包括赫赫有名的《马克·吐温自传》，开创了美国西部牛仔小说先河的《弗吉尼亚人》，反映纽约上层社会生活的《纯真年代》，表现女性自我探索的《满溢之杯》，讲述一战之后生死与重建的《贫穷的聪明人》，扣人心弦、探求正义的《公平与不公平》，文字优美、充满真挚情感的爱情小说《百分之一的机会》和表现纽约曼哈顿贫民区生活的《明确的目标：纽约爱情故事》等；此外还有文化类书籍——世界史研究界几乎无人不知的 H. G. 威尔斯的《历史的概要（世界史纲）》。每本读来都会有不一样的收获，可以满足读者对不同类型书籍的偏好。

阅读美国百年畅销图书，浸润美国最地道的语言，了解美国原汁原味的文化。

## INTRODUCTION

Mark Twain had been a celebrity for a good many years before he could be persuaded to regard himself as anything more than an accident, a news-writer to whom distinction had come as a matter of good fortune rather than as a tribute to genius. Sooner or later his "vein" would be worked out, when he would of necessity embark in other pursuits.

He had already owned a newspaper, and experimented more or less casually – and unfortunately – with a variety of other enterprises, when in 1884 he capitalized a publishing concern, primarily to produce his own works, but not without a view to the establishment of something more dependable than authorship. It probably never occurred to him during those years that he had achieved anything like a permanent place in literary history; if the idea of an autobiography had intruded itself now and then, it had not seriously troubled him.<sup>1</sup>

But a year later, when the publication by his firm of the *Memoirs* of Gen. U. S. Grant brought him into daily association with the dying conqueror, the thought came that the story of this episode might be worthy of preservation. It was not, for the present, at least, to be an autobiography, but no more than a few chapters, built around a great historic figure. General Grant's own difficulties in setting down his memories suggested prompt action. Mark Twain's former lecture agent, James Redpath, was visiting him at this time, and with a knowledge of shorthand became his amanuensis. The work they did together was considerable, covering in detail the story of the Grant publishing venture. Clemens may have planned other chapters of a personal sort, but, unaccustomed to dictation, he found the work tedious, with a result, as it seemed to him, unsatisfactory. A number of important things happened to Mark Twain during the next dozen years, among them his business failure,

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<sup>1</sup> Most of Mark Twain's work up to this time, *Roughing It*, *Tom Sawyer*, *Life on the Mississippi*, etc., had been of an autobiographical nature. Also, as early as 1870 he had jotted down an occasional reminiscent chapter, for possible publication, though apparently with no idea of a continuous narrative. Such of these chapters as have survived are included in Vol. I of the present work. – A. B. P.

which left him with a load of debt, dependent entirely upon authorship and the lecture platform for rehabilitation and support. The story of his splendid victory, the payment to the last dollar of his indebtedness, has been widely told. He was in Vienna when he completed this triumph, and, whatever he had been before, he was now unquestionably a world figure with a recognized place in history. Realization of this may have prompted him to begin, during those busy Vienna winters (1897 to 1899), something in the nature of an autobiography, recollections of his Missouri childhood, a picture as primitive and far removed from to-day as anything of the Colonial period. These chapters were handwritten, his memory was fresh and eager, and in none of his work is there greater charm. As he proceeded he did not confine himself to his earlier years, but traveled back and forth, setting down whatever was in his mind at the moment. He worked incidentally at this record for two or three years, eventually laying it aside for more immediate things. Five years later, in Florence, where he had taken Mrs. Clemens for her health, he again applied himself to what he now definitely termed his "Autobiography." As in that earlier day, he dictated, and this time found it quite to his liking. He completed some random memories of more or less importance, and might have carried the work further but for his wife's rapidly failing health. Her death and his return to America followed, and there was an interval of another two years before the autobiographical chapters were again resumed.

It was in January, 1906, that the present writer became associated with Mark Twain as his biographer. Elsewhere I have told of that arrangement and may omit most of the story here. It had been agreed that I should bring a stenographer, to whom he would dictate notes for my use, but a subsequent inspiration prompted him to suggest that he might in this way continue his autobiography, from which I would be at liberty to draw material for my own undertaking. We began with this understanding, and during two hours of the forenoon, on several days of each week, he talked pretty steadily to a select audience of two, wandering up and down the years as inclination led him, relating in his inimitable way incidents, episodes, conclusions, whatever the moment presented to his fancy.



It was his custom to stay in bed until noon, and he remained there during most of the earlier dictations, clad in a handsome dressing-gown, propped against great snowy pillows. He loved this loose luxury and ease and found it conducive to thought. On a little table beside him, where lay his cigars, papers, pipes, and various knickknacks, shone a reading lamp, making more brilliant his rich coloring and the gleam of his shining hair. There was daylight, too, but it was north light and the winter days were dull, the walls of the room a deep, unreflecting red. His bed was a vast carved antique affair, its outlines blending into the luxuriant background. The whole, focusing to the striking central figure, made a picture of classic value.

His talk was absorbingly interesting – it never failed to be that, even when it left something to be desired as history. Mark Twain's memory had become capricious and his vivid imagination did not always supply his story with details of crystal accuracy. But always it was a delightful story, amusing, tragic, or instructive, and it was likely to be one of these things at one instant and another at the next. Often he did not know until the moment of beginning what was to be his subject for the day; then he was likely to go drifting among his memories in a quite irresponsible fashion, the fashion of table conversation, as he said, the methodless method of the human mind. He had concluded that this was the proper way to write autobiography, or, as he best conveys it in his own introductory note:

Start at no particular time of your life; wander at your free will all over your life; talk only about the things which interest you for the moment; drop it the moment its interest threatens to pale, and turn your talk upon the new and more interesting thing that has intruded itself into your mind meantime.

Certainly there is something to be said in favor of his plan, and I often thought it the best plan for his kind of autobiography, which was really not autobiography at all, in the meaning generally conveyed by that term, but a series of entertaining stories and opinions – dinner-table talks, in fact, such as he had always delivered in his own home and elsewhere, and with about the same latitude and elaboration. I do not wish to convey that his narrative is in any sense a mere fairy tale. Many of the chapters, especially the earlier ones, are vividly true in their presentation; the things he told of Mrs.

Clemens and Susy are marvelously and beautifully true in spirit and aspect, and the story as a whole is amazingly faithful in the character picture it presents of the man himself. It was only when he relied upon his memory for details of general history, or when his imagination responded to old prejudice, or when life-long habit prompted a "good story" that he went wandering into fields of elaboration and gathered there such flowers and thorns as his fancy or feelings seemed to require. Mark Twain's soul was built of the very fabric of truth, so far as moral intent was concerned, but memory often betrayed him, even when he tried most to be accurate. He realized this himself, and once said, plaintively:

"When I was younger I could remember anything, whether it happened or not; but I am getting old and soon I shall remember only the latter."

And at another time, paraphrasing Josh Billings:

"It isn't so astonishing the things that I can remember, as the number of things I can remember that aren't so."

Perhaps it is proper to assure the reader that positive mistakes of date and occurrence have been corrected, while, for the rest, the matter of mere detail is of less importance than that the charm of the telling should remain undisturbed.

Our work, begun in the New York house at 21 Fifth Avenue, continued with considerable regularity during a period of about two years, and intermittently during another two. When the first spring came it was transferred to the Upton House, on the slopes of Monadnock, near Dublin, New Hampshire, a perfect setting for the dictations. He no longer remained in bed, but, clad in creamy-white flannels and loose morocco slippers, bareheaded, he paced up and down the long veranda against a background of far-lying forest and distant hill. As I think of that time, now, I can still hear the ceaseless slippered, shuffling walk, and see the white figure, with its rocking, rolling movement, that preternaturally beautiful landscape behind it, and hear his deliberate speech – always deliberate except at rare intervals; always impressive, whatever the subject might be. In September we returned to the New York house and the work was continued there, that winter and the next. It reached its conclusion at Stormfield, the new home which he had



built at Redding, Connecticut, and it was here that he died, April 21, 1910. In the beginning it was Mark Twain's frequently expressed command that the "Autobiography" was not to be published until he had been dead at least a hundred years. But as the months passed he modified this idea, and himself selected a number of chapters for use in the *North American Review*. Discussing the matter later, he expressed a willingness that any portions of the work not dealing too savagely with living persons or their immediate descendants should be published sooner, either serially or in book form.

The manuscript in time became very large and very inclusive. He even incorporated in it articles and stories which he had written and laid aside, among them "Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven." "Is Shakespeare Dead?" was originally a part of the "Autobiography," but he published it separately in a small volume. "The Death of Jean," written (not dictated) immediately following that tragic event, was to be the closing chapter, and such in time it will become. He wished, however, that it should have separate publication and it is for the present included in another volume. It was his last complete writing of any sort, and in all his work from beginning to end there is nothing more perfect — nothing more beautiful.

Albert Bigelow Paine

## PREFACE

### As from the Grave

In this Autobiography I shall keep in mind the fact that I am speaking from the grave. I am literally speaking from the grave, because I shall be dead when the book issues from the press.

I speak from the grave rather than with my living tongue, for a good reason: I can speak thence freely. When a man is writing a book dealing with the privacies of his life – a book which is to be read while he is still alive – he shrinks from speaking his whole frank mind; all his attempts to do it fail, he recognizes that he is trying to do a thing which is wholly impossible to a human being. The frankest and freest and privatest product of the human mind and heart is a love letter; the writer gets his limitless freedom of statement and expression from his sense that no stranger is going to see what he is writing. Sometimes there is a breach-of-promise case by and by; and when he sees his letter in print it makes him cruelly uncomfortable and he perceives that he never would have unbosomed himself to that large and honest degree if he had known that he was writing for the public. He cannot find anything in the letter that was not true, honest, and respect-worthy; but no matter, he would have been very much more reserved if he had known he was writing for print.

It has seemed to me that I could be as frank and free and unembarrassed as a love letter if I knew that what I was writing would be exposed to no eye until I was dead, and unaware, and indifferent.

MARK TWAIN

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## EARLY FRAGMENTS

1870~1877

NOTE. — *The various divisions and chapters of this work, in accordance with the author's wish, are arranged in the order in which they were written, regardless of the chronology of events.*

I will construct a text:

What a wee little part of a person's life are his acts and his words! His real life is led in his head, and is known to none but himself. All day long, and every day, the mill of his brain is grinding, and his *thoughts*, not those other things, are his history. His acts and his words are merely the visible, thin crust of his world, with its scattered snow summits and its vacant wastes of water — and they are so trifling a part of his bulk! a mere skin enveloping it. The mass of him is hidden — it and its volcanic fires that toss and boil, and never rest, night nor day. These are his life, and they are not written, and cannot be written. Every day would make a whole book of eighty thousand words — three hundred and sixty-five books a year. Biographies are but the clothes and buttons of the man — the biography of the man himself cannot be written.

M. T.



[Written about 1870]

## The Tennessee Land<sup>1</sup>

The monster tract of land which our family own in Tennessee was purchased by my father a little over forty years ago. He bought the enormous area of seventy-five thousand acres at one purchase. The entire lot must have cost him somewhere in the neighborhood of four hundred dollars. That was a good deal of money to pass over at one payment in those days – at least it was considered so away up there in the pineries and the “Knobs” of the Cumberland Mountains of Fentress County, East Tennessee. When my father paid down that great sum, and turned and stood in the courthouse door of Jamestown, and looked abroad over his vast possessions, he said, “Whatever befalls me, my heirs are secure; I shall not live to see these acres turn to silver and gold, but my children will.” Thus with the very kindest intentions in the world toward us, he laid the heavy curse of prospective wealth upon our shoulders. He went to his grave in the full belief that he had done us a kindness. It was a woeful mistake, but, fortunately, he never knew it. He further said: “Iron ore is abundant in this tract, and there are other minerals; there are thousands of acres of the finest yellow-pine timber in America, and it can be rafted down Obeds River to the Cumberland, down the Cumberland to the Ohio, down the Ohio to the Mississippi, and down the Mississippi to any community that wants it. There is no end to the tar, pitch, and turpentine which these vast pineries will yield. This is a natural wine district, too; there are no vines elsewhere in America, cultivated or otherwise, that yield such grapes as grow wild here. There are grazing lands, corn lands, wheat lands, potato lands, there are all species of timber – there is everything in and on this great tract of land that can make land valuable. The United States contain fourteen millions of inhabitants; the population has increased eleven millions in forty years, and will henceforth increase faster than ever; my children will see the day that immigration will push its way to Fentress

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<sup>1</sup> The Tennessee Land is an important feature in a novel by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner, *The Gilded Age*.

County, Tennessee, and then, with 75,000 acres of excellent land in their hands, they will become fabulously wealthy." Everything my father said about the capabilities of the land was perfectly true – and he could have added, with like truth, that there were inexhaustible mines of coal on the land, but the chances are that he knew very little about the article, for the innocent Tennesseans were not accustomed to digging in the earth for their fuel. And my father might have added to the list of eligibilities, that the land was only a hundred miles from Knoxville, and right where some future line of railway leading south from Cincinnati could not help but pass through it. But he never had seen a railway, and it is barely possible that he had not even heard of such a thing. Curious as it may seem, as late as eight years ago there were people living close to Jamestown who never had heard of a railroad and could not be brought to believe in steamboats. They do not vote for Jackson in Fentress County; they vote for Washington.

My eldest brother was four or five years old when the great purchase was made, and my eldest sister was an infant in arms. The rest of us – and we formed the great bulk of the family – came afterward, and were born along from time to time during the next ten years. Four years after the purchase came the great financial crash of '34, and in that storm my father's fortunes were wrecked. From being honored and envied as the most opulent citizen of Fentress County – for outside of his great landed possessions he was considered to be worth not less than three thousand five hundred dollars – he suddenly woke up and found himself reduced to less than one-fourth of that amount. He was a proud man, a silent, austere man, and not a person likely to abide among the scenes of his vanished grandeur and be the target for public commiseration. He gathered together his household and journeyed many tedious days through wilderness solitudes, toward what was then the "Far West," and at last pitched his tent in the little town of Florida, Monroe County, Missouri. He "kept store" there several years, but had no luck, except that I was born to him. He presently removed to Hannibal, and prospered somewhat; rose to the dignity of justice of the peace and had been elected to the clerkship of the Surrogate Court, when the summons came which no man may disregard. He had been doing tolerably well, for that age

of the world, during the first years of his residence in Hannibal, but ill fortune tripped him once more. He did the friendly office of “going security” for Ira –, and Ira walked off and deliberately took the benefit of the new bankrupt law – a deed which enabled him to live easily and comfortably along till death called for him, but a deed which ruined my father, sent him poor to his grave, and condemned his heirs to a long and discouraging struggle with the world for a livelihood. But my father would brighten up and gather heart, even upon his death-bed, when he thought of the Tennessee land. He said that it would soon make us all rich and happy. And so believing, he died. We straightway turned our waiting eyes upon Tennessee. Through all our wanderings and all our ups and downs for thirty years they have still gazed thitherward, over intervening continents and seas, and at this very day they are yet looking toward the same fixed point, with the hope of old habit and a faith that rises and falls, but never dies.

After my father's death we reorganized the domestic establishment, but on a temporary basis, intending to arrange it permanently after the land was sold. My brother borrowed five hundred dollars and bought a worthless weekly newspaper, believing, as we all did, that it was not worth while to go at anything in serious earnest until the land was disposed of and we could embark intelligently in something. We rented a large house to live in, at first, but we were disappointed in a sale we had expected to make (the man wanted only a part of the land and we talked it over and decided to sell all or none) and we were obliged to move to a less expensive one.

[Written in 1877]

## Early Years in Florida, Missouri

I was born the 30th of November, 1835, in the almost invisible village of Florida, Monroe County, Missouri. I suppose Florida had less than three hundred inhabitants. It had two streets, each a couple of hundred yards long; the rest of the avenues mere lanes, with rail fences and cornfields on either side. Both the streets and the lanes were paved with the same material – tough black mud in wet times, deep dust in dry.