

Earth Manifesto



A Quite Curious and Illuminating Biography of Mark Twain

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Samuel Langhorne Clemens was born in rural Missouri on November 30, 1835 and he died on April 21, 1910 in southwestern Connecticut, 111 years ago. When he was born, Halley's Comet was visible in the skies, and the next time the comet returned was the year he died. The famous Halley's Comet has a highly elliptical orbit that brings it inside Earth's orbit from the outer reaches of our solar system once every 75 years. It is remarkable that two of the near approaches of this famous comet to the Sun coincided with the birth and death of Samuel Clemens.

In the year 1909, by then internationally known as Mark Twain, he wrote: "I came in with Halley's Comet in 1835. It is coming again next year, and I expect to go out with it. It will be the greatest disappointment of my life if I don't go out with Halley's Comet. The Almighty has said, no doubt: 'Now here are these two unaccountable freaks; they came in together, and they must go out together.'" And sure enough, he died the day after the comet's closest approach to the Sun in 1910.

This biography is intended to shed light on Mark Twain's formative influences, motivations, character, and deep psychological impulses. The deservedly famous writer and public speaker was extraordinarily prolific in writing letters, and because many of his letters were saved over the years, one of the most extensive collections of correspondence ever written by a famous person still exists. These letters provide a fascinating look into the persona of this man, richly adding to the perspective provided by his writings, his autobiography, and the record of his lectures, extensive travels, personal associations and social activism.

Late in life, Sam bragged that, as Mark Twain, he had become "the most conspicuous person on the planet." He once wryly noted that he was "born modest, but it didn't last." In 1897, he declared: "I am not *an* American. I am *the* American. I am the human race compacted and crammed into a single suit of clothes, but quite able to represent all its massed moods and inspiration. I am only human, though I regret it." I chuckle appreciatively and sigh an existential Ha!

The Purpose of These Words

The purpose of this biography is to explore the sensational cultural phenomenon of one of America's greatest historical characters, and to apply his humor, wry wit, occasional exuberant cheerfulness, irreverently trenchant observations and wise insights to our modern day challenges and conundrums.

Mark Twain is highly relevant to people in the world today for a number of good reasons. For one, he cultivated open-minded, even revolutionary attitudes toward vital concerns like the curious nature of human follies, political corruption, war, slavery, discrimination, and attitudes of disrespect for women. His thoughts on these topics can give us a deeper context to discover the greater truths that lie beneath many of the serious conflicts and social antagonisms and reactionary movements in the world today.

Mark Twain had a facile and mischievous faculty for being able to mock absurdities like political extremism and dogmatic religious fundamentalism. His light-hearted approach toward beliefs that were patently preposterous is an attitude that could help us today to clearly see the growing insanity of religious fanatics in their ruthless power grabs and unholy alliance with extreme social conservatives. We could surely benefit from an effective new means of derailing obstructionist opposition to forward-thinking ideas, ecumenical understandings, social progress and initiatives that facilitate peaceful coexistence and protect the environment and make our existence more likely

sustainable. Mark Twain's humorous perspectives have been as powerful and influential -- and as serious -- as earlier salvos by the great philosopher Voltaire against the crushing infamy of socially nefarious and wrongheaded doctrines promoted by established religious and political authorities.

Mark Twain coined the phrase "Gilded Age" in a book he co-wrote in 1873, and he gave us valuable perspectives concerning the negative impacts of irresponsible corporate activities, wealthy "robber barons" and the drastic inequalities in the society of his times. His early thoughts about these topics provide a provocative point of view that could motivate us to make honest investigations into our own increasingly inegalitarian modern age with its unfair concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the few and ratcheting up of disparities between the "haves" and the "have nots". This fresh way of seeing could give us new purpose in investigating how and why we are creating socially harmful, risky and instability-stoking increases in inequities between people.

Mark Twain was angered by the brutal conquest of the Philippines by the United States after the Spanish-American War and during the Philippine-American War. This emotion-charged personal reaction gives us a rather important perspective on imperialistic aggression in war. He was upset by activities of American missionaries, who he regarded as a front for imperialism, so he summonsed them back, declaring: "Come home and Christianize Christians in the States." In our new age of terrorism, militaristic counterterrorism, U.S. armed occupations of other countries, drone bombings and nuclear brinksmanship, the need has grown more urgent than ever for new fair-minded movements to arise. The world today is dominated by economic and political systems that are deeply controlled by wealthy people and giant corporations prepossessed with the drive to maximize profits. One of their favorite ways of accomplishing this is by foisting costs onto others, making the need for common sense reforms increasingly urgent. A powerful movement is needed that should be guided by sensible ideas, fairer dealings, smart understandings, greater moderation and more empathetic attitudes.

The historian Will Durant once wrote, "a sense of humor is born of perspective, so it bears a near kinship to philosophy; each is the soul of the other." A modern Twainian perspective offers us good hope of altering the exceedingly dysfunctional status quo and helping make the world a healthier, safer and saner place. So the Earth Manifesto is a philosophical effort to "save the world", and it is my hope that the hook of achieving a better understanding of Mark Twain's life and worldviews will be effective in advancing this goal, and to do so from a more modern, progressive, feminine and heart-centered perspective.

An Overview of the Life of Sam Clemens

Since Sam Clemens was born in 1835 and died in 1910, he witnessed far-reaching changes during his lifetime. The ideas of three men who lived contemporaneously with Mark Twain have had some of the most profound impacts in human history on the way we understand the world. These three men were Charles Darwin, Sigmund Freud and Albert Einstein, and they helped launch revolutionary new understandings of biology, psychology and the physical nature of the universe into human awareness.

Sam Clemens grew up in a Missouri culture that accepted slavery and was then involved in fighting a terrible Civil War over the issue. Missouri was a border state that sent men, armies, generals and supplies to both opposing sides during the conflict, and it endured a neighbor-against-neighbor war within the state that took place as the larger national war unfolded. More than 600,000 people died in that horrible War Between the States. In the span of his lifetime, Clemens also saw the emancipation of slaves by Abraham Lincoln followed by sadly inadequate postwar reconstruction efforts in the South. He also witnessed many violent conflicts with Native Americans. He lived through times of extraordinary economic turmoil, including financial panics in 1857, 1873, 1884, 1893 and 1907. He was alert to the nature of the Gilded Age of robber barons and the extreme inequalities of that era. He spent a good number of years in the Wild West, which was experiencing rapid growth after the legendary California gold rush and the Comstock Lode silver strike in the Nevada Territory. During his lifetime, communications improved from correspondence carried by Pony Express riders to communications by electric telegraph and then the telephone. Transportation improved from horses, covered wagons and steamboats to railroads, automobiles and early airplanes. Steam power was largely replaced by the internal combustion engine and electric power. The world's population increased by more than 50% from 1.1 billion to 1.7 billion while he was alive, and the United States expanded from 25 states to 46 states.

As these events were unfolding, Sam spent most of his boyhood in Hannibal on the west bank of the mighty Mississippi. Hannibal at the time was a small town about one day's steamboat journey up the river from St. Louis. Sammy was a mischievous boy, full of fun and games and all manner of pranks and mischief. He had an idyllic but adventurous boyhood, as one may surmise from the novels he later wrote about characters like Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn and Becky Thatcher. He happily regarded his youth as a lovely thing, especially in retrospect, "and certainly never was there a diviner time to me in this world," he later noted of his childhood.

The Early Life of Samuel Clemens

Sam was born into a poor family, and he received only a rudimentary education. But he was an avid reader and became a lover of books and later a lifelong advocate of public libraries. As a teenager, he worked at a variety of jobs in Hannibal, his most significant early occupation being as an apprentice doing typesetting in the burgeoning newspaper printing business, where he eventually began to write clever stories for newspapers. He dreamed of becoming a respected riverboat pilot on the Mississippi River, and eventually wrangled his way into a position as a pilot's apprentice, where he spent two years learning the intimate features of the treacherous, ever-changing river between St. Louis and New Orleans. Such knowledge was vital to a steamboat's safe passage, and the undertaking fed his love for travel and adventure, so he reckoned this period of his life was marvelous.

The fabled Golden Age of Steamboats on the Mississippi River lasted less than 100 years, but Oh Boy! -- it was eventful. The first steamboat to navigate the Mississippi was a coal-fired side-wheel steamboat named the *New Orleans* that set off from Pittsburgh in October 1811 and made its way down the Ohio River to the Mississippi, and then down south, traveling through seven states and arriving in New Orleans on January 10, 1812. While the steamboat was en route, the region suffered some of the most powerful earthquakes ever recorded in North America on a fault centered near New Madrid, Missouri. The quakes caused shocking ruptures in the land, and the mighty Mississippi was said to have even flowed backwards for a period of time. The geographer and geologist Henry Schoolcraft was so moved by the scary, calamitous nature of the shaking earth that he turned to poetry:

"The rivers they boiled like a pot of coals,
And mortals fell prostrate, and prayed for their souls."

By the time Sam Clemens was born in 1835, more than 250 steamboats were plying the Mississippi, primarily on the route between St. Louis and New Orleans. The number of steamboats proliferated rapidly, and reached a peak of perhaps 1,200 in the 1850s. Many perils plagued riverboat transportation, and these dangers surprisingly made the average lifespan of a steamboat less than five years. Floating ice in the upper reaches of the river during the spring thaw could sink boats, and many were lost due to hidden snags or submerged sandbars. Collisions were an ever-present danger, and both floods and tornados caused shipwrecks. Numerous fires and boiler explosions destroyed boats, and thousands of lives were lost in these calamities. One might wonder what God had against this mode of transportation!

It was during this time, in May 1858, that Sam met Laura Wright, a 14-year-old niece of a friend of his that was a riverboat pilot. Imagine the scene when Sam spent two of the most memorable days of his life in Laura's company in the bustling and bawdy port city of New Orleans way back then. It was said that there were so many steamboats tied up along the Louisiana waterfront that you could walk a mile from boat to boat without touching the riverbank, and the sounds and smells and frenzied energy of the French Quarter were no doubt colorful, pungent and stimulating. The city of New Orleans was famous for its great music then, as it is now, and many steamboats offered live entertainment in the form of brass bands or banjo-playing minstrels. Loud, lively steam calliopes were popular, featuring upbeat tunes that created a carnival-like atmosphere. Later, the South became home to music infused with plaintive soulfulness that reflected the feelings of those who lived their lives in endless toil. Ragtime, jazz and the blues all incorporated the offbeat syncopation of rhythms inspired by soulful African roots.

The young lass Laura struck Sam's fancy with such infatuation that, decades later, he would still think of her charms. Her sweet Victorian character was an idealized fantasy for him, and he found her to have a cheerful presence, a precocious wisdom and an alluring innocence. She became a source of inspiration to him for the rest of

his life, and he used her memory to model some of his female characters in his novels around her image. She was a magnificent muse for his imagination, and he later wrote that he regarded her as his "dream-sweetheart".

After two years as an apprentice under the pilot Horace Bixby, he became a licensed pilot himself on paddle-wheel steamboats. He loved the exciting work as a riverboat pilot, but then -- dang it! -- commerce up and down the Mississippi was rudely and abruptly interrupted by the outbreak of the Civil War in April 1861. Sam joined a local group of Confederate militia in Missouri when the war broke out, but he resigned after two weeks, joking later that "I was incapacitated by fatigue through persistent retreating".

Soon after the start of the war, Sam "absquatulated to the territories", heading off with his brother Orion on a stagecoach journey across the Great Plains and over the Rocky Mountains and through Salt Lake City to the rough-and-tumble Wild West towns of the Nevada Territory. In the aftermath of the Gold Rush to California, this region was in the throes of a mining frenzy for riches of silver, gold and other minerals. The Comstock Lode near Virginia City was in the process of becoming the single most valuable source of silver in all of history.

The Comstock Lode was discovered in 1859, and soon thereafter Virginia City and its environs were transformed from a sparsely populated near-wilderness area into a mining boomtown. As can well be imagined, change was chaotic when adventurous risk-taking miners from all over the world descended upon this area and indulged in a carelessly destructive mania of mineral mining and hard living. The zealous gold-fever enthusiasm of miners in the Old West is legendary. "They came to the Comstock to get rich! Some did, most didn't, and many died trying."

Samuel Clemens began calling himself Mark Twain while writing for the *Territorial Enterprise*, a newspaper in Virginia City, when he was 27 years old in February 1863. He signed off, "Yours, dreamily, Mark Twain", and this pen name was to become the most famous in all of American letters. Knowledgeable observers point out that "mark twain" was a nautical shout to a riverboat pilot from a leadsman on the boat's bow who was charged with plumbing the depth of the water ahead. It meant "mark two fathoms deep", or twelve feet, which was the depth of relatively safe water for Mississippi riverboats.

Virginia City was a boomtown that had many saloons and 'houses of ill repute', and even an opera house. It had a seedy "Barbary Coast" area with many different ethnic groups and lots of gambling, drinking, prostitution and crime. Interestingly, frontier newspapers of the nineteenth century tended to routinely print rumors, personal attacks, racist invective and flat-out fabrications, and were little concerned with fair or accurate reporting. They shamelessly promoted commercial interests, as for instance the *Solid Muldoon* did in the Ouray region of western Colorado when it lobbied for the dispossession of the native Utes. Why? Oh, yes, the Ute Indian Tribe held title to much of the San Juan Mountains, where prospectors and real estate profiteers were seeking their fortunes. The *Solid Muldoon* was published by David Day, who once had 42 libel suits pending against him, and he regarded them almost proudly, "like a row of combat medals." A roadside interpretive sign near Ouray points out: "Slanted though they were, publications such as the *Solid Muldoon* were the only news sources available, making them very influential in shaping opinion -- and events." (Manipulating opinion, and skewing the lives of many; it might be regarded as an early precursor of Fox News.)

With the advent of social media and its use by devious emotion-manipulating politicians who push misinformation frequently, there has been a dramatically more complicated reality to the wry observation Mark Twain once made, "If you don't read the newspaper you are uninformed; if you do, you are misinformed."

Mark Twain worked for the *Territorial Enterprise* as a full-time reporter and journalist for almost two years until May 1864, and then he went to California, where he lived until March 1866. By the end of 1865, he was very poor and in debt, so he sought a commission to write letters for publication by the *Sacramento Union* newspaper for \$20 apiece on a journey aboard a steamship to the Sandwich Islands (now known as the Hawaiian Islands). These letters proved to be entertaining and popular, so they helped launch his career as a writer.

When Mark Twain stayed in bawdy San Francisco at various times between 1863 and 1867, it is entirely possible that he went up to the top of Twin Peaks. The view to the west of this prominence from a proper vantage point on a clear day reveals the almost mystical but very real Farallon Islands. These rocky islands lie about 30 miles northwest of the Golden Gate. The islands teem with seabirds like Tufted Puffins and Storm Petrels, and with

"charismatic megafauna" -- marine mammals like harbor seals, sea lions and elephant seals. This aquatic wilderness was the scene of an awesome display of the living world's mysterious, beautiful and daunting natural order when wildlife enthusiasts on a whale-watching expedition in 1997 reported having witnessed an attack just south of the Farallons in which a killer whale lifted a great white shark right out of the sea. Ouch!

Twenty-four hundred miles to the west and south of the Farallon Islands lie those mythic-sounding Sandwich Islands. Mark Twain spent more than four months there in 1866, traveling, absorbing a wealth of experiences, and writing captivating sketches. He later developed a highly entertaining and creative series of lectures about the curiosities of those Sandwich Islands, real and invented.

In the years to follow, Mark Twain became famous for his humorous stories about a wide variety of topics, including his celebrated story about a jumping frog contest in Calaveras County in the Sierra Nevada foothills. He would regale crowds with tales of the Sandwich Islands as well as his *Roughing It* adventures in the Wild West, and his 1867 "Innocents Abroad" travels to Europe. He later recalled that *The Innocents Abroad* marked a turning point in his life, because the book led to his remarkable literary success after he turned to writing novels like *Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Mark Twain became an American icon because of his clever humor, great novels, incisive social commentary, insightful journalism, captivating lectures, philosophical thinking and opinionated persona. He gave public talks to overflowing audiences for decades, frequently provoking uproarious laughter and receiving great acclaim for his performances. He was down-to-earth and neighborly in his talks, and he spoke with a deadpan delivery and a dry drawl and made dramatically effective use of pauses to heighten anticipation and amusement. He asserted that the judicious usage of pauses in verbal expression can have "exceeding value", and he exemplified this virtue in his often-hilarious talks.

His lampooning wit, whimsical observations and practical jokes were a kind of genius that sprang from a uniquely perceptive awareness of natural pretensions, vanities, follies, shams, and fraudulent behaviors of humankind in general. His clever ability to humorously depict these foibles endeared him to audiences. He often related ludicrous stories and expressed astonished bemusement, and was genuinely funny with his appealing delivery. Not only was he a canny observer of life, but he also sometimes startled his audiences with his unpretentiousness, eloquence and accessibility.

I highly recommend filmmaker Ken Burns' almost poetic film *Mark Twain*, for it is a production that provides excellent images and insights into the life and character of Sam Clemens. It's available on Netflix -- check it out!

Formative Influences, Including the Genesis and Revelations of *The Innocents Abroad*

Mark Twain loved to travel, and once he had left Missouri, he rarely returned to the Midwest for the rest of his life. He lived primarily in the Northeast, and spent more than eight years living abroad during the 1890s. His extensive travels reflected the fact that he enjoyed the variety and cultural experiences involved in traveling. Like Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer, he loved freedom and hated routine. Similarly, most people like variety and do not like routine, and many people demonstrate strong desires for freedom, adventure, travel, escape and even an ardor for undertaking a heroic odyssey of some sort. There is no doubt that travel broadens horizons and perspective, and Sam would likely have agreed that all who wander are not necessarily lost. Ah, wanderlust! (But make no mistake about it, "wherever you go, there you are.")

Each of us also has contrasting urges to put down roots and find a calm and connected balance in our often hectic lives. Most of us would consider it ideal to have a secure base in life from which we could be somewhat free to make our own individualistic and adventurous excursions. Such situations foster variety, which is a real nice existential spice, stimulating and rather satisfying.

Mark Twain's first travels to Europe and the Middle East were on a five-month voyage from New York City to the Mediterranean and the Holy Land in 1867, aboard an elegant side-wheel steamship named the *Quaker City*. He accompanied a group of 75 other passengers on this trip, most of whom were notably staunch in their religious beliefs. Their pilgrimage to the Holy Land revealed to him a shocking reality of beggars, appalling conditions, desolate landscapes, squalid ruins, filth, braying donkeys, melancholy dogs, ignorantly superstitious people, petty

frauds, vandalism and historical falsifications. As he ruefully observed later, "It is an awful trial on a man's religion to waltz it through the Holy Land."

After returning from his voyage aboard the *Quaker City*, he assembled and revised the many stories he had written for newspapers about the journey, then published them in *The Innocents Abroad, or The New Pilgrims' Progress*. He was ostensibly striving to piggyback his book on the shoulders of the extraordinarily successful 1678 classic by John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress from This World to That Which Is To Come*. This was a simplistic Christian allegory that is oddly one of the most widely published works of literature in history. Faithful and Pliable would so attest. *The Innocents Abroad* became Mark Twain's best-selling book during his lifetime.

By the time the *Quaker City* returned to the East Coast, Mark Twain regarded people who believed in a literal "Second Advent" of Jesus Christ with severe skepticism. He had seen that believers in this biblical myth seemed to relish the idea of innocent non-believers being slaughtered in mass during foretold apocalyptic End Times, even more than they appeared to actually look forward to a time of potential fellowship, love, peace, beauty, glory and redemption in an idyllic afterlife in Heaven. In keeping with this point of view, Mark Twain portrayed people in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* as being far more devoted in their religious observances to self-righteous attitudes and duty to God than to brotherhood with the poor or concerns for downtrodden folks. Mark Twain once remarked: "This thing of stretching the narrow garment of belief till it fits the broad shoulders of a wish, is too much for my stomach."

A deeper investigation into End Times concepts of religious fundamentalists is explored in *Rapture Mania: Bizarre Beliefs and Epic Epiphanies*. Read therein about the bizarre Rapture Index, and the wiser idea of a Sustainability Index that would help us collectively see ways to accomplish vital greater good goals like reducing injustices, mitigating inequalities, solving difficult problems, mitigating global warming-induced climate change, stopping rainforest destruction, protecting wetlands, cutting down on production of toxic wastes, protecting biological diversity, building peace, and discouraging risk-laden rapid growth in human numbers and potentially disastrous population overshoot.

An Aside Concerning Theodore Roosevelt

Mark Twain loved leisure time. Since he had traveled around the world more extensively than almost anyone else alive in his day, he had earned the right to consider it a luxury to stay in bed until late morning. His penchant for enjoying leisure time contrasts distinctly with the inclinations of Theodore Roosevelt, another iconic figure who was a contemporary of his, albeit almost 24 years younger.

Roosevelt lionized "the strenuous life", and criticized a life of what he described as "ignoble ease". He lived his life in ways consistent with this active philosophy, bustling with incredible energy and intrepid undertakings before, during and after his presidency. His nearly fatal journey down the *River of Doubt* in Brazil in 1914 makes an extraordinary story of its own. This river was an uncharted tributary of the Amazon that snakes through one of the most remote and treacherous jungles in the world.

While I deeply admire Mark Twain's iconic persona and the effect he has had in America and around the world, I also admire the character of Theodore Roosevelt. After he had become president in 1901, he sought to protect America's national resources from the greed of Big Businesses. One of his signature accomplishments during his terms in office was to conserve forests, fresh water resources and wildlife habitats. His convictions in the importance of conservation were so strong that he succeeded in having 230 million acres of land set aside for the public in the form of five National Parks and 150 national forests, along with 51 federal game preserves and bird sanctuaries and 18 national monuments and 24 fresh water reclamation projects. Among the five National Parks he established was beautiful Crater Lake National Park and the impressive Mesa Verde National Park.

Think about this great accomplishment. "It was an astounding record, unprecedented and against all odds; for much of what the president did, he had to do despite Congress," declared biographer Philip McFarland. "But Congress and the property interests that Congress by-and-large spoke for -- the lumbermen, ranch owners, mine owners, commercial hunters, the beef and other trusts -- fought him along the way. The Constitution had charged the

House of Representatives with spending the people's money; and Joe Cannon, the Speaker of the House, wouldn't spend one cent of it, he said, on scenery!"

"Others protested the government's interference in what belongs to all of us. Why was the President meddling with that? Those were our lands out there, our forests, property to purchase and use as we chose. They were, yes, the young president agreed, except that 'we' and 'our' included Americans yet unborn, who far outnumbered the nation's current inhabitants."

This is a valuable perspective for us today, because any assessment of the collective best interests of all humankind are shifted substantially when the well-being of generations of people to be born in the future are taken into account! Let us honestly begin to do this, and reject the conflict-of-interest-filled ambitions of rash resource exploiters and power-abusing conservatives in all future elections!

Theodore Roosevelt is somewhat of a hero in my mind because he was an aristocrat and Republican who actually fought the corrupting influence of powerful corporations. During his tenure as president, the Department of Justice brought more than 40 lawsuits against huge corporate trusts. Dozens of big corporate entities were busted up into smaller organizations so that they wouldn't be able to abuse monopoly power so easily. Today's Republicans, operating in our Big Money corrupted political system, are veritable cowards and pandering pushovers by contrast! And libertarian anti-environmentalists in the Republican Party cast a dim light on the integrity and respectability of their public service. Their rigid ideological unwillingness to compromise seems madly myopic and ludicrously misguided, I do passionately declare!

Theodore Roosevelt spoke these words in a speech titled *The New Nationalism*, in 1910: "At every stage, and under all circumstances, the essence of the struggle is to equalize opportunity, destroy unfair privilege, and give to the life and citizenship of every individual the highest possible value both to himself and to the commonwealth." Right on!

He continued: "I stand for the square deal. But when I say that I am for the square deal, I mean not merely that I stand for fair play under the present rules of the games, but that I stand for having those rules changed so as to work for a more substantial equality of opportunity and of reward for equally good service." Excellent call, Theodore! Our leaders today should honorably stand for a much fairer deal than the "conservative" agenda.

Roosevelt also spoke in *The New Nationalism* about the epic and contentious strife between Capital and Labor. This conflict has been intense since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, and it has been a "conflict between the men who possess more than they have earned and the men who have earned more than they possess." It is "a struggle of freemen to gain and hold the right of self-government as against the special interests who twist the methods of free government into machinery for defeating the popular will." These sure are perceptive and highly relevant words today!

Remarkably, President Roosevelt was among the first to support a kind of universal health insurance plan. He did so because he believed that no country could be strong whose people were sick and poor. More than 100 years have passed since Roosevelt's presidency, and today there sadly are millions of people without health insurance who get their "health care" in emergency rooms. In pandemic times, this is pathological. There is still sensationally strong opposition by conservatives to fair and sensible reforms that would make healthcare available to all, and they even seem to oppose a smart emphasis on prudent preparedness and preventative measures, and on making medical care and prescription drugs more affordable. Dignity in dying? They're against it!

Of course, almost anything can be judged in dramatically different ways. Consider the fact, in light of these virtues of Theodore Roosevelt, that Mark Twain once wrote in private that he regarded Roosevelt as "far and away the worst president we have ever had." Samuel Clemens expressed this sentiment because of Roosevelt's excessive enthusiasm for war, and because the president had subjected Henry Rogers, one of his friends and a financial savior of his, to a vituperative verbal lashing. Rogers at the time was the vice-president of Standard Oil and a famously shark-like capitalist who was known as Hell-Hound Rogers. The jury is still out on both Roosevelt and Rogers, as it is on us all.

On Early Rising

Mark Twain definitely did not like to get up early. He wrote an article about the misadventures of a trip made "at an hour in the morning when all God-fearing Christians ought to be in bed." In this humorous sketch titled *Early Rising, As Regards Excursions to the Cliff House*, he made note of the rude contrast between the anticipated pleasures of an early morning excursion to San Francisco's Ocean Beach and the actual nature of the experience.

Expectations and reality often do not coincide, as most everyone knows. We may make plans in good hopes of enjoying some pleasure in them, but as travelers can attest, plans can go awry, and distinctive inconveniences -- or worse -- can occur. It turns out that unexpected and fortuitous pleasures are often of a richer variety than those we intend. Adventures, interestingly, are frequently considerable inconveniences that we regard in retrospect as more memorable than more mundane experiences. Things may fortuitously turn out to be better than we expected (for a while), but of course the certainty of our own personal deaths provides us with a cogent context in which to see our lives, and to appreciate Being Here Now. Philosophers point out that rather than regarding our mortality as lamentable, we should see it as a reminder to focus on living well, and realizing *What Really Matters*, and appreciating any good fortune we have, while it lasts. Eat, drink, and be merry?! And strive to leave a positive legacy.

Mark Twain on Belief, Fate, God and Satan

The circumstances surrounding Samuel Clemens' towering achievements after humble beginnings contributed to his occasionally megalomaniacal self-image, as occasionally revealed in his correspondence with others. Fortunately, he had a contrasting inclination to be slyly self-deprecating, and he was able to laugh at himself, which is a quite healthy attitude to have in life.

Early in his career he had realized that ridiculing others could be an occupation that would generally be met with anger and criticism in reaction, and it was fraught with a certain measure of hypocrisy. Ridiculing the fool within is a vein that can be much more profitably and safely mined. A collateral benefit of this approach is that one's own fool is generally a fairly good representative of the fool in others. All miners know that some veins are richer than others in the quest to hit paydirt, and Mark Twain had discovered that the specific veins of absolute certitudes and ethnocentric convictions of righteous religious superiority are like the Comstock Mother Lode of folly and absurdly hypocritical small-mindedness.

Fate has a fickle finger, whether or not one believes in any sort of circumstantial determinism. A particular concatenation of events led to Sam's younger brother Henry suffering an agonizing death in June 1858. Henry was in the wrong place at the wrong time when a boiler exploded on the steamboat *Pennsylvania*, killing 250 people. Sam had gotten Henry his job working on steamboats, so he felt anguished guilt and terrible self-reproach when his brother suffered an excruciating death from severe burns. This event contributed to his belief in the randomness of good and bad luck in life, and to his skepticism concerning religious claims that there is an all-knowing, all-powerful Christian God whose divine will is providential, paternalistic, caring and loving.

This accident reinforced Mark Twain's doubt as to whether a benevolent force exists in the cosmos, and these feelings eventually became subsidiary themes in his novels, written sketches and public talks. It was a tragedy that contributed to his fascination with dreams and parapsychology, particularly in the wake of a dream that had foretold Henry's death in striking detail, like a bona fide premonition. In my personal experience, most accidents and calamities arrive without being announced, so in the year 2021, with 20-20 hindsight, I note that it is hard to explain the principles, beyond coincidence, by which a phenomenon such as premonition might operate.

Mark Twain lived in times where superstitions and fears of Hell had powerful portent. Remember that religious authorities fervently promoted a concept of "eternal damnation" for sins in those days, and vivid beliefs in supernatural causes were widespread. Today we might be rather more inclined to be skeptical, though most people might agree with novelist Joseph Conrad words, written in 1911: "The belief in a supernatural source of evil is not necessary; men alone are quite capable of every wickedness." Yes, indeed -- and tragically so! And in the Trumpian era, things in general seem to be getting rashly worse.

Advances in knowledge in the past century have corroborated the fact that geophysical events like earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, hurricanes and destructive storms have natural causes. Some people attribute things

like this to an angry God that is supremely peeved about moral transgressions, but those folks are generally merely revealing deep biases, judgmental prejudices and superstitious ignorance. Such projections onto a deity reflect fears, anger and spite that can tragically and malevolently be used as a basis for real evils like harsh discrimination, ethnocentric hatreds and even brutal violence against immigrants, poor people, females, gay men, lesbian women and people in racial minorities -- or against those who believe in a different God.

Mark Twain had become disillusioned when he was young with teachings in the New Testament that asserted people would get what they asked for, if only they prayed hard enough. Prayer just didn't seem to him to yield hoped-for results, and besides it seemed self-centered and "so ignoble" to him. His novels convey the strength of fears and superstitions that were inspired by religion in his day, especially among black slaves. His books also reflect the author's suspicions that fate may be largely determined by happenstance and luck.

"Then I see a snake, a puff adder gliding along as smooth as silk. This is the queer part I'm trying to tell. I don't shoot off like a rocket and lam out of there, I just lay quiet watching it come along the ground till it reaches my foot where it stops, surprised I'm still there, not scared or nothing... I knowed right off it's a sign, but the meaning of it was a mystery."

--- *The Further Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, by Greg Matthews

Have you ever experienced a coincidental circumstance that seemed to you to be a sign? All manner of such occurrences may take place, but assessing the meaning of them puts me in a frame of mind to contemplate John Fowles observation in *The Aristos*: "... below the surface, we do not know; we shall never know why; we shall never know tomorrow; we shall never know a god, or if there is a god; we shall never even know ourselves. This mysterious wall around our world, and around our perception of it, is not there to frustrate us, but to train us back to the now, to life, to our time being."

In his later days, Sam was plagued by disappointments and hardships and tragedies, so he harbored a conviction that the dark forces of 'Satan' may have more influence in human affairs than the bright forces of 'God' and 'angels'. He had an almost compulsive fascination with seemingly malevolent forces in the universe, recognizing that bad fortune is often the result of circumstances, and that adversities are often made worse by the harsh and heartless inhumanity of robber barons, criminals, murderers, corrupt government officials, dictators, die-hard ideologues, religious fundamentalists and other such-like villains.

Samuel Clemens' mother had suffered a number of misfortunes in her life, but she had a spirited love of living and she managed to maintain a "sunshiny disposition". This seems to be an excellent attitude to maintain in life. See and appreciate the positive!

A Digression Concerning Sam Clemens' Parents

I once stumbled across the rich online archive of New York Times articles about Mark Twain that were published in the long span between 1867 and 1970. I read with lively interest an article from February 1928 about Mark Twain's mother and an interview with the woman who was a real life character model that he used in his novels in portraying Becky Thatcher.

Mark Twain's mother, Jane Lampton Clemens, was a great lover of fun. "She preferred folks who were full of life, liked anything gay, and hated the solemn and morbid," according to this article in the *New York Times* about a boyhood sweetheart of Mark Twain's who figured prominently in his novels as Becky Thatcher. At the time of that article, the woman was then 90 years old, but still had vivid memories of the Clemens family. To her, of course, the famous humorist was Sam, not Mark. "Sam was always full of mischief," she said, "and liked to tease his mother. For this she often reprimanded him. She never knew what he was going to do next."

In dramatic contrast to his mother, Mark Twain remembered his father as a dreamy kind of man who was proud, silent and austere. Before the family moved to Hannibal from the town of Florida, Missouri, Sam later remarked about his father, "He had no particular luck except that I was born."

Jane Clemens resembled Sam in that she possessed a dry sense of humor and held strong opinions. She and her family were said to have liked the "colored people" in the Hannibal area, and they liked her, and would do almost anything for her. "She was never a Puritan in any sense but she tried to raise her children to be good and dutiful."

In 1849, when Sam was 14 years old, gold seekers on the way to California were streaming through Hannibal, and "many of the men and boys, including Sam, got the gold fever. Mrs. Clemens excitedly watched the covered wagon processions go through town. Sam, not content with mere watching, expended his energy with his gang of friends playing at mining; they borrowed skiffs and went down the river three miles to the cave where they would stake their claims and pretend to dig gold."

These reflections take me back to the life and times of the great author, and provide fodder for contemplation. Sam's father, it is said, had once been well off, but had lost his money, so when they came west to Missouri, "they were very poor but mighty fine people." Being "mighty fine people" is a great thing to aspire to!

The Light and the Dark

Things had gone so well in his life, by-and-large, that by the age of 50, Sam Clemens was astonished at the extent of his good fortune. He had a happy family and an extensive group of friends and was living a storied existence in a large mansion in Hartford, Connecticut. He had come from very modest roots and had achieved great fame as Mark Twain, and he was proud to have earned substantial wealth and worldwide accolades.

Sam Clemens' immense success by the age of 50 can be seen as his glory years. Wouldn't you know it, these years were followed, in contrast, by some very challenging times in the last 25 years of his life, when he had cause to feel bereft and adrift due to the tragic deaths of his beloved daughter Susy in 1896 and his wife Livy in 1904. He also had squandered huge sums of money and invested poorly, and his publishing firm Webster & Company was forced to declare bankruptcy in 1894. Feeling the financial pinch as early as 1891, the Clemens family had been obliged to move to Europe to save money and get their financial house in order. In the summer of 1895, Sam and Livy and their oldest daughter Clara sailed forth on an around-the-world cruise and lecture tour to pay off debts. By 1898, he had earned enough money to honorably succeed in that task.

One of the most tragic events during this period was the death of his first daughter Susy. She was the favorite in the family back in those innocent days long ago "when such open partiality was commonplace", according to biographer Philip McFarland. Susy Clemens provided a fertile source of inspiration to her father, who regarded her as a prodigy. "She is the most interesting person I have ever known, of either sex," declared one good family friend. "She knows all there is of life and its meanings," said another about her when she was still a teenage girl.

Susy secretly wrote a biography about her father in 1885-86, starting when she was 14 years old. It was titled *Papa: An Intimate Biography of Mark Twain*. She kept it under her pillow, and she wrote nearly 20,000 words before breaking off in mid-sentence and never continuing it. Samuel observed late in his life, writing about this biography by his daughter: "I had had compliments before, but none that touched me like this; none that could approach it for value in my eyes. It has kept that place always since."

One of Susy's most important insights was that the world didn't accurately understand her papa. People tended to see Mark Twain as "a humorist joking at everything", but she saw that "he has much more in him that is earnest than that is humorous", and was determined to set the record straight. In her biographical journal, Susy documented her world-famous father -- from his habits (good and bad!) to his writing routine to their family's colorful home life. Her biography was "frank, funny and tender", and it gives rare insight and a compelling perspective of this American icon.

The serious side of the famous humorist was revealed by his love of liberty and hate of shams. He wrote in a letter to the president of Yale University in 1888 that the trade of satirical humorists is useful and "a worthy calling; that with all its lightness and frivolity it has one serious purpose, one aim, one specialty, and it is constant to it -- the deriding of shams, the exposure of pretentious falsities, the laughing of stupid superstitions out of existence; and that whoso is by instinct engaged in this sort of warfare is the natural enemy of royalties, nobilities, privileges, and all kindred swindles, and is the natural friend of human rights and liberties."

In Susy's biography, she asserted that her father did not like going to church for the reason that he loved to hear himself talk but couldn't bear to hear someone else go on and on and on, like a preacher. She clearly loved and admired her father, but she also shared some of his personal faults, as she wrote, like having a quick temper and being somewhat absent-minded. Hmmm ... well, stuff happens.

Sam Clemens openly admitted that he thought of Susy when he wrote his *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*: "Susy at 17, Joan of Arc at 17. Secretly, I drew Joan's physical portrait from Susy at that age, when I came to write that book. Apart from that, I had no formally appointed model for Joan but her own historical self. Yet there were several points of resemblance between the girls, such as vivacity, enthusiasm, precocious wisdom, wit, elegance, mental penetration, and nobility of character." Wonderful qualities!

Susy was reputedly attractive and charming, with "dark eyes full of intelligence and an alert eager manner." She attended Bryn Mawr College in Pennsylvania in 1890-91, just five years after it was founded to give young women academic opportunities that many young men took for granted. She later expressed a strong emotional longing for an intimate friendship she had forged with Louise Brownell, a fellow classmate at Bryn Mawr. Susy had sent Louise more than three dozen letters that have survived in the historical record, and she expressed a love-filled, romantic and passionate longing for Louise in these letters. One observer noted that in dealing with what might be regarded as a lesbian relationship today, "There was as yet no clear notion in the 1890s of a fixed gender identity determined by the object of one's desire." ... "College girls could develop 'smashes' on one another and have intimate romantic relationships without such choices or activities constituting an 'identity' as we have come to know it in the twenty-first century." I guess Victorian times were innocent, but could be quite passionate.

Susy tragically died at the age of 24 in Hartford while her parents and her sister Clara were on their years-long trip around the world. Perhaps there is nothing quite like tragedy and loss, remorse and adversity to catalyze the imagination and provoke daunting dreams and provide intense and provocative insights. Sam Clemens experienced visceral dreams of disaster and calamities after Susy died. For instance, in the story *The Enchanted Sea-Wilderness*, he imagined a story of a sweet, heroic and much-loved St. Bernard dog that was abandoned aboard a flaming ship. And in *The Great Dark*, he conjured up visions of a man with a happy family, peering into a microscope at infinitesimal creatures in a drop of water, and then the man entered a dream world where the family is aboard a ship under sail on that very same drop of water, in perpetual darkness among grave dangers.

Sam Clemens felt a deep sense of loneliness later in his life after Susy had died, but it was the death of his wife Livy that made him more frequently disconsolate. Then he suffered a final sling and arrow of tragic angst and sorrow piercing his heart in the last year of his life when his youngest daughter Jean died of a sudden epileptic fit while taking a bath on Christmas Eve in 1909. As a result of the many adversities of his last twenty years of life, the aging observer can be forgiven for having harbored doubts about the existence of a benevolent God.

An Aside on Passages in Life

Every person is on his or her own individual life journey, and we all go through our own personal life passages. I find it interesting that some famous men like Mark Twain achieved triumphant success in their lives but then experienced dramatically different stages in their lives as they got older. Ludwig van Beethoven and Carl Jung were two others who had been exceptionally successful in the middle years of their lives and then experienced serious adversities that forced them to become much more philosophical in their waning years. *Being Mortal*, it seems, one never knows what fate is in store.

Beethoven has been called the "first rock star" for the fame his virtuoso piano playing and brilliant musical compositions engendered after he had moved from his native Germany to Vienna, Austria. He had three defining stages in his life, the most notable being his "heroic period" when he wrote pieces like his Symphony No. 5, with its famously booming opening notes. Then his musical compositions underwent a transition to a third period when his health was faltering and he was losing his hearing, and his music took on a more meditative character and seems to reflect a pensive, muted and transcendent spirit.

Likewise, Carl Jung had achieved great fame early in his career as a psychologist, but then later in his life he experienced a "metanoia" life crisis and sought healing in "the spirit of the depths". It was during these years that he created his deeply meditative *Red Book* as a reflective response. Carl Jung's life and his fascinating perspectives are explored in *Transcendental Musings: A Bugle Horn Sounds for Solidarity of Purpose*.

The Value of Great Literature and Artistic Perspectives in Better Understandings

History itself is like a turbulent river, a great confluence of people, ideas and events. The course of history, like the course of a river, can be reshaped by distant storms. Since the remote days of our ancestors' incipient awareness, human beings have strived to comprehend reality and understand things that are mysterious, sublime, ineffable or implacable. The history of philosophical ideas and understandings can be regarded as a series of stages that began as superstition, evolved into theology, and were later explained by abstruse metaphysical abstractions. Finally, today they are understood in a more comprehensive way through the coupling of direct experience with scientific observations, hypotheses and experiments that reflect the functioning of the world in accordance with natural causes and effects. Like a river, life undergoes evolutionary change, and it does so highlighted by meanders and "punctuated equilibrium" events. Notably, our interpretations of reality profoundly influence the way we believe reality to be, whether our perspectives are accurate or not.

"Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one."

--- Albert Einstein

Great literature can provide us with deep understandings by presenting compelling ideas and universal themes and underlying motifs. Literary passages often use subtle but powerful symbolism. In the days before the visual imagery of mediums like photography and television, such themes and motifs and symbolism appealed to reader's imagination much more cogently than the concrete and numbing specificity of more modern forms of media with their rapid sequences of images. Unfortunately, mass media today tends to be obsessed with sex, violence, scandal and the sensational -- and the modes of media that inform us are filled with bad news, conflict, war, ideology, brazen propaganda, indoctrination and suasive marketing. And mass media is interrupted, all too frequently, by shallow, distracting, subliminally manipulative materialistic commercial messages.

Symbolism can be simple, transparent and allegorically plain, as it was in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, with its characters Christian, Evangelist, Obstinate, Pliable, Worldly Wiseman, Faithful, Hypocrisy and the like. Symbolism can also be complex, abstruse and even shadowy, as in Melville's *Moby Dick*, in which deranged Captain Ahab sees an evil malignity and despair on an all-consuming scale, and then projects these feelings as an embodiment onto a great white whale.

The symbolism in Mark Twain's stories is one of their most noteworthy aspects. To him, the Mississippi River symbolized a godlike force, with its unpredictable and impersonal natural currents, floods, snags, fog and other dangers. The river also represented adventure, escape and the essence of freedom. Like a wide river with a turbulent flow, every person's life metaphorically swirls with complexity. We are all affected by inexplicable eddies, unfathomable undercurrents, labyrinthine undertows of uncertainty, unconscious biological imperatives, seductions of status and power, and motivating desires for validation and material goods. Mark Twain recognized that each and every one of us, including the author himself, has tragic flaws, comic foibles and stunning shortcomings, as well as individual promise and rich potential.

Naturalists and psychologists alike recognize that wisdom can be gained through insights gleaned from close observations of natural phenomena, and from insightful introspections into human nature. Time spent by a lovely river that cascades out of majestic mountains, for instance, allows one to reflect on life, and may reinforce understandings of the value of going with the flow, of letting be what is, and of making the best of whatever comes our way. "Breathe in slowly and deeply, and breathe out, letting go." (Repeat!)

The Jewish Buddhist Sylvia Boorstein once sagely observed, "We don't get a choice about what hand we are dealt in life. The only choice we have is our attitude about the cards we hold and the finesse with which we play our hand." Yay for right mindfulness and positive thinking! While hiking in areas with swift streams that must be crossed, it becomes clear that one should pay close attention and focus on maintaining balance and being nimble as you go. These are good lessons for coping in life!

"All great books are symbolical myths, overlaid like a palimpsest with the meanings that men at various times assign to them."

--- Clifton Fadiman, in his Introduction to Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*

Symbolism can be an essential way of apprehending and understanding reality because it contains a compellingly sensuous and intrinsically visual quality. Literary symbolism can reveal much about the conscious and unconscious aspects of an author's life experiences and passions and ways of thinking. Symbolism is interpreted by readers according to their own personal perceptions, emotions, cultural conditioning, biases, worldviews and projections. Thus, symbolism can be a kind of Rorschach test that evokes feelings and reveals readers even unto themselves.

In an actual Rorschach test, intricate inkblots are used as a psychological tool to assess a person's subjective interpretations of abstract visual images. This can reveal fascinating insights into the subject's personality and mental projections and emotional make-up and thought processes. Aha! See the extensive exploration of world literature and philosophy contained in the Earth Manifesto essay *Inspiration, Imagination, and the Deep Well of Human Impulses*, for associated insights.

A Subjective Perspective of Storytelling and its Significance

Storytelling is one of humanity's oldest creative traditions. The telling of stories began as oral histories that were passed down through many generations in various cultures, long before the invention of alphabets and the written word. Languages themselves are like rivers, ever changing and flourishing and sometimes altering course, or drying up and dying away.

Some people wax philosophical and say that storytelling is an effort to achieve a kind of immortality. Just think about this. Sam Clemens has achieved the enduring attention and appreciation of millions of people around the world, and his novels continue to be discovered long after his death. Many of his writings have been published posthumously in the century since he died, and articles and books continue to be written about him, so in many ways he has indeed achieved a kind of immortality.

In a literal case of storytelling contributing to longer life, the famous *Arabian Nights* is one heck of a fantastic tale, and one that Mark Twain happened to hold in high regard. It is a story about a beautiful, wise and clever woman named Scheherazade who married a Persian king notorious for marrying a succession of virgins and then executing each of them the morning after he married them. He supposedly did this because his first wife had been unfaithful to him so he was intensely motivated to prevent any other woman from committing such infidelity. Scheherazade told the king compelling stories night after night, weaving unfinished tales in such a captivating manner that she kept him in thrall, eager to hear more, and more, and more, and thus he ended up sparing her life again and again and again for 1,001 nights.

Scheherazade's tales were entertaining, but they also taught morals and kindness. These stories progressively enlightened the king, and he finally made her his queen. Storytelling saved her life, staving off the premature mortality that would otherwise have been her fate at the hands of her ruthlessly despotic husband. In many of the stories Scheherazade told in *Arabian Nights*, characters are waylaid by chance and circumstance, thus making preordained destiny and inevitable fate seemlike plausible things in which to believe. This may have been one reason Samuel Clemens loved the stories in the *Arabian Nights* so much. He found them to be among the most creative and original tales in the history of literature, and they stimulated his thinking about circumstance and chance in the meandering course of life.

Samuel Clemens also respected his contemporary, the brilliant novelist Charles Dickens, as well as the famous theatrical plays of the Bard of Avon, William Shakespeare. Sam marveled at Thomas Paine's fearlessness and power, as expressed in books like *The Age of Reason*, and he loved Miguel Cervantes' fabulous stories of the knight-errant Don Quixote who traveled around the La Mancha region of Spain on his horse Rocinante, with his sidekick Sancho Panza. Don Quixote's ridiculous behavior, tilting at windmills, led to a new word, "quixotic" that means "romantic without regard to practicality". Ah, Dulcinea, to dream the impossible dream!

A wide variety of techniques such as the 'frame story' (that contain stories within stories) have been used in literary composition to captivate readers. Two of the most famous examples of frame stories are *Arabian Nights* and *The Canterbury Tales*. Though Mark Twain began his writing career as a journalist, a humorist and a travel writer, he later created some of the greatest American novels by using his mastery of telling stories and tall tales in his own unique kind of frame narratives, such as the adventures of Huckleberry Finn seeking freedom that take

place during a journey on a raft with the escaped slave Jim as they floated together down the ever changing and sometimes turbulent Mississippi.

Mark Twain's great novels are notable for his characters' use of vernacular speech that authentically reflected the Negro culture of the South and the anything-but-genteel culture of the Wild West during Gold Rush days. Vernacular refers to the native language and colloquialisms of a region or locality. Mark Twain's use of vernacular made his stories more evocative and accessible to the general public. Most original editions of his novels were extensively illustrated, a fact that gave his readers an additional dimension for appreciating his works.

Mark Twain kept notebooks that he filled with observations as "his way of processing experience." Many people regard him as a keen observer and a deep philosophical thinker, and he was able to interweave his rich personal experiences, great sense of humor, and vivid imagination into highly entertaining stories. His fervent brain drove him to observe astutely and express himself both authentically and facetiously, and sometimes eloquently. He also had a way of writing things that are wildly exaggerated and preposterous, and he often wantonly made things up. He was fond of adjusting facts and exaggerating circumstances to make a good story. Albert Bigelow Paine, one of his biographers, explained that he had "curious confusions of memory and imagination that more than once resulted in a complete reversal of the facts." I wonder if that's ever happened to anyone else?!

"You know, I never told the truth in my life that someone didn't say I was lying, while, on the other hand, I never told a lie that somebody didn't take it as a fact."

--- Mark Twain

A Slithering Aside on Snakes and Humor

Here is a funny passage that demonstrates Mark Twain's wonderful creativity. Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer were mischievous boys, oh, I reckon so! They knew that women generally were not fond of snakes, and this warn't something they learned in Sunday school. The boys, just for some fun, collected "a couple dozen garters and house-snakes" in a bag and hid them in a bedroom of the home of Tom's Aunt Sally. The snakes soon got loose:

"No, there warn't no real scarcity of snakes about the house for a considerable spell. You'd see them dripping from the rafters and places, every now and then; and they generly landed in your plate, or down the back of your neck, and most of the time where you didn't want them. Well, they was handsome, and striped, and there warn't no harm in a million of them; but that never made no difference to Aunt Sally, she despised snakes, be the breed what they might, and she couldn't stand them no way you could fix it; and every time one of them flopped down on her, it didn't make no difference what she was doing, she would just lay that work right down and light out... And if she turned over and found one in bed, she would scramble out and lift a howl that you would think the house was afire ... Why, after every last snake had been gone clear out of the house for as much as a week, Aunt Sally warn't over it yet; she warn't nearly over it; when she was setting thinking about something, you could touch her on the back of her neck with a feather and she would jump right out of her stockings. It was very curious."

Ha! Those boys were real rascals. Bravo for Mark Twain's humor!

Note that all the ideas in this biography are, in a sense, elaborations of observations and philosophies contained in the 121 Soliloquies of the original Earth Manifesto, published in October 2004 (Book Nine, and Part Seven online), AND of such treatises as the 'magnum opus' of the Earth Manifesto, *Comprehensive Global Perspectives: An Illuminating Worldview* (Book Seven). At the moment I write this, none of these writings have ever been read in full by anyone. Make history! The imaginative reflections in *Inspiration, Imagination, and the Deep Well of Human Impulses* alone would be well worth the time spent. And speaking of tall tales and the truths they may embody, I encourage readers to check out *Tall Tales, Provocative Parables, Luminous Clarity, and Evocative Truths: A Modern Log from the Sea of Cortez*. This story advances the brilliant ideas of writer John Steinbeck in the context of my own excursion to the Sea of Cortez with a group of great gal friends 12 years ago.

The Liberating Effects of Writing under a Nom de Plume

Sam Clemens was fascinated with switched identities, multiple personalities, relativistic uncertainties, confused identities, imposters, twins and the true reality behind appearances. He explored these things in short stories like

The Siamese Twins, and in novels like *Pudd'nhead Wilson* and *The Prince and the Pauper*. I suspect that this interest may have been correlated to his adoption of a *nom de plume*. His use of a pen name seems to have inspired his interest in dual personas and situational ambiguities, and it also gave free rein to his alter ego. It may even have had the substantial effect of helping stimulate his creativity.

Mark Twain once wrote, "In religion and politics, people's beliefs and convictions are in almost every case gotten at second-hand, and without examination." He bemoaned the unfortunate "decay of independent thought". This is why Mark Twain's intellect, clever wit and irreverent satire were brazenly directed at people's behaviors and the frequently odd folly of their actions. His laughter at preposterous beliefs and sanctimonious piousness, and hypocrisy, strict puritanism and literal interpretations of the Bible stem from such cynicism. Since boyhood, he had been enveloped in a culture steeped in conventional propriety and Victorian modesty, yet despite this fact, he personally indulged in "sinful behaviors" like smoking cheap cigars from a young age and occasionally drinking alcohol intemperately. He fell prey to a gold rush mentality, gambled, used profane language, wrote with biting satire, and sometimes acted with vindictiveness toward people he perceived as having wronged him.

Everyone has their own bright ideas, to be sure, but they are not always consonant with reality. Most ideas are like "Corn Pone Opinions", inherited or learned as a result of the ways parents bring up their children or through repetitive indoctrination by churches, or other forms of peer and social conditioning. All too many people have, sadly, swallowed questionably-valid conservative political ideologies and religious dogmas "hook-line-and-sinker".

Trying to definitively define Mark Twain is, of course, fraught with difficulty. His character was chock full of contradictions, so all commentaries about him are only partly true. He had a kind of split personality: he was "an agnostic, almost anarchistic enemy of established everything", as Malcolm Jones wrote in a *Newsweek* article titled "Our Hippest Literary Lion", and yet he became a somewhat bourgeois man who "married above his station" and loved to hobnob with rich and famous people. In his final decade of life, Mark Twain lived large and sumptuously, "a first-class life", according to Michael Shelden in *Mark Twain: Man in White*.

Malcolm Jones also noted the curious fact that few people quote Mark Twain's contemporary, Walt Whitman, a man who helped define the shape of American poetry much as Mark Twain defined its prose. Whitman once said, "Do I contradict myself? Very well then, I contradict myself." So be it.

A 'Second Advent' of Mark Twain

Picture Mark Twain sitting in his octagonal gazebo at Quarry Farm in western New York State, writing and reflecting atop a knoll overlooking a lovely river valley. Among the many books he wrote is the illuminating satire, *Letters from the Earth*. It was not published until 1962, more than 50 years after his death, because of its scathingly irreverent and satirical nature. He had considered the short book to be too blasphemous and sacrilegious for his times. He had once written: "We never become really and genuinely our entire and honest selves until we are dead -- and not then until we have been dead years and years. People ought to start dead, and then they would be honest so much earlier." That's a creatively witty way of looking at it!

At the time Samuel Clemens made this observation, he was no doubt thinking about all the things he had written that he was afraid to publish during his life. In *Letters from the Earth*, for instance, he ridicules people's concepts of heaven, expressing astonishment that there is so much singing and harp playing in heaven, and yet such a complete lack of respect for intellectual accomplishments or interest in sexual intercourse, which are such unmistakably dominating features of many people's preoccupations while they are alive.

Hear Mark Twain's astonishment about mankind having left sexual relations out of his conceptions of Heaven: "... the human being, like the immortals, naturally places sexual intercourse far and away above all other joys -- yet he has left it out of his heaven! The very thought of it excites him; opportunity sets him wild; in this state he will risk life, reputation, everything -- even his queer heaven itself -- to make good that opportunity and ride it to the overwhelming climax. From youth to middle age, all men and all women prize copulation above all other pleasures combined, yet it is actually as I have said: it is not in their heaven; prayer takes its place." LOL!

Yours truly, Tiffany Twain, considers it even more exceedingly odd that Churches leave the healthy expression of human sexuality out of their moral conceptions of life while we are alive. The purpose of sex is not only to

reproduce, no more than the purpose of food is merely to keep us from starving to death. For those who prudishly atavistically oppose the use of contraceptives to prevent unwanted pregnancies, I editorially observe, get a life!

In *Letters from the Earth*, Mark Twain also made a telling comment concerning the Christian Bible: "It is full of interest. It has noble poetry in it; and some clever fables; and some blood-drenched history; and some good morals; and a wealth of obscenity; and upwards of a thousand lies." I would bet that in another advent of Mark Twain's life today, he would complement the observations like those he made in *Letters from the Earth* with more modern inclusions, ones that I imagine would embrace a truer spirituality, and perhaps resemble a humorous version of the ideas contained in the essays of the *Earth Manifesto*, and in particular the epistle *Revelations of a Modern Prophet*.

"A little rudeness and disrespect can elevate a meaningless interaction to a battle of wills, and add drama to an otherwise dull day."

--- Bill Watterson, *Calvin and Hobbes*

Mark Twain was intently interested in geology and paleontology. His interest led him to write *A Brace of Brief Lectures on Science* in 1871. If he were to be resurrected today in some sort of miraculous Second Advent, he would be startled and impressed with the extraordinary advances in scientific understandings that have been made since his death, especially in arenas of astronomy, astrophysics, geology, biology, psychology and the curious electrochemical nature of the workings of the human brain.

An extensive discussion of geology precipitated out of this biography and became *Gaia's Geological Perspective: Episodes Since Genesis*, an essay that delves into things like the astonishing geologic processes by which the Hawaiian Islands were formed, and how the gold came to be in "them thar hills", and how marine limestone rock layers that formed at the bottom of the Indian Ocean much later came to be found at the top of the world's highest mountain range, the Himalayas. One of the most important insights in this Gaia essay is one that Mark Twain would have been fascinated to have been able to hear and understand, long before geologists discovered the true nature of the genesis of the beautiful volcanic Hawaiian Islands. This is the surprising discovery of the processes of plate tectonics and the causative relationships between a hot spot deep in Earth's mantle, below the overlying oceanic crust, and the formation of these tall roughly conical volcanic mountains. These understandings are included in *Gaia's Geological Perspective*, along with further reflections on Mark Twain's thinking, and they are hereby incorporated into this biography with this reference.

Mark Twain would have loved to be able to more fully comprehend the processes by which the current Hawaiian Islands were formed, and to understand that a 4,000-mile-long chain of former Hawaiian islands, which have been eroded down to underwater seamounts that still tower far above the deep ocean floor, march all the way across the Pacific Ocean to the planet's deepest sea trenches near the Kamchatka Peninsula and the western end of the Aleutian Islands of southwest Alaska.

In a Second Advent of Mark Twain, he'd probably even try to put all the scientific developments made since his death in 1910 into an extensively articulated elaboration of modern developments in human thought. As likely as not, he'd marry this astute analysis with a satirical barrage of sly observations about the ridiculous follies of human nature and the fascinating pathos of the human condition. Maybe he would even surmise that the waste in our societies is meretricious, the level of political corruption is abominable, and neo-Gilded Age inequalities are dastardly -- and aggressive American militarism is so misguided and costly as to be lame-brained insane. He would probably be extremely cynical about the ruthless U.S. military police-state occupation of Middle Eastern nations, for he had once declared: "An inglorious peace is better than a dishonorable war."

During Mark Twain's extensive travels throughout his lifetime, he developed a deep concern for the exploitation of native peoples, though not for American Indians, whom he largely scorned in keeping with strong prejudices of his times. He was aghast at the stupidity and barbarity that were rampant in American culture. This is one reason he opposed U.S. imperialism and jingoistic leadership.

At the time Mark Twain co-wrote *The Gilded Age - A Tale of Today* in 1873, there were maybe 1.5 billion people on Earth. Today, human numbers are approaching 8 billion. What would Mark Twain, the perceptive social critic, have

thought of this perturbing trend, and its attendant glaringly daunting challenges? He loved inventions, so he would be astonished at technological advances since his day, but in his cynicism about human folly, he would likely direct scathing sarcasm at the new set of absurdities that accompany our immoderate consumer activities and aggression and current day fundamentalist forces that so stubbornly oppose sensible family planning policies.

In a Second Advent, Mark Twain would probably suggest that we boldly dare to doubt primitive mythological conceptions of the universe. I imagine he would valiantly strive to attain greater clarity of perception, and with his astute critical thinking abilities, he might even focus on the wisdom of cultivating social and emotional intelligence in our daily lives. He would clothe his lessons in humor, and would use satirical wit to refute blind beliefs of moralistic, judgmental, hypocritical and evangelical fire-and-brimstone ideologues and their narrow-minded brethren. He would be especially cynical about attitudes that negatively affect others, instead of respecting truer virtues like generosity of spirit and love, and neighborly goodwill and "Christian" compassion. And he would also, in this day and age, likely be incisively serious about the need for us to clearly recognize the intensifying impacts that our growing human needs and desires are having on the health of Earth's ecosystems. He thus might conclude that aggregate behavioral changes should be encouraged and incentivized so that we begin to give greater respect and protections to the oceans, atmosphere and natural habitats!

Creativity, Intelligent Design, and the Church

Mark Twain loved science and rational thinking, so he would have heaped praise on the amazing discoveries made in genetics in recent decades. He would have been astonished by confirmations of Darwin's scientific theory of evolution by natural selection that paleontologists have found in the fossil record, and that geneticists and molecular biologists have discovered in the genetic record. He would have found an expanded basis for heaping ridicule on the stubborn intransigence of Creationists in their embrace of denial, ignorance and blind belief in biblical literalism.

He might have particularly appreciated a stunning rebuke given to disingenuous dogmas of Intelligent Design that came out of a trial in a federal court in Pennsylvania in 2005. In this legal challenge, science teachers opposed religion-motivated members of the Dover Area School Board who had advocated questioning the scientific theory of evolution in biology classes. Judge John Jones, a conservative judge who heard this widely watched case, eventually decried Intelligent Design as manifesting "breathtaking inanity". He asserted that this was a dogma consisting of untestable hypotheses grounded in religion, not in science. He sensibly noted that Intelligent Design had been introduced for religious reasons as a form of repackaged Creationism. With poetic irony, one month before Judge Jones made his ruling in this case, voters in the Dover Area cleaned house by electing 8 out of 9 people to the school board who did not hew to orthodox religious views that question the extensive evidence of biological evolution. For deeper insight into this case, watch the *Nova* episode titled *Judgment Day: Intelligent Design on Trial* (available on Netflix).

"God made the Idiot for practice, and then He made the School Board."

--- Mark Twain

Charles Peirce's 2009 book *Idiot America - How Stupidity Became a Virtue in the Land of the Free* discussed the Dover Intelligent Design case in Chapter Six: *God and Judge Jones*. Pierce also examined idiotic undertakings like the bizarre Creation Museum that opened in 2007 near the town of Petersburg, Kentucky, which lies about 400 miles southeast of Hannibal. This fake "museum" depicts people riding dinosaurs that have been saddled up to show that the two species existed contemporaneously, in a ridiculous attempt to deny the fact that more than 65 million years separated the times that dinosaurs last lived and the evolutionary arrival of *Homo sapiens*.

"Like so much of the blasted landscape of Idiot America," Pierce wrote, "the Dover trial was a war on expertise". Intelligent Design was being "sold in such a way that people would speak loudly and authoritatively in its support; then, enough people would believe it to make it a fact, and they would believe it fervently enough to make it true." Ha! Hmmm ... The tradition of Mark Twain's skepticism and ridicule lives on in America today!

Churches in the U.S. are making concerted efforts to market themselves and their ideological doctrines, as if emulating a clever sloganeering sales pitch for a "Gospel According to Wal-Mart." These efforts have served to

cheapen almost everything worthwhile about their faiths, even their ostensible virtues as moral institutions. The manipulation of faithful folks into giving support to reactionary politicians and egomaniacal Donald Trump makes our nation unnecessarily vulnerable, more anti-progressive and somewhat stupid, and anti-feminist, and less flexible, and less adaptable in dealing with overarching challenges. "Churches, evolve!"

Denials of expertise, like those of Trump Republicans about climate change, or the knowledge of the foremost disease expert Dr. Anthony Fauci, are proving to be both colossally costly and deadly. More instances of idiocy!

An Entertaining Aside

Mark Twain made a good point when he once wrote: *"It ain't those parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand."* Sam Clemens was much more familiar with the Bible than anyone I know personally, and he felt that people who swallow the biblical whale of a story as literal truth, rather than regarding it as myth and allegory, are far more gullible than a child who fervently believes in Santa Claus, the Tooth Fairy, the Easter Bunny, or a Boogeyman. After even a small dose of virgin births, resurrections after death, a planet-wide flood, 500-year-old men, and assertions that "There were giants in the earth in those days", most people begin to seek more metaphorical meanings in their holy books, and in the ways they interpret such stories. And they should soundly reject all encouragements and glorification of disconnected attitudes against others, or their slaughter.

Religious fundamentalists, perplexingly, feel that only a properly literal and inflexible belief in their dogmatic doctrines and mythological stories is adequate to demonstrate obedient faith. These are people that become dangerous when they head toward the lunatic fringe. Such folks generally have been indoctrinated from their childhoods in a belief that their holy book is wholly holy, so they believe in bizarre notions and follow absurd paths. Taken to extremes, they are even willing to murder abortion doctors, blow themselves up to hurt others, or launch "holy wars" of aggression.

Mark Twain's humorous scorn for the God portrayed in the Christian Bible is revealed in his exclamation that the Bible is "the most damnatory biography that exists in print anywhere." He had been brought up as a Presbyterian, and he regarded that faith as preferable to being in the mainstream of Christianity with its domineering Vatican hierarchy, meddling missionaries and hypocritical faithful. He had forgiving pride in Presbyterian moderation, observing: "You never see us Presbyterians getting in a sweat about religion and trying to massacre the neighbors." Ha! That's an excellent call, especially in light of violent conflicts between monotheistic religions in the world today, and between conservative religious folks and progressives.

Other Churchy Considerations

I love conservative Judge John Jones' phrase "breathtaking inanity" that he had used in referring to Intelligent Design ideologies. Mark Twain, even in his grave, might be envious that he had not come up with those words himself to describe dubious religious fundamentalist doctrines. He would probably guffaw with suppressed glee at the richly cogent nature of this characterization.

The reason Mark Twain heaped sardonic ridicule upon those who mindlessly touted biblical certitudes was presumably because of the variety of unnecessary and socially undesirable conflicts such attitudes create. This is why he once indicated that the frivolousness of his literary work had one overriding serious purpose: "the deriding of shams, the exposure of pretentious falsities, and the laughing of stupid superstitions out of existence." He famously wrote: "Against the assault of laughter, nothing can stand," so it is curious in this light that a revival of religious evangelism in the USA in the last few decades has brought into question the effectiveness of both rational thinking and ridicule against the pitched defenses of dogmatic unreason.

Religion often presents its doctrines as a believe-it-or-else-go-to-hell proposition. This is patently absurd. Four of the Ten Commandments, and oddly enough the first four, are concerned with the proper honoring of a jealous Lord God and "His" holy word and the Sabbath day. Of all the possible missing injunctions against bad human behavior, like Thou shalt not rape, Thou shalt not sexually abuse children, Thou shalt not persecute others for their personal religious beliefs, Thou shalt not commit violence against thy spouse, and dozens of others, God overlooked them all and spent four-tenths of his Commandments obsessing over any person taking "the name of the Lord thy God in

vain". It is as if cursing is one of the worst sins, or that believing in some more likely truth than the existence of a loving jealous wrath-prone vindictive and inscrutably capricious male God is a threat to human well-being.

I personally believe that social cohesion is becoming increasingly important as the world gets more crowded, and that monotheistic rigidity of ideological beliefs is dangerous. The need is growing for people to come together to solve problems, and this should take precedence over compulsions to find righteous justifications in beliefs in One and Only One True God. Demagogues who demonize others and impose reactionary dictates and obstruct fair-minded progress are the real "losers"!

Fear and insecurity have remarkable motivating power, and they contribute to the strong staying power of established religions. People have deep hopes for a caring personal God, and for a better life in some 'hereafter', so they are easily manipulated from a young age by religious authorities and indoctrinating catechisms they teach.

"Doubt is not a pleasant condition, but certainty is an absurd one."

--- Voltaire

The principal theme of Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* was that the Roman Catholic Church is ultimately an enemy of the people because it embodies the established evils of churches when they manipulate religious believers for monetary and political purposes. The Catholic Church purports to serve noble spiritual functions, but such laudable purpose is subverted when it allies itself with political conservatives and helps enable abuses of power. In *Connecticut Yankee*, the protagonist visits early medieval England and accuses the church of helping prolong ills of 6th century society. The ills in those days of the legendary King Arthur included a perpetuation of social inequalities, a helpless subservience of the masses to domineering authority, and a supposition that persons in the nobility had hereditary rights and deserved prerogatives. Occupy these ideas!

Established churches have extremely sordid histories of violently opposing any evolution in their dogmas, other than shrewdly deceptive ones. The creative transmogrification of creationism into creation science and then into intelligent design, for example, was a cunning ploy to try to sell an archaic mythology as science, not religion. That attempt has been done with such blatant duplicity and a dose of downright incompetence that it has always remained transparently full of holes. Church leaders seem to think that once any part of their supposed truths are seen to be hogwash, then a closer examination might be made of all their claims, even by loyal believers.

Many thousands of women were burned at the stake during the Middle Ages by authorities in the Catholic Church for what were minor offenses that Church leaders saw as threats to their hegemony. Then in 1633, Galileo was confined under house arrest for the remainder of his life after he dared contradict the Church's antediluvian dogma that asserted the Earth is the center of the Universe. The Church refused to admit the colossal error of its geocentric worldviews for more than 350 years after the persecution of Galileo. Three hundred fifty years! Finally, after Pope John Paul II commissioned an oddly long 13-year investigation into the Church's condemnation of Galileo, the Church formally admitted that it had erred in condemning Galileo, and that 'Gosh, by the way, Copernicus and Galileo were right, the Earth actually does orbit around the Sun'.

Let's hear from the famous astronomer and philosopher himself! Galileo Galilei stated: "I do not feel obligated to believe that the same god who has endowed us with sense, reason, and intellect has intended us to forego their use." -- Hallelujah!

Conservative religious authorities demand fidelity and obedience, even to the most bizarrely antiquated aspects of the doctrines of church, temple or mosque establishments. To disagree and thus be considered a heretic or an infidel is dangerous worldwide, even still today. The Mormon faith makes Utah one of the most bone-headedly conservative states in the Union. And places abroad where Shariah Islamic Law is practiced can be intensely sexist, barbaric and cruel. As an example, the death penalty can be applied under Shariah law for 'crimes' of blasphemy, adultery or homosexuality, and theft can be punished by amputating a thief's hand. Shariah law also holds that both "fornication" and public intoxication should be punished by flogging.

People's adherence to religious dogmas is, in some ways, a barbarous waste of moral energy. As writer John Fowles observed in his philosophical treatise *The Aristos*, misguided religious thinking and action are "like keeping ramshackle water mills on a river that could serve hydroelectric dynamos." Much more positive outcomes could be

achieved if these formidable energies, along with the enormous amounts of time and money devoted to churches, were to be redirected into more moderate, inclusive, wholesome, sustainable and peaceable channels.

Imagine, for instance, if we could transcend the terrible conflicts over religious supremacy that are taking place between Christianity and Islam in the world today, as manifested by the 9/11 terrorist attacks against the U.S. and the retaliatory military occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the on-going disastrous war in Syria, and the drone assassinations of Islamic extremists (and assorted innocents in the vicinity) in places like Pakistan and Yemen. American involvements in the region have for years used air supremacy to bomb insurgents, yet terrorist extremism has gained excessive influence, as did the Islamic State. The costs of these conflicts are terribly high in a world so much in need of smarter and more salubrious investments of money and energy.

Think how different the world would be if more people studied big picture open-minded progressive ideas that are future-respecting and enlightened -- rather than ideas that are closed-minded, reactionary, myopic and narrowly parochial. The synapses of our brains have remarkable neuroplasticity, and maybe with broader ways of seeing, these synapses would build new circuits and snap into new healthier perspectives and understandings and worldviews that would revolutionarily affect our societies in positive ways. This might even make it easier for us to work together to achieve greater good goals!

Consider what a difference it would make if more people studied progressive ideas today rather than the Bible and Quran. The world would be a better place if millions of people explored and debated ideas that are socially and ecologically intelligent, like those articulated in this manifesto, instead of studying improbable stories and archaic commandments, and cartoonish concepts of a Supreme Being, and the divisive, antagonism-provoking supremacism of monotheistic religions and authority figures.

Religious devotion may not be a barbarous waste of time, energy and money from the perspective that religious beliefs may have considerable value in people's lives, and may provide compensatory consolation, structured values and affirmative social connections. Such beliefs can be a convenient vehicle for people to express their deep spiritual needs -- sing out loud! -- and they can be a good outlet for people to indulge their hopes and assuage their fears, insecurities and stresses. But when fervent convictions cross the line and begin contributing to progress-opposing political activities, or when they provide strong support to politicians who seek personal advantages by rationalizing harm to the environmental commons, or when they act to impose or perpetuate a host of harshly discriminatory biases or result in outright violence, then they should be rejected!

It may be that, as Albert Einstein once observed, "A foolish faith in authority is the worst enemy of truth."

Stories, Facts and Telescopic Illumination

Science and rational thinking, in contrast to religious orthodoxy, promote ideas that are consistent with the evidence of experience. Science adaptively incorporates incisive understandings that are much more accurate whenever new insights or advanced scientific instruments come along that provide better ways of seeing the world. To believe blindly, with no evidence other than the distilled and manipulative hearsay of 'holy books', is like taking an irrational and stultifying plunge from the vaulting battlements of reason.

Galileo significantly improved telescopic lenses more than 400 years ago, in the year 1609, allowing him to observe four moons orbiting the planet Jupiter. This was a surprising discovery that helped confirm the theory, first advanced 66 years earlier by Nicolaus Copernicus, that the solar system operates on a different principle than one involving everything being in orbit around a stationary Earth. This knowledge effectively displaced the Earth from the center of the Universe in our understandings, whether we liked it or not. The Catholic Church refused to admit this fact for centuries; its leaders seem to have preferred to burn people at the stake for heresy for refusing to conform to their narrow, dogmatic, manipulative and erroneous version of reality. Dastardly!

Telescopes and microscopes are instruments that have vastly improved our ability to see the cosmically big and the extremely small in the universe. The insights gained from such expanded vision should not be denied merely because they contradict primitive understandings of the world. Seeing is believing! The photos taken by the Hubble Space Telescope provide us, for instance, with extraordinary pictures of things like "The Pillars of Creation", huge clouds of interstellar gas and dust in the Eagle Nebula in which new stars are being created. The

Hubble Space Telescope also gave us a beautiful view of "The Perfect Storm" in the Swan Nebula, revealing another hotbed of star formation, along with thousands of other almost artistic visions of astrophysical reality.

The greatest advance in the resolution of telescopes since Galileo's day was achieved after the Hubble Space Telescope, launched in April 1990, had its optics properly focused in December 1993 and helped revolutionize our human understanding of the universe. Its images have been used to determine that the universe is almost 14 billion years old, and to confirm the "existence and ubiquity of black holes". Hubble images have surprised scientists with discoveries about deep space and early developments in the universe, and they have helped us learn more about the planets in our own neighborhood of the cosmos. These images led to a "recent revolution in human conception of the universe" that has more-or-less "done away with the old sense of a benign firmament filled with twinkling lights. In its place looms a forbidding realm of surreal violence and weirdness."

Mark Twain fans in the Midwest may be heartened to know that the 43-foot long Hubble Space Telescope is named for Missouri-born astronomer Edwin Hubble, the first scientist to discover, back in the 1920s, that the Milky Way is not the only galaxy in the universe. It stunningly turned out that there are hundreds of billions of other galaxies. Edwin Hubble also was the first scientist to establish that the universe is physically expanding, as if from an initial colossal Big Bang impulse.

Our understandings have come a remarkably long way since the days of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Copernicus and Galileo. Nonetheless, ultimate mysteries remain. We are insecure seekers of the agent behind Creation, and seekers of a universal purpose in existence. Most people's heads spin when they think too hard about ultimate mysteries, so they tend to choose to believe in simplistic explanations that just happen to be provided by manipulative ideologues and evangelical preachers.

Every God ever conceived by human beings is an anthropocentric personification of forces, human archetypes or attributes of our own better or worse natures. Gods are a convenient receptacle for our hopes and fears, and they reflect a need that we feel for some sort of absolute in a relative world. Gods provide a good channel for our spiritual impulses and prayers, our thanksgiving and our curses, and our powerful desires for hope and meaning and beliefs in an afterlife to compensate for the slings and arrows of misfortune that inevitably eventually afflict each of us in our lives.

Divine personifications tend to take the form of a 'She', or a 'He', like the Great Mother Goddess of primitive humankind or the Father God of patriarchal religions, or Goddesses of infinite love, wisdom and virtue, or the tyrant God of the Old Testament who seems to crave adulation and command faith, obedience and sacrifice. The reason Mark Twain poked fun at absurdities involved in this entire God-inventing business was because he found it to be so pathetically affiliated with odd rationalizations, discriminatory biases, repressive control impulses, deep hypocrisies, and violently merciless conflicts, and Inquisitions, pogroms and wars.

Intelligent Athenians 2,500 years ago likely understood that their gods and goddesses were personifications of natural forces and principles. How could evangelicals today actually believe that their anthropocentric God is a real Supreme Being, rather than a metaphorical personification? How could people today be more gullible in some ways than our ancestors long ago in classical times?

Science is not static like most religions. Vastly more expansive understandings have been revealed by science since the days of Sam Clemens. Astrophysicists today use sophisticated instruments like mass spectrometers to confirm that countless galaxies of matter are hurtling through space in a billions-of-years long unfolding of the cosmos through space and time. Nonetheless, many people who cling to literal interpretations of the Bible still obtusely adhere to primitive explanations of our origins. In 1650, Irish bishop James Ussher proclaimed that he had traced the lineage of Jesus and the ancestral life spans given in the Old Testament of the Bible back to the time of Adam and Eve, and he declared God created the Universe on Sunday, October 23, 4004 B.C.

Really?! Some Biblical literalists have blindly believed this genealogy ever since, despite the fact that beliefs like this have grown increasingly absurd in light of more accurate understandings. As Mark Twain once perceptively wrote, "Faith is believing what you know ain't so."

It is fine to "believe what you know ain't so" -- it's a free country! -- as long as such beliefs do not have negative impacts on others. But the aggressive promotion of religious doctrines that condemn all people who believe differently is proving to be inimical to the prospects of peace and justice on Earth. It may even be dangerous to the survival of our species to have large segments of the population cling to primitive beliefs and deny crucially important social, environmental and ecological understandings.

Repressive and regressive forces supported by stubbornly rigid believers in established religions are having many impacts that are much more detrimental than they are beneficial in our societies. We should strive for better understandings of the emotional motives behind blockheaded inanities that deny more accurate ways of seeing. This is why we should formulate public policies that encourage good education and broad-minded critical thinking. It is simply becoming ever more urgently necessary for us to deal effectively with the daunting problems facing us, and to insist on finding ways to transform our societies into fairer and more sustainable ones. The time has come for us today to strive with greater collective commitment to actually achieving a more propitious destiny.

A Whale of an Illuminating Story

In Sam Clemens boyhood, cities were illuminated by burning whale oil made from the blubber of slaughtered whales. Jonah in the Bible might have felt prodigious vindication at the poetic justice of this development, for surely Jonah was mortified at having been swallowed alive by a whale back in the days of old. I'm just speculating, because if Jonah was anything like the LORD God in the Old Testament, he could easily have held a grudge against an entire species throughout all eternity for the supposed wickedness of a single action. Forgiveness does not seem to have been in fashion back then. After all, the whale had "vomited out Jonah upon the dry land", and some of the whales' descendants might have been given some small break for that consideration, instead of having been mercilessly hunted by mankind nearly to extinction in the last 200 years. I imagine the experience was ignominious for Jonah to have been swallowed whole and then to be required to spend the biblical interregnum of three days, cramped and clammy in the belly of "a great fish", before being resurrected in so rude a way at the direction of God!

For an extraordinary true story about a huge sperm whale that attacked and sank a whaling vessel in the middle of the Pacific in 1820, read *In the Heart of the Sea: The Tragedy of the Whaleship Essex*.

Ironies certainly abound in our world. Urban and rural illumination is achieved today by using electric lighting, not whale oil, and most electricity is generated by burning coal, oil or natural gas. Good God! --- Here we are using fossil fuels formed from fractious deposits of organic matter far back in Geologic Periods eons ago, like the swampy Carboniferous (an era hundreds of millions of years ago) -- and yet more than a third of people in the U.S. still claim they don't believe in evolutionary change!

The most basic fact about the Universe is that everything changes and everything is in constant motion. Countless galaxies are hurtling through space, as if away from some colossal explosion of initial genesis. Each of these galaxies consists of billions of big balls of burning matter. Planets, asteroids, comets and other stellar debris orbit around each burning star, just as our home planet and a bunch of other matter orbits around the Sun. Earth's atmosphere is also in motion, with winds, air currents, jet streams and gaseous agitation continuous phenomena. Oceans are in motion with daily tides, undulating waves, flowing currents and turbulent upwellings. Even the crust of the Earth moves slowly in giant slabs called "tectonic plates", and earthquakes and volcanoes reveal the continuous nature of these subterranean forces at work. And every electron of every atom of every molecule of everything on Earth is in constant motion in every moment.

Motion is change, so everything is changing all the time. All things change, ironically, in accordance with what seem to be unchanging "laws of nature", as described by scientific disciplines that include physics, chemistry, geology and mathematics. This irreversible sequence of altering matter through time and space can be seen as a physical evolution. This evolution of Earth is evidenced in the formation and lithification of sedimentary rocks, fossilization, mountain building, erosion, chemical weathering, glaciation, volcanism and earthquakes. Geophysical changes like this demonstrate the continuous evolution of our home planet. The photograph on the front cover of Book Two of the Earth Manifesto shows the aftermath of the collapse of a high rock arch onto the beach of a sandy Pacific cove that is a fine example of the "punctuated equilibrium" nature of some of an infinite number of such changes.

Charles Darwin's scientific theory of biological evolution by means of natural selection grew out of a recognition that all forms of life are found nearly perfectly adapted to the conditions that pertain in the habitats and ranges where they live. This adaptation of life to an infinite number of changing ecological niches is compelling evidence of biological evolution.

Tidy new evidence surfaced in 2015 that provided surprising confirmation of Darwin's theory of evolutionary adaptation by means of natural selection in response to changing conditions. Think about this proof, a surprise that scientists call a "null hypothesis" confirmation. Certain types of microbes have been found living in extremely stable sediments on the bottom of deep seas, and fossil evidence indicates that these microbes have remained evolutionarily unchanged for more than two billion years. Just imagine it: our ancestors at the time of the Cretaceous Extinction 65 million years ago were early primates that resemble little lemurs found on the island of Madagascar today. Since then, our ancestors evolved into an amazing succession of new species along the branching tree of life that included tarsiers then monkeys, then gibbons, orangutans, gorillas, chimpanzees and early Homo species, before finally evolving into *Homo sapiens sapiens* -- human beings. Yet over a period of time that is more than 30 times longer than the last 65 million years, life forms found in deep ocean sediments have remained unchanged! (See Wikipedia entries for *The Ancestor's Tale* for detailed information about the path traced backwards in time from today to meet humanity's forbearers as they converge on common ancestors of all species of life.)

Anyway, it really is astonishing that about one third of Americans say they believe life has not evolved. What sophistry! (Sophistry is superficially plausible reasoning that is actually fallacious, like much faulty thinking that characterizes the beliefs of hard-right conservatives.) It is stunning that so many people deny some of the best modern understandings just to cling to primitive myths and dogmas -- and the whole right wing agenda.

In April 2009, many people were fearful that an outbreak of 'swine flu' in Mexico would spread into a global epidemic. This flu virus was widely understood to be one that was mutating. No matter how fervently people stick their heads in the sand, the factual evolution of a virus can strike us, and such antigens can make an end-run around our miraculously well-adapted immune system defenses, whether or not we believe in evolution. Rapidly mutating varieties of viruses strike fear into our hearts, and yet some religious fundamentalists still deny that species of life have changed since "the Beginning"

The delta variant mutation of the coronavirus in 2021 is proving to be deadly, having adapted to be much more easily transmissible, and denials about this are deadly.

Clearer thinking is vitally important at this juncture in human affairs. Mark Twain was particularly sensitive to the personal peculiarities of the human animal, making note of people's Corn Pone Opinions and remarkable sincerity of self-deceit and amazing propensities to indulge in self-justifications, foolish follies and bizarre leaps of faith. Can't we restructure our societies in recognition of these aspects of human nature, and through a process of wiser understanding, achieve a goal of creating fairer, healthier, more sensible, more peaceful and more sustainable societies? (Yes, we could; and, Yes, we should!)

Let us shake ourselves awake, elevate our sights, and momentarily escape the workaday concerns that command our attention and practically devour our souls. We are like quixotic knights absurdly tilting at quiescent windmills, mistaking them for monstrous giants and hoping for glory in combat and vanquishment. More likely than not, however, such distorted vision will leave us in a sorry condition, as it did with Don Quixote on the Spanish plains of La Mancha.

The Big Picture

We live in a world of universal hazard, with Chaos pitted against Order. In this situation, "the whole" seems to be indifferent to every individual thing in it. In this whole, nothing is unjust or good or bad; all is relative. Things are fortunate or unfortunate to one individual or another, but not to the whole. One person's gain is often another person's loss. Nature is supremely indifferent to individual outcomes. As an example of this truism, when a meteor slammed into Earth 65 million years ago, causing the Cretaceous Extinction in which the majority of living organisms on the planet were wiped out, this catastrophe was certainly a severe misfortune for almost every

individual and species of life alive at the time. But the event eventually proved to be a boon for descendants of the survivors that were able to exploit the opportunities inherent in the altered conditions and reduced competition, and these plants and animals evolved into untold numbers of new species, including all of our mammalian ancestors.

Today, a new wave of mass extinctions is occurring, and humankind is causing them by destroying habitats, over-harvesting, polluting and spewing climate-destabilizing gases into the atmosphere. These developments threaten our own collective well-being. No God will save us from this assault; no one can save us but ourselves. We should recognize and acknowledge this, and honorably commit ourselves to taking appropriate steps! Hear these words.

The writer Nikos Kazantzakis imagined Jesus as a real man giving his first sermon on a hill above a lake in Galilee. "Forgive me, my brothers, but I shall speak in parables", he said. "The sower went out to sow his field, and as he sowed, one seed fell on the road and the birds came and ate it. Another fell on stones, found no soil in which to be nourished, and withered away. Another fell on thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked it. Finally, another fell on good soil; it took root, sprouted an ear, brought forth grain and fed mankind. He among you who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

Recipes

In case anyone who reads this soliloquy feels they aren't getting their money's worth, here is a reward: yummy cookies and exceptionally healthy beverages! Before reading another word, brew some Ginger Infused Health Beverage or make a version of a Papaya Blueberry Banana Lassi, or bake some Dark Chocolate Chip Cookies Made with Almond Meal and lots of Oats, Walnuts, Pecans, Sunflower Seeds, Sesame Seeds, Chia Seeds and Ayurvedic Good Health Spices. The recipes for these drinks and delicious and nutritious cookies can be found in *Twelve Delicious Recipes for Good Health and Gourmet Appreciation*.

Let Mark Twain entertain us for a moment with this humorous passage from *Roughing It*, for it can give us an enjoyable pause for reflection:

"In Syria, once, at the head-waters of the Jordan, a camel took charge of my overcoat while the tents were being pitched, and examined it with a critical eye, all over, with as much interest as if he had an idea of getting one made like it; and then, after he was done figuring on it as an article of apparel, he began to contemplate it as an article of diet. He put his foot on it, and lifted one of the sleeves out with his teeth, and chewed and chewed at it, gradually taking it in, and all the while opening and closing his eyes in a kind of religious ecstasy, as if he had never tasted anything as good as an overcoat before, in his life. Then he smacked his lips once or twice, and reached after the other sleeve. Next he tried the velvet collar, and smiled a smile of such contentment that it was plain to see that he regarded that as the daintiest thing about an overcoat. The tails went next, along with some percussion caps and cough candy, and some fig-paste from Constantinople. And then my newspaper correspondence dropped out, and he took a chance in that -- manuscript letters written for the home papers."

"But he was treading on dangerous ground, now. He began to come across solid wisdom in those documents that was rather weighty on his stomach; and occasionally he would take a joke that would shake him up till it loosened his teeth; it was getting to be perilous times with him, but he held his grip with good courage and hopefully, till at last he began to stumble on statements that not even a camel could swallow with impunity. He began to gag and gasp, and his eyes to stand out, and his forelegs to spread, and in about a quarter of a minute he fell over as stiff as a carpenter's work-bench, and died a death of indescribable agony. I went and pulled the manuscript out of his mouth, and found that the sensitive creature had choked to death on one of the mildest and gentlest statements of fact that I ever laid before a trusting public." (Verily funny!)

An Aside

Some of this "biography" was written near Earth Day 2012, when it seemed appropriate to champion ideas that celebrate marvelous aspects of the Earth and the wonderful balance found in healthy ecosystems that support us. I saluted Mark Twain and expressed the sincere hope that the influence of accurate understandings will come to inform our actions and public policies more powerfully in coming years!

In *Roughing It*, Mark Twain tells the funny story of Dick Baker, an earnest gold miner in a place named Dead-Horse Gulch. Baker had a large grey cat named Tom Quartz. It was "the remarkablest cat" anyone ever did see. He had "a power of dignity -- he wouldn't a let the Gov'ner of Californy be familiar with him. He never ketched a rat in his life -- 'peared to be above it." Tom Quartz loved to superintend the miners in their placer-mining search for gold, but when miners got into pick'n 'n' blast'n shafts along visible veins of quartz, that cat regarded it as the most "cussedest foolishness". He developed a powerful prejudice against the activity after having gotten blown up only once, and he became quite sagacious. It proved to be impossible to cure him of his prejudice: "Cure him! No! When Tom Quartz was sot once, he was always sot -- and you might a blowed him up as much as three million times 'n' you'd never a broken him of his cussed prejudice agin quartz mining."

Hilarious! Marvelous! Thank you, Samuel Clemens, for having enriched our world!

One observer said we should expect wisdom from writers, and that, while art may stop short of Biblical revelation, it ought to tell us more than we already know. Mark Twain's books do this. They help clarify the world and make it a more sublime place. In the film *Mark Twain* by Ken Burns, Russell Banks calls Mark Twain "a wise guy who was wise." Amen!

On Racism and Folly

Hear me now, as I turn to important perspectives on issues that Mark Twain was too courageous to shy away from. Sam Clemens' home state of Missouri had become the twenty-fourth state in the Union in August 1821. It entered the Union as a "slave state" as part of the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which admitted Maine as a "free state" to maintain the political balance between slave and free states in a growing conflict between the North and the South. Sam was accustomed to the seeming normalcy of domestic slavery in his family and in the economic and social culture of his boyhood. Even though the institution of domestic slavery in Missouri was more benign than the harsh farm slavery of the Deep South, slaves could still be beaten for any reason, and slave owners routinely sold slave families asunder, according to the will, exigencies and prerogatives of those who owned them.

The Civil War pitted advocates of abolition of slavery against those who defended the conventional rights of "property owners". Many people in Missouri during Clemens' youth regarded abolitionists as low-down radicals and subversives who threatened the established rights of slave owners. One infamous white abolitionist named John Brown struck fear into the hearts of many people in 1856 by advocating militant actions to abolish slavery. In light of these facts, it took considerable courage of conviction and fair-mindedness for Mark Twain to confront the issue of racism that was implicit in the institution of slavery. He did this through the character of Huck Finn in his most famous novel in which the young protagonist-narrator Huck and the good-hearted avuncular runaway slave Jim escape together down the mighty Mississippi River on a raft.

Mark Twain's attitude toward slavery, as explored in *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson*, was compelling. This tale explores some cutting-edge ideas of the times when it was published in 1894. Set in a fictional Missouri frontier town on the banks of the Mississippi, it tells the story of David Wilson, who had made an unfortunate remark about a howling dog that earned him serious ridicule and the mocking nickname of "Pudd'nhead". Wilson was avidly interested in people's fingerprints, a standard forensic science today, but a sensational and controversial new understanding in those days. Fingerprint analysis is a discipline that relies on the fact that each person has unique genetic patterns in his or her fingerprints. Roxy, the female slave in this story, was 1/16 black. She was responsible for taking care of two children who were born the same day. One was her own son, and the other was the son of her master. Roxy realized that her son could be "sold down the river" to the Deep South, being a slave from Missouri, and since such a possibility was widely regarded as equivalent to being condemned to hell, she switched her baby with the master's, and the two boys grew up in their switched roles.

Roxy's real son grew up as Tom Driscoll, the master's son. He eventually got into a terrible bind with gambling, and ended up murdering his uncle. A jury trial ensued, and Pudd'nhead Wilson, acting as his lawyer, discovered that fingerprints on the murder weapon were Tom's. Further, he discovered that Tom was actually part Negro, thereby revealing the switched identities. Tom was condemned to life in prison for the murder, but Missouri's Governor sympathized with creditors of the slave-owning uncle's estate and immediately pardoned him -- so that he could be sold down the river!

This story is a tragedy, said one literary critic, that reads like an episode of *Matlock* written by Jonathan Swift, "and in it Mark Twain somehow manages to be heartbreaking, entertaining and viciously funny all at once". The story casts light on the racism of the antebellum South, and on the pathetic ways that Negro slaves were treated in American society at the time. This backdrop can be poignantly mined to uncover the lingering legacy of racism in America today, particularly in the South.

As time continues lapsing from the future to the past, new developments take place that have relevance to these ideas. Many of them reveal how intractably stubborn the systemic injustices are that continue to disadvantage Black people and other people of color. We live in extraordinarily interesting times, and big picture perspectives expressed by Mark Twain are cogent -- like his observation about history not repeating itself, but surely rhyming a lot. In February 2016, as intense competition for the office of the presidency heated up, racist invective was veritably oozing out from under the veneer of civilized behavior, and conservative presidential candidates ridiculed "political correctness" with bombastic fervor, asserting that it is a form of tyrannical suppression of free speech. They proclaimed absurdly negative and devious characterizations of the actually impressive accomplishments of the first black man to preside as president over American leadership in the White House, and tried to ignore the role of conservatives in their unprecedented obstruction in the House and Senate of all attempts to improve the economy for the majority.

History will judge Barack Obama's tenure in a far more positive light, for when he took office a severe financial crisis was unfolding and an economic recession was underway, and unemployment and national debt were spiking, and unprecedented bailouts were required to save banks and the auto industry from bankruptcy. Since then millions of jobs were created and a significant amount of progress was made on a wide range of issues during President Obama's tenure in office, and all of this despite a "hard times swindle" and stubborn obstructionism that Republican adversaries used to try to make him fail.

Many conservatives appeared to suffer from a case of what was called "Obama Derangement Syndrome". This was due in part to their listening too faithfully to Fox News and right-wing talk radio zealots like Michael Savage and Rush Limbaugh. This contributed to extreme political partisanship that so consequentially pervades our politics in the USA today. The degree of this rancorous disagreement erupted into prominent view and stunning perspective in February 2016 when Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia died. The Supreme Court had been deciding many cases in favor of conservative ideological positions by a narrow 5 to 4 vote ever since Sandra Day O'Connor retired and was replaced by Samuel Alito, and Scalia's death ended the conservative dominance, until it was reestablished with the appointment of Neil Gorsuch. And then, with Brett Kavanaugh -- and then Amy Coney Barrett -- it sadly strengthened.

Soon after Antonin Scalia died, the Republican echo chamber immediately erupted with disrespectful and antagonistic opposition to having President Obama fulfill his Constitutional duty to appoint a justice to replace Scalia on the Supreme Court. This vitriolic opposition was led by the obstructionist-in-chief of the "Party of No", Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, who declared almost before Scalia's corpse was cold that the Senate would not consider any replacement President Obama nominated.

Note that journalists have a serious responsibility of helping hold powerful people and institutions accountable, as Boston Globe journalists did in the case of widespread abuses of children by priests and the cover-ups of this scandal by Catholic Church officials. This story is told with skill and powerful impact in *Spotlight*, a film that was recognized for excellence as the Best Picture of 2015 during Academy Awards ceremonies in February 2016.

Reflections on Patriotism

Ethnocentric biases are often expressed through nationalistic fervor and misguided loyalties masquerading as patriotism. Again Mark Twain was 'right on' when he noted: "My kind of patriotism and loyalty is loyalty to one's country, and not to one's institutions or officeholders." See my essay *My Country, Right or Wrong* for an in-depth exploration of this perspective in the era of Trump Republicans.

In truth, patriotism in America should be an honest commitment to the principles and ideals that this country represents. This includes the primary concerns of our Founding Fathers: fairness, freedom, guaranteed human

rights, justice, limited government intrusiveness, and fair representation of the best interests of all the nations' citizens. It still irks me that George W. Bush and Dick Cheney and the Republican political apparatus perverted patriotism into a caricature of righteousness in which opposing opinions and dissent were suppressed to promote corporate power, inequality-promoting initiatives, anti-environmentalism, aggressive militarism, male patriarchal dominion, evangelical Christianity and the uncompromising ascendancy of rich people and right-wing politicians. As Mark Twain once observed, an attitude of "My country, right or wrong" is an insult to the nation!

In the biggest picture context, if Mark Twain were alive today, being the Big Thinker that he was, he would be a strong advocate of two important things: (1) a new brand of foreign policy based on social justice, fairer competition, greater efforts to achieve peaceful coexistence, the freedom of religion for all, concerted efforts to marginalize religious extremism, and a more committed striving for the USA to be a better neighbor to others; and (2) a transformation in our national policies on the domestic front to make them fairer and more humanitarian and just, and long-term oriented and ecologically sane. He would probably agree that the best hope of humanity would be to find more effective ways of collaborating together to solve the serious challenges we face.

Joseph Heller provides a relevant point of view in his satirical novel *Catch-22* "It was miraculous. It was almost no trick at all, he saw, to turn vice into virtue and slander into truth, impotence into abstinence, arrogance into humility, plunder into philanthropy, thievery into honor, blasphemy into wisdom, brutality into patriotism, and sadism into justice. Anybody could do it; it required no brains at all. It merely required no character." From 2017 to 2021, with a reality TV show celebrity and political charlatan and his cronies having seized power, that last sentence would be changed to "It merely required a demagogic deceiver with a fraudulent, egomaniacal, unhinged and deviously manipulative character."

Observations about Empire and Propriety

Another salient aspect of Mark Twain's involvement in political affairs was his participation as an outspoken member of the Anti-Imperialist League, an organization that was the first national American peace movement. Mark Twain was commendable for having expressed outrage at politicians who unethically capitalize on national tragedies to push through unrelated agendas.

Not long after the battleship USS *Maine* was hit by mysterious and still unexplained explosions in the harbor of Havana in February 1898, killing 260 people, the United States intervened militarily in Cuba and the Philippines. Quite quickly, a decisive victory was won over colonial Spain. Mark Twain initially found this triumph "glorious", and asserted that it was the worthiest war ever fought because it was waged for the freedom of other peoples. Not long thereafter, he was shocked and disillusioned to realize that prime considerations for the war were for the U.S. to strengthen its empire with coal stations for the navy, seeking new markets for American goods, and establishing new places for missionaries to convert the disrespected "heathen" natives.

The U.S. and Spain ended the war with the signing of the Treaty of Paris in 1898. In this peace agreement, Spain ceded Cuba, Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippines to the United States. Mark Twain saw that America then occupied the Philippines and subjected its people to "benevolent assimilation", which the Philippine people regarded as a new form of oppression by a different foreign master, so he went ballistic. Hear the words he wrote in the year 1900, because they are significant:

"I left these shores, at Vancouver, a red-hot imperialist. I wanted the American eagle to go screaming into the Pacific. It seemed tiresome and tame for it to content itself with the Rockies. Why not spread its wings over the Philippines, I asked myself? And I thought it would be a real good thing to do. I said to myself, here are a people who have suffered for three centuries. We can make them as free as ourselves, give them a government and country of their own, put a miniature of the American constitution afloat in the Pacific, start a brand new republic to take its place among the free nations of the world. It seemed to me a great task to which we had addressed ourselves.

But I have thought some more, since then, and I have read carefully the Treaty of Paris, and I have seen that we do not intend to free, but to subjugate the people of the Philippines. We have gone there to conquer, not to redeem. We have also pledged the power of this country to maintain and protect the abominable system

established in the Philippines by the Friars.

It should, it seems to me, be our pleasure and duty to make these people free, *and let them deal with their own domestic questions in their own way.* And so I am an anti-imperialist. I am opposed to having the eagle put its talons on any other land."

Mark Twain then penned his famous anti-Imperialist article *To the Person Sitting in Darkness* in February 1901. He borrowed this ironic phrase from the *Gospel According to Matthew*, a phrase used by Christian missionaries when referring to the "savage," "heathen," and "uncivilized" populations of lands that aggressive imperialists were conquering. This is how *To the Person Sitting in Darkness* begins: "Extending the Blessings of Civilization to our Brother who Sits in Darkness has been a good trade and has paid well, on the whole; and there is money in it yet, if carefully worked -- but not enough, in my judgment, to make any considerable risk advisable."

Mark Twain referred to Lord Kitchener in *To the Person Sitting in Darkness*, a man whose British troops in South Africa routinely bayoneted unarmed Dutch farmers and other colonists (Boers) who were trying to surrender. "Kitchener knows how to handle disagreeable people who are fighting for their homes and their liberties," he satirically stated. He also harshly condemned similar atrocities committed by American forces against Filipinos. In bold letters he claimed that America knew how to treat the rebels: "WILL SHOW NO MERCY KITCHENER'S PLAN ADOPTED!" "Kitchener's Plan" in South Africa included herding tens of thousands of Boer women and children and black Africans into the world's first "concentration camps", where many of them died.

Some people accused Mark Twain of not being patriotic when he took this outspoken stance against imperialistic national policies, and there can be real questions about exactly who is patriotic, and who is not. Twain observed in 1901, during the Philippine-American War in which revolutionaries in the Philippines fought for independence: "It would be an entirely different question if the country's life was in danger, its existence at stake, then -- that is one kind of patriotism -- we would all come forward and stand by the flag, and stop thinking about whether the nation was right or wrong; but when there is no question that the nation is in any way in danger, but only some little war away off, then it may be that on the question of politics the nation is divided, half patriots and half traitors, *and no man can tell which from which.*"

It is an odd fact that one person's "freedom fighter" can be regarded by another as a terrorist, or that it can be very difficult to determine who is a patriot and who is a traitor. Ronald Reagan supported anti-communist groups that he called "freedom fighters" in countries like Nicaragua, Afghanistan and Angola, but members of the groups he supported, like the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan, later come to be seen as dangerous foes and terrorists when their insurrections came to violently oppose American economic goals and military hegemony.

History can provide us with provocative perspectives that often prove to be astonishingly revealing. Ronald Reagan, for instance, regarded Nelson Mandela as a terrorist who opposed what Reagan saw as the legitimate white rulers in South Africa during the racist apartheid era. Reagan even vetoed legislation passed by Congress that would have divested from investments in South Africa until the discriminatory apartheid system was ended. After Reagan shamefully vetoed this law, both houses of Congress actually overrode his veto for one of the few times such an override took place during his eight years in office.

We can see that the difference between a freedom fighter and a terrorist insurgent can be an ideological matter that involves deeply biased opinion and a none-too-subtle underlying agenda. Nelson Mandela had been confined for 27 years in prison for his activist stances against the apartheid segregation of white rule in South Africa. His life was a "long walk to freedom", and after gaining liberty from his long incarceration, he laudably led his deeply divided country through a remarkably peaceful transition to democratic government. He received the Nobel Peace Prize for his honorable statesmanship. Bravo for Nelson Mandela! When he died in December 2013, his accomplishments in helping bend the arc of the moral universe toward equitable justice were highlighted in the news. Mandela represented a triumph in the struggle for freedom in South Africa.

Mark Twain, with his intellect, philosophic understanding and skepticism of the motives of politicians, adopted a critical perspective toward American expansionist actions in places like Panama, Puerto Rico, Hawaii and the Dominican Republic, as well as in Cuba and the Philippines. He would be astonished and outraged at the far-flung

extent of our military presence today, and at the more than 175 American interventions in foreign countries in the century from 1900 to 2000, not to mention the rash and harsh occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq since then, and the permanent military bases that the U.S. has established in more than 130 nations worldwide.

"The radical of one century is the conservative of the next. The radical invents the views. When he has worn them out, the conservative adopts them."

--- Mark Twain

A further elaboration of Mark Twain's ideas is contained in *Reflections on War - and Peace*, an essay in which I discuss 'false flag operations'. Some people say the explosion aboard the USS Maine in Havana in 1898 might have been this kind of treacherous operation that is used as a convenient pretext to get a nation involved in war. Such ruses are a type of perfidious activity that has been repeated periodically throughout history. I elaborate on other more definitive instances of false-flag operations like the occasion when the RMS Lusitania was sunk by a German submarine in 1915, which led to the U.S. getting involved in World War I, and the 1964 Gulf of Tonkin incident that led to our nation's involvement in the Vietnam War. Some people suspect that the 9/11 attacks may also have been some kind of precipitated exploitation of events to get our nation involved in military occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq. But no wild conspiracy theories are needed to conclude that this modern military adventurism has proved to be excessively costly. The fact that it has been hugely profitable for some giant corporations and influential investors, and good for the careers of many people in power, is a harsh indictment of the rash opportunism that contributes to war.

A correspondent named John Nichols once wrote:

Mark Twain was no fan of war, which he described as 'a wanton waste of projectiles', and he nurtured a healthy disdain for anyone who suggested that patriotism was best displayed through enthusiastic support for military adventures abroad. ... But Twain's deepest disgust was reserved for politicians who played on fear and uncertainty to promote the interests of what would come to be known as the military-industrial complex. Describing how Americans were frequently goaded into war by their leaders, Twain recalled: 'Statesmen will invent cheap lies, putting blame upon the nation that is attacked, and every man will be glad of those conscience-soothing falsities, and will diligently study them, and refuse to examine any refutations of them; and thus he will by-and-by convince himself that the war is just, and will thank God for the better sleep he enjoys after this process of grotesque self-deception.'

The Big Bang of the Mind

Recalling that Mark Twain was fascinated by accurate understandings, I think of perspectives articulated by a brilliantly sensible professor who teaches Lifelong Learning courses. He is a man who finds merit in philosophic wisdom traditions like Buddhism and Taoism. He was once asked by a respectful and heart-aware student: "Do you think we have an immortal soul?" The professor did not hesitate. "I don't believe so. There is a soulful aspect of the mind, but death is as likely to be final for us as it is for every other animal on Earth."

Following this line of inquiry, the student asked, "Do you believe in reincarnation, like they teach in Buddhism?" The down-to-earth professor replied, "No, I don't. The accretions of dogma in every religion appeal to the hopes and fears of their adherents, but I don't think it likely that an immortal soul came to be for human beings during the processes of biological evolution." This same professor first exposed me to the compelling idea of "the Big Bang of the Mind."

Most biological experts believe we *Homo sapiens* developed self-conscious awareness and expansive capacities like foresight sometime about 50,000 to 75,000 years ago. This was relatively recent, from the point of view that the brains of our ancestors had been in the process of tripling in average size over the past 5 million years. Others of our ancestral relatives like Neanderthals actually had bigger brains than we do, so it was not simply brain size that led to this tremendous developmental leap forward.

This Big Bang of the Mind allowed us a burst of creative thinking that modern thinkers associate with higher intelligence. This development in our awareness was related to the emergence of a suite of higher intellectual functions that facilitated our ability to plan ahead, use chains of logic, imagine outcomes, communicate better,

develop syntax in language, create sophisticated art, give structure to music, invent games with arbitrary rules, and be able to discover hidden patterns and seek coherence in the world. The archeological record shows that subsequent to this mental advance, people began to create more sophisticated art and music, and to invent religions, and to ceremonially and reverently bury their relatives after they died.

It is intriguing to study some of the hundreds of different Creation stories that have been created in the human mind over the many millennia of the cultural evolution of our kind since this development of awareness. The realization that we have a mortal nature -- that we are aging and will die -- and the ideas of love and a soul that outlives us all seem to have been prominent features of this expression of human hopes and fears. And these aspects of our awareness have surely been all balled up with our spiritual theories of goddesses and gods even from the earliest days of animism and polytheism, long before monotheistic ideas of one God sprang into being and gained ascendance.

Mark Twain would have chuckled when he was 50 years old, at the height of his success, at these ideas. Later in his life, after he had experienced so many hardships and emotionally difficult losses, he would likely have sighed rather ruefully.

A Revealing Sidebar Concerning Revelations on Walks in Nature

Mark Twain was in San Francisco in 1865 when a moderately powerful earthquake struck. He wrote in *Roughing It*, "... at that moment a third and still severer shock came, and as I reeled about on the pavement trying to keep my footing, I saw a sight! The entire front of a tall four-story brick building on Third Street sprung outward like a door and fell sprawling across the street, raising a dust like a great volume of smoke!" Later, he wrote a humorous piece in which he observed: "I will set it down here as a maxim that the operations of the human intellect are much accelerated by an earthquake." Run!

A better understanding of the cause of earthquakes can be gained by taking a walk along the Earthquake Trail near the Bear Valley Visitor Center in Point Reyes National Seashore, about an hour's drive northwest of San Francisco. The half-mile-long trail follows the famous San Andreas Fault, a 'transform fault' that roughly marks the boundary between the Pacific Plate today as it moves north relative to the North American Plate. A rough rupture line is still visible from the 1906 earthquake that wreaked destruction on San Francisco. An old fence marches down the hill in Point Reyes and then abruptly continues on a parallel trajectory about 16 feet to the north, where it had jumped in a few minutes back in 1906. An old story alleges that the rupture swallowed a cow in what was then a dairy farming area, but this may be an apocryphal tale like so many that spring up after traumatic events. Sample rocks have been placed on the east side of the interpretive Earthquake Trail that are characteristic of the rock mélange that typifies the North American Plate, and distinctly different sample rocks characteristic of the Pacific Plate have been placed on the trail's west side.

A few years ago, 25 miles south of the Earthquake Trail, I went on a long hike with a slender, attractive and enthusiastic friend of mine, and it turns out that she had recently begun to follow a path less taken, and it is making a whale of a difference in her life. We followed a trail up to the 'Spiritual Driver's Seat of the Bay Area' on distinctive Mt. Tamalpais. This is a natural chair formed in a barren outcropping of smooth pale blue-green serpentine rock. The seat has a commanding view of Mount Diablo, the East Bay, Mt. Hamilton, San Francisco and the entire region to the east and south. A short distance away along the ridge to the west, we stopped at a stone bench dedicated to "Dad O'Rourke". It has a similar view but also includes the Farallon Islands to the west. That morning was one of those startlingly clear days when God seems to have moved these fabled islands closer to the coast under cover of the dark of night. A plaque set into the stone bench in 1927 records a quote from Dad O'Rourke on the occasion of his birthday: it reads, "Give me these hills and the friends I love. I ask no other heaven." I personally regard this as a marvelously holistic sentiment!

As we approached the stone bench commemorating Dad O'Rourke, we saw a rattlesnake with bold markings enjoying the warm late-March sunshine in a crevice in the rocks. Since these creatures are quite territorial, it is likely that the snake spent most of its time there. My friend told me she had never actually heard a rattlesnake rattle, which is a sound that inspires fear deep in our limbic brains, so I gently agitated the snake a bit and it stirred awake, coiled, rattled a scary warning and slithered back into recesses of the rocks in retreat.

We continued our hike along the ridge and made our way cross-country down to Cataract Creek, a beautiful chortling mountain stream in March after good winter rains. We crossed the stream a half mile above the point where the water begins a rapid descent down fabulous cataracts and waterfalls into a lovely succession of pools, and then we ascended through a forest of oak, madrone and fragrant California bay laurel trees past a green meadow and up onto a ridge where endemic Marin Manzanita and Sargent Cypress grow. Years ago, some hard-working soul had constructed two large stone seats on this ridge, and they are locally known as "The Throne". The site has marvelous views toward the Point Reyes peninsula and the line of the San Andreas Fault that can be seen in long and narrow Tomales Bay and distant Bodega Bay.

After enjoying the view, we hiked over to a place named Barth's Retreat where we had a tasty picnic in the warming sunshine. My animated friend talked at length about the significant changes in circumstances that had been taking place in her personal life, and the effects these challenging changes have had on her relationships and psyche, and we enjoyably philosophized at length. But that's another story.

Here's the curious part I'm trying to tell. A snake must have somehow slithered into my friend's daypack during our delicious repast, for she reported that, later in the day after taking a refreshing shower at home, she was startled to discover an uncoiled serpent next to her daypack in her living room. She managed to capture the snake in a box without harming it, and she released it outdoors into a nearby Open Space, making note that the snake had a bright orangish-yellow ring around its neck and a similar coloration along its belly. That description identifies it as a harmless Ringneck Snake, but in the moment all she could think and exclaim was "Yikes!" and "Holy cow!!". One can well imagine! Was it some sort of a sign? (And if so, what pray tell did it signify?!)

Some say that "Everything happens for a reason". I particularly dislike hearing this maxim right after being smitten by some embarrassing or painful misfortune. This saying has been extrapolated into an uplifting "Author Unknown" philosophical ditty that enumerates the truly valuable lessons that can be learned from adversities. This ditty concludes that we should live in the moment, forgive others and love unconditionally. Hallelujah!

But let's examine the meaning of this conventional belief that everything happens for a reason, as the sentiment is often expressed. All effects naturally have causes. But such contentions are often followed by prejudiced rationalizations, like when religious bigots claimed that the reason for severe damages wreaked on New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina was that Ellen DeGeneres, a New Orleans native, was a lesbian, and God was venting his anger at homosexuals. Oh, right!

Opinions like this are an expression of the prudish, biased and patriarchal dominion of our societies by men who strive to deprive women of rights and relegate them to inferior roles in our culture. Curiously, snakes sometimes symbolized positive feminine attributes in pharaonic Egypt and ancient Greece and Rome, and snakes were respected more than feared. When the patriarchal religion of the Bible arose, it blamed a serpent and Eve, the first woman, for seeking knowledge, and it made snakes and women scapegoats for the wrath of an angry male God at the dawn of Creation.

Lisbon in Portugal was destroyed by an earthquake and subsequent tsunami on November 1, 1755. Many of the religious leaders at the time attributed the calamity to God's anger at sinners, and claimed this was one of 'His' punishments. It is a fact of supreme coincidental irony that this powerful earthquake killed tens of thousands of people on the day of the Christian holiday known as All Saints' Day, and that large numbers of the faithful died as churches crumbled onto them during services. Many superstitious types had a field day with this remarkable coincidence, insisting that the Portuguese people had been living lives of sinful indulgence. Reasons attributed to happenings often reflect projections of the sometimes malicious biases of observers, rather than more probable and sensible explanations. What a world -- Can't we all just get along?!

When Nikos Kazantzakis wrote his version of the *Odyssey*, he rewrote it repeatedly to "broaden its scope, until it came to include all he had ever seen and heard and thought." It was not my intention to report exhaustively on barely-related digressive details in this biography, like some blog-obsessed or twitter-enamored reporter, so I'll return to the 'red meat' of this story of Mark Twain's life.

Observations from the Gilded Age

Okay, I have digressed. This is a biography of Mark Twain, the most successful travel writer of his time. Travel writing suited him well, according to professor Richard Bridgman, because it freed him "to use his special literary gifts: short bursts of pointed observations, anecdotes, episodes and tales. He could examine the diversity of the world without worrying overmuch about such matters as consistency or transitions." And thanks to "the sequence of the journey itself," his narratives have "at least a simulacrum of coherence."

Mark Twain's groping thoughts and digressions parallel the way our minds operate, with intricate courses taken by discursive consciousness. According to Bridgman, the ostensible order of the world "remained tantalizingly elusive for him". But today we have the wonderful opportunity to easily gain more accurate understandings of our world. This is one reason why my own ideas, philosophic explorations and observations have been so extensively set forth in this manifesto.

People could so easily know more and understand better, and our world would be a more propitious place if we did. This is why it is one of my motives to share my perspectives, hoping that they will lead to a fairer and saner world. This is one reason I regard the transformative ideas contained in *Common Sense Revival*, and the subset contained in Part Four of this manifesto online, to be so crucial. Check them out! And review *See Clearly: Sanity During Insane Times - Book Twelve of the Earth Manifesto* for the latest sensational details of how bizarrely rigged the world is, against the greater good -- and what should be done about it.

Mark Twain had coined the term *The Gilded Age* in a collaborative novel with essayist Charles Dudley Warner in 1873. He did so partially out of his deep concern with the politics, economics and political corruption of the era. During the materialistic times of the *Gilded Age*, things like large homes built using Victorian Gothic Revival architecture were considered to be reflections of intellectual and moral worth. Wealthy people indulged in highly visible conspicuous consumption during that era, and this indulgence contributed to a recognition of the injustices involved in poorly regulated capitalism, along with the detrimental aspects associated with it, including its abuses, wasteful profligacy, and ruthless exploitation of working people. These excesses sparked many muckraking exposés and a Progressive Era of reform in the early 20th century. Important reforms were made to combat unfair monopoly practices, long working hours, child labor abuses, unsafe working conditions, discrimination, public corruption, and the oppressive growth of the conglomerate power of corporations.

Disparities of wealth today have grown to be as large or larger than they were during the *Gilded Age* that Mark Twain wrote about in the late nineteenth century. At that time, industrialists, financiers and 'robber barons' dominated American society and Mark Twain decried what one observer at the time called "the Great Barbeque" of brazen extremes in economic inequality.

While the policies that led to this lopsided concentration of income and wealth sparked a turbulent reform movement in reaction, it was not until decades later, when the Great Depression made the failings of capitalism even more starkly clear, that economic collapse, massive labor unrest and social turmoil forced political elites to take actions to really make society fairer, and to accept policies that led to a larger and healthier middle class and a reduction in the concentration of income and wealth in the years between 1940 and 1980. It's time for more such actions once again today!

The ethical standards of American businesses have never been notably high. When referring to the widespread business corruption of his times, Mark Twain stated in 1905: "We gave the world the spirit of liberty more than one hundred years ago, and now we are giving the world the spirit of graft." That's not a good thing! Fast forward 115 years, and Disaster Capitalism is having deeply harmful impacts upon millions of people, and conservatives are too cowardly to take smart steps to honestly fix our woefully rigged system.

In the years since Ronald Reagan became president, an expanding inegalitarian trend has once again become dominant. The main reason for this is that corporations and wealthy investors have been given greater power and they have been subjected to fewer regulations and lower marginal tax rates. At the same time, organized labor has been crushed as a counterforce that could help balance out corporate power and unbridled greed. American workers have been deprived of being allowed to share in gains made from their increasing productivity, and their 'real wages' (after inflation is taken into account) have more or less remained unchanged for decades. Workers

have also been subjected to less job security, fewer healthcare benefits, and inadequate retirement plans, especially in recent years. The richest 1% of Americans, meanwhile, has seen their fortunes increase fabulously.

Labor unions, like businesses and governments, have had notorious episodes of corruption, bureaucratic idiocies and market distortions throughout the Industrial Revolution. But labor unions in the private sector have been a somewhat effective aspect of a free market economy. They have helped give working folks a fairer shake, and contributed substantially to the growth of a stronger middle class in the decades after World War II. Labor unions could once again today become an effective force in stopping systemic labor-law violations and in reining in absurd levels of executive pay. A stronger labor movement could be one of the best ways to advance a progressive agenda that would be consistent with our founding American principles of liberty, equality, justice and democratic representation. A proposed Employee Free Choice Act that Congress has failed to pass would likely help rectify the increased worker injustices that have taken place since 1980.

Globalization and the export of jobs abroad complicate this situation, and stubborn ideological arguments confuse the issues. High costs and distortions created by employee unions in the public sector have given union organizing efforts a negative connotation in many people's opinions, sometimes with good reason due to pension-spiking scams and huge unfunded liabilities. It is time for us to come together to deal sensibly and fairly with all these issues, keeping the interests of the greater good foremost in our national and international priorities.

Samuel Clemens Opinion on Women

"The sun rose upon a tranquil world, and beamed down upon the peaceful village like a benediction."

--- *Adventures of Tom Sawyer*

Mark Twain had a paradoxical character, and he lived in curious times. Victorian sensibilities were puritanical and conformist, so it is interesting that he was able to rise above the prejudices of his times to eventually oppose slavery, and to regard women with sometimes enlightened perspectives. His observation in his Notebook in 1895 is especially admirable: "We easily perceive that the peoples furthest from civilization are the ones where equality between man and woman are furthest apart -- and we consider this one of the signs of savagery. But we are so stupid that we can't see that we thus plainly admit that no civilization can be perfect until exact equality between man and woman is included."

Samuel Clemens had aspired to become a part of the respected Eastern gentility, despite his lower class origins and tawdry Wild West experiences and humorous ridicule of pretentiousness. He met a slender and attractive girl named Olivia Langdon in December 1867 at a reading of scenes by Charles Dickens from his novel, *David Copperfield*, and he was immediately smitten with her charms. Olivia was the sister of Charles Langdon, one of the passengers he had met on his voyage to the Holy Land aboard the *Quaker City*. She was sophisticated, well-educated and genteel, and she came from a wealthy family that lived in Elmira, New York. She was reputedly a fine representative of the Victorian upper class. The Victorian Age was one in which the favored feminine look and attitude was the demure, shy and obedient, and Livy veritably embodied these alluring character traits.

Sam began to court her, hoping to gain her hand in marriage, but his stature at the time was too insignificant and coarse, and he was considered to be too irreverent at the time they met for the religious sensibilities of her family. Since Sam came from a poor family, his struggle to make money and gain respectability and fame was a notable aspect of his endeavors and compulsions. After *The Innocents Abroad* was published and achieved great success, Olivia agreed she would marry him, and he remained married to 'Livy' for 34 years until her death,

Though Mark Twain had gained his early renown as a humor writer, this was regarded as a somewhat low and disreputable form of writing. Once he married Livy, he strived to be more respectable and to write books with more literary value and gravitas. Livy acted for decades as an editor of his writings, paying particular attention to their tone and content. She proved to be a wise and intelligent woman, and an excellent spouse.

Somebody Spoke and I Went into a Dream

A writer named Fitz Hugh Ludlow had suggested to Mark Twain in 1865 that he focus on humor writing rather than straight news reporting and writing sketches. So he began "seriously scribbling to excite the laughter of God's creatures." Soon thereafter, Clemens sent a letter to his brother Orion, saying "I have had a call to literature, of

a low order -- i.e. humorous. It is nothing to be proud of, but it is my strongest suit." Just a few weeks later his humorous short story *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County* made him nationally known and launched his great literary career. "He'd hit upon his most marketable talent, with the aid of Ludlow's advice, and possibly hashish, too," noted the writer Ellen Komp.

Hashish?! Ellen Komp was referring to the fact that Mark Twain used hashish when he lived in San Francisco in 1865. This form of concentrated cannabis was both legal and commonly available in drug stores at the time. His friend Fitz Hugh Ludlow was well-known as the author of the 1857 book *The Hasheesh Eater*. Ludlow had found hashish to be a boon to creativity, and gave high praise to Mark Twain in a newspaper article, observing: "In funny literature, that Irresistible Washoe Giant, Mark Twain, takes quite a unique position. He makes me laugh more than any Californian. He imitates nobody. He is a school by himself."

"When I was younger, I could remember anything, whether it happened or not."

--- Mark Twain

It is noteworthy that a long list of well-known comedians and humorists have used cannabis, including George Carlin, Whoopi Goldberg, Jon Stewart, Rodney Dangerfield, Lily Tomlin, Bill Maher and the late, great Robin Williams. In this context, consider again Mark Twain's observation, "Against the assault of laughter, nothing can stand." With so many insightful luminaries having used this mindset-altering herbal inspiration, it is high time we end the harshly unjust, counterproductive, racially discriminatory, ridiculously costly prohibition against cannabis.

Laughter Possessed Me

I actually laughed out loud for a few minutes when I happened to re-read Chapter 12 of *Adventures of Tom Sawyer* one day recently. Something in that passage about Tom moping around "as dismal as a hearse" because Becky Thatcher was absent from school for a while -- and so wasn't around for him to show off to -- got me reading about Aunt Polly's peculiar obsession with quack remedies and her experiments on Tom to try to get him out of his doldrums. It was when I got to the part about Tom's Aunt Polly having heard of "Pain-killer" for the first time, and ordered up a lot of it at once, that my peculiar laughing spell took hold. Listen in:

She tasted it and was filled with gratitude. It was simply fire in a liquid form. She dropped the water treatment and everything else, and pinned her faith to Pain-killer. She gave Tom a teaspoonful and watched with the deepest anxiety for the result. Her troubles were instantly at rest, her soul at peace again; for the "indifference" was broken up. The boy could not have shown a wilder, heartier interest, if she had built a fire under him.

Tom felt that it was time to wake up; this sort of life might be romantic enough, in his blighted condition, but it was getting to have too little sentiment and too much distracting variety about it. So he thought over various plans for relief, and finally hit upon that of professing to be fond of Pain-killer. He asked for it so often that he became a nuisance, and his aunt ended by telling him to help himself and quit bothering her. If it had been Sid, she would have had no misgivings to alloy her delight; but since it was Tom, she watched the bottle clandestinely. She found that the medicine did really diminish, but it did not occur to her that the boy was mending the health of a crack in the sitting-room floor with it.

One day Tom was in the act of dosing the crack when his aunt's yellow cat came along, purring, eyeing the teaspoon avariciously, and begging for a taste. Tom said:

"Don't ask for it unless you want it, Peter."

But Peter signified that he did want it.

"You better make sure." Peter was sure.

"Now you've asked for it, and I'll give it to you, because there ain't anything mean about me; but if you find you don't like it, you mustn't blame anybody but your own self."

Peter was agreeable. So Tom pried his mouth open and poured down the Pain-killer. Peter sprang a couple of yards in the air, and then delivered a war-whoop and set off round and round the room, banging against

furniture, upsetting flower-pots, and making general havoc. Next he rose on his hind feet and pranced around, in a frenzy of enjoyment, with his head over his shoulder and his voice proclaiming his unappeasable happiness. Then he went tearing around the house again spreading chaos and destruction in his path. Aunt Polly entered in time to see him throw a few double summersets, deliver a final mighty hurrah, and sail through the open window, carrying the rest of the flower-pots with him. The old lady stood petrified with astonishment, peering over her glasses; Tom lay on the floor expiring with laughter.

"Tom, what on earth ails that cat?"

"I don't know, aunt," gasped the boy.

"Why, I never see anything like it. What did make him act so?"

"Deed I don't know, Aunt Polly; cats always act so when they're having a good time."

"They do, do they?" There was something in the tone that made Tom apprehensive.

"Yes'm. That is, I believe they do."

"You do?"

"Yes'm."

The old lady was bending down, Tom watching, with interest emphasized by anxiety. Too late he divined her "drift." The handle of the telltale teaspoon was visible under the bed-valance. Aunt Polly took it, held it up. Tom winced, and dropped his eyes. Aunt Polly raised him by the usual handle -- his ear -- and cracked his head soundly with her thimble.

"Now, sir, what did you want to treat that poor dumb beast so, for?"

"I done it out of pity for him -- because he hadn't any aunt."

"Hadn't any aunt! -- you numskull. What has that got to do with it?"

"Heaps. Because if he'd had one she'd a burnt him out herself! She'd a roasted his bowels out of him 'thout any more feeling than if he was a human!"

Aunt Polly felt a sudden pang of remorse. This was putting the thing in a new light; what was cruelty to a cat might be cruelty to a boy, too. She began to soften; she felt sorry. Her eyes watered a little, and she put her hand on Tom's head and said gently:

"I was meaning for the best, Tom. And, Tom, it did do you good."

Tom looked up in her face with just a perceptible twinkle peeping through his gravity.

"I know you was meaning for the best, aunty, and so was I with Peter. It done *him* good, too. I never see him get around so since --"

"Oh, go 'long with you, Tom, before you aggravate me again. And you try and see if you can't be a good boy, for once, and you needn't take any more medicine." ...

Tom reached school ahead of time. It was noticed that this strange thing had been occurring every day latterly. And now, as usual of late, he hung about the gate of the schoolyard instead of playing with his comrades. He was sick, he said, and he looked it. He tried to seem to be looking everywhere but whither he really was looking -- down the road. Presently Jeff Thatcher hove in sight, and Tom's face lighted; he gazed a moment, and then turned sorrowfully away. When Jeff arrived, Tom accosted him; and "led up" warily to opportunities for remark about Becky, but the giddy lad never could see the bait. Tom watched and watched, hoping whenever a frisking frock came in sight, and hating the owner of it as soon as he saw she was not the right one. At last frocks ceased to appear, and he dropped hopelessly into the dumps; he entered the empty schoolhouse and sat down to suffer. Then one more frock passed in at the gate, and Tom's heart gave a great bound. The next instant he was out, and "going on" like an Indian; yelling, laughing, chasing boys, jumping over the fence at risk of life and limb, throwing handsprings, standing on his head -- doing all the heroic things he

could conceive of, and keeping a furtive eye out, all the while, to see if Becky Thatcher was noticing. But she seemed to be unconscious of it all; she never looked. Could it be possible that she was not aware that he was there? He carried his exploits to her immediate vicinity; came war-whooping around, snatched a boy's cap, hurled it to the roof of the schoolhouse, broke through a group of boys, tumbling them in every direction, and fell sprawling, himself, under Becky's nose, almost upsetting her -- and she turned, with her nose in the air, and he heard her say: "Mfff! Some people think they're mighty smart -- always showing off!"

Tom's cheeks burned. He gathered himself up and sneaked off, crushed and crestfallen.

Evocative, beautifully clever, and wryly funny!

Give Us Cause to Laugh, Mark Twain!

Our understandings of issues are often confused by manipulative marketing, deceptive spin and other forms of promotion and propaganda. As Mark Twain wrote in *THE PUDD'NHEAD MAXIMS* (in *Following the Equator*, 1897): "Noise proves nothing. Often a hen who has merely laid an egg cackles as if she had laid an asteroid."

Speaking of cackling, the arrogant efforts made by Senator Ted Cruz seemed to emulate Don Quixote's quixotic quest in La Mancha by grandstanding before the Senate in a vain and confounding 21-hour filibuster-style protest against the Affordable Care Act in September 2013. Republicans in Congress spent an incredible amount of time and effort trying to get rid of the Affordable Care Act, voting on more than 60 occasions to repeal it, and then trying doggedly to overturn the law under Trump to give wealthy investors a huge tax break by cutting costs and depriving millions of Americans of health insurance. It is confounding to reconcile their extreme antagonism with what Senator Edward Kennedy considered to be the most important cause of his career -- health care reform. Kennedy, known as "the Lion of the Senate", wrote as he was dying of cancer in 2009: "What we face is above all a moral issue; that at stake are not just the details of policy, but fundamental principles of social justice and the character of our country." Republican hubris and wrongheaded antagonism to fairness in this impactful public health issue is really stunning. Hubris has an element of character-deficient vanity to it.

And once the coronavirus pandemic insidiously spread around the planet, the lethal vulnerabilities of all to the shortcomings of our healthcare system -- and politicking by "conservatives" -- have become shockingly clearer.

A funny story in *Following the Equator* refers to the loud level of noise in India, and to one of the primary instigators of that racket, the Indian crow. This passage illustrates Mark Twain's wry sense of humor and his easy capacity for exaggeration, which he elevated to a form of art:

"Some natives -- I don't remember how many -- went into my bedroom, now, and put things to rights and arranged the mosquito-bar, and I went to bed to nurse my cough. It was about nine in the evening. What a state of things! For three hours the yelling and shouting of natives in the hall continued, along with the velvety patter of their swift bare feet -- what a racket it was! They were yelling orders and messages down three flights. Why, in the matter of noise it amounted to a riot, an insurrection, a revolution. And then there were other noises mixed up with these and at intervals tremendously accenting them -- roofs falling in, I judged, windows smashing, persons being murdered, crows squawking and deriding and cursing, canaries screeching, monkeys jabbering, macaws blaspheming, and every now and then fiendish bursts of laughter and explosions of dynamite. By midnight I had suffered all the different kinds of shocks there are, and knew that I could never more be disturbed by them, either isolated or in combination. Then came peace -- stillness deep and solemn and lasted till five."

"Then it all broke loose again. And who re-started it? The Bird of Birds, the Indian crow. I came to know him well, by and by, and be infatuated with him. I suppose he is the hardest lot that wears feathers. Yes, and the cheerfulest, and the best satisfied with himself. He never arrived at what he is by any careless process, or any sudden one; he is a work of art, and "art is long"; he is the product of immemorial ages, and of deep calculation; one can't make a bird like that in a day. He has been reincarnated more times than Shiva; and he has kept a sample of each incarnation, and fused it into his constitution. In the course of his evolutionary promotions, his sublime march toward ultimate perfection, he has been a gambler, a low comedian, a dissolute priest, a fussy woman, a blackguard, a scoffer, a liar, a thief, a spy, an informer, a trading politician, a swindler, a professional

hypocrite, a patriot for cash, a lawyer, a reformer, a lecturer, a conspirator, a rebel, a royalist, a democrat, a meddler, a practicer and propagator of irreverence, an intruder, a busybody, an infidel, and a wallower in sin for the mere love of it. The strange result, the incredible result, of this patient accumulation of all damnable traits, is that he does not know what care is, he does not know what sorrow is, he does not know what remorse is, his life is one long thundering ecstasy of happiness, and he will go to his death untroubled, knowing that he will soon turn up again as an author or something, and be even more intolerably capable and comfortable than ever he was before." Ha!

Personal Reflections

The Big Dipper and the constellation Cassiopeia both bear mute but eternally majestic witness to celestial realities that are witnessed in the northern hemisphere of our home planet. The stars in these two clearly visible constellations appear to rise and set every night, each roughly opposite the other in the night sky, and their nightly movement appears to circumscribe a circle around the North Star. There is a reason for this, which involves the axis of Earth's North Pole and the planet's daily rotation, but I may be forced to absquatulate and figuratively "light out for the territories" if I keep providing these explanations like a real nowhere gal sitting in a nowhere land making all my nowise explanations for nobody. Who cares?!

There is one thing that is certain, however: it is mighty hard to find frontiers these days to which one can absquatulate. Besides, whereas the impulse was powerful for Samuel Clemens to achieve praise, recognition and fame, my own preference is to enjoy my good fortune in life while remaining anonymous. I have had remarkable success at this, so far!

Sam Clemens noted during the time he wrote his first successful book that he had no expectations that many people would actually read it, so he felt a considerable "freedom from restraint" in expressing himself in *The Innocents Abroad*. "The idea that nobody is listening," he wrote, "is apt to seduce a body into airing his thoughts with a rather juvenile frankness." I know the feeling! (And YAY! for the freedom of expression!)

Observations and Introspection

Within every adult, the suppressed remnant of a curious, adventurous and enthusiastic child lies hidden deep in our individual psyches and souls. It is to this child within, in part, that Mark Twain's novels appeal. Perhaps everyone secretly regrets they have suppressed the child within, a child that wants to show off and gain glory like the kids in Sunday school in the *Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Maybe everyone envies the smitten smart alecks in that sketch as they skylark through the sermons!

In the first chapter of *The Further Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, Huck had whittled a snake from a stick as a totem "like the Injuns do." When he showed it to Jim, he explained that the Indians carved animals on a totem pole for good luck. Jim said, "Is dat a fac'? Den how come dis totem got a snake on it? A snake ain't no animal."

Huck replies, "What is it then, if it ain't an animal?"

Jim says, "Huck, you know more'n anyone 'bout most ever'thin', but even a nigger knows better'n to call a snake a animal. Animals got fur an' claws an' such."

"Well all right then, what is it?"

"Why a insec', Huck. Ain't nothin' else for it to be, I reckon."

Ideas, literature and richly descriptive stories are wonderful stimulants for the imagination. One reason people read Mark Twain's books is to gain a perspective on his good-natured, humorous, and unpretentious perspective on life. His way of creatively exploring ideas is valuable, as was the case with his invention of traveling companions he used in his travel writing to express vulgar observations and give byplay with others in his stories. I have always remembered the character Mr. Ballou in *Roughing It*, who described the old horses on their journey across the desert as being "bituminous from long deprivation". Mr. Ballou complained mildly about the familiarities of their camp dog being allowed in their bed, saying that such a dog as that was not a proper animal to admit to bed with tired men, because he was "so meretricious in his movements and so organic in his emotions." Ha!

I salute the sesquipedalian! Mr. Ballou's "one striking peculiarity was his Partingtonian fashion of loving and using big words for their own sakes, and independent of any bearing they might have upon the thought he was purposing to convey. He always let his ponderous syllables fall with an easy unconsciousness that left them wholly without offensiveness. In truth, his air was so natural and so simple that one was always catching himself accepting his stately sentences as meaning something, when they really meant nothing in the world. If a word was long and grand and resonant, that was sufficient to win the old man's love, and he would drop that word into the most out-of-the-way place in a sentence or a subject, and be as pleased with it as if it were perfectly luminous with meaning."

Mark Twain's Vivacious "Angelfish"

Another of Samuel Clemens' distinct eccentricities can be found in the little-known fact that he had what was like a grandfatherly obsession in his old age that led him to associate chivalrously, eagerly and perhaps just a bit pathologically with young girls. He formed an 'Aquarium Club' with girls between the ages of 10 and 16, and he called these surrogate granddaughters his "angel-fish". He loved their company and was able to live vicariously through their inspiring enthusiasms. Maybe they reminded him of his long-felt infatuation with Laura Wright, whom he had met when he was 22 years old and she was only 14, when they were both in New Orleans.

Mark Twain liked girls who were pretty, sincere, straightforward, vivacious, enthusiastic, naïve and frank, and he loved innocence, purity and nobility of character. Sam Clemens was also probably trying to assuage his lonely heart in his later days after his wife Livy and daughter Susy had died. An interesting online summary of "Mark Twain's Angel-Fish Roster and other young women of interest" provides old photos and information about some of these girls and the roles they played in his life.

There seems to be a "gravity of attraction" of older males to younger females in our society, then and now. Today, this attraction carries vastly less innocence, and this fact makes it important that we support fair-minded principles and public policies that help protect our daughters, and young people in general. (Especially from authority-abusing males and priests!) This issue assumed new urgency after the Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein was accused of sexual abuses by dozens of women, and this led to the #MeToo movement, which exposed countless episodes of sexual improprieties by powerful men in politics and business in the U.S. and around the world, and sadly continues to do so.

Smart remedial actions are needed on this issue, and on issues like the excessively easy availability of assault weapons in the USA, and the dangers of democracy-undermining politicians and insurrectionists, and the folly of debt-financing tax cuts for the rich, and many other important concerns. Tiffany Twain is throwing down a proverbial gauntlet, and wonders, "What commendable activists will pick it up and run with it?"

"It appears to me, my dear Mr. Copperfield," said Mrs. Micawber forcibly, "that what Mr. Micawber has to do, is to throw down the gauntlet to society, and say, in effect, 'Show me who will take that up. Let the party immediately step forward.' "

--- Charles Dickens, in *David Copperfield*

Biography and Autobiography

Mark Twain hobnobbed with colorful characters, rich people and many dignitaries and even European royalty during his lifetime. I'm sure those interactions had their marvelous merits, advantages and enjoyment. He gained widespread fame while he was alive, and was prominent in American literary circles for more than 40 years, working or socializing with notable writers that included Bret Harte, Artemus Ward, William Dean Howells, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Rudyard Kipling, Henry James, Harriet Beecher Stowe and many others.

Mark Twain began extensive dictations of an autobiography in 1906. Everett Emerson, one of his biographers, observed: "The entire exercise encouraged his egotism and his love of showing off". Everett Emerson made this alliterative observation in *Mark Twain - A Literary Life*. Audaciously, it soon thereafter came to pass that this famous personality began to wear his signature white suits even in the wintertime.

Oxford University conferred an honorary "Literary Doctor" degree on the great author in 1907, and he made a triumphant trip to London to receive it. He judged the honor to be the world's most prestigious intellectual

distinction, and was particularly proud of it because he had been "a formerly barefoot truant from Hannibal schooldays", and he had essentially educated himself. Sam Clemens had left school at the age of 12 after his father died, so he was proud of this distinction, along with having been awarded honorary degrees from Yale University and the University of Missouri.

At times his written expressions were characterized by "half-insane tempests and cyclones of humor." His boasting and craving of attention and compliments were sometimes offset by periods of moodiness and lonesome melancholy. Some of his biographers point out that he became more bitter, pessimistic, deterministic and cynical in his outlook as he advanced into old age, but I like to think that he merely became more passionate in his conviction that the forces of nature are ruthlessly impersonal, and that human follies frequently lead to adverse consequences, and that life will likely smite each and every one of us with seemingly cruel heartlessness before we die, as it did him. Many are the indignities associated with getting old! But, oh well, "C'est la vie!"

Mark Twain was said to have been occasionally tortured with self-doubt. After the hysterically funny comedian Robin Williams committed suicide in August 2014, I pondered the profound curiosity of human creative genius and its many disparate expressions and coincident pitfalls. This line of thinking sent me to my *Germinating* files to read again about the deep psychological underpinnings of the Impostor Syndrome, which happens to affect females in our post-women's-liberation American societies much more than males.

The Impostor Syndrome is a phenomenon describing people who are unable to internalize their accomplishments. "Despite external evidence of their competence, those exhibiting the syndrome remain convinced that they are frauds and do not deserve the success they have achieved." Notably, impostor syndrome is particularly common among high-achieving women, and this may be due to dismissive cultural attitudes toward females in our paternalistic and patriarchal societies. Psychologists and researchers coined the term Impostor Syndrome in the 1970s, explaining that many people feel so deeply insecure that they tend to dismiss any proofs of success as luck, good timing or a result of deceiving others into thinking they are more intelligent and competent than they actually believe themselves to be.

How can we change this calculus? Women are needed in responsible roles more than ever in our society, and they should be given greater encouragement, opportunities, rewards and recognition. After all, consider a bottom line measure. Big Fortune 500 companies with the highest representation of women on their boards of directors attained measurably better financial performance, on average, than those with the lowest numbers of women in such capacities, according to Catalyst, "the leading nonprofit corporate membership research and advisory organization working globally with businesses and the professions to build inclusive environments and expand opportunities for women and business."

There are, of course, many other reasons that females should be accorded more respect in our societies, and Mark Twain would have agreed wholeheartedly with this idea. After all, remember those words he once wrote that "no civilization can be perfect until exact equality between man and woman is included."

Michael Sheldon portrays Mark Twain in an interesting light in the later days of his life in his 2010 book *Mark Twain: Man in White - The Grand Adventure of His Final Years*. He makes it clear that Mark Twain was proud of his works, and of his life. Sheldon also tells a curious story about the great author having suffered a debacle of treachery when his trusted assistants Isabel Lyon and Ralph Ashcroft took advantage of his trust to try to secure their own futures at his expense. This episode makes a compelling tale, and reveals that Mark Twain was a man "who wore his passions on his sleeve, and who cares too much about the truth to let it be obscured by half-truths and lies."

Mark Twain's extensive musings on human nature were not unified in any one definitive philosophy. Fatalistic determinism was distinctly reflected in his stories like *The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg*, and in *What Is Man?*. His sometimes bleak determinism was based on his own "corn pone" analysis and his absorption of the lessons of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer and the scientific revolution of the late nineteenth century. His darker perspectives were also shaped by personal adversities that he endured, which tended to reinforce his angst and pessimistic perspectives. These included his financial hardships and all the deaths that touched him, including that of his younger brother Henry, his daughter Susy, his beloved wife Livy, and his daughter Jean.

These events were intense tragedies to him, and he naturally wrote with less whimsy, humor or enthusiastic vitality as he got older. I recently read Tom Quirk's *Mark Twain and Human Nature*, which was published in 2007 by the University of Missouri Press, to gain a broader perspective on Mark Twain's points of view with regard to "the human race", and this book contains many fascinating understandings.

A quote by Scotsman Robert Louis Stevenson is etched into a polished granite tablet in the shape of an open book on the flanks of Mt. St. Helena, high above California's Napa Valley, in a spot where Stevenson lived while writing *The Silverado Squatters* in 1880. It reads:

"Doomed to know not Winter, only Spring,
A being trod the flowery April blithely for a while,
Took his fill of music, joy of thought and seeing,
Came and stayed and went, nor ever ceased to smile."

"Doom" is, in a sense, the fate of each and every one of us. Some people have more Aprils to live than others, and some have more to smile about; and some have more of a disposition to smile. Yay for being Chipper! The imagination is stimulated in giving consideration to what brain scientists have found out about how our brains function. Neurotransmitters like serotonin and dopamine play significant roles in our attitudes, dispositions and moods. Studies done in recent years of the structure and functioning of the brain, and of the influences of neurochemicals on our perceptions and moods, reveal that our ways of seeing the world are intricately and profoundly affected by chemical messengers in our brains, including oxytocin, dopamine, adrenalin, cortisol and norepinephrine. Curious and curiouser!

The ghost of Dorothy Parker, aghast at this new dimension in understanding, might query once again, "What fresh hell is this?!" The extensive indignities inevitably involved with aging are almost always regarded as preferable to the finality of the alternative -- death! These indignities can ironically be accepted with greater or lesser amounts of dignity, depending upon one's grace, disposition, philosophy and fortune.

Mark Twain's fascination with determinism may have been a reflection of more complex springs of action than the ones we usually recognize or acknowledge. Swiss psychologist Carl Jung once observed, "The more one sees of human fate, and the more one examines its secret springs of action, the more one is impressed by the strength of unconscious motives and by the limitations of free choice." That is provocative food for thought!

In the Earth Manifesto treatise *Comprehensive Global Perspective*, valuable perspective on issues of free will and the freedom of choice are contained in Chapter #52 - So Many Choices, and So Hard to Make the Right Ones. Anyone, incidentally, who thinks that folks who are most fortunate in their lives are not distinctly 'lucky', really hasn't thought much about the nature of the "cosmic lottery" of birth and inheritance, or of the random happenstances of circumstance, or of the unpredictable aspects and mechanisms of what we call fate. Our health and appearance are both significantly affected by our genetic inheritance, and poor health or unsightly looks often have a genetic genesis. The fact that we are born to parents who are wealthy and privileged, or to ones that are poor and underprivileged, is to a large extent a matter of good fortune or bad luck, especially in terms of financial security.

The ideologies of various political parties tend to coalesce around people who champion either the interests and prerogatives of the jealous rich or the contrasting interests of the envious masses. Conservatives, revealingly, tend to defend a maximum amount of freedom for those who have the most money and privileges to be able to maintain and expand their advantages, while liberals tend to want measures that would ensure greater equality of opportunity, legal justice and social equity for all. Given the reality of the vagaries and vicissitudes of fortune, it seems to me that the idea that we should structure our societies in fairer ways should appeal to everyone.

Introspection into the Concept of Corn Pone

"You tell me whar a man gits his corn pone, en I'll tell you what his 'pinions is," declares an impudent and satirical young black slave who preached sermons to Sam Clemens from the top of his master's woodpile, long before Sam became known as Mark Twain. The young man "imitated the pulpit style of the several clergymen of the village, and did it well, and with fine passion and energy."

Corn pone is a cheap form of corn bread made without eggs or milk, which poor people created out of necessity. Just as the corn in their corn-pone was grown in nearby fields, and ground by a miller they knew, and bagged by others in nearby communities, their opinions were acquired second-hand from their families and fellow members of their church, and others in their towns and region. Seasonings that made individual batches of corn pone distinctive revealed much socioeconomic information, and told a penetrating story about economic constraints that affected the cooks.

Mark Twain extrapolated the proclamations of his black philosopher atop the woodpile during his Missouri boyhood into a scathing set of incisive truths in his thoughtful 1901 essay, *Corn Pone Opinions*, exploring the pitfalls of unthinking opinions and beliefs. Using Mark Twain's analysis, author Greg Beatty wrote an excellent article titled *Quarter Pound Opinions*, in which he pointed out that people tend to accept the opinions of those around them, "especially Americans with their divided allegiances to God, democracy, and the dollar".

"Too often we hold fast to the clichés of our forebears. We subject all facts to a prefabricated set of interpretations. We enjoy the comfort of opinion without the discomfort of thought."

--- John F. Kennedy

On the off chance that readers are less than intrigued by this commentary, here is a compensatory reward for you, right here and right now. Here is a good recipe for my own modern version of Corn Pone Polenta that creates a delicious and healthy meal to be shared with a dozen friends. I recommend serving it with a Greek Salad that contains tangy French Feta cheese as a first-class first-course accompaniment.

Tiffany Twain's Baked Corn Pone Polenta with Shiitake Mushrooms

(Serves 12)

Polenta:

- 3 cups coarse or medium polenta cornmeal
- 9 cups water, with 1.5 teaspoons salt in it
- 1 teaspoon each dried sage, thyme, lemon pepper and chili lime seasoning (or a good dash of cayenne)
- 4 oz. grated Parmesan cheese
- 1/2 cup olive oil, and 3 Tbls. butter (optional)

Vegetable Layer:

- 1 pound shiitake mushrooms, tip of ends chopped off, quartered or sliced in bite-sized pieces
- 1 red onion, outer layers discarded, chopped medium fine
- 2 leeks, chopped (including white part and a third of the green)
- 2 red bell peppers, or 12 tri-color mini-sweet peppers, cut into bite-sized pieces
- 3 crowns broccoli (3/4 lb.), washed and cut into bite-sized pieces
- 2 zucchini, washed and cut into bite-sized pieces (optional)
- 2 yellow summer squash or 4 small sunburst yellow squash (optional)
- 3 Tablespoons sesame seeds and 2 Tbls. sesame oil
- Spices: 1/2 teaspoon fresh-ground black pepper, plus 2 tsp. basil, oregano, cumin seeds, coriander, Turmeric and black pepper, plus a few good dashes of cayenne.
- 1/2 cup pitted Kalamata olives and/or yummy pimiento-stuffed green olives, cut in thirds
- 1 bunch Fresh Italian Parsley or cilantro, washed, stems removed, and chopped
- 1/2 lb. fontina cheese, or pepper jack, grated

Procedure:

In a medium saucepan, bring the water to a boil with the salt. Add half the olive oil (and butter, if you're using it), and the sage, thyme, lemon pepper and cayenne, and then whisk in the cornmeal. Reduce the heat to very low and simmer, stirring frequently with a wooden spoon so it doesn't stick to the bottom, until it is very thick, about 20 minutes. Remove from heat; stir in half the grated Parmesan.

Heat the oven to 350° and coat the bottom of a big (10"-by-15"-inch) baking dish with olive oil.

In a large frying pan or pot, heat the remaining olive oil over moderately high heat for a minute. Add the

mushrooms, stirring, and the spices. Cook, stirring for a few minutes. Add the red onion, stir together, and then the broccoli, squashes and bell peppers. Cook, stirring for 4 or 5 more minutes. Add olives, sesame seeds and sesame oil, and sauté one minute more. Remove. (Can be done in two batches if the pan is not large enough to accommodate all the ingredients).

Pour the vegetables into the big baking dish and spread into an even layer. Top with the Italian Parsley or cilantro and the rest of the Parmesan and the grated fontina or pepper jack. Top with the polenta, smoothing it into an even layer. Sprinkle red paprika on top. Bake until bubbling, about 25-30 minutes.

Sliding toward a Conclusion

Mark Twain, like his fellow American author Jack London, was among the small number of writers who achieved substantial monetary success while they were alive. Both of them had observant brains, vivid imaginations, keen memories, lucid dreams, adventurous spirits and strong needs to express their experiences and perceptions and ideas. Both of them also managed to spend large amounts of money on big expensive houses and to make poor judgments in speculative risks. At least Mark Twain was able to live in his large mansion in Hartford, Connecticut for many years; in contrast, Jack London spent a fortune on a 15,000 square-foot stone mansion on his Beauty Ranch above Glen Ellen, just west of Sonoma Valley and north of San Francisco, but he never got to live in it.

Jack London had stated: "My house will be standing, Act of God permitting, for a thousand years." Ironically, God apparently had other plans. Jack and his wife Charmian had spent three years building the so-called Wolf House, but then a fire destroyed it just days before they were to move in. The cause of the fire was never definitively determined. The impressive ruins still stand on the hillside estate that is now a beautiful State Historic Park with lots of good places to hike, and there are also extraordinary Broadway musical performances by the Transcendence Theater Company outdoors under the stars during the generally balmy summer evenings.

Mark Twain invested and lost an equivalent of \$4 million in a 'Paige Typesetting' machine that was never brought to commercial success. Despite his substantial earnings, he was beset by financial problems and investments that went awry, and in 1894 his publishing firm was forced to declare bankruptcy. This is what led him to travel with Livy and live abroad for eight years in the 1890s, because it was cheaper back then. He finally got out of debt by earning money from writing and lecturing during those extensive travels.

Sam Clemens had his idiosyncrasies, sure enough, but then again, so do I have mine, and you, I suspect, have yours! He once wrote, somewhat disingenuously, "I don't care anything about being humorous, or poetical, or eloquent, or anything of that kind -- the end and aim of my ambition is to be authentic." Really?! Both the conventional and the renegade actually seem to have struggled mightily in Mark Twain, and he toned down his satire against religion and his language in many instances. His upper-class wife had, after all, acted as his editor in recommending what language and topics to self-censor for respectability, and to ensure popularity.

Certain aspects of his authenticity shine through in his writings, like his scathing sardonic humor, his occasional eloquence, and his propensity to exaggerate wildly. He was driven by the impulse for expression as well as many underlying motivations. He had an often urgent need to make money to support his family, extravagant lifestyle and properties, servants and investments. On the whole, he is one of the most fascinating of all characters in American history. His great literary accomplishments led to him being referred to as "the Lincoln of our literature", for he, like Abraham Lincoln, made a spectacular rise from humble beginnings to great prominence.

Mark Twain would have appreciated a word that was invented by a Washington Post reader: "Sarchasm, n. The gulf between the author of sarcastic wit and the person that doesn't get it." Ha! As Henry Miller once wrote, "Profundity and nonsense have certain unsuspected affinities".

So That's All, Folks!

As this point is reached in my discursive narrative, I note that the acclaimed actor Hal Holbrook did a one-man show giving extraordinarily well-prepared talks onstage as Mark Twain for more than 60 years -- longer than the great writer himself filled that role. He once made the observation that he had a natural affinity for some of Mark Twain's sentiments, such as his cynical disapproval of racism, injustices, shallow principles and idiocies that are prevalent in our society. I saw Hal Holbrook perform a half dozen years ago, and he did an outstanding job.

("May he rest in peace"!) As a substitute, anyone can watch the curious animated clay-model film titled *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. In this film, James Whitmore gives voice to Mark Twain's words as he is accompanied on a hot-air balloon voyage by a jumping frog and Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer and Becky Thatcher. Whitmore gives a good rendition of Mark Twain's speaking style, and the film contains some of Mark Twain's most famous quotes. It starts with the story about Halley's Comet, and this brings my story full circle.

The 75-year long orbit of Halley's Comet traces a long elliptical path that takes it far out to a distance more than 30 times the distance of our home planet from the Sun. Half an orbit later, Halley's Comet streaks inside our own orbit to approach the Sun at a proximity closer than the planet Venus. The comet has a small core composed of ice, cosmic dust and gases that is less than ten miles in diameter, but when it gets close to the Sun it warms up and a nebulous coma, or tail, can be seen extending 60 million miles across the sky. This makes an impressive display to us Earthlings. To stretch a point, Mark Twain's orbit within circles of literary and popular imagination extends not only far and wide, but vividly onward through history in influence and impact. Bravo for him!

Truly,

Dr. Tiffany B. Twain

April 21, 2021 (evolving since 2008)