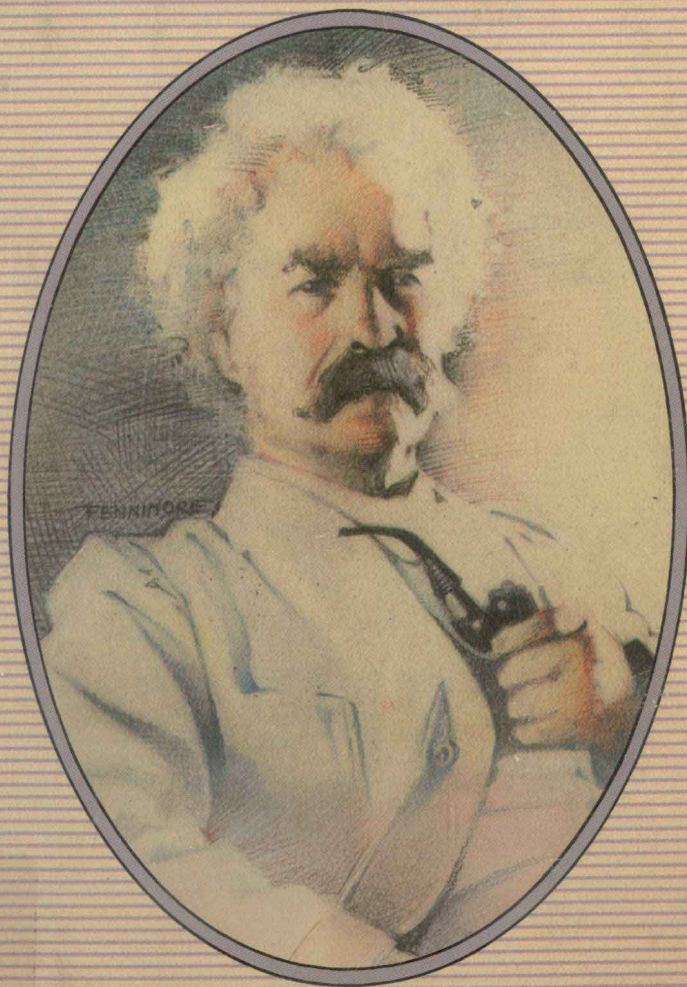


THE COMPLETE  
HUMOROUS SKETCHES  
AND TALES OF  
**MARK TWAIN**



Edited and with an Introduction by Charles Neider

**THE COMPLETE HUMOROUS SKETCHES AND TALES  
OF MARK TWAIN**



ALSO BY CHARLES NEIDER

*Fiction*

NAKED EYE

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MARK TWAIN

THE FROZEN SEA, A STUDY OF FRANZ KAFKA

EDITED BY CHARLES NEIDER

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF MARK TWAIN

THE COMPLETE SHORT STORIES OF MARK TWAIN

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SHORT NOVELS OF THE MASTERS

GREAT SHORT STORIES FROM THE WORLD'S LITERATURE

THE STATURE OF THOMAS MANN

THE GREAT WEST

MAN AGAINST NATURE



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*Drawings by Mark Twain*

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

The present volume contains all of Mark Twain's humorous sketches which the author saw fit to issue in book form, also a number published in such form by his literary executor, A. B. Paine. Mark Twain changed his mind about the worth of certain of these sketches and did not include them in later editions of his books. For this reason, the reader will here encounter sketches not to be found in the collected works. It can be argued that I ought not to have resurrected sketches which the author himself judged ought to be left in the relative obscurity of first editions. My desire to be as complete as possible within the scope of a single volume has overridden this argument, despite the fact that I am aware of a certain cogency which it possesses. The current volume is not only the first substantial collection of Mark Twain's humorous sketches ever to be made; it is also the most complete such collection which can be made, short of exhuming certain materials which the author never cared to dignify with book appearance. I refer to those numberless and fugitive items which he wrote for newspapers and magazines, some of the files of which, unfortunately, have been badly scattered or even lost.

The present volume contains 136 sketches, thirty of them gathered from the five books of travel. The contents are arranged chronologically according to the years of first publication, and alphabetically within a given year whenever more than one item was published in that year. I have indicated the source of the sketches taken from the books of travel, and in such cases have given as the date of publication the date of the first edition of the particular book of travel.

C. N.





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## INTRODUCTION

Mark Twain's sketches never won for themselves the illustrious reputation gained by his other kinds of writing, but no one interested in American humor can long remain indifferent to them. They comprised a substantial share of his literary apprenticeship and developed so thoroughly into a flair of genius that they made their way into his important books long after he had decided he had broken their spell. As with the short story, he was long on hodgepodge in form and short on French neatness. It is often not easy to say which is a story and which a sketch, and sometimes it is not possible. In the long run it makes little difference, for fortunately his minor works carry the impress of his literary features so strongly that they possess an intrinsic value quite apart from any which they might have gathered to themselves by being more akin to the usual genres.

Some of Clemens's well-wishers were embarrassed by his sketches and were ready to consign them to oblivion. His official biographer, Albert Bigelow Paine, in discussing a collection of items entitled *Sketches New and Old*, published in 1875, said, "Many of them are amusing, some of them delightful, but most of them seem ephemeral. If we except 'The Jumping Frog,' and possibly 'A True Story' (and the latter was altogether out of place in the collection), there is no reason to suppose that any of its contents will escape oblivion." Its contents included such tales as "My Watch," "Political Economy," and "The Experience of the McWilliamses with Membranous Croup." William Dean Howells praised the book in the *Atlantic* on its publication, however. The sketches are a minor side of Mark Twain, but it ought to be noted that they are a particularly brilliant and representative side.

He began writing them at an early age, before he left Hannibal, and the newspapers of the day made their publication possible. The



blights of bigness and sameness had not yet come to the papers. There were no press associations and no syndicates. Each paper had an intimate, personal, local tone rare today and reflected the personality of its editor, also of the town or area in which it was read. Today a reader's only, slim hope of a hearing is in the Letters to the Editor section of the editorial pages. In those earlier times the papers welcomed contributions from its readers, particularly pithy paragraphs from clever men. If you were bright enough you could work your way up to whole sketches. The reward was a haven from anonymity.

It was not only a question of appearing in your local paper. Because papers did not jealously guard their copyright status, if you were good other papers would pick up your items and reprint them along with your name, and your fame might spread over a whole region, as it did in the case of Mark Twain. Those paragraphs of comment, news, observation, hoax, skit, and sketch were the apprenticeship of Samuel Clemens on the American literary scene, although it is doubtful that he ever regarded them in so portentous a manner. He used what was available to him in outlet and matter, and the result is that his beginnings and his career were so different from those of the masters of the predominant New England school and from those of the emerging Henry James. If anyone strayed into literature (the phrase is Thomas Mann's as applied to himself) it was Samuel Clemens.

But anonymity was only the first part of the reward. Later there was payment in greenbacks and gold. Thus Clemens wrote sketches for the *Hannibal Journal*, the New Orleans *True Delta*, the *Territorial Enterprise* of Virginia City, Nevada, the San Francisco *Morning Call* and *Alta California*, for the *Californian* and the *Golden Era* and the Buffalo *Express* and the *Galaxy*. Beginning in the fifties, he continued writing them into the seventies. He traveled a familiar road to fame, the road of Artemus Ward, Josh Billings, and Petroleum Vesuvius Nasby, all humorists, all commentators—and all lecturers and showmen. For once one's fame was established in the paragraphic way the lecture circuit beckoned with its gold as it competed with other forms of entertainment—with the minstrel show, the music hall, the variety show, the circus.

The humorous lecturer in those days was invariably a showman and invariably "quaint" in matter and style. He availed himself of the appurtenances of showmanship: pseudonyms, advance agents, puff advertisements, colored lithographs, droll posters. The poster