RACIAL MINORITIES IN MARK TWAIN

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RACIAL MINORITIES IN MARK TWAIN

by

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Table of Contents

Chapter I

The Problem

With the vigor and energy of expression characteristic of him, Mark Twain once appraised himself concerning his racial prejudices. The pessimistic, sardonic twist of his later writings rounds off his remarks but they may still be taken as a sincere statement on Mark Twain's part of what he believed to be true of himself. As every student of Mark Twain's soon learns, however, his remarks about himself cannot often be taken as literal turth.

> I am quite sure that (bar one) I have no race prejudices nor caste prejudices nor creed prejudices. Indeed, I know it. I can stand any society. All that I care to know is that a man is a human being -- that is enough for me; he can't be any worse.[1]

Mark Twain would have been genuinely surprised to have his self-analysis challenged. When he wrote it in Vienna in 1899, he believed it to be true that his only racial dislike was for the French (his reference in the phrase "bar one"), because he had always admitted that dislike and had aired it openly in his writings. Yet all his life Twain had harbored another prejudice, a contempt for the American Indian which he had nursed at least since his days in Nevada. Here in Vienna in his old age there was no occasion to remind him or interest him in the subject and so he forgot it. But who can doubt that if the occasion had arisen, if his interest had been rekindled, he would have given vent to a heated tirade against the "noble red man"? He had done so years before, when he was in Palestine and some ragged urchins had reminded him of the western Indians he had known, back in America. Consistency was not one of Mark's virtues and any

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1. S. Clemens, "Concerning the Jews," Literary Essays, p. 251.

analysis of his work must allow for his lack of it.

Contrary to his belief, and it was a sincere belief, Twain could not be and never was objective or impartial in his point of view about any racial group. His comment, "I can stand any society" indicates that he meant racial prejudice in the usual sense of an antagonistic feeling toward a particular group. For the purposes of this study, however, the term will be used in the sense of a disposition for as well as against a particular group. This is because Mark Twain never in his life took a middle-of-the-road stand on any issue he discussed. In the case of the Jewish race, he was as prejudiced in their favor as he was prejudiced against the American Indian. And as his lapse of memory about his sentiments concerning the Indians demonstrates, Mark Twain had no reasoned approach to the problem of racial minorities as a whole. Sporadic remarks on a particular group when the impulse seized him or literary characterizations of an individual such as Nigger Jim were as far as Twain pursued the subject. There was no conscious pattern, no intentional crusade. Yet to examine those remarks and literary characterizations seems to be a project worthy of attention. Such attitudes are one expression of a magnif icent and complex personality -- a personality recognized by Twain's countrymen as well as by the rest of the world as a superb expression of the American character -- and a personality, therefore, deserving of thorough and exhaustive exploration. To understand his attitude toward certain racial groups is to throw light upon the man's mind as a whole. To analyze his literary expression of that attitude is to illuminate further, Mark Twain, the artist.

It was as a humorist that Mark Twain's reputation was made and as a humorist that he is primarily remembered. But he was more than a mere humorist and shrewd satirist of human nature. He was as capable of serious

thought as he was of broad humor. He was always concerned with the abuses of individual liberty and the violations of human dignity and on occasion considered them in connection with racial minorities in America. The purpose of the present study is to examine all of his remarks about and literary characterizations of four racial groups, Chinese, Indian, Negro and Jewish. With the exception of the Jewish, all of his considerations are in respect to the groups as minorities in America. The emphasis must necessarily be upon his view of the individual groups, and not upon his view of racial minorities in general, since a sustained, conscious pattern and development of thought on the whole problem cannot be demonstrated. As Stephen Leacock has aptly phrased it:

> He never came out as a champion or protagonist against anything -- or never for long. The mental fatigue of being a champion was contrary to the spirit of his genius.[2]

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The first and most important factor influencing Mark Twain's attitude toward racial groups, as in any opinion he ever held, was his own emotional temperament. "His reactions to experience were always emotional."[3] He was an extremely volatile personality, subject to quick changes of mood and sudden whims -- often an indication of the artistic temperament:

> The humorist like the poet is sensitively responsive to life and the scars multiply fast. Endowed with a nature not unlike Swift's in its fierce rage at inhumanity, not unlike

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2. Stephen Leacock, Mark Twain, p. 13.

3. Vernon L. Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought, III, p. 88.

> Sir Philip Sidney's in its romantic chivalry, he was not a stoic to endure with equanimity.[4]

Constance Rourke says of Twain:

> Thin-skinned, so sensitive that he could hardly endure a joke turned against himself, he showed the quick revulsions, the neurotic explosiveness which for long had broken forth into a long-winded comic vein.[5]

Such a disposition was bound to affect Twain's intellectual processes. It conditioned in him a completely subjective point of view and fostered a desire for self-dramatization and theatrical effect which he was never able to subdue for very long even when absorbed in serious discussion. A thorough examination of these aspects of the emotional factor is therefore necessary to understand Mark Twain's attitudes in general and his attitude in particular toward racial minorities.

Granting an impatient and remarkably sensitive disposition, and adding to it tremendous mental energy, it is not to be wondered that Mark Twain seldom stopped to consider all the factors and all the implications of a question. Instead, he plunged in and attacked or defended according to his immediate reaction. He habitually concentrated on one aspect, one facet of a problem, driving that home with devastating accuracy, but sometimes wearing it a little thin with repetition. This is especially evident in his writings about the treatment of Chinese in San Francisco, the bulk of which are found in a series of satiric letters written for his column in the Galaxy Magazine in 1871 and 1872.

Those same letters illustrate in another way the subjectivity of Mark Twain's point of view. They are a thinly disguised account of certain indignities he saw inflicted upon innocent Chinese in San Francisco.

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4. Ibid., p. 89.

5. Constance Rourke, American Humor, p. 218.

The same indignities are described in another essay written slightly earlier than the Galaxy letters and there is reference to them, too, in Roughing It. They were the source of Mark Twain's attitude toward the Chinese in this country; in fact, his reaction to those episodes was his attitude. Over and over again in his writing, Mark Twain reverted to incidents of his past life and people he had known, illustrating how dependent he was upon the world of his own experience. Most of his judgements were formed in the light of it. To quote Stephen Leacock again:

> Yet let it be noticed that all the basis and background of his work was and remained the Mississippi and the West, and Europe as seen therefrom; from his setting in Elmira, nothing; from his life and surrounding in Buffalo, nothing; from Hartford, nothing, ... To get vision, he must shut his eyes and look across the prairies and the mountains to the sunset over the Golden Gate. Such was the genesis of Tom Sawyer and Roughing It and Huckleberry Finn and Life on the Mississippi and all the splendid work that he wrote in the years that followed his return from Europe.[6]

The important phrase here is "to get vision." Mark Twain could devastatingly expose the injustices accorded the Chinese in San Francisco but that was as far as he pursued the question of a Chinese minority in America. He had raised the issue of civil rights for racial minorities, and the inequalities present in American democracy but he was never again interested in the problem of the Chinese in America beyond what he himself had witnessed in one city at one time. This was true of Twain's general attitude toward life. If he could reduce things to personal terms, to terms within his experience, then he was vitally interested. Parrington has expressed this point well:

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6. Leacock, op. cit., p. 62.

> Hamlin Garland in a bleak Dakota shack found help and comfort in the philosophy of Taine, but Mark Twain could not get outside his own skin. He could not break a path through the provincialism of his environment. He was held prisoner to his own thoughts, and his only release was through the window of imagination.[7]

Twain's first successful book, Innocents Abroad, illustrates this. In this delightful account of adventures in Europe and the Near East, Twain continually reduced the sights he saw to terms of his own experience. The lakes of Switzerland reminded him of Lake Tahoe (which he maintained was infinitely superior); the great paintings of Italian masters and the cathedrals of France bored him exceedingly because there was nothing comparable to them in his America and he had never been educated to their value; the ragged and dirty people in Palestine reminded him of the Washoe Indians in Nevada.[8] Mark Twain's use of his own background and his constant remembrance of it was an integral part of everything he wrote and as Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn demonstrate, he was at his best when he devoted himself exclusively to it.

One important manifestation of Twain's subjective point of view was his attitude toward the Negro race. Hannibal, Missouri, the village of his childhood, was a blend of the small slave-holding community and the semi-frontier settlement. In Mark Twain's America Bernard De Voto sums up the significance of Twain's early contact with Negro slaves:

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7. Parrington, op. cit., p. 89.

8. This of course needs qualification. "While it is true that he was unhistorical in his approach to European culture ... at the very least, there was in Twain a healthy sense of democratic feelings, a hatred of oppression and injustice, a deep-seated feeling that men were more important than the rags and cloth of the past, the trumpery, the show, the color, the glitter attached to outmoded historic institutions. (J.T. Farrell, "Twain's Huckleberry Finn and the Era He Lived In," New York Times Book Review, December 12, 1943, p. 6.)

> Sam Clemens grew up among Negroes: The fact is important for Mark Twain. Mark Twain became, in his way, an artist. In his books the Negro is consistently a noble character, and much that is fruitful in his art springs from the slaves.[9]

Slavery existed in Hannibal in a form quite different from the plantation system described in Uncle Tom's Cabin. Mark Twain, reminiscing in his Autobiography, reveals how deep an impression his earliest years made upon him:

> As a rule, our slaves were convinced and content ... However, there was nothing about the slavery of the Hannibal region to rouse one's dozing humane instincts to activity. It was the mild, domestic slavery, not the brutal plantation article. Cruelties were very rare, and exceedingly and unwholesomely unpopular. To separate and sell the members of a slave family to different masters was a thing not well-liked by the people, and so it was not often done, except in the settling of estates. I have no recollection of ever seeing a slave auction in that town, but I am suspicious that that is because the thing was a common and commonplace spectacle, not an uncommon and impressive one. I vividly remember seeing a dozen black men and women chained to one another, once, and lying in a group on the pavement, awaiting shipment to the Southern slave market. Those were the saddest faces I have ever seen. Chained slaves could not have been a common sight, or the picture would not have made so strong and lasting an impression on me.[10]

Supporting Mark Twain's memories of the kind of slavery he witnessed is a statement in Brashear's, Mark Twain: Son of Missouri:

> Above all else, the region was proudly southern -- but southern with a difference. Instead of large plantations with swarms of slaves to support its social fabric, it had a simpler -- at best, an idyllic -- type of farm life, where slaves lived for the most part happily, their only fear being that a turn of fortune might make it necessary for them to be "sold down the river." These farms supported country towns as centers of the social life of that region. Their social traditions came down mainly from Virginia by way of Kentucky.[11]

Twain's father at one time owned two slaves, and his uncle, John Quarles, on whose farm Twain spent his summers until he was twelve years old, owned

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9. Bernard De Voto, Mark Twain's America, p. 66.

10. S. Clemens, Autobiography, I, 123-124.

11. Minnie Brashear, Mark Twain, Son of Missouri, p. 259.

thirty slaves. In his Autobiography, Mark Twain wrote, referring to one of the Negroes, "Uncle Dan'l":

> It was one the farm that I got my strong liking for his race and appreciation of its fine qualities. I know the look of Uncle Dan'ls kitchen as it was on the privileged nights, when I was a child, and I can see the white and black children grouped on the hearth ... and I can hear Uncle Dan'l telling the immortal tales which Uncle Remus Harris was to gather into his book ... I can feel again the creepy joy which gathered through me when the time for the ghost story was reached.[12]

Of such vivid memories was Mark Twain's attitude toward the Negro formed. His lifelong tenderness for the race and his deep understanding of its nature was a result of those early years. As one of his biographers has commented:

> All unfair discriminations notwithstanding -- the Southerner did, even in slavery days, often understand the negro better and love him more than the Northern abolitionists who were so untiring and so vociferous in his defense. It is always a comparatively easy thing tobecome enthusiastic about the rights of a race we do not have to live with.[13]

Mark Twain retained this affection and understanding for the Negro although he lived to repudiate the system of slavery as many southerners were unable to do. He became what Howells called "The most desouthernized southerner"[14] he ever knew. Probably Howells' explanation that this was a result of his later Western training replacing his original Southern inheritence is an accurate estimate, though it must not be forgotten that Twain's early friendship with negroes was in an atmosphere more democratic than the majority of southerners knew. The western, frontier element in

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12. Clemens, op. cit., 100-15.

13. Edward Wagenknecht, Mark Twain, The Man and His Work, p. 238.

14. De Lancey Ferguson, Mark Twain, Man and Legend, p. 213.

Hannibal softened the aristocratic tradition associated with the slavery system of the south.

So Twain's attitude toward the negro race was a reflection of his early experience, of the problems of the negro in American society after the Civil War, he had no conception. He was concerned that the negro have a fair deal and he himself sent two negro students through Yale as his part of the reparation due every black man from every white man for the wrong done to his race.[15] But further than that he was not interested. Just as his attitude was a result of his personal experience, so his literary treatment of the Negro was confined to the slave type he had known, and one of his greatest characterizations became the runaway slave, "Nigger Jim".

Since consistency was not one of Mark Twain's virtues, we may expect to find an exception to the general rule that his point of view was always subjective and that he was never vitally interested in a subject unless he could reduce it to personal terms. In his attitude toward the Jewish race, Mark Twain seems to have had no personal bias. He once attempted an objective, impartial discussion of the reasons for prejudice against the Jew, in an essay titled "Concerning the Jews." It was an admirable attempt and the only time he ever discussed a racial minority in general terms without his personal reaction and experience obviously flavoring his judgement.

As a result of his emotional temperament, Mark Twain possessed an incurable love of the dramatic. He delighted in dramatizing himself, whether on the stage or in his home. His mastery of the art of telling a story on the platform (as his rendition of "The Golden Arm" for example), reflects

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15. R.E. Spiller, et. al., Literary History of the United States, II, p. 932.

the flair he had for self-dramatization. He knew the secret of playing a role. He created a separate and unique personality symbolized by the pen-name "Mark Twain" and that personality became a real individual in the mind of America, far more real than Samuel Clemens. His famous decision in his old age to wear nothing but white was another example of his delight in the dramatic effect. One cannot read the reminiscences of his daughter, Clara, without retaining an impression of Mark's joy in the attention some of his volcanic tirades and antics brought upon himself. He was, in one sense, a perinnial Tom Sawyer, willing to venture anything for a hearty laugh or even for disapproval, so long as he could surprise a reaction of some sort. His wife understood this irrepressible trait of his and nicknamed him "Youth." As one writer has commented:

> It should be borne in mind that Mark Twain was not only a genius with the pen, but also with the buskin. Many of Mark Twain's moods were simply histrionic. He could not resist an opportunity to take the limelight, and any subject that absorbed him raised his temperature immediately to a point where it became necessary for him to walk to the center of the stage and sweep the house before him.[16]

So one must often weigh Mark Twain's remarks for the element of the theatrical in them. This is not to doubt his sincerity but merely to be certain that an opinion has not been uttered primarily for effect, likely to be contradicted in a later remark.

A final word about the effect of Mark Twain's emotional temperament upon his attitudes and the literary expression of them is found in this estimate by Quinn:

> Mark Twain's career had to an unusual degree an effect upon his fiction. It was not only that he used his own adventures as a basis, but his interests, his sympathies, even

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16. Cleveland Rodgers, "The Many-Sided Mark Twain," The Mentor, XII, (May, 1924), 34-5.

> his prejudices colored the selection of his material. This subjective quality is a source of the vitality of his best work and of the extravagance and even dullness of his worst.[17]

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Equally important with his emotional temperament as a factor in shaping Mark Twain's attitude toward racial minorities was the democratic element in his makeup.

> Mark Twain was both a genuine democrat and a cynic. As a democrat he defended the Jacobins. Democratic ideas seemed to be part of his very blood and flesh. His individualism, and consequently, his sense of the worth of human beings, is a direct product of democratic ideas. And he expressed these magnificently when he made an unschooled boy and a runaway slave the heroes of what is truly an American odyssey. His cynicism is related to the many disillusioning observations of the failure of democratic ideas. In his most buoyant and productive periods, this cynicism is not sharply contradictory to his democratic feelings. Rather, it suggests something of the healthy cynicism of the sansculottes. In his latter days he witnessed the triumph of industrialism and the rapid expansion of American capitalism. His conscience was disturbed ... then, he became a bleak determinist ... his cynicism concerning "the damned human race" became corrosive.[18]

Mark Twain's formative years were spent on the semi-frontier of Missouri and the real frontier of Nevada in the days of sliver mining fever. Violence and injustice were always present but so, too, was the opportunity of success for everyone who was energetic enough to seek it. There was room for all, and every man was indeed the equal of every other man in that respect. There were the petty class distinctions brought along from the East and the South, but there was no landed aristocracy and no established

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17. Arthur Quinn, American Fiction, p. 245.

18. Farrell, op. cit., p.6.

institutions. Any man could rise to a position of prominence and power through his own efforts. A man had to be hardworking and quickwitted to survive in the competition; those were the virtues, along with honesty, that they admired and recognized, and a man could cut across the class distinctions if he had them. It was democracy in the most elementary sense of the word and its values and standards were Mark Twain's all his life.

In his Autobiography Twain remembered the democratic qualities which mingled with the aristocratic in the village of Hannibal:

> In the small town of Hannibal, Missouri, when I was a boy, everybody was poor but didn't know it. And there were grades of society -- people of good family, people of no family. Everybody knew everybody, and was affable to everybody, and nobody put on any visible airs; yet the class lines were quite clearly drawn and the familiar social life of each class was restricted to that class. It was a little democracy which was full of liberty, equality and Fourth of July, and sincerely so, too; yet you perceived that the aristocratic taint was there. It was there, and nobody found fault with the fact, or ever stopped to reflect that its presence was an inconsistency.[19]

The democratic element in Mark Twain's character accounts for his hatred of sham and hupocrisy. In the worlds of Hannibal, Carson City and Virginia City, Nevada, there were hypocrits, of course, but they were despised whenever exposed. Pretense smacked of snobbery and aristocracy, and there was no place for that on a frontier where everyone was judged by what he produced through hard work. Much of Twain's humor was a pitiless revelation of human sham and hypocrisy and it was due in large part to his early background on the western frontier. He not only wrote about it, he practised it himself:

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19. S. Clemens, op. cit., I, 119-20.

> Mark Twain was a radical, resolute, and rather uncritical democrat, committed to the principles of the Preamble to the Constitution. He did not and could not give a "square deal" to the South or to Scott or to Europe or to the Arthurian realm. He refused all recognition to aristocratic virtues which retard the complete establishment of the brotherhood of man. He was not ... a democrat in his study and a snob in his drawing room; he was of the people and for the people at all times.[20]

Frontier values were simple and fundamental, there was no compromise, no blurring of judgement in a land where existence was composed of harsh and stern realities. (No extenuating circumstances were considered by vigilante committees.) Dishonesty was as rife there as anywhere else, but it went hard for the man who was caught in it. So Mark Twain's standards of value were uncompromising and basic. Leacock says of Twain, regarding his repudiation of slavery:

> It ran counter to the simple principles of right and wrong, of equality and fairness, on which his mentality was based. Mark Twain always tried to think in elementary terms, to reduce everything to a plain elementary form and to judge it so. By this process much of his humour was formed, and all of his philosophy. He knew nothing of relativity, of things right in one place and wrong in another, righteous in one day and wicked in another.[21]

Mark's democratic nature explains why he always defended the underdog. In this he verifies the statement quoted earlier that he was an "uncritical democrat." Wagenknecht discusses this trait of Twain's in his biography:

> ... Temperamentally, he was always on the side of the underdog. He might or he might not admire the people involved, but let him once be convinced that an injustice

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20. S.P. Sherman, On Contemporary Literature, p. 41.

21. Leacock, op. cit., p. 12.

> was being practised, and he would immediately constitute himself counsel for the defense.[22]

It will be seen later that there was one notable exception to this otherwise consistent habit of his, that was in the case of the American Indian.

Mark's official biographer, Albert Paine, describes his work on the Buffalo Express in terms of his defense of the underdog:

> His sympathy had been always with the oppressed, and he had now become their defender. His work on the paper revealed this more and more. He wrote fewer sketches and more editorials, and the editorials were likely to be either savage assaults upon some human abuse, or fierce espousals of the weak. They were fearless, scathing, terrific. Mark Twain on the Express was what he had been from the beginning, and would be to the end -- the zealous champion of justice and liberty; violent and sometimes wrong in his viewpoint, but never less than fearless and sincere. Invariably he was for the oppressed. He had a natural instinct for the right, but, right or wrong, he was for the underdog.[23]

To summarize, then, Mark's early years in the West where he encountered and lived with every type of human nature and where every man was respected and considered equal if he proved his worth through hard effort, made him despise petty discrimination and injustice wherever he saw it. The democratic instinct was fundamental in Twain's character, even replacing his Southern inheritance and it was inevitable that he should unhesitating be on the side of almost every racial minority.

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The emotional and democratic factors in Mark Twain's habits of thought conditioned his attitude toward racial minorities. It remains only to

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22. Wagenknecht, op. cit., p. 237.

23. Albert B. Paine, Mark Twain, A Biography, I, p. 400.

to discuss briefly the style of his literary expression of those attitudes.

Mark Twain was a product of the American frontier. His humor was the supreme expression of the frontier spirit.[24] Twain's humor, as a product of the American frontier, contained certain characteristics which extended into his serious writing. Chief among these was an anecdotal framework. Frontier humor consisted of anecodotes, or yarns, usually gross exaggerations of the truth. Hence the "tall tale," exemplified by the legends of Davy Crocketts' and Paul Bunyon's exploits. Twain was acquainted with the crude examples of this folk humor in the newspaper sketches and cheap books of the time. Parrington provides a summary of this native anecdotal humor and its influence on Mark Twain:

> Since the first crossing of the Alleghany Mountains a swaggering extravagance of speech had been a hallmark of The Westerner. In part this swagger was an unconscious defense-mechanism against the drabness of frontier life; and in part it was the spontaneous expression of new experiences in an untrammeled world, the spirit of wilderness-leveling. Its procreative source would seem to have been the Ohio River where the rough flatboatmen bequeathed the Mike Fink legend to literature; and it expanded in the huge Davy Crockett hoax ... It developed further in Gus Lonstreet's Georgia Scenes ... and in Joseph Baldwin's Flush Times of Alabama and Mississippi ... It was this humor that Mark Twain inherited, and he enriched it with a wealth dug from his own large and generous nature.[25]

Not only was Twain familiar with the anecdote of exaggeration in folk literature but as Ferguson points out:

> For one specimen of this humor, moreover, which he read in print, Sam Clemens must have heard dozens by word of mouth. The American was anecdotal, and on the frontier the anecdote

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24. cf. Farrell, op. cit., p. 6. "As Bernard De Voto has demonstrated in detail in Mark Twain's America, Twain's source of inspiration was the frontier. He is the literary summation of pioneer America.

25. Parrington, op. cit., 91-2.

served all purposes from laughter to sermonizing ...[26]

A specific application of this habit of exaggeration to his serious writing is made by one critic of Twain:

> The reader must allow for Mark Twain's journalistic enlargement in his writings on public questions. To attract the attention of his common readers and audiences, he made his expression more or less sensational. He used a magnifying glass; he spoke through a megaphone. His exaggerations worked in both directions -- humorous and pessimistic -- and between these two extremes there were many kinds of sarcastic exaggeration in which sweetness and bitterness went together.[27]

Alongside Mark Twain's tendency to exaggerate must be placed an equally western trait, anti-romanticism. The blunt realism in Twain's writing was a strong contrast to the romantic tradition which had persisted for so long in American literature. As Parrington states:

> Here at last was an authentic American -- a native writer thinking his own thoughts, using his own eyes, speaking his own dialect -- everything European fallen away, the last shred of feudal culture gone, local and western yet continental. A strange and uncouth figure in the eyes of Thomas Bailey Aldrich, yet the very embodiment of the turbulent frontier that had long been shaping a native psychology, and that now at last was turning eastward to Americanize the Atlantic seaboard.[28]

The importance of Twain's realistic treatment of racial minorities in his writing needs to be stressed. In the case of the negro, his significance has not been sufficiently acknowledged. Bernard De Voto emphasizes the point:

> He was probably not aware that he was bringing to literature a theme it had refused to use. Apart from him the institution of slavery had no place in the fiction of his

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26. Ferguson, op. cit., p. 27.

27. Masajiro Hamada, "Mark Twain's Conception of Social Justice," Studies in English Literature, XVI (October, 1936), p. 615.

28. Parrington, op. cit., p. 86.

> century. Northern novelists may have been unable to understand more than its propriety in reform: none went beyond the exegesis of Mrs. Stowe and John T. Trowbridge. The South had no realist before Mark Twain, except the humorists who have been here examined and who ignored the theme ... After the war, a few thin talents did sometimes attempt an objective picture of remembered slavery, but they were submerged in the reveries of Confederate officers. Thomas Nelson Page is this sentiment achieving full expression. His example dominated his region until the next war. Cable and Harris, although romancers, had meanwhile examined slavery with less sentiment than Page, but they were ineffective -- and, besides, had received instruction from Mark Twain.[29]

Referring to Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn, Puddinhead Wilson and The Gilded Age, De Voto concludes his remarks:

> Slavery as an institution and Negroes as sharers of the scene are organic in the community to which these novels are devoted. It is a whole community: the effect is totality. Several generations of American experience, a race, an era, and a society are enregistered.[30]

Exaggeration and realism (often in the form of anti-romanticism), then, are an integral part of Mark Twain's humor and are reflected in his serious writing. "It is interesting to see exaggeration and anti-romantic irreverence joining forces to give the typical American quality to Mark Twain's work."[31]

Returning to the anecdotal basis of Twain's humor, its most important influence on his work was in his story-telling technique. It was extremely difficult for Mark Twain to work out a detailed plan for a book. His method was to start with an episode and develop as he went along, piling on more episodes and letting the story work itself out as it progressed. In this way he started many stories which he never finished simply because they faltered and fell to pieces. With such a technique it is easy to understand why he

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29. De Voto, op. cit. p. 292.

30. Ibid., p. 294.

31. Sculley Bradley, "Our Native Humor," North American Review, CCXLII (1937), p. 360.

seldom attempted a novel based on social criticism. The Gilded Age and A Connecticut Yankee are, on one level, it is true, works of social criticism, but the effect is spasmodic and unsustained. Individual episodes succeed but the incidents in a humorous vein obscure their effect. Twain's humor was always just below the surface, even when his righteous indignation was at white heat. Constance Rourke points out the effect Twain's early schooling had on his attempts at social criticism:

> It is a mistake to look for the social critic -- even manqué -- in Mark Twain. In a sense the whole American comic tradition had been that of social criticism: but this had been instinctive and incomplete, and so it proved to be in Mark Twain. Like the earlier humorists he was rich in notation. ... But as he turned toward the inconclusive or penetrative view he was invariably blocked by some preposterous extravagance that seemed to mount visibly before his eyes. He was primarily a "raconteur," with an "unequalled dramatic authority," as Howells called it. He was never the conscious artist, always the improviser.[32]

I cannot entirely agree with this estimate because the social criticism in Mark Twain was an important part of his contribution to American literature. True, he had no concrete plan for social reform, but does this invalidate his observations? Mark Twain, himself, deplored the fact that people would not take him seriously. His observations about injustice and inequality in American democracy were as much a part of the man's thought as his humorous stories and they deserve to be remembered. However, as an estimate of his literary technique and the effect his western training had upon it, the statement is valuable.

An emotional and highly democratic attitude, often inconsistent but

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32. Rourke, op. cit., p. 211. For an interesting letter by Mark Twain to an unidentified minister, in which Twain analyzes his methods of writing, see "My Methods of Writing," Mark Twain Quarterly, XIII (winter-spring, '49).

always realistic in literary treatment, then, characterizes Mark Twain's approach to the Chinese, Indian, Negro and Jewish races. The following chapters present an analysis in detail of his writings about each racial group.

Chapter II

The Defense of the Underdog

When Mark Twain left the Mississippi in 1861 and accompanied his brother, Orion, to Carson City, Nevada, he anticipated great adventure and quick success on the new frontier. Adventure he found, but after two years of exciting and futile attempts to make himself a quick fortune in both gold and silver mining, he decided on a more practical source of income. He accepted a position on the staff of the Virginia City Enterprise, whose shrewd editor, Joseph B. Goodman, was to be the first to encourage Mark's talent for literary humor. Virginia City was a typically crude, rough and boisterous town of the Nevada frontier. "The sidewalks swarmed with people -- to such an extent, indeed, that it was generally no easy matter to stem the human tide," Mark wrote in Roughing It. He continued in typically western style, "the mountain side was so steep that the entire town had a slant to it like a roof. Each street was a terrace, and from each to the next street below the descent was forty or fifty feet."[33] Many nationalities thronged the streets of Virginia City, Irish, Spanish, Mexican, Indian and Chinese. To go slumming on the "terrace" known as "Chinatown" was a pastime Twain and his friends indulged in several times. At one time, the occasion was Artemus Ward's visit to Virginia City:

> One night Dan De Quille and Mark took Artemus to Chinatown to show him the sights. They went to visit Hop Sing, the head of one tong, and to old Sam Sing, the champion of the opposite tong. Food, drink, and cordiality always accompanied these festive events. As the trio visited each

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33. Samuel Clemens, Roughing It, II, 27-29.

> head-quarters, they were treated to "blandy" -- rice brandy -- and other kinds of fiery drinks.[34]

Such occasional hilarious visits to Chinatown in Virginia City were Mark Twain's principal contact with the Chinese race before he went to San Francisco. Even after his arrival there, they attracted his attention for a while only as sources of amusement. Paine describes how Mark's and Steve Gillis' favorite Sunday amusement was to sit on the hillside and bounce empty beer bottles off the tin roofs of the Chinamen's shanties.[35] Eventually, however, an incident did occur which aroused all of Twain's righteous indignation at the white man's injustice and cruelty to the yellow minority. He saw a group of hoodlums stonning a Chinaman and setting their dogs on him while an Irish policeman stood by and grinned. Mark was employed by the San Francisco Call at the time and Paine recounts what happened afterward:

> He wrote an indignant article criticizing the city government and raking the police. In Virginia City this would have been a welcome delight; in San Francisco it did not appear.[36]

When the story did not appear Twain made inquiries and discovered that the editor had killed it because the Irish were the chief supporters of the Call and the paper couldn't afford to offend them.[37] The incident rankled in his mind for a long time and apparently it stimulated him to investigate further the condition of the Chinese in San Francisco, because he was to refer more than once in the next few years to that episode and others he witnessed

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34. Effie M. Mack, Mark Twain in Nevada, p. 293.

35. Paine, op. cit., I, 255-6.

36. Ibid., p. 258.

37. Ferguson, op. cit., p. 98.

while he was in California. Certainly what zest he had for his work on the Call was gone when he discovered that he was not free to write as he pleased. It was not long after that Twain resigned and sought employment elsewhere.[38]

Mark Twain's brief acquaintance with the Chinese minority in Virginia City and San Francisco forms the background of his writing on the yellow race. All of his remarks on the Chinese minority occur in his work during the early 1870's, the decade following his stay in Nevada and California, and all of those remarks are a reflection of the western experiences. Apparently the memory of certain episodes remained in his mind and he had to release the bitterness that rankled when he thought of them. When he had done that, his interest was not absorbed again by the questions he had raised. Probably, too, the fact that he had not been allowed to publish his account of one episode, in San Francisco, made him all the more determined to do so somewhere else, and explains partially why he was intensely interested in the problem of the Chinese minority in America for a few short years after his return from the West, and then never again concerned.

The tenor of all Mark Twain's remarks on the Chinese minority in America reveals a marked sympathy for them and a righteous indignation against their mistreatment. Again and again he draws upon the episodes he witnessed and heard about, as literary material in his newspaper work and in his second successful book, Roughing It. The repetition of one episode in particular becomes increasingly evident as these writings are examined in the order

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38. The Washoe Giant in San Francisco, p. 13.; ed. Franklin Walker. "Only the need of money could have made him work for the Call as long as he did; he went through a monotonous daily regime in getting local news, which were de-humanized before printing; he was allowed to sign no articles."

in which he wrote them.

In May, 1870, Twain began the editorship of a column called "Memoranda" in a current New York Literary Magazine, The Galaxy. He was living in Buffalo at the time with his bride of three months and managing the Buffalo Express. His column in The Galaxy was to be filled each month with items of his own choice on any subject that interested him. It was the kind of assignment Mark Twain enjoyed, allowing him to indulge his whims freely. The variety of subject matter he printed in each issue reflected many moods. In his first column, May, 1870, alongside such subjects as "The Story of the Good Little Boy Who Did Not Prosper," "The Facts in the Case of the Great Beef Contract," and several humorous anecdotes, appeared what Paine calls "a presentment of the Chinese situation in San Francisco, depicting the cruel treatment of the Celestial immigrant."[39] The article was satirically titled "Disgraceful Persecution of a Boy" and in a note at the bottom of the page, Twain informs his readers:

> I have many such memories in my mind but am thinking just at present of one particular one, where the Brannan Street butchers set their dogs on a Chinaman who was quietly passing with a basket of clothes on his head; and while the dogs mutilated his flesh, a butcher increased the hilarity of the occasion by knocking some of the Chinaman's teeth down his throat with half a brick. This incident sticks in my memory with a malevolent tenacity, perhaps, on account of the fact that I was in the employ of a San Francisco journal at the time, and was not allowed to publish it because it might offend some of the peculiar element that subscribed for the paper. ----
>
> Editor Memoranda[40]

The article describes a newspaper item from San Francisco about a "well dressed boy on his way to Sunday school" who was thrown into jail for stoning a Chinaman. Twain writes ironically:

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39. Paine, op. cit., I, p. 404.

40. Samuel Clemens, "Disgraceful Persecution of a Boy," The Galaxy, IX (May 1870), p. 723.

> Probably his parents were intelligent, well-to-do people, with just enough natural villainy in their compositions to make them yearn after the daily papers, and enjoy them ... in this way the boy could learn how Chinamen are treated.[41]

Through the rest of the essay Twain repeats the idea that "in this way" (i.e. his parents' example) the boy had learned how to abuse Chinamen and he was therefore not to be blamed for stoning one of them. In fact he was being unduly persecuted because he had never seen any kindness or justice dealt to them and was merely imitating his elders. The essay is an example of Twain's by then well developed journalistic style, an editorial crusading for a worthy cause. It reveals a control of the subject matter despite the extravagance of the language. Indeed, the extravagance is responsible for the sharp satiric effect, and a few exerpts will demonstrate how well Twain had mastered his technique at this early point in his literary career:

> It was in this way that he found out that in many districts of the vast Pacific coast, so strong is the wild, free love of justice in the hearts of the people, that whenever any secret and mysterious crime is committed, they say,"Let justice be done, though the heavens fall," and go straightway and hang a Chinaman.[42]

Continuing with the phrase, "in this way," Twain writes:

> It was in this way that he found out that by studying one half of each day's "local items" it would appear that the police of San Francisco were either asleep or dead, and by studying the other half it would seem that the reporters were gone mad with admiration ... of that very police making exultant mention of how "The Argus-eyed officer So-and-so captured a wretched knave of a Chinaman who was stealing chickens, and brought him gloriously to the city prison ..."[43]

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41. Ibid., p. 722.

42. Ibid., p. 722.

43. Ibid., p. 723.

In a later essay Twain was to refer to the habit of the newspapers of slanting any mention of Chinamen, increasing the prejudice against them. He was to develop more thoroughly, too, his contempt for the San Francisco police force and to satirize bitterly the corruption he witnessed there.

In the following quotation from "Disgraceful Persecution," Twain alludes to a fraud which had impressed him greatly. It, too, would appear again in his later essay:

> It was in this way that the boy found out that the Legislature, being aware that the Constitution has made America an asylum for the poor and oppressed of all nations, and that therefore the poor and oppressed who fly to our shelter must not be charged a disabling admission fee, made a law that every Chinaman, upon landing, must be vaccinated upon the wharf, and pay to the States appointed officer ten dollars for the service, when there are plenty of doctors in San Francisco who would be glad enough to do it for him for fifty cents.[44]

Twain gathers all his fury for the summary of his case in favor of freeing the "persecuted" boy:

> It was in this way that the boy found out that a Chinaman had no rights that any man was bound to respect; that he had no sorrows that any man was bound to pity; that neither his life nor his liberty was worth the purchase of a penny when a white man needed a scapegoat; that nobody loved Chinamen nobody befriended them, nobody spared them suffering when it was convenient to inflict it; everybody, individuals, communities, the majesty of the State itself, joined in hating, abusing, and persecuting these humble strangers.[45]

In the issue of The Galaxy for September, 1870, Twain wrote a short humorous sketch titled "John Chinaman in New York" which reveals him poking fun at the very attitude he had been expressing in the article "Disgraceful Persecution of a Boy." It is a typical example of the kind of literary hoax

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44. Ibid., p. 723.

45. Ibid., p. 723.

Twain loved to do -- the careful buildup of a misleading situation which is destroyed by the last sentence. It is burlesque plus the anti-climax technique and was written for the sheer fun of playing a joke on his readers. Twain begins on a supposedly serious note, describing a bent over Chinaman he had seen sitting before a large American tea company in New York, acting in the capacity of a sign for the concern, a sort of local color advertisement. He continues in an indignant tone:

> Isn't it a shame that we who prate so much about civilization and humanity are content to degrade a fellow-being to such an office as this? ... Men calling themselves the superior race, the race of culture and of gentle blood, scanned his quaint Chinese hat with peaked roof, and ball on top; and his long queue dangling down his back; his short silken blouse, curiously frogged and figured ... his blue cotton, tight-legged pants tied close around the ankles ... and having so scanned him from head to foot, cracked some unseemly joke about his outlandish attire or his melancholy face, and passed on.[46]

Twain then relates how he stopped and conversed with the Chinese:

> In my heart I pitied the friendless Mongal ...
> "Cheer up -- don't be down-hearted. It is not America that treats you in this way -- it is merely one citizen, whose greed of gain has eaten the humanity out of his heart. America has a broader hospitality for the exiled and oppressed. America and Americans are always ready to help the unfortunate. Money shall be raised -- you shall go back to China -- you shall see your friends again. What wages do they pay you here?[47]

and the "Oriental" replies:

> "Divil a cint but four dollars a week and find meself; but it's aisy, barrin' the bloody furrin clothes that's so expinsive."[48]

The sketch illustrates some qualities of Mark Twain's humor. It is first of all an anecdote polished to just the right length for proper effect.

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46. Samuel Clemens, "John Chinaman in New York," The Galaxy, X (Sept. 1870), p. 426.

47. Ibid., p. 426.

48. Ibid., p. 426.

Burlesque of a virtuous attitude, in this case, tolerance for another race, is the keynote. The anti-climax of the last sentence is a technique that Mark Twain achieved to perfection. The ridiculous position in which he places himself was a role he was fond of playing, as many of the episodes in Roughing It and Innocents Abroad demonstrate.

With the last sentence, Twain throws a satiric light on the noble sentiments he has previously expressed, illustrating the familiar fact that he could never resist an opportunity for humor. This habit of his is the principle reason that readers have never been able to take him seriously. One never knows just when the unexpected joke will turn up. His delight in building up a misleading situation and catching his audience off guard makes his serious remarks suspect, something which Mark Twain never seemed to realize. Readers of Mark Twain, now as well as during his lifetime, have never wanted to take him seriously. He has been unique as an American humorist, and his readers always wait hopefully for the unique Twainian phrase which will explode the serious tone of his observations. It was a bitter disappointment to Twain in his later years, when pessimism grew in him, to realize that his serious thoughts were not appreciated by his audience. He characterized himself to George W. Cable, his co-partner on one of his lecture tours, as a mere buffoon. Yet in the early days, when he himself had refused to take his own thoughts too seriously, when his writings had reflected his buoyancy and youthful irreverance, he had established the pattern of his humor and the result he deplored later was merely an inevitable conclusion.

Albert Paine says in his biography of Mark Twain that Twain was always the champion of the Chinese as long as he lived. He writes:

> In the October number of The Galaxy he began a series of letters under the general title of "Goldsmith's Friend Abroad Again," supposed to have been written by a Chinese immigrant

> in San Francisco, detailing his experience there. In a note the author says: "No experience is set down in the following letters which had to be invented. Fancy is not needed to give variety to the history of the Chinaman's sojourn in America. Plain fact is amply sufficient." The letters show how the supposed Chinese writer of them had set out for America, believing it to be a land whose government was based on the principle that all men are created equal, and treated accordingly; how, upon arriving in San Francisco, he was kicked and bruised and beaten and set upon by dogs, flung into jail, tried and condemned without witnesses, his own race not being allowed to testify against Americans -- Irish Americans -- in the San Francisco court. They are scathing, powerful letters, and one cannot read them, even in this day of improved conditions, without feeling the hot waves of resentment and indignation which Mark Twain must have felt when he penned them.[49]

Paine's estimate of the letters is an accurate one. Mark Twain's pen was its most devastating and merciless when applied to a subject within his personal experience. He conveys a bitter irony through the gentle, uncomplaining naive Chinese as he recounts episodes of shocking fraud and brutal treatment. In these letters Twain details the things he had witnessed and investigated while he was in San Francisco. "Disgraceful Persecution of a Boy" had dealt with the matter briefly; the "Goldsmith" letters cover it thoroughly and give him an opportunity to release the indignation he had harbored since his stay in California.

Twain derived his title and pseudo-letter form from a series of letters written by Oliver Goldsmith, 1760-1761, "a series of one hundred and twenty-three mellow potboiling essays contributed twice a week to Newbury's Public Ledger." Goldsmith's letters, titled "The Citizen of the World; or Letters from a Chinese Philosopher, Residing in London, to his Friends in the East," were written "to discuss and expose the political intrigues and moral opinions of the English; advocating, for example, the reform of the

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49. Paine, op. cit., I, p. 406.

laws of marriage and divorce ..."[50] Since Twain's purpose was to expose the political corruption and unjust treatment of the Chinese minority in San Francisco it is easy to see why he was reminded of Goldsmith's essays, familiar to him from his piloting days on the Mississippi when the co-pilot, George Ealer, used to read aloud to him.[51]

The first letter in "Goldsmith's Friend Abroad Again" is headed Shanghai, 18--, and reads in part:

> Dear Ching-Foo:
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> ... I am to leave my oppressed and overburdened native land and cross the sea to that noble realm where all are free and all equal, and none reviled or abused -- America! America, whose precious privilege it is to call herself the Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave ... and we know that America stands ready to welcome all other oppressed peoples and offer her abundance to all that come without asking what their nationality is, or their creed or color ...
>
> Ah Song Hi [52]

In the second letter Twain repeats the phrase, "Land of the Free and Home of the Brave," the device he had used with the words "in this way" in "Disgraceful Persecution." The letter was supposedly written on the boat and Ah Song Hi describes the conditions under which he traveled to America:

> We are far away at sea now, on our way to the beautiful Land of the Free and Home of the Brave. We shall soon be where all men are alike, and where sorrow is not known.
> ... We are in that part of the vessel always reserved for

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50. Otis and Needleman, A Survey - History of English Literature, p. 377.

51. Wagenknecht, op. cit., p. 46. "The Goldsmith of the Vicar of Wakefield was, as we already know, anathema, but the essayist was another story. Mark Twain first came to know him well from George Ealer's readings ... His most direct imitation of Goldsmith was in the essay, "Goldsmith's Friend Abroad Again," that noble protest against inhumanity toward the Chinese on the West Coast."

52. Samuel Clemens, "Goldsmith's Friend Abroad Again," The Galaxy, X (October, 1870), p. 569.

> my countrymen. It is called the steerage. It is kept for us, my employer says, because it is not subject to changes of temperature and dangerous drafts of air. It is only another instance of the loving unselfishness of the Americans for all unfortunate foreigners.[53]

Twain concludes the letter with a description of the fraudulent practice of charging every Chinese immigrant $2.00 at the dock for a "certificate." His irony this time is directed at making the officials look ridiculous:

> My employer tells me that the Government at Washington knows of this fraud, and are so bitterly opposed to the existence of such a wrong that they tried hard to have the extor-- the fee, I mean, legalized by the last Congress; but as the bill did not pass, the Consul will have to take the fee dishonestly until the next Congress makes it legitimate. It is a great and good and noble country, and hates all forms of vice and chicanery.
> *Pacific and Mediterranean steamship bills[54]

Ah Song Hi's habit of praising the Americans who have wronged him is at times a little too naive to be convincing. Twain, in his enthusiasm, sometimes overdid his satire and took the edge from it. In these letters he often came dangerously close to satirizing the Chinese immigrant by making his gullibility seem ridiculous.

Letter III once more reiterates the theme, "Land of the Free":

> I stepped ashore jubilant! I wanted to dance, shout, sing, worship the generous Land of the Free and Home of the Brave.[55]

Twain describes in this letter how Ah Song Hi was beaten and kicked by policemen, and how he was forced to have a vaccination for small pox and pay a fee even though he protested that he had had the disease! With this last episode, Twain puts a clever twist on a practice whose corruption he had attacked in "Disgraceful Persecution of a Boy."

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53. Ibid., p. 569.

54. Ibid., p. 569.

55. Ibid., p. 570.

Letter IV, the last in the October issue, is based on the incident which Twain had witnessed and written up for the Call. After describing how some young men set a fierce dog on a passing Chinese and an Irish policeman stood by and watched, leaving it up to a passerby to rescue the unfortunate victim (one wonders if the passerby was Mark Twain?), Twain has one of the young men say:

> "This Ching divil comes tell Ameriky to take the bread out o' dacent intilligent white men's mouths, and whin they try to defind their rights there's a dale o' fuss made about it."[56]

Mark Twain had grasped the fundamental reason for the prejudice against the Chinese minority, who were willing to work for such low wages that they crowded out other foreign groups. It is significant that he makes the speaker Irish; they were often the object of his satire. When Ah Song Hi is thrown into jail it is an Irish policeman who tells him, in words heavy with irony:

> "Rot there, ye furrin' spawn, till ye lairn that there's no room in America for the likes of ye or your nation."[57]

The second series of "Goldsmith" letters appeared in the November, 1870, issue of The Galaxy. Letter no. V details the crowded jail conditions and describes how two drunken women in the cell next to Ah Song Hi fall on him while he is dozing against the grating and batter him. They, too, are Irish and reveal the source of the prejudice against the Chinese in San Francisco:

> ...because they discovered I was a Chinaman, and they said I was "a bloody interlopin' loafer come from the divils own country to take the bread out of dacent

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56. Ibid., p. 570-1.

57. Ibid., p. 571.

> people's mouths and put down the wages for work whin it was all a christian could do to kape body and sowl together as it was."[58]

In letter vI Twain gives a picture of the courtroom and summarizes the discriminations which were freely practised there. His dislike for the Irish and their control over local government and his wrath at the abuses of justice are the principle themes. Clearly, he must have been present at court sessions when he was in San Francisco:

> Pretty soon I was compelled to notice that the culprits' nationality made for or against him in this court. Overwhelming proofs were necessary to convict an Irishman of crime, and even then his punishment amounted to little; ... negroes were promptly punished, when there was the slightest preponderance of testimony against them; but Chinamen were punished always, apparently.
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> ... I found that any succored and befriended refugee from Ireland or elsewhere could stand up before the judge and swear away the life or liberty or character of a refugee from China; but that by the law of the land The Chinaman could not testify against the Irishman. I was really and truly uneasy, but still my faith in the universal liberty that America accords and defends, and my deep veneration for the land that offered all distressed outcasts a home and protection, was strong within me ...[59]

In the January, 1871, issue of The Galaxy Twain concluded his "Goldsmith" series with one letter in which Ah Song Hi describes his "trial" and thereby exposes the complete denial of his basic rights in a corrupt court:

> I had no lawyer. In the early morning a police court lawyer (termed in the higher circles of society, a "shyster") had come into our den in the prison and offered his services to me, but I had been obliged to go without them because I could not pay in advance or give security.[60]

Ah Song Hi asks that four Chinese witnesses be called to the stand and the interpreter informs him:

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58. Ibid., p. 730.

59. Ibid., P. 730.

60. Ibid., XI, p. 156.

> "That won't work," said he. "In this country white men can testify against Chinamen all they want to, but Chinamen aren't allowed to testify against white men!"[61]

Up to this point, Twain has maintained a bitter satire of the abuse of judicial procedure, but his inability to avoid humor whenever an opportunity arises, overcomes him and for a moment he pokes fun at ancient Oriental traditions. Ah Song Hi relates how, in cases between two Chinese, the rule of the court is that preponderance of testimony should determine gult or innocence:

> ... There being nothing very binding about an oath administered to the lower orders of our people without the ancient solemnity of cutting off a chicken's head and burning some yellow paper at the same time, the interested parties naturally drum up a cloud of witnesses who are cheerfully willing to give evidence without ever knowing anything about the matter in hand.[62]

Finally, two officers (Irish) take the stand and report that Ah Song Hi was making a disturbance and the judge fines him $5.00 or ten days in jail:

> Then the trial so unspeakably important to me, and freighted with such prodigious consequence to my wife and children, began, progressed, ended, was recorded in the books, noted down by the newspaper reporters, and forgotten by everybody but me -- all in the little space of two minutes![63]

Ah Song Hi is taken back to prison with some of the others and everyone departs:

> ... and left the uncomely court room to silence, solitude, and Stiggers, the newspaper reporter, which latter would

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61. Ibid., p. 157.

62. Ibid., p. 157.

63. Ibid., p. 157.

> now write up his items (said an ancient Chinaman to me), in the which he would praise all the policemen indiscriminately and abuse all the Chinamen and dead people.[64]

The "Goldsmith" letters contain passages of superb irony. At times, it is true, these are marred by Twain's habit of overdoing a point. They reveal his intense hatred of corruption and fraud and his constant attack on the abuse of democratic principles. Ah Song Hi is a conventionalized type and never emerges as a convincing individual. His is the underdog, the unfortunate and innocent victim of despiccable human beings. Twain's knowledge of actual Chinese is obviously cursory and his attitude unconsciously condescending at times as he portrays the naive and gullible reaction of the immigrant, the superstitious customs solemnly accepted by Ah Song Hi. But Mark Twain's championship of a mistreated racial minority and his impassioned defense of their right to equality and justice are an expression of the finest qualities in his character.

Only once again did Twain turn his attention to the Chinese minority in America. This was in Roughing It, published in 1872, and dealing with his life in the West. Chapter thirteen in volume II is devoted to a discussion of Chinatown in Virginia City, which he had visited under conditions described earlier in this chapter. Twain's admiration for the race and a sympathy for them as towards a misused child is clearly evident:

> They are a harmless race when white men either let them alone or treat them no worse than dogs; in fact, they are almost entirely harmless anyhow, for they seldom think of resenting the vilest insults or the cruelest injuries. They are quiet, peaceable, tractable, free from drunkenness, and they are as industrious as the day is long. A

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64. Ibid., 157-8.

> disorderly Chinaman is rare, and a lazy one does not exist ... He is a great convenience to everybody -- even to the worst class of white men, for he bears the most of their sins, suffering fines for their petty thefts, imprisonment f for their robberies, and death for their murders. Any white man can swear a Chinaman's life away in the courts, but no Chinaman can testify against a white man. Ours is the "land of the free" -- nobody denies that -- nobody challenges it. Maybe it is because we won't let other people testify. As I write, news comes that in broad daylight in San Francisco, some boys have stoned an inoffensive Chinaman to death, and that although a large crowd witnessed the shameful deed, no one interferred.[65]

After an account of living conditions in Virginia City Chinatown, Twain again attacks the frauds practised on the defenceless Chinese:

> In California he gets a living out of old mining claims that white men have abandoned as exhausted and worthless -- and then the officers come down on him once a month with an exorbitant swindle to which the legislature has given the broad, general name of "foreign" mining tax, but it is usually inflicted on no foreigners but Chinamen.[66]

Later in the chapter Twain refers once more to the practice which had so incensed him in San Francisco:

> There was another bill -- it became a law -- compelling every incoming Chinaman to be vaccinated on the wharf and pay a duly-appointed quack (no decent doctor would defile himself with such legalized robbery) ten dollars for it. As few importers of Chinese would want to go to an expense like that, the lawmakers thought this would be another heavy blow to Chinese immigration.[67]

Concluding the Chapter, Twain sums up his contempt for the petty types of the human race who take advantage of defenceless minorities:

> They are a kindly -disposed, well-meaning race, and are respected and well treated by the upper classes, all over the

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65. Clemens, Roughing It, II, 105-6.

66. Ibid., p. 107.

67. Ibid., p. 109.

> Pacific coast. No California gentleman or lady ever abuses or oppresses a Chinaman, under any circumstances, an explanation that seems to be much needed in the East. Only the scum of the population do it -- they and their children; they, and naturally and consistently, the policemen and politicians, likewise, for these are the dust -- licking pimps and slaves of the scum, there as well as elsewhere in America.[68]

Thus, the remarks in Roughing It, written a year after the "Goldsmith" letters, are a restatement of Twain's attitude in the earlier essays. He describes in detail some of the customs and habits he observed on one of his visits to Chinatown in such words as "He offered us a mess of bird's-nests; also, small, neat sausages, of which we could have swallowed several yards if we had chosen to try, but we suspected that each link contained the corpse of a mouse, and therefore refrained."[69]

In later years Twain interceded to General Grant on behalf of the Chinese Educational Mission for aid in the internal affairs of China, but he never again took up his pen to champion the rights of the Chinese minority in America. His life in the East brought no contact with the race, and new ideas and new surroundings absorbed his attention. His defense of their rights demonstrates his emotional reactions in the intensity and inevitable subjectivity of his literary expression. Certain episodes he had witnessed, particular abuses legal and otherwise with which he was personally familiar, were referred to again and again. His skillful satire of the abuses exposes them in all their shameful reality and shows a Mark Twain fearlessly devoted to the destruction of non-democratic processes, stopping momentarily to indulge in humor but never forgetting the real purpose of his essay. His

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68. Ibid., 111-12.

69. Ibid., p. 110.

70. Samuel Clemens, Autobiography, I, 20-4 for a detailed account of the episode.

defense of the Chinese minority is a defense of basic principles -- the Chinese happen to be the race involved but it could be any race because he is crusading for the rights of minorities abused by unscrupulous authorities and vicious types of civilians. It is not, as in the case of the Negro, a result of his deep affection for another race because of close contact with some of its members. It is, rather, a result of sympathy for the underdog, in this case the unfortunate foreigner who is not accorded the equal rights and the respect that Mark Twain believed was due to all decent peoples in American democracy.

Chapter III

The Noble Red Man

The village of Hannibal in the year of Mark Twain's birth, 1835, was still sufficiently near the frontier so that Indians were a commonplace sight. Mark Twain's acquaintance with the Indian race began in his childhood and one of his most famous characters was to be based on a half-breed he had known in Hannibal. Bernard De Voto writes, in Mark Twain's America, of this influence on Twain's attitude toward the Indian:

> Half-breeds were common to their experience and, being of the dispossessed, were charged with crime as a matter of course -- and some accuracy. Revenge, a motive of infrequent validity for most people, was axiomatic in the Indian nature. Where Injun Joe addresses Dr. Robinson across the blanketed corpse and alludes to an affront put upon him, his language comes close to the thrillers of the itinerant stage, but his emotions are genuine.[71]

Mark Twain would have been unique, indeed, if he had not looked upon the American Indian as a no-good, dangerous individual, for that was the universal attitude of the residents of any settlement on the semi-frontier. It was the attitude of pioneers throughout the long development of the West, a natural result of the clash between the red man and the white man in which treachery and murder were freely exchanged. The Indians in Hannibal and the surrounding country were, by Twain's childhood, half-civilized, and for small boys they held, also, a certain romantic fascination. In his Autobiography Twain reminisces about this quality in Injun Joe:

> Once he [Twain's father] tried to reform "Injun Joe." That also was a failure and we boys were glad. For Injun Joe,

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71. De Voto, op. cit., p. 306.

> drunk, was interesting and a benefaction to us, but Injun Joe, sober, was a dreary spectacle. We watched my father's experiments upon him with a good deal of anxiety, but it came out all right and we were satisfied. Injun Joe got drunk oftener than before, and became intolerably interesting.[72]

Mark Twain's next encounter with the Indian race came in Nevada and here he saw a type even more recently subdued by the white man. These were the Goshoot, the Pi-Ute and the Washoe tribes, the latter occupying the area around Carson City:

> From the year when history is black the red man has eked out only a slender living in this land of little rain and limited food supply. It was so difficult to get a living that each tribe had its well-defined food domain. The Washoe Indians claimed the land on the immediate eastern slope of the Mountains. And after this tribe, the mountains, the lake, the valley, and the surrounding land to the east was named, from the days of Forty-nine, "The land of the Washoes."[73]

War with the Indians in Nevada Territory had been concluded only a short while before Twain arrived there. The last skirmish, in which a large force headed by regular Army officers routed the final warring tribes, took place in March, 1861, a few months before Mark and his brother Orion set out for the West. Mark, no doubt, heard the stories of these recent battles; at any rate he often referred to the cruelties inflicted by the Indians on captured white people.

In Virginia City, one of the "terraces" below the level of Chinatown was inhabited by remnants of two of the tribes mentioned earlier:

> And far down the mountainside, and also down the town's social ladder, a few ragged huts and wickiups scantily sheltered the Paiute and Washoe Indian families. These

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72. S. Clemens, Autobiography, II, p. 175.

73. Mack, op. cit., p. 4.

> poor vagabonds -- once lords of the soil, who had been the proud possessors of all the mountain -- were now forced to live on the refuse of the human strata above them, or to wander among the back alleys in search of rotten food thrown out by the markets.[74]

Mark Twain's contact with the American Indian was limited to these few experiences in Nevada and to the few individuals, particularly Injun Joe, he had known in Hannibal. His writings about the Indian, with the exception of one or two brief reminiscences about Injun Joe in the Autobiography, occur in the first five years of the 1870's. As in the case of the Chinese, those were the years of recording his western experiences and making literary capital out of them.

Mark Twain's many remarks about the Indian show a degree of contempt seldom surpassed by him in his observations on any other subject. He despised the American Indian for certain traits which he enumerated time and again, never tiring of emphasizing them. His remarks reveal a conscious attempt at theatrical effect and the inevitable tendency to inject humor even into the most biting condemnation. He was thoroughly prejudiced against the Indian and never gave him the benefit of a doubt, always ridiculing and denouncing him in the most scathing terms.

The first remarks that Mark Twain made about the Indians are contained in a long letter he wrote to his mother, shortly after his arrival in Carson City. The letter, not included in the official volume of his letters, is quoted in part by Lorch in an article in the Twainian:

> If you want a full and correct account of those lovely Indians not gleaned from Cooper's novels ... but the result of personal observation ... you will find that on that subject I am a fund of useful information.[75]

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74. Ibid., p. 184.

75. Fred T. Lorch, "Mark Twain's Early Views on Western Indians," Twainian, IV (April, 1945), p. 1.

The tone of the letter is clearly indicated by Lorch in his appraisal:

> While the letter is obviously intended to be humorous, there is but little doubt that his observations are approximately accurate. He notes their childish ignorance and vanity, their personal filth, their unashamed begging, and love of gambling. Their poverty is implied but not raised into particular prominence. Nothing is said to indicate that they are treacherous or unusually depraved. They are presented chiefly as harmless savages, interesting as curiosities to the traveler.[76]

The difference between this attitude and the contempt so manifest in all of his published writings about the Indian will easily be seen in the quotations following. That the Indians in Nevada did thoroughly disgust him is unquestionable but the element of theatricality, of conscious dramatic intent, and the ever-present vein of humor must not be overlooked. Mark Twain had found an appropriate subject for his developing style and he made the most of it. Then, too, he was writing for an Eastern audience and he played up their vague conception of the West as a wild and romantic land.

One other point must be mentioned. It is stated that in the letter to his mother Twain did not refer to the Indians as treacherous or depraved. This was a trait he was to dwell on repeatedly in his later writings. Most likely he had not yet heard the tales of Indian treachery and cruelty which were current around Carson City as a result of the late Pi-Ute and Washoe wars, and when he had heard them he could not refer to them often enough.

In his first successful book, Innocents Abroad, published in 1869, Twain indulged in several tirades against the Indian. The first occurs in a discussion of Lake Tahoe in Nevada. He had been reminded of it by the

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76. Ibid., p. 1.

sight of Lake Como in Switzerland:

> Tahoe means grasshoppers. It means grasshopper soup. It is Indian and suggestive of Indians. They say it is Pi-ute -- possibly it is Digger. I am satisfied it was named by the Diggers -- those degraded savages who roast their dead relatives, then mix the human grease and ashes of bones with tar, and "gaum" it thick all over their heads and foreheads and ears, and go caterwauling about the hills and call it mourning. These are the gentry that named the lake.[77]

Warming to his subject, Twain continues to vent his contempt for the American Indian as he has seen him exemplified in Nevada. The following passage is the first in which he attacks the literary concept of "The noble savage" in the novels of James Fenimore Cooper. It was a pet antagonism of Twain's all his life and many years later he was to give full expression to it in an essay titled "The Literary Offences of Fenimore Cooper." Twain's dislike for Cooper's portrayal of the Indian is an example of his anti-romanticism and he spared no details in his many attempts to prove that Cooper's Indians were completely unrealistic. The passage also contains Twain's first use of the phrase, "the noble red man," an expression he employed many times with the deepest sarcasm. It should be noted that the expression illustrates his generalized attitude toward the Indian because in Twain's mind "the noble red man" was the Indian he knew in Nevada. As far as he was concerned all Indians were like the degenerate Pi-utes, Goshoots, and Washoes and he seldom bothered to explain that he was thinking in terms of those particular tribes:

> It isn't worthwhile, in these practical times, for people to talk about Indian poetry -- there never was any in them -- except in the Fenimore Cooper Indians. But they are an extinct tribe that never existed. I know the Noble Red Man.

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77. Clemens, Innocents Abroad, I, 204-5.

> I have camped with the Indians; I have been on the war-path with them, taken part in the chase with them -- for grasshoppers; helped them steal cattle; I have roamed with them, scalped them, had them for breakfast. I would gladly eat the whole race if I had a chance.[78]

Deliberate humor and extravagant language to achieve that humor dominate the passage but a contempt soon to be more savagely expressed is there also.

In volume II of Innocents Abroad Twain breaks off in the middle of a description of the miserable poverty he has witnessed in Jerusalem to draw a pointed comparison:

> They reminded me much of Indians, did these people ... They sat in silence, and with tireless patience watched our every motion with that vile, uncomplaining impoliteness which is so truly Indian, and which makes a white man so nervous and uncomfortable and savage that he wants to exterminate the whole tribe.
>
> These people about us had other peculiarities, which I have noticed in the noble red man, too: they were infected with vermin, and the dirt had caked on them till it amounted to bark.[79]

Twain's description of a nervous, uncomfortable and savage reaction to the Indian trait of stony impassiveness, so freely credited by him to all white men, is actually a confession of his own personal reaction. It explains, in part, the exasperation so evident in everything he wrote about the Indian. His contempt for their unclean condition was another reason for Twain's dislike of the race and he was to dwell on it many times.

In 1869, two years after his return from the West, Twain accepted the position of editor of the Buffalo Express and in the same year he wrote an essay for the Express titled "Last Words of Great Men" in which he poked fun

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78, Ibid., I, p. 205.

79. Ibid., II, p. 199.

at the Indian. After attributing ridiculous dying statements to such men as Benjamin Franklin, Lord Chesterfield, Voltaire, and others, Twain writes the following:

> And Red Jacket, the noblest Indian brave that ever wielded a tomahawk in defence of a friendless and persecuted race, expired with these touching words upon his lips, "WAWKAWAM PANGOSUC, WINNEBAGA -- WALLAWSAGA MORE SAS KATCHEMAN." There was not a dry eye in the wigwam.[80]

The passage illustrates the kind of humor Twain was to use on the Indian many times and is interesting for the use of the phrase "a friendless and persecuted race." It was one of two times he ever pretended to sympathize with the red man, and of course he meant it satirically.

Twain's column, "Memoranda," in The Galaxy for September, 1870, contained (alongside the humorous sketch "John Chinaman in New York"), an essay titled "The Noble Red Man." It begins with a paraphrase of the Indian in romantic fiction, and though he does not name Cooper it is obvious he has that author in mind:

> In books he is tall and tawny, muscular, straight, and of kingly presence; he has a beaked nose and an eagle eye ...
>
> His language is intensely figurative. He never speaks of the moon, but always of "The eye of the night;" nor of the wind as the wind, but as "the whisper of the Great Spirit;" and so forth and so on ...
>
> He is noble. He is true and loyal; not even imminent death can shake his peerless faithfulness ... With him gratitude is religion; do him a kindness, and at the end of a lifetime he has not forgotten it ...
>
> He loves the dark-eyed daughter of the forest, the dusky maiden of faultless form and rich attire, the pride of the tribe, the all-beautiful ...[81]

Having listed these attributes, Twain proceeds to tear down in terse, forceful language:

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80. S. Clemens, "Last Words of Great Men," Buffalo Express, Sept. 11, 1869, in The Curious Republic of Gondour and Other Whimsical Sketches, p. 139.

81. S. Clemens, "The Noble Red Man," The Galaxy, X (Sept. 1870), pp. 426-7.

> Such is the noble Red Man in print. But out on the plains and in the mountains, not being on dress parade, nor being gotten up to see company, he is under no obligation to be other than his natural self, and therefore:
>
> He is little and scrawny, and black, and dirty; and judged by even the most charitable of our canons of human excellence, is thoroughly pitiful and contemptible .*.
>
> There is nothing figurative, or moonshiny, or sentimental about his language. It is very simple and unostentatious, and consists of plain, straightforward lies ...
>
> His heart is a cesspool of falsehood, of treachery, and of low and devilish instincts ... the scum of the earth! ...
>
> Such is the genuine noble Aborigine. I did not get him from books but from personal observation.

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* This is not a fancy picture; I have seen it many a time in Nevada, just as it is here limned.
Ed. "Memoranda" [82]

With scorching realism Twain has described two of the traits which disgust him most in the Nevada Indian, uncleanliness and treachery. Further on in the essay he details some of their cruelties:

> By Dr. Keim's excellent book it appears that from June, 1868, to October, 1869, the Indians massacred nearly 200 white persons ... Children were burned alive in the presence of their parents. Wives were ravished before their husband's eyes. Husbands were mutilated, tortured, and scalped, and their wives compelled to look on. These facts and figures are official, and they exhibit the misunderstood Son of the Forest in his true character -- as a creature devoid of brave or generous qualities, but cruel, treacherous, and brutal. During the Pi-Ute war the Indians often dug the sinews out of the backs of white men before they were dead. (The sinews are used for bow-strings.) But their favorite mutilations cannot be put into print.[83]

In contrast to this grim portrait of the Indian, Twain's next essay, written in 1871, develops fully the satirical possibilities of the Indian

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82. Ibid., 427-8.

83. Ibid., p. 428.

brave in Fenimore Cooper's novels, a theme first mentioned in Innocents Abroad and hinted at again in the paraphrase in "The Noble Red Man." The essay, "A Visit to Niagra," which appeared in Sketches New and Old (1875), is reminiscent of "John Chinaman in New York." Twain begins with a misleading statement, resorts to the device of an Irishman disguised, this time as an Indian, and then explodes the whole situation with broad burlesque. The essay has the double purpose of ridiculing the American Indian and Fenimore Cooper's romantic portrayal of him. After a few humorous remarks on his tourist tour of Niagara Falls, Twain says with his tongue in his cheek:

> The noble Red Man has always been a friend and darling of mine. I love to read about him in tales and legends and romances. I love to read of his inspired sagacity, and his love of the wild free life of mountain and forest, and his generous nobility of character, and his stately metaphorical manner of speech, and his chivalrous love for the dusky maiden, and the picturesque pomp of his dress and accoutrement.[84]

He goes on to describe his first encounter with one of the Indians:

> When I found the shops at Niagara Falls full of dainty Indian beadwork, and stunning moccasins, and equally stunning toy figures representing human beings who carried their weapons in holes bored through arms and bodies, and had feet shaped like a pie, I was filled with emotion. I knew that now, at last, I was going to come face to face with the noble Red Man.
>
> A lady clerk in a shop told me, indeed, that all her grand array of curiosities were made by the Indians, and that they were [sic] plenty about the Falls, and that they were friendly, and it would not be dangerous to speak to them. And sure enough, as I approached the bridge, leading over to Luna Island, I came upon a noble Son of the Forest sitting under a tree, diligently at work on a bead reticule. He wore a slouch hat and bragans, and had a short black pipe in his mouth. Thus does the baneful contact with our effeminate civilization dilute the picturesque pomp which is so natural to the Indian

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84. S. Clemens, "A Visit to Niagara," Sketches New and Old, p. 74.

when far removed from us in his native haunts.[85]

Addressing the Indian in a heavy burlesque of Cooper's style, Twain asks him:

> Is the Wawhoo-Wang-Wang of the Wack-a-Whack happy? Does the Great Speckled Thunder sigh for the war path, or is his heart contented with dreaming of the dusky maiden, the Pride of the Forest? ... Speak, sublime relic of bygone grandeur -- venerable ruin -- speak.
>
> The relic says:
>
> "An is it,mesilf, Dennis Hooligan, that ye'd takin' for a dirty Injun, ye drawlin', lantern-jawed, spider-legged divil!"[86]

Departing hastily, Twain meets another "Indian":

> By and by, in the neighborhood of the Terrapin Tower, I came upon a gentle daughter of the Aborigines in fringed and beaded buckskin moccasins and leggins, seated on a bench with her pretty wares about her. She had just carved out a wooden chief that had a strong family resemblance to a clothespin, and was now boring a hole through his abdomen to put his bow through.[87]

Their encounter follows the same pattern as the meeting with the "Indian" brave. Twain asks her:

> "Is the heart of the forest maiden heavy? Is the laughing Tadpole lonely? Does she mourn over the extinguished council-fire of her race, and the vanished glories of her ancestors? Or does her sad spirit wander afar towards the hunting-grounds whither her brave Gobbler-of-the-Lightings is gone?"
>
> The maiden says:
>
> "Faix, an' is it Biddy Malone ye dare to be callin' names? Lave this, or I'll shy your lean carcass over the cataract, ye snivelin' blaggard!"[88]

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85. Ibid., p. 75.

86. Ibid., p. 76.

87. Ibid., p. 76.

88. Ibid., p. 76.

The conclusion of the essay is a long address purportedly delivered by Twain to a camp of Indians whom he has come upon making moccasins and wampum. It is a curious blend, attacking first the Indian and then the white man. The satire this time is savage and powerful:

> "Noble Red Men, braves, Grand Sachems, War-Chiefs, Squaws, and High Muck-a-Mucks, the paleface from the land of the setting sun greets you. You, beneficent Polecat -- you, Devourer of Mountains -- you, Roaring Thundergusts -- you, Bully Boy with a Glass Eye -- the paleface from beyond the great waters greets you all. War and pestilence have thinned your ranks, and destroyed your once proud nation. Poker and seven-up, and a vain modern expense for soap, unknown to your ancestors, have depleted your purses. Appropriating, in your simplicity, the property of others, has gotten you into trouble. Misrepresenting facts, in your simple innocence, has damaged your reputation with the soulless usurper. Trading for forty-rod whisky, to enable you to get drunk and happy and tomahawk your families, has played the everlasting mischief with the picturesque pomp of your dress, and here you are, in the broad light of the nineteenth century, gotten up like the ragtag-and-bobtail of the purlieus of New York. For shame, recall your ancestors. Recall their mighty deeds. Remember Uncas -- and Red Jacket -- and Hole-in-the-Day -- and Whoopde-doodledo. Emulate their achievements. Unfurl yourselves under my banner, noble savages, illustrious guttersnipes."[89]

Uncleanliness, cruelty and drunkeness (which had fascinated Twain in Injun Joe, as a boy), emerge again as traits that Twain despised in the Indian. At the same time, the white man is described as the "soulless usurper," Except for the phrase "persecuted race" in "Niagara," this was the only time Twain ever admitted that the white man, too, might have been guilty in the clash between the two races. The phrases, "appropriating, in your simplicity, the property of others," and "misrepresenting facts, in your simple innocence," are actually a scathing indictment of the white man's treatment of the American Indian, as fierce and subtle a satiric thrust as any written by Swift in his denunciations of the human race. With those two

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89. Ibid., p. 77-8.

two exceptions, the passage is entirely anti-Indian, summed up in the sharp juxtaposition of "noble savages, illustrious guttersnipes."

It was in Roughing It that Mark Twain revealed how much he despised the American Indian, that is, the Indian specimens he saw in Nevada. He develops in Roughing It a savage comparison between the Nevada Indian and one of the most despicable of animals, the coyote. He had found in this comparison the ideal terms for his violent antagonism and he explores it fully. There is humor in his description but the prevailing note of disgust overrules it:

> The coyote of the deserts beyond the Rocky Mountains has a peculiarly hard time of it, owing to the fact that his relations, the Indians, are just as apt to be the first to detect a seductive scent on the desert breeze, and follow the fragrance to the late ox it emanated from, as he is himself; and when this occurs he has to content himself with sitting off at a little distance watching these people strip off and dig out everything edible, and walk off with it. Then he and the waiting ravens explore the skeleton and polish the bones. It is considered that the coyote, and the obscene bird, and the Indian of the desert, testify their blood-kinship with each other in that they live together in the waste places of the earth on terms of perfect confidence and friendship, while hating all other creatures and yearning to assist at their funerals.[90]

Chapter 19 of volume I is entirely devoted to the subject of the Goshoot tribe Twain saw on his trip in the stage coach to Carson City.

> On the morning of the sixteenth day out from St. Joseph we arrived at the entrance of Rocky Cañon, two hundred and fifty miles from Salt Lake. It was along in this wild country somewhere, and far from any habitation of white man, except the stage-stations, that we came across the wretchedest type of mankind I have ever seen, up to this writing. I refer to the Goshoot Indians. From what we could see and all we could learn, they are very inferior to even the despised Digger Indians of California; inferior to all races of savages on our continent; inferior to even the Terra del Fuegans; inferior to

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90. Clemens, Roughing It, I, p. 35.

> the Hottentots, and actually inferior in some respects to the Kytches of Africa.[91]

Twain's description of the Goshoot Indians emphasizes the same traits that were brought out in "The Noble Red Man" and the long speech at the end of "Niagara," uncleanliness and treachery. He also depicts again the animal-like existence that he had compared to the habits of the coyote:

> Such of the Goshoots as we saw, along the roads and hanging about the stations, were small, lean, "scrawny" creatures; in complexion a dull black like the ordinary American Negro; their faces and hands bearing dirt which they had been hoarding and accumulating for months, years, and even generations, according to the age of the proprietor; a silent, sneaking, treacherous-looking race; taking note of everything, covertly, like all the other "Noble Red Men" that we [do not] read about, and betraying no sign in countenances; indolent, everlastingly patient and tireless, like all other Indians; prideless beggars -- for if the beggar instinct were left out of an Indian he would not "go" any more than a clock without a pendulum; hungry, always hungry, and yet never refusing anything that a hog would eat, though often eating what a hog would decline; hunters, but having no higher ambition than to kill and eat jackass-rabbits, crickets, and grasshoppers, and embezzle carrion from the buzzards and coyotes.[92]

Twain continues the description with a reference to the Indian's thirst for liquor, indicating also his irritation at their habit of stony impassiveness, mentioned in Innocents Abroad:

> They are savages who, when asked if they have the common Indian belief in a Great Spirit, show a something which almost amounts to emotion, thinking whisky is referred to.[93]

Turning next to the Indian's treacherous instincts, Twain writes:

> One would as soon expect the rabbits to fight as the Goshoots, and yet they used to live off the offal and refuse of the stations a few months and then come some dark night when no mischief

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91. Ibid., p. 131.

92. Ibid., I, p. 131-2.

93. Ibid., I, p. 132.

> was expected, and burn down the buildings and kill the men from anbush as they rushed out.[94]

His annoyance at Cooper's fictional Indians appears again in this discussion of the Goshoots and Twain offers an explanation in terms of it for his dislike of the Indian:

> The disgust which the Goshoots gave me, a disciple of Cooper and a worshiper of the Red Man -- even of the scholarly savages in the Last of the Mohicans, who are fittingly associated with backwoodsmen who divide each sentence into two equal parts; one part critically grammatical, refined, and choice of language, and the other part just such an attempt to talk like a hunter or a mountaineer as a Broadway clerk might make after eating an edition of Emerson Bennett's works and studying frontier life at the Bowery Theater a couple of weeks -- I say that the nausea which the Goshoots gave me, an Indian worshiper, set me to examining authorities, to see if perchance I had been overestimating the Red Man while viewing him through the mellow moonshine of romance. The revelations that came were disenchanting. It was curious to see how quickly the paint and tinsel fell away from him and left him treacherous, filthy, and repulsive -- and how quickly the evidences accumulated that wnerever one finds an Indian tribe he has only found Goshoots more or less modified by circumstances and surroundings -- but Goshoots, after all.[95]

Twain's statement of his disillusionment cannot be taken as literal truth. It has already been pointed out that he was acquainted with Indians, particularly the half-breed "Injun Joe" in his childhood. The prevailing contempt of the pioneer for the Indian was an inherent part of his background and he could not have observed the remnants of the once powerful Indian tribes in Missouri without absorbing some of that attitude. True, the novels of Cooper probably fascinated him in his childhood, just as the spectacle of drunken Injun Joe did, but by the time Twain reached the West he was a mature man with travel in the East and four years on the

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94. Ibid., I, p. 132-3.

95. Ibid., I, p. 134.

Mississippi steamboats behind him. With his satiric gift slowly ripening it is not likely that he still regarded Cooper's Indians as authentic. The shock he received at sight of the Goshoot Indians, and later the Washoes and Pi-Utes was one of degree. They were in worse condition than the few he had known in his childhood. So his explanation becomes an example of Twain's habit of exaggerating the facts about himself. There is an element of truth in it, of course, but one cannot accept literally his description of himself as a "disciple of Cooper and a worshipper of the Red Man." His jeers at the language of the backwoodsmen in Cooper's novels demonstrates that he never could have taken Cooper very seriously because his own experience contradicted what he read in Last of the Mohicans, and the same must have been obvious to him in the case of the Indian. Indeed, he had stated the same explanation of his disillusionment in "Niagara," the year before Roughing It, and the conclusion is inescapable that he was exaggerating the effect of Cooper's novels on himself in order to show how unrealistic he considered them.

The chapter ends with a supposedly contrite expression of pity for the degeneration of the American Indian. Actually it is double-edged satire, with someone else equally an object of his ridicule. Twain develops the idea that there is a rumor about many of the employers and employees of the Baltimore and Washington Railroad being Goshoots. He states that this is an error because there is only a plausible resemblance and deplores the effect the rumor has had upon the Goshoots:

> The necessary effect was to injure the reputation of a class who have had a hard enough time of it in the pitiless deserts of the Rocky Mountains, Heaven knows! If we cannot find it in our hearts to give these poor naked creatures our Christian sympathy and compassion, in God's name let us at least not throw

mud at them.[96]

In analyzing Twain's chapter about the Goshoot Indians, F.T. Lorch points out two obvious flaws:

> In considering Mark Twain's appraisal of Indians in "Roughing It," two things should be noted: (1) that the many characteristics which he ascribes to the Goshoots are generalized as true of all Indians; and (2) that he is reporting more about the Goshoots than he could possibly have observed of them while passing through their country in a stage-coach. In view of his harsh and sweeping condemnation of Indians on such passing acquaintance, it is fair to question his competence to judge. How well, at first hand, did he know Indians, and was he reporting the character and condition of Nevada Indians in the decade of 1860-1870 or was he reflecting certain popular conceptions with regard to them that had sprung up in the early days of settlement of the territory?[97]

Twain's remarks in Roughing It were written ten years after the events described and they follow the same pattern as his other comments on the Indians written in the preceding three years. They do not represent the results of previous close personal contact with the Indians but, rather, casual observation embroidered for literary purposes from the distance of ten intervening years. Lorch develops further his point that Mark Twain was depending more upon popular report of the Goshoot Indians than he was upon his own knowledge of them:

> In his annual report for 1857-1858, Forney, the Indian agent for the Territory noted the extreme destitution of the tribe. "They were without exception the most miserable set of human beings I have ever beheld ... In his book "The City of the Saints," (1862) Richard Burton refers to them as "mean and vile."
>
> Whatever the truth may have been about the extraordinary meanness and vileness of the Goshoots in the years preceding Mark Twain's arrival in Nevada Territory, later reports are distinctly more favorable and go into causes of the difficulties which Nevada Indians faced. In his annual report for

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96. Ibid., I, p. 135.

97. Lorch, op. cit., p. 1.

> 1863-1864 the Indian Agent for the Territory described the Goshoots as "peaceable and loyal, striving to obtain their living by tilling the soil and laboring for the whites whenever an opportunity presents, and producing almost entirely their own living, receive comparatively little help from government appropriation ... I am satisfied, also, that not half the depredations committed are the work of the Goshee Utes, although they have name and blame.[98]

Lorch judges Twain severely for his portrayal of the Indian in Roughing It:

> In dealing with the Goshoots in "Roughing It" it is obvious that Mark Twain was striving for literary effect rather than historical accuracy. Had he taken the trouble to examine the official reports of the Indian Agents and the Secretary of the Interior for the period between 1863 and 1870 he could not in good conscience have offered the public an appraisal based merely upon observation and popular report no longer valid. Nor might his appraisal have ignored the economic difficulties which were in large measure the cause of their low cultural status. He would have learned what he himself should have observed during his residence in Nevada Territory, that the rapid influx of the white settlers had greatly decreased the Indians' means of subsistance by depriving them of their hunting and fishing grounds and forcing them to seek their living in portions of the country so barren that starvation was all but inevitable.[99]

It is futile to argue that Mark Twain should have written differently than he did. He was not interested in historical facts; all his life he was indifferent to them and it was a matter of coincidence when he was accurate with them. As Lorch finally concludes:

> In 1872 when he published Roughing It he was still the literary showman, concerned with theatrical effects rather than with the "naked truth."[100]

One other reference to the Nevada Indians in Roughing It illustrates a trait Twain loathed in the Indian and the humorous jibe he never could resist when an opportunity arose. Jokes like this one are a reminder of

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98. Ibid., p. 1.

99. Ibid., p. 1-2.

100. Ibid., p. 2.

the sort of humor Twain led his readers to expect and then wanted them to forget when he was in a serious mood. The comment is inserted as an excuse to make a pun:

> A white man cannot drink the water of Mono Lake, for it is nearly pure lye. It is said that the Indians in the vicinity drink it sometimes, though. It is not improbable, for they are among the purest liars I ever saw.[101]

Injun Joe in Tom Sawyer (1875), one of the most familiar characters in American literature, embodies most of the traits Twain despised in the American Indian but to account for him solely in these terms is to oversimplify him. It must be remembered that Injun Joe is seen through the eyes of Tom and Huck and has, therefore, a certain aura of romantic fascination about him. He is also, for literary purpose, the agent of melodramatic action. He has all the trappings of a villain on the stage; indeed, his first appearance is in a graveyard at midnight where his approach is prepared by Huck's whisper to Tom, "that murderin' half-breed! I'd druther they was devils a durn sight."[102]

Injun Joe revengeful nature is established beyond a doubt in his threats to the young Doc Robinson:

> "Five years ago you drove me away from your father's kitchen one night, when I come to ask for something to eat, and you said I warn't there for any good; and when I swore I'd get even with you if it took a hundred years, your father had me jailed for a vagrant. Did you think I'd forget? The Injun blood ain't in me for nothing. And now I've got you, and you got to settle, you know!"[103]

Twain develops the full extent of Injun Joe's revengeful and cruel nature near the end of the book when he has Injun Joe reveal his plans for the Widow Douglas to a companion. To the companion's plea that they abandon the idea of robbing the widow, Injun Joe snorts that he doesn't want the

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101. Clemens, Roughing It, I, p. 260.

102. Clemens, Tom Sawyer, p. 93.

103. Ibid., p. 95.

money; he wants revenge for the horsewhipping once inflicted on him by the widow's husband:

> "He had me horsewhipped! -- horsewhipped in front of the jail, like a nigger! -- with all the town looking on! Horsewhipped! -- do you understand? He took advantage of me and died. But I'll take it out of her."
>
> "Oh, don't kill her! Don't do that!"
> "Kill? Who said anything about killing? I would kill him if he was here; but not her. When you want to get revenge on a woman you don't kill her -- bosh! You go for her looks. You slit her nostrils -- you notch her ears like a sow!"[104]

And for a final emphasis on the cruel and revengeful nature of the Indian, Twain has the Welshman say to Huck:

> "It's all plain enough, now. When you talked about notching ears and slitting noses I judged that was your own embellishment, because white men don't take that sort of revenge. But an Injun! That's a different matter altogether."[105]

Injun Joe's murder of Doc Robinson and shifting of the evidence to the innocent Muff Potter demonstrate his treacherous nature and Tom and Huck reveal their awareness of it in their frightened discussion of the events:

> "Tom, we got to keep mum. You know that. That Injun devil wouldn't make any more of drownding us than a couple of cats, if we was to squeak 'bout this and they didn't hang him."[106]

Another habit of the Indian which Twain often alluded to in the foregoing essays also belongs to Injun Joe, drunkenness. (It will be remembered that this was a fatal weakness of the original Injun Joe in Hannibal). When Huck describes to Tom how he found Injun Joe in his tavern

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104. Ibid., p. 259.

105. Ibid., p. 267.

106. Ibid., p. 101.

hideout, he says that the half-breed was stretched out asleep on the floor and that he "never budged, Drunk, I reckon."[107]

The reputation of half-breeds on the frontier which De Voto has pointed out, the tales of Indian cruelty in Nevada and the requirements of a villain in a melodrama are all reflected, then, in the cruel, treacherous, revengeful nature of Injun Joe. These habits of character, together with drunkenness, were repeatedly emphasized by Twain in his earlier essays and comments on the red man. They represent the attributes he most frequently described and ridiculed whenever he discussed the Indians. Only uncleanliness is omitted in his portrayal of Injun Joe.

The melodramatic effect of Injun Joe's presence is enhanced by Twain's technique of presenting him in eery surroundings, first in a graveyard at midnight, then in a deserted, supposedly haunted house, and finally in the gloom of the underground cave. In the haunted house he appears even more sinister because he is in disguise as an old Spaniard, "wrapped in a serape; he had bushy white whiskers; long white hair flowed from under his sombrero, and he wore green goggles."[108] The shock of the boys when they realize that this stranger whom they have noticed in the village for several days is Injun Joe adds to their previous terror of the half-breed.

In his Autobiography, written in his last years, Twain reminisced about the Injun Joe who had been a local character in Hannibal. His remarks illustrate the extent to which he enlarged the career of the Indian for literary purposes:

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107. Ibid., p. 248.

108. Ibid., p. 233.

> Injun Joe, the half-breed, got lost in there [the cave] once, and would have starved to death if the bats had run short. But there was no chance of that. There were myriads of them. He told me all his story. In the book called Tom Sawyer I starved him entirely to death in the cave, but that was in the interest of art; it never happened.[109]

We may assume that much of Injun Joe's character was in the interest of art, also, in view of Twain's habitual literary treatment of the American Indian.

The passage in the Autobiography in which Twain relates his father's attempts to reform Injun Joe is cited by Lorch as proof that in his old age, Twain looked back on Injun Joe "with something of the same pity and sympathy for the underdog that he displayed in his picture of the negro, 'Jim,' in Huckleberry Finn." Lorch states that "in later years Mark Twain learned to look beyond the passing show of human misery and cry out against the causes which produced it."[110] That Mark Twain did explore human misery much more thoroughly and sympathetically in his mature writings than in such early works as Roughing It is true but it is not the case with his remarks about Injun Joe in the Autobiography. They are reminiscences in the spirit of nostalgia and do not contain the slightest suggestion of pity or sympathy for Injun Joe's condition or character. Neither does it seem to be the case that in his old age Mark Twain looked back on the Indian race in general with either sympathy or pity. Paine tells in his Biography of some marginal notes Twain made in a copy of Old Regime that he was reading at the time (1909). The book Old Regime by Francis Parkman was a history of the French colonization of Canada and contained descriptions of the

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109. Clemens, Autobiography, I, p. 105.

110. Lorch, op. cit., p. 2.

tortures endured by missionaries in their attempts to convert the Indians, especially the Iroquois. Paine tells us:

> In one place he wrote:
> "that men should be willing to leave their happy homes and endure what the missionaries endured in order to teach these Indians the road to hell would be rational, understandable, but why they should want to teach them a way to heaven is a thing which the mind somehow cannot grasp."[111]

It was, of course, the cruelty and barbarity again which Mark Twain was holding against the Indian, even though he was referring to incidents of two hundred years before, but his comment reveals that even in the last year of his life Mark Twain was still nursing his comtempt for the Indian and keeping alive his old antagonism.

Mark Twain's writings on the American Indian and his literary creation of Injun Joe demonstrate, then, that he was violently prejudiced against the red man, and that he never felt anything but contempt and revulsion at the sight of him. His reaction was characteristically intense and emotional, and completely subjective, based almost entirely on a few brief contacts in Hannibal and Nevada and the popular reports circulated by local residents.

Unlike the Chinese minority, Twain did not consider the Indian in the role of the underdog, despite his one reference to the "soulless usurper." Wagenknecht says on this point, quoting from the essay "The Noble Red Man":

> Mark Twain's tendency to champion the underdog would seem to have failed him, however, in connection with the Goshoot Indians, whom he came in contact with in Nevada, and whom he denounced as "scum o' the earth," and of whom he

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111. Paine, op. cit., IV, p. 1538.

> declared that to exterminate them would be a charity "to the Creator's worthier insects and reptiles." He denounces as sentimentalists those who sympathize with the Indians and rejoices that "the inquiry his always got to come after the good officer has administered his little admonition." But it is clear that he hates the Indian for his cruelties to women and children.[112]

It is also clear that Twain hated the Indian for his uncleanliness, his revengeful instinct, his frequent drunkenness and his animal like existence. The Indian trait of imperturbability irritated him, perhaps because, having an emotional temperament himself, he could not understand an unemotional response or, what seemed even worse, no response at all!

Mark Twain obviously did not consider that the Indian deserved any place at all in American democracy. His usual democratic urge was not aroused and the miserable condition of the Indians he saw in Nevada aroused only antipathy in him. He could not consider them as humans even when they were living as harmless residents of Carson City and Virginia City.

His remarks about the Indians were often a reaction against the concept of the "noble savage" in Cooper's novels. Twain could not resist the opportunity of satirizing Cooper's literary style and romantic portrayal of the Indian, and in so doing he exaggerated the intensity of his feelings. The desire for theatrical effect and for humor also colored many of his comments on the Indian, but when all these allowances have been made, it is still evident that Twain could not consider the Indian objectively, and that in spite of his statement in his essay "Concerning the Jews" that he believed he had no racial prejudices, he did have a most positive antagonism toward the "noble red man."

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112. Wagenknecht, op. cit., p. 277.

Chapter IV

The Friend of a Race

Mark Twain's childhood years in the small semi-frontier slaveholding community of Hannibal profoundly influenced his attitude toward the negro race. It has already been pointed out that the kind of slavery in Hannibal was not the large plantation variety which formed the economic basis of society in the deep South. Twain's Pudd'nhead Wilson furnishes a vivid example of the difference between the life of the slave on the small farms and in the villages of Missouri and the life of the slave on the large cotton plantations:

> The horror of being 'sold down the river,' which forms the leading motif of Pudd'nhead Wilson, and the description in the novel of the cruel methods of the overseer on an Arkansas plantation, make the contrast between the Missouri system and that of the large cotton plantation apparent.[113]

In his Autobiography, Mark Twain makes some observations about the slavery system that was a part of his childhood, revealing the complacency with which it was accepted:

> In my schoolboy days I had no aversion to slavery. I was not aware that there was anything wrong about it. No one arraigned it in my hearing; the local papers said nothing against it; the local pulpit taught us that God approved it, that it was a holy thing, and that the doubter need only look in the Bible if he wished to settle his mind -- and then the texts were read aloud to us to make the matter sure.[114]

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113. Brashear, op. cit., 58-9. Also Mark Twain's statement, " ... to our whites and blacks alike, the Southern plantation was simply hell; no milder name could describe it. If the threat to sell an incorrigible slave "down the river" would not reform him, nothing would -- his case was past cure." (Clemens, Autobiography, I, p. 124.)

114. Clemens, Autobiography, I, p. 101.

Twain justifies the complacency of the slave holders in Hannibal, and of most Southerners, by saying that the slavery system did not make them hard hearted but rather, merely stupified their humanity.[115] John Marshall Clemens owned two slaves, Jenny, and "Uncle Ned" who were treated kindly according to Twain's memory, but who were nevertheless subject to the restrictions of the system.

Twain's Autobiography which contains many reminiscences of the slaves he knew, though colored by the nostalgia of remembering a golden past, still offers a clear picture of the impression made upon him by those early relationships. Some of the memories are grim, such as the time he saw a slave struck down by a chunk of slag because he had committed some small offense. He watched the slave die.[116] Others are delightful, such as the description of the old bed-ridden negress whom the children visited every day and looked upon with awe because it was believed she was 1,000 years old and had talked with Moses.[117] Twain recalls the nature of his relationship with the negro slaves on his Uncle John Quarles' farm, the paradoxical relationship that children recognized early:

> All the negroes were friends of ours and with those of our own age we were in effect comrades. I say in effect, using the phrase as a modification. We were comrades, and yet not comrades; color and condition interposed a subtle line which both parties were conscious of and which rendered complete fusion impossible.[118]

Of such ingredients was Mark Twain's knowledge of the negro race formed. An understanding of the particular kind of relationship he experienced is essential to an understanding of his attitude toward the negro and

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115. De Voto cites a case in point about Twain's father. "The Clemens slaves would have been given their freedom, except that would have entailed a loss of money." (De Voto, op. cit., p. 65).

116. Clemens, Autobiography, I, p. 132. Also the account of the negro boy, Sandy, whose singing made Jane Clemens rejoice because she knew then that he was not remembering his mother, a slave in Maryland. (Clemens, Autobiography, I, 102-3).

117. Ibid., I, p. 99.

118. Ibid., I, p. 100.

the portrayal of him in his writing, because Mark Twain drew upon his memory of those years and translated it into art. As De Voto has written:

> The boy Samuel Clemens entered wholly into the slaves' world. It was a much more developed, much more various world than is ingeniously believed. Abysses of horror it contained were to have their share in the soul of Samuel Clemens, but his shaping soul was to bear other impresses of that world.[119]

Mark Twain's experiences among negro slaves in his formative years conditioned in him a lifelong sympathy and understanding for the race. He had, always, a deep affection for negroes because he had lived close to them and had known them as friends. True, he had to overcome an occasional tendency toward the complacent, superior attitude described in the above passage from his Autobiography, a tendency natural to one raised as he was; but he did in time overcome it, and at all times it never influenced him to say an unkind word about the negro race. His life was filled with many examples of his genuine affection and tenderness for the negro. Paine writes that he never missed an opportunity to pay tribute to them and that "he would go across the street to speak to an old negro, and to take his hand."[120] Paine quotes also in the collection of Twain's letters edited by him, a letter to William Dean Howells that illustrates Mark Twain's enjoyment when he lectured in a negro church. Paine's comment and the letter, in part, follows:

> Clemens would go out of his way any time to grant favor to the colored race. His childhood associations were partly accountable for this, but he also felt that the white man owed the Negro a debt for generations of enforced bondage. He would lecture any time in a coloured church, when he would as likely as not refuse point-blank to speak for a white congregation.
>
> Hartford, Feb. 27, 1881
>
> ... On the evening of March 10th, I am going to read to the

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119. De Voto, op. cit., p. 37-8.

120. Paine, op. cit., II, p. 700-1.

> colored folk in the African Church here (no whites admitted except such as I bring with me), and a choir of colored folk will sing jubilee songs. I count on a good time, and shall hope to have you folks there, and Livy.[121]

One important manifestation of Mark Twain's appreciation of the negro race was his delight in negro spirituals, which he often sang with deep feeling. The family servant of the Clemens family for many years, Katy Leary, in the book dictated by her to Mary Lawton, gives a moving description of an evening when Twain sang spirituals. Preserved in her speech, the scene reveals a Mark Twain stirred by memories of long ago slavery days:

> "They was just settin' there in the music room, lookin out at the moonlight. And suddenly Mr. Clemens got right up without any warning and begun to sing one of them negro spirituals. A lady that was there told me he just stood up with both his eyes shut and begun to sing kind of soft-like-a faint sound, just as if there was wind in the trees, she said; and he kept right on singin' kind o' low and sweet, and it was beautiful and made your heart ache somehow. ... Twas somethin' from another world, she said, and when he got through, he put his two hands up to his head, just as though all the sorrow of them negroes was upon him; and then he begun to sing. 'Nobody Knows the Trouble I Got, Nobody Knows but Jesus' ... and when he come to the end, to the Glory Halleluiah, he gave a great shout -- just like the negroes do -- he shouted out the Glory, Glory Halleluiah!"[122]

Clara Clemens' "My Father, Mark Twain, also mentions Twain's love of the old spirituals and the family occasions when he was persuaded to sing them. "He sang them with much spirit and played his own accompaniments on the piano, as well as he could remember them."[123]

There are other examples of Mark Twain's affection for the negro race.

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121. Paine (ed.), Mark Twain's Letters, p. 394-5.

122. Mary Lawton, A Lifetime With Mark Twain, p. 212-13.

123. Clara Clemens Gabrilowitsch, My Father, Mark Twain, p. 72-3.

Paine tells of the servant, George, who was with the family for eighteen years and was "precisely the sort of character Mark Twain loved." George was "typically racially Southern, with those delightful attributes of wit and policy which go with the best type of negro character."[124]

In the year 1881, Twain wrote to President Garfield on behalf of the negro, Frederick Douglass, who was Marshal of the District of Columbia and who, according to rumor was about to lose the position. Twain respectfully asked "as a simple citizen" that Garfield retain Douglass in office. He closed his letter with these words:

> I offer this petition with peculiar pleasure and strong desire, because I so honor this man's high and blemishless character, and so admire his brave, long crusade for the liberties and elevation of his race.
>
> He is a personal friend of mine, but that is nothing to the point, his history would move me to say these things without that, and I feel them, too.[125]

These and other examples from the life of Mark Twain verify his affection for the negro as a consistent and sincere feeling all his life and as the principal source of his literary treatment of the race. Twain often indulges in humorous characterization of the negro but there is no malice, no desire for theatrical effect as in the case of the Indian. His humor about the negro is an expression of his rich enjoyment of the traits found in the racial character. It reveals a tolerance and generous appreciation which could only come from such close association as Twain had had. There is respect in his humorous portraits of the negro and characters like Nigger Jim and Roxy emerge under his pen as convincing individuals, not conventional stereotypes. That he was unique up to this time in the literary tradition

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124. Paine, Mark Twain, A Biography, II, p. 573-4.

125. Ibid., II, p. 701.

of the negro in fiction will be seen later in this chapter.

Twain's early relationship with negro slaves was also responsible, as De Voto has said, for much that was fruitful in his art. His novels in which slavery is part of the background are rich in the lore of the slaves -- the superstitions, the weird tales (such as "The Golden Arm," which became a standard feature of Twain's lecture repertorie), the fears and beliefs of an African race transplanted to a new continent. De Voto has explored thoroughly the nature of this influence in Mark Twain's work, of which the following quotation gives a small indication:

> Thus the lore of slaves. The world was ominously corrupted with malevolence looking toward the terror of death, but time had heaped up a variety of defences and forewarnings in which the slaves were always busy. They were vigilant to inform the children and the boys who lived with them wholly shared their dread. Childhood was thus seasoned in miracle and terror.[126]

Farrell has assigned a special significance to Twain's recording of slave lore in Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn:

> The institution of chattel slavery always exists as the background against which these boys live. It forces itself into the very content of consciousness, not only of Tom and Huck, but of all the members of their village. As Bernard De Voto has pointed out, the existence of slavery explains the role which superstition plays in the minds of Tom and Huck. Here Mark Twain made a neat social comment. He told us, in effect, that if you preserve the institution of slavery it will permeate your entire culture and become an important bar to progress. Just as it produces meanness and brutality, so does it perpetuate magic. Briefly, the backwardness of the slaves, treated as property rather than as human beings, will blunt the moral and intellectual development of the masters.[127]

The significance certainly exists in Twain's books but it is questionable if he himself was intentionally pointing it out especially in a book like Tom Sawyer which was written as a story of perennial boyhood, and not

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126. De Voto, op. cit., p. 73.

127. Farrell, op. cit., p. 6, 37.

with any serious purpose of social comment. In Huckleberry Finn the inclusion of negro superstitions and folklore is given a deeper meaning by Mark Twain than in Tom Sawyer because it is connected with the tragedy of Nigger Jim. Still, it is doubtful if Mark Twain intended it as a warning that its continued existence would demoralize white men. Mark Twain was not inclined to probe a question so deeply; he was more interested in the simple issue of right or wrong, and in painting a realistic picture of conditions as he knew them.

De Voto also relates two of Mark Twain's most famous stories, "The Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" and the Bluejay Yarn from A Tramp Abroad to the negro folklore familiar to Twain in his childhood. He tells of a negro variant of the Jumping Frog story and points out that both versions are tales of shrewdness, or outwitting, a favorite theme in negro folklore, as well as frontier lore. He does not seek to establish the negro version as the original or even to claim that Mark Twain had heard it, but merely points out its existence "in the vein that composed Mark Twain's finest ore."[128] Of the Bluejay Yarn De Voto writes that it likewise is in the tradition of negro folklore, this time the fables of animals who talk. The Uncle Remus stories, of course, represent the literary expression of these old tales.[129] De Voto links the Bluejay Yarn directly to the influence of negro folklore:

> Its material comes from the Negro's bestiary, interstitial with the life of his boyhood in Hannibal; and in this way the humor rises from fantasy, from the imaginative myth-making of the slaves ane the frontier.[130]

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128. De Voto, op. cit., p. 174.

129. "And at Hannibal his own childhood had understood animals which talked and kabolds and enchanted folk, desirable in the stories that Uncle Dan'l told before the fire and Uncle Remus repeated, or dreadful in their darker traffic across new graves. So he is not surprised when a raven begins to caw at him derisively. 'However, I made no reply; I would not bandy words with a raven.'" (Ibid., p. 247).

130. Ibid., p. 251.

Another phase of the influence of negro lore and superstitions on Mark Twain's writing is evidenced by the element of melodrama in his work. As De Voto says:

> One reason why melodrama is constant in Mark's books is that his imagination had fed on actual melodrama since infancy. A child who was educated by Negroes and had witnessed a dozen or so mob murders ... was not likely to impose in his fiction the minute psychological hesitations of Henry James.[131]

Not only was Mark Twain's early association with negroes responsible for the inclusion of their folklore and for the element of melodrama in his work, but also it contributed to his realistic portrayal of the negro race. He recorded their speech as he remembered it, not as a false literary tradition had disguised it for a gullible public:

> From 1835 on the melodrama was amplified by the discovery that the stage Negro was laughable ... the discovery that Sambo was funny was, in the main, a Northern one; for the writers of Southern humor preferred the poor white. This observation may account for the atrocity of negro dialect, or coon talk, that fastened itself on literature. Mrs. Stowe merely lifted it from Christy's minstrels ... Christy in turn had got it from Northern broadsides and newspapers ... much later it worked back into the South, Nelson Page presenting it with a spurious nicety that passed as realism. Samuel Clemens and George W. Cable and Joel Chandler Harris, meanwhile, had written Negro speech, but the convention ignored them, and of late, transferred to Harlem and the Caribbean, has again been accepted as realsim.[132]

The negro slave types Mark Twain had known are drawn with accuracy in his books. They are convincing as individuals and as representatives of a whole race. Because they are based on experience they have an authenticity which has secured them a permanent place in American literature.

So Mark Twain's childhood in the company of negro slaves conditioned in him a lifelong sympathy and understanding of the negro race. The imprint

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131. Ibid., p. 270.

132. Ibid., p. 33-4.

of this attitude is found in his humorous treatment of the negro, which is good natured and tolerant, and in the strengthening of his habitually realistic style by a personal knowledge of the pre-Civil War slave. Authentic negro folklore is reproduced in his books as he remembered it from childhood and the element of melodrama in his writings may also be traced, at least in part, to the influence of that folklore.

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It is possible to trace a development in the attitude of Mark Twain toward the negro race, as it is not possible to do in his attitude toward the Chinese, Indian or Jewish races. He had, always, sympathy and affection for the negro but in the beginning his attitude also contained an element of superiority. He still reflected the Southern idea of the negro as an inferior race, of the negro as a child second in intelligence to the white "parent" race. Mark Twain's attitude changed in time and he came to look upon the negro in a more democratic spirit, as an equal. In the files of the Hannibal Journal, the newspaper operated for a time by Orion Clemens, a letter has been discovered that antedates those published in Paine's volume. The letter was written by Twain after his arrival in New York in 1853 and was apparently printed in the paper by Orion as being of interest to the readers. It reads, in part:

> New York, August 24, 1853
> " ... When I saw the Court House in Syracuse, it called to mind the time when it was surrounded with chains and companies of soldiers, to prevent the rescue of Mc Reynold's nigger, by the infernal abolitionists. I reckon I had better black my face, for in these Eastern States niggers are considerably better than white people.[133]

This easy sarcasm reveals the complacency of the Southern attitude which

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133. Brashear, op. cit., p. 154.

Twain learned, much as Huck Finn does, to overcome. His Southern training provided a solid basis of affection but as the democratic influence of the frontier grew upon him it gradually erased the unconsciously condescending attitude bequeathed to him by his Southern inheritance and he developed a more thoughtful appreciation of the negro race. An instance of this sharpened awareness of the negro is found in his Notebook in a paragraph jotted down in 1867 during his travels in the Near East. The entry is dated June 22, 1867 and reads:

> Many of the blacks are slaves to the Moors: -- when they can read first chapter of Koran, can no longer be slaves; -- would have been well to adopt educational test for nigger vote in America.[134]

In his first novel, The Gilded Age (1873), Twain's attitude toward the negro race reflects the Southern point of view. The amusing chapter in which Uncle Dan'l, seeing for the first time a steamboat churning up the river out of the darkness, believes it to be the Lord, illustrates this. Describing Uncle Dan'l, his wife and the three white children, Twain writes:

> The little company assembled on the log were all children, (at least in simplicity and broad and comprehensive ignorance,) and the remarks they made about the river were in keeping with the character.[135]

Uncle Danl's terrified shout, "It's de Almighty! Git down on yo' knees!," is followed by his eloquent prayer in which the negro slave's superstitious and childlike nature is movingly drawn:

> " ... O Lord, we's been mighty wicked, an' we knows dat we 'zerve to go to de bad place, but, good Lord, dear Lord, we ain't ready yit, we aint ready -- let dese po' chil'en hab one mo' chance, jes' one mo' chance. Take de ole niggah if

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134. Paine (ed.), Mark Twain's Notebook, p. 65.

135. S.L. Clemens and C.D. Warner, The Gilded Age, p. 35-6.

you's got to hab somebody."[136]

Later in the novel a conversation occurs between the hypocritical demogog, Senator Dilworthy, and the ebullient Colonel Sellers, about the merits of educating the negro. Since both are targets of Mark Twain's satire, the Senator treated with subtle contempt and the Colonel with goodhumored indulgence, the remarks of neither can be taken as expressing Mark's attitude. However, in view of the portrait of the slave, Uncle Dan'l, Colonel Sellers' opinion is probably closest to Twain's at this time. It is primarily, of course, a recording of the two points of view which were being hotly debated after the Civil war when the free negro was still a relatively new addition to American democracy. Mark Twain was not yet the impassioned defender of the negro's rights that he was to become in Huckleberry Finn, and he never did discuss the particular question of education for the negro beyond the brief notation quoted above. He was here, in The Gilded Age, merely repeating the familiar argument, poking gentle fun at Colonel Seller's easy complacency and satirizing fiercely the insincere platitudes of Senator Dilworthy. To the Senator's recommendation that the negroes be educated, Colonel Sellers replies, "You can't do much with 'em. They are a speculating race, sir, disinclined to work for white folks without security, planning how to live by only working for themselves." The Senator objects that when the negro is educated he will be better able to make his speculations fruitful. The rest of the conversation follows. The Colonel begins with:

> "Never, sir, never. He would only have a wider scope to injure himself. A niggro has no grasp, sir, Now, a white man can conceive great operations and carry them out, a niggro can't."

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136. Ibid., p. 37.

> "Still, granting that he might injure himself in a worldly point of view, his elevation through education would multiply his chances for the hereafter -- which is the important thing after all, Colonel. And no matter what the result is, we must fulfill our duty by this being."
>
> "I'd elevate his soul, that's just it. You can't make his soul too immortal, but I wouldn't touch him, himself. Yes, sir! make his soul immortal, but don't disturb the niggro as he is."[137]

In 1874, the year following the publication of The Gilded Age, Mark Twain's first contribution to the Atlantic Monthly appeared in that magazine. It was an account, faithfully preserved in the original speech, of the life story of the negro cook on the farm of Mrs. Clemens' sister, Sue Crane. Auntie Cord, as she was called, had been born in slavery, and had had the harrowing experiences familiar to many slaves. Twain's article, "A True Story, Repeated Word for Word as I Heard It," through the simple device of allowing the old woman to tell her own story, catches all the sorrow and humiliation of the negro slave. For dramatic effect, Twain contrasts his own amazement that the jolly woman he knows could ever have had trouble in her life, with the facts of her past as she reveals them. However, one cannot but believe that essentially he was telling the truth about his own attitude. He begins with a description of the scene when Auntie Cord told her story, writing that they were sitting on the porch of the farmhouse and Auntie Cord "was sitting respectfully below our level, on the steps -- for she was our servant, and colored."[138] The company was teasing the colored woman and she was enjoying it thoroughly when Mark Twain suddenly asked her how it happened that she had lived sixty years and never had any trouble. This sobered her so that she asked in amazement if

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137. Ibid., p. 187-8.

138. Clemens, "A True Story," Sketches New and Old, p. 265.

he was in earnest. Twain's reply indicates his surprise:

> "Why, I thought -- that is, I meant -- why, you can't have had any trouble. I've never heard you sigh, and never seen your eye when there wasn't a laugh in it."[139]

This brings forth Auntie Cord's story of her life, of how she and her husband and seven children were sold at an auction and of how she never saw any of them again until twenty years later when by a miraculous coincidence she was reunited with her youngest son, now a grown man. The old cook's description of the slave auction is intensely dramatic in its simplicity:

> "Dey put chains on us an' put us on a stan' as high as dis po'ch -- twenty foot high -- an' all de people stood aroun', crowds an' crowds. An dey'd come up dah an' look at us all roun', an' squeeze our arm, an' make us git up an' walk, an' den say 'Dis one too ole', or 'Dis one lame', or 'Dis one don't 'mount to much.' An' dey sole my ole man, an' took him away, an' dey begin to sell my chil'en an' take dem away ...[140]

Auntie Cord concludes her story with words, "Oh, no Misto C -, I hain't had no trouble. An' no joy!"[141]

One can readily see the impression this episode made on Mark Twain. He considered it as suitable material for the Atlantic Monthly without any comment of his own, and so he made no attempt to dress it up or to use it as a starting point for further discussion. Certainly it was another step in his slowly deepening perception of the tragedy of the negro slave. When the article appeared the following year in Sketches New and Old, Howells commented on the volume as illustrating "the growing seriousness of meaning in the apparently unmoralized drollings" of the essays and pointed to a similar growth in Dickens and Thackerey. He mentioned "A True Story" as showing "a gift in

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139. Ibid., p. 266.

140. Ibid., p. 267-8.

141. Ibid., p. 272.

the author for the simple, dramatic report of reality."[143] Paine writes in his Biography of Mark Twain's affection for Auntie Cord and two other negroes on the farm:

> He wished to do more with Auntie Cord and her associates of the farm, for they were extraordinarily interesting. Two other negroes on the place, John Lewis and his wife ... were not always on terms of amity with Auntie Cord. They disagreed on religion, and there were frequent battles in the kitchen. These distressed the mistress of the house, but they gave only joy to Mark Twain. His Southern raising had given him an understanding of their humors, their native emotions which made these riots a spiritual gratification. He would slip around among the shrubbery and listen to the noise and strife of battle, and hug himself with delight. Sometimes they resorted to missiles -- stones, tinware -- and dressed poultry -- ... How the greatest joker of the age did enjoy that summer warfare![144]

In Tom Sawyer the folklore and superstitions of the negro slave receive supreme literary expression. The book is permeated with them and their presence enriches it and contributes to the authentic picture of an era in American history. Although the condition of slavery is gone, much of the lore remains in the same or disguised form. Education may eventually destroy most of it but the tendency to cling to the habits of a race cannot be easely erodicated and in this sense Mark Twain's recording of the beliefs and practises and superstitions of the negro slave is as valid now as when it was written. De Voto makes this point when he says:

> Tom and Huck, shuddering in the moonlight when a dog's howl is the presage of death, are carriers of a truth struck from a whole population. The dark world of the slaves has made this gift.[145]

De Voto provides a useful summary of the superstitious beliefs described in Tom Sawyer and it is not difficult to recognize that echoes of some of them survive today:

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143. W.D. Howells, My Mark Twain, p. 134.

144. Paine, Mark Twain, A Biography, II, p. 515-16.

145. De Voto, op. cit., p. 306.

> On page 54 of Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn wanders into immortality swinging a dead cat. He proposes to use it to cure a wart, for which rain water in a hollow stump is also efficacious, if employed with the proper ritual and incantation. A bean will magically dispose of warts, too, when sprinkled with blood and burried at a crossroads -- when vampires cannot pass -- at the proper phase of the moon ... The boys take to earth in the old tannery, where presently a dog howls, a stray dog brought hither by his foresight of death ... it tramspires that the auspice is not on the boys, for the dog howls in the moonlight and he faces Muff Potter, who surely must die. And so must Gracie Miller, for a whippoorwill entered her house and sang ... and Huck has dreamed of rats, a fearsome omen but tolerable since in this dream they did not fight.[146]

It has been indicated previously that the inclusion of negro folklore in Tom Sawyer is not intended as social comment. The tone of the book is proof of this since it is a story of American boyhood in an era from the past and slavery is pictured solely as a part of that boyhood and that era. Later, in Huckleberry Finn, the portrait of slavery was to have a deeper significance as Mark Twain examined it in the light of a more profound social conscience.

Although Tom Sawyer is saturated with negro lore, there is only brief mention of its source. When Tom reflects on the fact that Gracie Miller has not yet died, in spite of the fact that a whippoorwill flew in her house and sang, he tells Huck:

> "She's a goner, just as dead sure as Muff Potter's a goner. That's what the niggers say, and they know all about these kind of things, Huck.[147]

Early in the famous episode of white washing the fence, there is mention of a scene that must have been familiar to Mark Twain as a boy, and illustrates the comradeship "in effect" which white children enjoyed with the negro slaves:

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146. Ibid., p. 73-4.

147. Clemens, Tom Sawyer, p. 106.

> Jim came skipping out at the gate with a tin pail, and singing Buffalo Gals. Bringing water from the town pump had always been hateful work in Tom's eyes, before, but now it did not strike him so. He remembered that there was company at the pump. White, mulatto, and negro boys and girls were always there waiting their turns, resting, trading playthings, quarrelling, fighting, skylarking.[148]

Tom's attempt to coax the water pail away from the slave, Jim, and set him to whitewashing the fence, contains a suggestion of the attitude of Southern whites toward the negro, as being like a child. Jim weakens under the promise of a white marble, and when Tom offers to let him look at his sore toe, the temptation is too much for Jim. The amusing description of the absorbed attention of the two as the bandage is unwound also subtly compares them, the boy, Tom, and the black man, Jim, who concentrate with equal fascination on the spectacle of Tom's sore toe.[149]

Tom Sawyer is a prelude to the greater book, Huckleberry Finn. Slavery is a part of the background in Tom Sawyer; in Huckleberry Finn it emerges as a principal theme, illustrating the developing concern of Mark Twain in the humanity of the negro race.

In 1883, Mark Twain published Life on the Mississippi. He had written a chapter for it in which he criticized harshly the nostalgic post-war attitude toward slavery but in the published edition he omitted it, perhaps out of respect for his Southern readers. Ferguson says of him that "he had graduated forever from the roses-and-magnolia legend of the pre-war South."[150] His discussion in Life on the Mississippi of the pre-Civil War South with its slave economy is based on one of his pet fancies, i.e., that Sir Walter Scott's novels were responsible for the South's clinging to a slave system

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148. Ibid., p. 14.

149. Ibid., p. 15.

150. Ferguson, op. cit., p. 213.

because they glorified and romanticized a caste system. It is one of his wildest assertions and reflects, of course, his personal antagonism to the romanticism in Scott, much like his personal antagonism to the romanticism in Fenimore Cooper's novels. The castigation is directed at Scott more than at the Southern whites, so its value as social criticism is blunted.

Life on the Mississippi contains a sympathetic protrayal of the ex-slaves whom Twain saw along the banks of the great river:

> We were getting down now into the migrating negro region. These poor people could never travel when they were slaves; so they make up for the privation now. They stay on a plantation till the desire to travel seizes them; then they pack up, hail a steamboat, and clear out. Not for any particular place; no, nearly any place will answer, they only want to be moving.[151]

Twain pictures the details of their poverty and bleak lives and the tone of his remarks is quite different from the other pictures of the Southern negro in the book. The other discussions are humorous. Some are anecdotes, some, descriptions of scenes he witnessed. All of them are goodhumored and reflect with no other intention, his affectionate understanding of the race. One example will speak for all. In commenting on the crewmen of the steamboats, Twain writes:

> It was a proud thing to be of the crew of such stately craft as the Aleck Scott or the Grand Turk. Negro firemen, deckhands, and barbers belonging to those boats were distinguished personages in their grade of life, and they were well aware of that fact, too ... The barber of the Grand Turk was a spruce young negro, who aired his importance with balmy complacency, and was greatly courted by the circle in which he moved. The young colored population of New Orleans were much given to flirting, at twilight, on the banquettes of the back streets. Somebody saw and heard something like the following, one evening, in one of those localities. A middle-aged negro woman projected her head through a broken pane and shouted

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151. Clemens, Life on the Mississippi, p. 253.

> (very willing that the neighbors should hear and envy), "You Mary Ann, come in de house dis minute! Stannin' out dah foolin' 'long wid dat low trash, an heah's de barber off'n de Grand Turk wants to converse wid you!"[152]

There can be no doubt that Mark Twain's revisiting of the old haunts along the Mississippi he had piloted twenty years before stimulated him to take up again the idea for Huckleberry Finn, which he had started seven years ago and then laid aside. The familiar scenes stirred him to recreate that era now gone from the American scene and he did so faithfully, at the same time with a perception deepened by the passing of years. He brought to the picture of remembered slavery an increased awareness of the negro as a human being, partly due to his democratic sympathies which had crystallized under the shaping influence of the frontier and partly due to his recent glimpses of the emancipated slave. Huckleberry Finn was published in 1884 and it has become recognized since that time as Twain's masterpiece. Whatever he left out of Life on the Mississippi Twain more than included in Huckleberry Finn.

Leacock has written that in Huckleberry Finn Mark Twain has given a "vision of American Institutions -- above all, of slavery -- as seen through the unsullied mind of little Huck," and that he has portrayed "the pathos and charm of the Negro race shining through the soul of Nigger Jim."[153] This brief estimate is not shared by Theodore Dreiser, who writes:

> You are not to forget that slavery was a part of the daily life of his boyhood town of Florida, Missouri, and of Hannibal; and that, in his teens, he was eyewitness, as he himself reports, to negro slaves, men slaves, women slaves, children slaves, chained together and left on some levee walk of the Missouri, while they waited for the steamboat that was to convey them south where they were to be resold. Yes, and there were men

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152. Ibid., 121-2. See also pp. 291-2 and p. 303.

153. Leacock, op. cit., p. 86.

> and women and children among them as he himself says, separated from wives, husbands, and parents. Yet never once in all of his American annals, apart from the foregoing note, did he ever write bitterly of that, not even in his notebook or in his Autobiography ... not, for instance, of any phase of the war of the Rebellion in which, except for one attempt at organizing a confederate guerilla band whose activities appear to have come to nothing, he did not take any part. The best he did for the Negro at any time was to set over against Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom, the more or less Sambo portrait of the Negro Jim ...[154]

A careful reader of Mark Twain's life and work could scarcely make such a statement because, except for the point about Mark Twain's never taking part in the Civil War or writing about it (with the exception of "The Campaign that Failed"), he would perceive that Dreiser's criticism is wholly inadequate. The following analysis of Huckleberry Finn should refute Dreiser's charge that the only thing Mark Twain ever did for the negro was to draw a more or less Sambo portrait of negro Jim.

It has been said that Huckleberry Finn is a kind of American Gulliver's Travels with Huck and Jim, "puny in all strengths save loyalty, as they wander among the Brobdingnagian boots of white adult supremacy."[155] Certainly slavery is one of the principal themes of the book and Farrell is correct when he says that it is through intimate association with the runaway Nigger Jim that Huck's moral landscape is broadened.[156] The superstitions and folklore of the race are this time uttered by the negro himself, and so they become a poignant example of the slave's enforced ignorance. Jim's high moral character makes him deserving of respect and points up his tragedy as a slave whose mind as well as body is held in bondage. This much Twain intended but it cannot be assumed, as quoted earlier, that he meant also a warning that the white race would absorb and be

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154. Theodore Dreiser, "Mark the Double Twain," English Journal, XXIV (1935), 622.
155. Spiller, Thorp, et. al., op. cit., p. 933.
156. Farrell, op. cit., p. 6, 37.

demoralized by these beliefs. Jim frequently calls upon magic charms, such as his "hairball as big as your fist, which had been took out of the fourth stomach of an ox,"[157] to help Huck and himself out of danger and he tells Huck many of the secrets of negro lore. His discussions of witches, dreams and spells[158] are a powerful revelation of the slave mentality but it is reading more than is justified to interpret Twain further.

The slave, Jim, is hardly a Sambo portrait. He is an heroic character with dignity, loyalty and courage, superior to man of the white men encountered on the voyage down the river. De Voto writes:

> Nigger Jim is, of course, the book's heroic character -- ... Jim has all the virtues Mark admired. He is kind, staunch, and faithful, a brave man, a friend who risks his life and sacrifices his freedom for a friend. There is greatness in him.[159]

Perhaps the modern tendency to consider Nigger Jim as the sentimentalized, artificial type implied by the name "Sambo" is partly because he is drawn in heroic proportions, in contrast to the low types of most of the Southern whites in the novel. It is true that he is a man of many virtues and no vices but he is still true to the racial type Twain had known, and the basic authenticity of his portrait cannot be questioned. He embodies the best qualities of the slaves Mark Twain had known well. Perhaps, too, the fact that since the era pictured in Huckleberry Finn a new type of negro has emerged in this country who is both educated and cultivated, has made some forget that the ignorant childlike Jim was the only kind of negro Twain had seen in his childhood and that he must

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157. Clemens, Huckleberry Finn, p. 24-5.

158. Ibid., pp. 8-9, 65, 123.

159. De Voto, Mark Twain at Work, p. 96.

necessarily be true to his own experience. Finally, perhaps the association has been made between Jim and those other negroes of nineteenth century fiction and the superiority of Jim's characterization not sufficiently recognized at any rate, Jim is a strong, individualized character, despite Mark Twain's tendency to emphasize his virtues because of his affection for him. The personal basis for Twain's characterization of Nigger Jim is set forth in his Autobiography:

> We had a faithful and affectionate good friend, ally, and adviser in "Uncle Dan'l," a middle-aged slave whose head was the best one in the negro quarter, whose sympathies were wide and warm, and whose heart was honest and simple and knew no guile. He has served me well these many, many years. I have not seen him for more than half a century, and yet spiritually I have had his welcome company a good part of that time, and have staged him in books under his own name and as "Jim," and carted him all around -- to Hannibal, down the Mississippi on a raft, and even across the Desert of Sahara in a balloon -- and he has endured it all with the patience and friendliness and loyalty which were his birthright.[160]

De Voto analyzes the difference between Nigger Jim and the conventionalized negro slave in other American fiction of the nineteenth century:

> Jim talking about Sollermun and other kings, his speculations about the stars, his arguments with Huck which triumphantly oppose his experience to the ideas and logic of a better intelligence (but the best of these is in Tom Sawyer Abroad) -- such things are great fiction. To set the scale of other achievement, recall Cable's honest but pedestrian sketches of Negroes, contemporary with Jim, or Uncle Remus, who, though he greatly tells the great fables of his race, is himself false-face and crêpe hair. Or think of the faithful slaves whose function in literature has been to croon in the honeysuckle while the Old South dies ... and remember that it is through the mind of Jim that Huckleberry Finn imparts its perception of the tragedy of human life.[161]

Huck Finn's attitude toward Nigger Jim changes, as Mark Twain's did

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160. Clemens, Autobiography, I, p. 100-1.

161. De Voto, Mark Twain at Work, p. 97.

toward the negro. From a thoughtless, superior feeling Huck learns to appreciate Jim as a human being like himself. It is not that he intends to be unkind, it simply has never occured to him that negroes have the same feelings he has, or the same potential intelligence. Early in the book, Huck says of Jim's fears of being sold down the river:

> Well, he was right; he was most always right; he had an uncommon level head for a nigger.[162]

Again, the hilarious chapter in which Huck and Jim discuss Solomon illustrates Huck's exasperation at Jim's patient, groping mind. Huck concludes, "I see it warn't no use wasting words -- you can't learn a nigger to argue. So I quit."[163]

The first step in Huck's change of attitude comes as a result of his making unkind fun of Jim's innocent credulity. Jim's gradual realization that Huck has been laughing at him causes him to point to the leaves and rubbish which have fallen on the raft and say, "without ever smiling":

> "Dat truck dah is <u>trash</u>; en trash is what people is dat puts dirt on de head er dey fren's en makes 'em ashamed."[164]

It is a powerful rebuke and one that is heavy with the sorrow and humiliation of the Negro slave who must endure the abuse and thoughtless cruelties of the white race. Huck's conclusion of the episode reveals his struggle to overcome his pride and his real surprise that a negro could be sensitive like other people:

> It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a nigger; but I done it, and I warn't ever sorry for it afterward, neither. I didn't do him no more mean tricks, and I wouldn't done that one if I'd 'a'

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162. Clemens, <u>Huckleberry Finn</u>, p. 109.

163. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 115.

164. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 124.

knowed it would make him feel that way.[165]

The chapter in which Huck finally makes the choice between turning the runaway Jim over to the authorities and helping him to escape is Mark Twain's greatest affirmation of the negro's right to consideration as a human being. Perhaps the fiercest satire in all Mark Twain's writing is found in Huck's struggle between his conscience, which tells him he must obey the law, and his affection for the companion who has shared his raft:

> Jim said it made him all over trembly and feverish to be so close to freedom. Well, I can tell you it made me all over trembly and feverish, too, to hear him, because I begun to get it through my head that he was most free -- and who was to blame for it? Why, me ...
>
> Jim talked out loud all the time while I was talking to myself. He was saying how the first thing he would do when he got to a free state he would go to saving up money and never spend a single cent, and when he got enough he would buy his wife, which was owned on a farm close to where Miss Watson lived; and then they would both work to buy the two children, and if their master wouldn't sell them, they'd get an ab'litionist to go and steal them.
>
> It most froze me to hear such talk. He wouldn't ever dared to talk such talk in his life before. Just see what a difference it made in him the minute he judged he was about free. It was according to the old saying, "Give a nigger an inch and he'll take an ell." Thinks I, this is what comes of my not thinking. Here was that nigger, which I had as good as helped to run away, coming right out flat-footed and saying he would steal his children -- children that belonged to a man I didn't even know; a man that hadn't ever done me no harm.
>
> I was sorry to hear Jim say that, it was such a lowering of him.[166]

But Huck's affection for Nigger Jim wins out over the law and after outwitting the strangers who seek to investigate the raft, Huck concludes not to betray Jim. It is a hard choice for him because the slavery system was right and natural to minds of those raised in its midst. Huck

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165. Ibid., p. 124.

166. Ibid., p. 126-8.

sincerely believed that he was doing a great wrong but his friendship with the negro had taught him that Jim was first a human being and second a slave. Later in the book, Huck ponders again his new perception of Nigger Jim as he describes how the slave often moans to himself at night when Huck is supposedly asleep. Huck says:

> I didn't take notice nor let on. I knowed what it was about. He was thinking about his wife and his children, away up yonder, and he was low and homesick; because he hadn't ever been away from home before in his life; and I do believe he cared just as much for his people as white folks does for their'n. It don't seem natural, but I reckon it's so.[167]

Jim's pathetic rememberance which follows, of his daughter, Elizabeth, expresses the mute grief he suffers when he realizes that he may never see her again. The particular episode he recalls, of a time when he punished her for something she was innocent of, is more than the sorrow of a slave separated from his family. It is the experience of every parent, regardless of race, and Twain's inclusion of it imparts to Nigger Jim an equality with all men. Where is the Sambo-like portrait in this account of Nigger Jim?

Equal to Huck's struggle with his conscience in satiric power is the passage in which Huck's father rages against the idea of letting negroes vote. Ferguson says of it that it "counterattacks the growing tendency to sentimentalize the memory of the South's 'peculiar institution' in a way that makes Mrs. Stowe and Simon Legree seem shrill and ineffective."[168] In old man Finn's tirade the vicious and ugly nature of racial prejudice is mercilessly exposed. It is as eloquent an attack on the evil of racial

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167. Ibid., p. 221.

168. Ferguson, op. cit., p. 227-8.

prejudice as has ever been written and is eternally true as a searching analysis of the mentality of those who are ruled by hate and bigotry. The entire passage must be quoted to convey the total effect of Twain's satire:

> "Oh, yes, this is a wonderful govment, wonderful. Why, looky here. There was a free nigger there from Ohio -- a mulatter, most as free as a white man. He had the whitest shirt on you ever see, too, and the shiniest hat; and there ain't a man in that town that's got as fine clothes as what he had; and he had a gold watch and chain, and a silver-headed cane -- the awfulest old gray-headed nobob in the state. And what do you think? They said he was a p'fessor in a college, and could talk all kinds of languages, and knowed everything. And that ain't the wust. They said he could vote when he was at home. Well, that let me out. Thinks I, what is the country a' coming to? It was 'lection day, and I was just about to go and vote myself if I warn't too drunk to get there; but when they told me there was a state in this country where they'd let that nigger vote, I drawed out. I says I'll never vote ag'in. Them's the very words I said; they all heard me -- I'll never vote a-g'in as long as I live. And to see the cool way of the nigger -- why, he wouldn't 'a' give me the road if I hadn't shoved him out o' the way. I says to the people, why ain't this nigger put up at auction and sold? -- That's what I want to know. And what do you reckon they said? Why, they said he couldn't be sold till he'd been in the state six months, and he hadn't been there that long yet. There, now -- that's a specimen. They call that a govment that can't sell a free nigger till he's been in the state six months. Here's a govment that calls itself a govment, and lets on to be a govment, and thinks it is a govment, and yet's got to set stock-still for six whole months before it can take a-hold of a prowling, thieving, infernal, white-shirted free nigger, and --"[169]

The final episode in Huckleberry Finn in which Mark Twain's satiric gift is directed against slavery occurs when Huck tells the kindly, bustling Mrs. Phelps that he has been on a steamboat which blew out a cylinder head. Their conversation is brief but it is weighted with significance:

> "Good gracious! Anybody hurt?"
> "No'm. Killed a nigger."
> "Well, it's lucky; because sometimes people do get hurt."[170]

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169. Clemens, Huckleberry Finn, p. 37-9.

170. Ibid., p. 317.

It is difficult to imagine a more devastating revelation of the pre-war Southern attitude toward slaves. Huckleberry Finn is indeed the highest expression of Mark Twain's defense of the negro race and his plea that they be treated democratically as human beings.

Nigger Jim appears again in Tom Sawyer Abroad (1894), but in this book he is only the happy-go-lucky companion of Tom and Huck. The books is a pure adventure story, answering the public's demand for more of Tom Sawyer. It was a part of Twain's artistic inconsistency that he could create a character like Nigger Jim, present him in all the humanity and tragedy of his slave condition and then drop back to a humorous sketch of him in later books. True, the arguments between the boys and Jim are a skillful depiction of Jim's slow, practical mind hampered by superstition, pitted against the logic of the partially educated boys, and Jim emerges as an individual and not merely a type. But the conversations become tiresome and there is no great theme as in Huckleberry Finn to lend deeper significance to the portrait of Nigger Jim.

The negress, Roxy, in Pudd'nhead Wilson, is more realistically drawn than Nigger Jim.[171] There is affection in Twain's characterization of her but her flaws are vividly presented whereas with Nigger Jim only the virtues are emphasized. Roxy is therefore a more complete representative of the negro race. She is a racial type but like Nigger Jim, she also retains her individuality. She is disappointingly subordinated to the other characters, however, at times when she should be the center of interest. An example of Twain's failure to carry through the artistic possibilities

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171. Paine does not agree. "The negro character is well drawn, of course -- Mark Twain could not write it less than well, but its realism is hardly to be compared with similar matter in his other books -- in Tom Sawyer, for instance, or Huckleberry Finn." (Paine, Mark Twain, A Biography, III, p. 999).

of Roxy is cited by Quinn. In the scene where Roxy's worthless son, known as Tom Driscoll, accepts his freed mother's offer and re-sells her into slavery to pay off his gambling debts, Twain focuses on Tom's feelings instead of Roxy's, and the dramatic opportunity is lost because Tom is an unconvincing character whom nobody cares much about.[172] Roxy suffers also from melodramatic situations, yet, as De Voto points out:

> In outline and in detail she is memorably true. She lives: her experiences and emotions are her own, and, being her own, are faithful to the history of thousands. With new instruments at its service and a generation of writers far distant from the reality, literature may make another essay of slavery -- but it is unlikely to go beyond the superstition, affection, malice, and loyalty of this woman. In her exist, as nowhere else, the experience, the thought, and the feelings of slaves. Even in melodrama she retains her verity. When she forces Valet de Chambre Essex to his knees, she is within reach of the preposterous, but the scene is as true, as inevitable, as her thieving and tippling.[173]

Roxy, in contrast to Nigger Jim, is aggressive and high spirited. She has a fierce pride and self-assurance among the other negroes, "a high and 'sassy' way," as Mark describes it. To one Jasper, who says he is coming to court her, Roxy retorts:

> "You is, you black mudcat! Yah-yah-yah! I got somep'n better to do den 'sociatin' wid niggers as black as you is. Is ole Miss Cooper's Nancy done give you de mitten?"[174]

Unlike Nigger Jim, Roxy is part white. Twain describes her coloring, an important factor in her aggressive nature:

> Only one-sixteenth of her was black, and that sixteenth did not show. She was of majestic form and stature ... her complexion was very fair ... her face was shapely, intelligent,

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172. Quinn, op. cit., p. 253.

173. De Voto, Mark Twain's America, p. 293.

174. Clemens, Pudd'nhead Wilson, p. 646.

and comely -- even beautiful.[175]

So Roxy represents the negro who could have passed for white but was condemned to live as a slave. She is a strange combination of selfish and tender qualities, of morality and immorality. Like Jim, she is intensely superstitious. She is half afraid of David Wilson because he keeps people's fingerprints under glass slides. 'I b'lieve he's a witch,"[176] she says to herself.

Through Roxy, the mind of the slaves is given a profundity and complexity of expression not found even in Nigger Jim. She lashes her son with bitter words when she realizes that he is a coward:

> "En you refuse to fight a man dat kicked you, 'stid o' jumpin' at de chance! ... Thirty-one parts o' you is white, en on'y one part nigger, and dat po' little one part is yo' soul. 'Tain't with savin'; 'tain't with totin out on a shovel en throwin' in de gutter."[177]

Conversely, Roxy later informs her son that "dey ain't another nigger in dis town dat's as high-bawn as you is,"[178] revealing the mixed feelings of pride and humiliation in the heart of the negro slave.

Mark Twain himself comments on Roxy's character as typical of her race in discussing her petty thievery:

> Was she bad? Was she worse than the general run of her race? No. They had an unfair show in the battle of life, and they held it no sin to take military advantage of the enemy -- in a small way ... They would smouch provisions from the pantry whenever they got a chance; or a brass thimble, or a cake of wax ... or a silver spoon, or a dollar-bill, or small articles of clothing, or any other property of light value; and so far

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175. Ibid., p. 647.

176. Ibid., p. 652.

177. Ibid., p. 697.

178. Ibid., p. 675.

> were they from considering such reprisals sinful, that they would go to church and shout and pray the loudest and sincerest with their plunder in their pockets.[179]

Roxy is a character of magnificent vigor and reality and Twain's treatment of her reveals how far he had developed in his attitude toward the negro race. She is as objective a literary creation as he was able to achieve from the memories of his childhood and in these terms she surpasses Nigger Jim.

Twain's castigation of slavery in Pudd'nhead Wilson revolves around the theme of "being sold down the river." The slaves' dread of this possibility is repeated throughout the novel and reaches a climax when Roxy discovers it is about to happen to her. Believing she is to be sold in Kentucky where her lot would be easier, she is horrified when she realizes the boat is heading downstream:

> ... her practised eye fell upon that telltale rush of water. For one moment her petrified gaze fixed itself there then her head dropped upon her breast, and she said:
>
> "Oh, de good Lord God have mercy on po' sinful me -- I's sole down de river!"[180]

The aspect of slavery which makes Pudd'nhead Wilson unique in nineteenth century fiction, however, is the theme of miscegenation. Here Twain was handling literary dynamite, for the subject was taboo in literature at that time. Yet that it was a recognized fact in the institution of slavery, that white masters exercised a sort of "droit de seigneur" over slave women, Mark Twain well knew,[181] and it was a part of his realistic approach to slavery, a part of his attack on the sentimentalized post-war attitude toward slavery, that he dared to use it in a novel. Perhaps

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179. Ibid., pp. 648-9.

180. Ibid., p. 708.

181. See Twain's account of Wales McCormick's gestures toward a mulatto girl in the presence of her mother's mild protests. "She quite well understood that by the customs of slave-holding communities, it was Wales' right to make love to that girl if he wanted to. (Clemens, Autobiography, II, pp. 276-277.)

he was not aware of what he was doing. Ferguson writes:

> The truly original element in the story Mark Twain seemingly overlooked. It had come naturally to him, as part of his inheritance from slavery days in Missouri, and he presented it simply, without heat or underscoring. The moral overhead of slavery, by which slave women became their master's concubines and bore them slave children, was a dangerously realistic theme to handle in the still prudish closing years of the Victorian Age. But simply because he handled it without heat, as a fact of nature, Mark Twain got away with it.[182]

Roxy feels no bitterness about the fact that she has born a son to a white man. She is, in fact, proud of it because the father is Colonel Cecil Burleigh Essex, and her son, therefore, has in his veins the best white blood in the town. Her daring transfer of the two babies, so that her child is raised as a white, reflects the pride and unselfishness which makes her determined that her son shall never know the ignominy of slavery. The tragedy of her futile attempt is two fold: the child grows up to be an incorrigible wastrel and when his identity is proved, he is sold down the river. Twain carries out the ending of Pudd'nhead Wilson in its own terms, since by law the negro who had lived as a white was still a negro, and must live from then on as a slave. It is a grim comment on the system and on the courage of the negress who tried to defy it.

There is a more subtle comment on the theory of white supremacy and racial superiority in the situation of the two children who were transferred in their cradles, but it is unsatisfactorily concluded. Twain seems to say that it is training or conditioning that makes a slave or a free man, not innate quality. This is clear in the case of valet de Chambre, the white raised as a slave, who upon learning that he is not a negro, is still unable to cast off the habits of years and is miserable in the presence of white

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182. Ferguson, op. cit., p. 253.

people. On the other hand, the case of Tom Driscoll is not so clearly drawn. He is given all the advantages of a high born white background and is always a no good rascal. Through the words of Roxy, this is blamed on the drop of negro blood in his veins. The result is that Twain's intention is somewhat blurred. He has made a powerful argument against the theory of racial superiority, starting with the two babies who cannot be told apart. They are equal in their potentialities, he seems to say, and it is only the accident of birth which will determine their future status. But he defeats his purpose in Tom Driscoll and the effect of his attack on racial prejudice is lessened. Nevertheless, as one critic has written, Pudd'nhead Wilson is one of the most realistic treatments of the negro race in American fiction:

> ... probably no white man ever dealt more justly with that race than Mark Twain did in Pudd'nhead Wilson, where all its faults are so mercilessly revealed, yet so tenderly and understandingly, so utterly without any sense of racial superiority.[183]

In Following the Equator (1897), Mark Twain unwittingly expresses one reason that he had no tendency to prejudice against the negro. He did not, as many white men, consider the dark-skinned races to be inevitably ugly. He writes:

> Nearly all black and brown skins are beautiful, but a beautiful white skin is rare ... where dark complexions are massed, they make the whites look bleached out, unwholesome, and sometimes frankly ghastly. I could notice this as a boy, down South in the slavery days before the war. The splendid black satin skin of the South African Zulus of Durban seemed to me to come very close to perfection.[184]

It is an unusual attitude for a white man to have and must be due to

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183. Wagenknecht, op. cit., p. 238.

184. Clemens, Following the Equator, p. 63.

his childhood associations. It illustrates the sincerity and honesty of Mark Twain's mind and is a valuable clue to his feeling for the negro race:

Except for an unpublished essay written in 1901,[185] the only remaining comments by Mark Twain on the issue of the negro's right to consideration as a human being equal to his white neighbor, are found in the Autobiography. Most of them have already been quoted but there is one yet to be cited which expresses tersely his feeling about slavery. Mark Twain, the Southerner by birth, describes the system of slavery as "a bald, grotesque and unwarrantable usurpation."[186]

* * *

Mark Twain's warm sympathy and genuine affection for the negro race is mirrored in his literary treatment of them. He portrays the negro humorously but at all times it is a respectful humor based on intimate understanding of the race. There is tolerance in the laughter, as there is not in his humor about the Indian, and an appreciation and enjoyment of the racial peculiarities as there is not in his humor about the Chinese. Mark Twain's subjective approach to the negro at first prevents him from giving a completely realistic picture (Nigger Jim) but eventually he achieves that in the character of Roxy without diminishing her stature. Because he knew from personal experience the type he was portraying he captured the essential

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185. "In 1901 the disgraceful lynching of three negroes and the burning of five negro households took place near Pierre City, Mo. This stirred Mark Twain so much that he wrote an article called 'The U.S. of Lyncherdom,' though for some reason or other it was not put into print." (Hamada, op. cit., p. 598).

186. Clemens, Autobiography, I, p. 123.

elements of the negro race and made an important contribution to American fiction. He was not interested in writing of the negro in American democracy after the Civil War so his defense of the negro's rights was always from the starting point he had known -- slavery -- but in his private life Twain exerted himself many times on behalf of the freed negro.

His democratic spirit found one of its most intense expressions in his writings about the negro race. An element of his habitual defense of the underdog must be admitted, but for the most part Twain's championship of the negro's humanity was due to his great affection for the race and his passionate belief in the ideals of a democracy. He had to overcome a tendency to look down on the negro -- a habit unconsciously retained from slavery days -- and this he achieved successfully in his mature years.

Mark Twain's literary treatment of the negro race is a strong indictment of racial prejudice. He never wrote an essay on the subject of prejudice against the negro, as he did on the question of anti-Semitism, but that he was aware of the ugly nature of such sentiments is clearly demonstrated in the tirade of Huck Finn's father.

Mark Twain's sincere defence of the negro race reveals him as a friend of the negro all his life and no one has left a greater tribute to the race than he did in the characters of Nigger Jim and Roxy.

Chapter V

Concerning The Jews

In his Autobiography Mark Twain reminisces about his first encounter with the Jewish race. His remarks are not significant except for their evidence of his first awareness of the Jews as a separate race, and even then, his description of his romantic attitude must be taken with caution:

> In that school were the first Jews I had ever seen. It took me a good while to get over the awe of it. To my fancy they were clothed invisibly in the damp and cobwebby mold of antiquity. They carried me back to Egypt, and in imagination I moved among the Pharoahs.[187]

Mark Twain had, always, a deep respect for the Jewish race.[188] Indeed, he was so prejudiced in their favor that it was difficult for him to admit of their having any flaws. Paine quotes from a letter of Twain's which indicates, in the usual superlative language, Twain's feeling for the race:

> Mark Twain was always an ardent admirer of the Jewish race, and its oppression naturally invited his sympathy. Once he wrote to Twichell:
>
> 'The difference between the brains of the average Christian and that of the average Jew -- certainly in Europe -- is about the difference between a tadpole's brain and an archbishop's. It is a marvelous race; by long odds the most marvelous race the world has produced, I suppose.'
>
> Yet he did not fail to see its faults and to set them down in his summary of Hebrew character.[189]

Paine's comment at the end refers to the essay, "Concerning the Jews", which Twain wrote in 1898 in Vienna. With the exception of a few scattered

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187. S.L. Clemens, Autobiography, II, p. 218.

188. "The Jews he did consistently admire as a people and considered the most gifted race in the world" (Wagenknecht, op. cit., p. 237.)

189. Paine, Mark Twain, A Biography, III, p. 1065.

remarks in some of his earlier writings this essay is Twain's principal literary expression of his sentiment for the Jewish race. A statement by De Voto to be quoted later provides the information that many of Mark Twain's unpublished papers contain expressions of his admiration for the Jews.

In her book, My Father, Mark Twain, Clara Clemens testifies to the fact that Mark Twain maintained a consistently high respect for the Jewish race all his life. Her account is also the only positive evidence that Twain was well acquainted, at least in his old age, with many Jews:

> Father had always been a great admirer of the Jewish race and now had the opportunity in Vienna to test and prove the soundness of his good opinion of that great people. For, in every walk of life there were large numbers of successful Jews, so much so, that one frequently heard the complaint: 'Everything in this city is owned by the Jews -- newspapers, banks, high professional offices, and all the successful ships.' It was perhaps largely due to this fact that there existed an extremely strong anti-Semitic feeling in Vienna; because, aside from any religious prejudices, there were certainly evidences of much jealousy on the part of Christians, and particularly of Catholics. Agruments as to the virtues or or non-virtues of the Jews were often the topic of discussion in our drawing-room, and Father always grew eloquent in defense of Christ's race. Indeed, so often were his remarks on this subject quoted that it was rumored at one time Father himself was a Jew.
>
> About this time he wrote his article "Concerning the Jews," in which he states he considers them "the most marvelous race the world ever produced." He used also to say that the difference between the intellect of a Jew and that of a Christian was about the difference between a tadpole's intellect and an archbiship's. Many of the talented and cultivated Hebrews were invited to call on us, adding much grace of intellect to every occasion.[190]

It is interesting to notice that she has confused the source of Twain's words, "the most marvelous race the world ever produced." The mention of Twain's comparison between the tadpole's intellect and the archbishop's

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190. Clara Clemens Gabrilowitsch, My Father, Mark Twain, 203-4.

suggests that this was either a favorite expression of Mark Twain's or that his daughter has forgotten its original source.

So Mark Twain's only appreciable literary expression on the subject of the Jewish race occurred in his old age. If we may accept his daughter's statement, he held a lifelong admiration and sympathy for the Jews. He was never to publish his sentiments, other than a few brief remarks, until events in Vienna while he was living there from September, 1897, to May, 1899, focused his attention on the subject of anti-Semitic prejudice.

The first comment Mark Twain made on the Jewish race in his published works is found in Innocents Abroad. Paine prints in the Biography the original form of the paragraph which Twain later revised for publication. This original version is as follows:

> We are glad to have seen Egypt. We are glad to have seen that old land which taught Greece her letters -- and through Greece, Rome -- and through Rome, the world -- that venerable cradle of culture and refinement which could have humanized and civilized the children of Israel, but allowed them to depart out of her borders savages -- those children whom we still revere, still love and whose sad shortcomings we still excuse -- not because they were savages, but because they were the chosen savages of God.[191]

Twain's characterization of the Jews in ancient times as savages carries with it none of the sting of contempt found in his writings on the savages of North America, the Indians. The inference is that the Jews were not to be blamed because of their savage state -- something Mark Twain could never bring himself to say about the red man. He reveals his own attitude toward the Jewish race when he says that "we" revere them and love them. Their shortcomings, significantly, are not despiccable, as in the case of

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191. Paine, Mark Twain, A Biography, I, p. 243.

the Indian, only "sad."

The version which appeared in Innocents Abroad makes no mention of his personal attitude toward the Jews; otherwise, it is the same, except for minor changes in the phrasing:

> We were glad to have seen the land which was the mother of civilization -- which taught Greece her letters, and through Greece Rome, and through Rome the world; the land which could have humanized and civilized the hopless children of Israel, but allowed them to depart out of her borders little better than savages.[192]

In Life on the Mississippi, Twain refers to complaints he has heard on his tour over the route he once piloted that Jewish store-keepers have been growing wealthy by taking advantage of the ex-slaves who now have money to spend.[193] Twain's account is matter of fact and gives no indication of his reaction aside from his one phrase, "thrifty Israelite," but later he was to cite this example again, in a spirit of criticism, in "Concerning the Jews."

An exerpt from Twain's notebook contains the first discussion at any length of the Jewish race. It was written during Twain's stay in Paris in 1879:

> Samson was a Jew, therefore not a fool. The Jews have the best average brains of any people in the world. The Jews are the only race in the world who work wholly with their brains, and never with their hands. There are no Jew beggars, no Jew tramps, no Jew ditchers, hod-carriers, day-laborers, or followers of toilsome mechanical trade.
> They are peculiarly and comspicuously the world's intellectual aristocracy.[194]

In this comment, a random expression jotted down under the influence of some momentary inspiration, Twain reveals the reason for his high regard of the Jewish race. It was the intellectual energy of the Jews that

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192. Clemens, Innocents Abroad, p. 387.

193. Clemens, Life on the Mississippi, pp. 290-1.

194. Paine (ed.), Mark Twain's Notebook, p. 151.

he admired so much. He could minimize their "sad shortcomings" in his contemplation of this one capacity, and when we remember that he himself was possessed of a super-abundance of mental energy, it is not surprising that he singled out that one trait (though not with his own similarity in mind) and let it absorb his attention. With the emphasis on a single fact, which was always his way, Mark Twain fastened on the intellectual capacity of the Jewish race and allowed it to become the focal point of his attitude.

"Concerning the Jews" was published in Harper's Magazine in September, 1899. About the article, Twain wrote to his close friend and financial adviser, Henry Rogers:

> The Jew article is my "gem of the ocean." I have taken a world of pleasure in writing it and doctoring it and fussing at it. Neither Jew nor Christian will approve of it, but people who are neither Jews nor Christians will, for they are in a condition to know the truth when they see it.[195]

"Concerning the Jews" grew out of an article that Mark Twain had published in Harper's Magazine in March, 1898, called "Stirring Times in Austria." This latter article was a result of Twain's visits to sessions of the City Council and the Parliament in Vienna:

> A short time after his arrival Mark Twain attended a session of the City Council of Vienna. He took a seat in the press gallery from where he had a good view ... Dr. Karl Lueger, then Mayor of Vienna, was at the same time President of the City Council. He was the leader of the anti-Semitic Christian-Social Party, which had its supporters mainly among the lower middle classes, and had come to power after brutally smashing all resistance, even that of the Crown ...
>
> It was here, probably, that Mark Twain received suggestions for his essay "Concerning the Jews." Further material for this study, as well as for his essay, "Stirring Times in Austria," was furnished by the sessions of the Austrian Parliament, which Mark Twain henceforth repeatedly attended, listening with closest attention. On November 4, 1897, the Austrian Parliament held one of those stormy sessions ... It

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195. Paine, Mark Twain, A Biography, III, p. 1066.

> was the time of one of the most violent parliamentary struggles of the Germans of the Hapsburg Empire against the (Provisional) Austro-Hungarian "Compromise."[196]

This stormy session of the Parliament was the one described by Mark Twain in "Stirring Times in Austria." De Voto contributes further information about the political background of the article:

> Toward the end of 1897, while Mark Twain was living in Vienna, there occured one of the periodic riots in the Reichsrath over the Ausgleich between Austria and Hungary. The government put a stop to it with military force and, as a result, more serious riots broke out in various parts of the country, especially in Bohemia ... certain elements used the political agitation as a cover for attacks on the Jews. Mark Twain wrote an account of the episode which, under the title of "Stirring Times in Austria" was published in Harper's Magazine for March, 1898.[197]

Although there were various political parties involved in the riots, they all had one point of agreement, i.e., that the Jew should be made to suffer; a point which Mark Twain had noticed a few years earlier in Berlin when there was a fierce demand that all Jews should be expelled from Germany.[198] Twain wrote on this point, in "Stirring Times in Austria":

> There was a popular outbreak or two in Vienna; there were three or four days of furious rioting in Prague, followed by the establishing there of martial law; the Jews and Germans were harried and plundered, and their houses destroyed; in other Bohemian towns there was rioting -- in some cases the Germans being the rioters, in others the Czechs -- and in all cases the Jew had to roast, no matter which side he was on.[199]

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196. Max Lederer, "Mark Twain in Vienna," Mark Twain Quarterly, VII (No. 1), p. 3.

197. Bernard De Voto, "Mark Twain About the Jews," Jewish Frontier, VI (May, 1939), p. 7.

198. H.L. Stewart, "Mark Twain on the Jewish Problem," The Dalhousie Review, XIV (January, 1935), p. 455. "In Berlin, a few years ago, I read a speech which frankly urged the expulsion of the Jews from Germany; and the agitator's reason was as frank as his proposition. It was this: that eighty-five per cent of the successful lawyers of Berlin were Jews, and that about the same percentage of the great and lucrative businesses of all sorts in Germany were in the hands of the Jewish race!" (S.L. Clemens, "Concerning the Jews," Literary Essays, p. 263.)

199. Clemens, "Stirring Times in Austria," Harper's Magazine, LXXXXVI (March, 1898), p. 540.

This statement brought many letters to Twain from Jews in the United States who read his article in Harper's Magazine. One letter in particular, from a Jewish lawyer, prompted Twain to write "Concerning the Jews." In this essay, Mark Twain tackles a delicate question with his customary blunt and forthright approach. It is an admirable attempt to analyze objectively the reasons for anti-Semitic prejudice. It is peculiarly unemotional to have come from the pen of Mark Twain and yet his personal reactions are clearly discernible. He attempts to examine both sides of the question but he is obviously biased in favor of the Jews. De Voto's estimate of the essay is an accurate appraisal:

> The essay sets out to explain anti-Semitism. It is not, in my opinion, a very profound or very searching analysis, but certainly it is extremely favorable to the Jews ...
>
> "Concerning the Jews" is not, I have said, an exhaustive analysis of the history of anti-Semitism. But certainly it is a warm-hearted expression of Mark Twain's lifelong liking and admiration for the Jews ... There are in the Mark Twain Papers, of which I am now the custodian, many unpublished expressions of this same liking and admiration.[200]

"Concerning the Jews" opens with a quotation from the Jewish lawyer's letter:

> "The show of military force in the Austrian Parliament, which precipitated the riots, was not introduced by any Jew. No Jew was a member of that body. No Jewish question was involved in the Ausgleich or in the language proposition. No Jew was insulting anybody. In short, no Jew was doing any mischief toward anybody whatsoever. In fact, the Jews were the only ones of the nineteen different races in Austria which did not have a party -- they are absolutely non-participants. Yet, in your article you say that in the rioting which followed, all classes of people were unanimous only on one thing, viz., in being against the Jews. Now will you kindly tell me why, in your judgment, the Jews have thus ever been, and are even now, in these days of supposed intelligence,

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200. De Voto, "Mark Twain About the Jews," pp. 7-9.

the butt of baseless, vicious animosities?"[201]

Twain begins his answer by saying that if he though himself prejudiced against the Jew, "I should hold it fairest to leave this subject to a person not crippled in that way. But I think I have no such prejudice."[202] It doesn't occur to him that he is prejudiced in favor of the Jew and that such an attitude can be just as crippling in a supposed objective discussion.

Twain continues this theme with a remark that unintentionally stresses one of the major qualities of Twain's writings:

> A few years ago a Jew observed to me that there was no discourteous reference to his people in my books, and asked how it happened. It happened because the disposition was lacking.[203]

Twain means that he had never made a discourteous reference to the Jewish race because he had no unkind feelings toward the Jews. Actually, it would seem safe to assume that had an opportunity arisen for satire at their expense, Mark Twain would have used it, as he did in the case of two other races for whom he had great sympathy, the Chinese and the Negro.

Twain defines his terms by saying, "In the present paper I shall allow myself to use the word Jew as if it stood for both religion and race,"[204] and then he lists the six points which the Jewish lawyer had made in his letter:

> In the above letter one notes these points:
> 1. The Jew is a well-behaved citizen.
> 2. Can ignorance and fanaticism alone account for his unjust treatment?
> 3. Can Jews do anything to improve the situation?
> 4. The Jews have no party; they are non-participants.

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201. S.L. Clemens, "Concerning the Jews,"pp. 250-1.

202. Ibid., p. 251.

203. Ibid., p. 251.

204. Ibid., p. 252.

5. Will the persecution ever come to an end?
6. What has become of the golden rule?[205]

The above listing is a useful summary of "Concerning the Jews" because in his essay Twain addresses himself to the answering of the points and except for the fact that he answers no. 4 before no. 3, does so in the order they are listed.

With the first point, Twain is in complete agreement:

> Point no. 1. --'The Jew is a well-behaved citizen.'
> The Jew is not a disturber of the peace of any country ... he is quiet, peaceable, industrious, unaddicted to high crimes and brutal dispositions ... his family life is commendable ... he is not a burden upon public charities ... he is not a beggar ... in benevolence he is above the reach of competition. These are the very quintessentials of good citizenship. If you can add that he is as honest as the average of his neighbors -- But I think that question is affirmatively answered by the fact that he is a successful business man.[206]

The sweeping generalizations are an example of Twain's customary approach to a problem. Positive statements without qualification were always his way of emphasizing his ideas. His notion of the incomparable benevolence of the Jewish race he had expressed earlier in the essay[207] and a few years afterward in the Autobiography, when discussing the Russian Revolutionists' cause with one of their leaders who was in America to raise funds:

> The Jew has always been benevolent. Suffering can always move a Jew's heart and tax his pocket to the limit. He will be at your mass meetings.[208]

The concluding statement in Twain's discussion of the good citizenship of the Jew, that success in business automatically means honesty, is

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205. Ibid., pp. 252-3.

206. Ibid., pp. 253-5.

207. "His race is entitled to be called the most benevolent of all the races of men." (Ibid., p. 253.)

208. Clemens, Autobiography, II, p. 294.

one of the most amazingly naive remarks he ever uttered. He develops the idea more thoroughly and in so doing, his usual cynicism about human nature (by this time a corrosive force in his thinking), fails him completely. His admiration for the Jews has apparently acted as a blind spot or he would never be able to proclaim that the business success of any man (not necessarily Jewish) is unmitigated proof of his honesty:

> The basis of successful business is honesty; a business cannot thrive where the partners to it cannot trust each other. In the matter of numbers the Jew counts for little in the overwhelming population of New York; but that his honesty counts for much is guaranteed by the fact that the immense wholesale business of Broadway, from the Battery to Union Square, is substantially in his hands.[209]

Twain's discussion of the citizenship of the Jew contains a summary of the charges traditionally lodged against the Jewish race:

> He has a reputation for various small forms of cheating, and for practising oppressive usury, and for burning himself out to get the insurance, etc. -- ... for smart evasions which find him safe and comfortable just within the strict letter of the law, when court and jury know very well that he has violated the spirit of it ... He is charged with an unpatriotic disinclination to stand by the flag as a soldier.[210]

Having paid recognition to these familiar attacks, Twain points out that many Christians are guilty of the same offences and concludes:

> ... the merits and demerits being fairly weighed and measured on both sides, the Christian can claim no superiority over the Jew in the matter of good citizenship.[211]

Turning to the second question raised by the Jewish lawyer, "Can fanaticism alone account for this?", Twain writes, "Indeed, it is now my conviction that it is responsible for hardly any of it."[212] He proceeds to

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209. Clemens, "Concerning the Jews," pp. 254-5.

210. Ibid., p. 257.

211. Ibid., p. 257.

212. Ibid., p. 257.

cite as proof the story of Joseph in Egypt who secured possession of all the grain and cattle until the people came to him and offered themselves as slaves. His point in referring to the story is the intellectual superiority of the Jewish race and their ability to get ahead of other peoples. Putting his own interpretation upon it, he asks:

> Is it presumable that the eye of Egypt was upon Joseph, the foreign Jew, all this time? I think it likely. Was it friendly? We must doubt it. Was Joseph establishing a character for his race which would survive long in Egypt? And in time would his name come to be familiarly used to express that character -- like Shylock's? It is hardly to be doubted. Let us remember that this was centuries before the crucifixion.[213]

As further proof that the Jews were persecuted as a race before they were persecuted on a religious basis, Twain refers to a statement he once read in a Latin historian:

> It was alluding to a time when people were still living who could have seen the Saviour in the flesh. Christianity was so new that the people of Rome had hardly heard of it, and had but confused notions of what it was. The substance of the remark was this: Some Christians were persecuted in Rome through error, they being mistaken for Jews!
>
> ... May I not assume, then, that the persecution of the Jews is a thing which antedates Christianity and was not born of Christianity? I think so.[214]

With these two proofs of pre-Christian persecution, the one theoretical, the other sufficiently vague to make it unconvincing, Mark Twain inquires into the origin of anti-Semitic feeling. He reviews the times in history when the Jew has been subject to mass banishment from a country because he has gained too much commercial power, as in England during the reign of King John or when his activities have been curtailed by law. He mentions again the complaints against Jewish storekeepers, quoted earlier from Innocents Abroad:

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213. Ibid., p. 258.

214. Ibid., p. 259.

> In the cotton States, after the war, the simple and ignorant negroes made the crops for the white planters on shares. The Jew came down in force, set up shop on the plantation, supplied all the negro's wants on credit, and at the end of the season was proprietor of the negro's share of the present crop and of part of his share of the next one. Before long, the whites detested the Jew, and it is doubtful if the negro loved him.[215]

Twain concludes from the historical evidence he cites, that the reason for anti-Jewish feeling since pre-Christian times is the Jew's superior ability to make money:

> I am convinced that the persecution of the Jew is not due in any large degree to religious prejudice.
>
> No, the Jew is a money-getter; and in getting his money he is a very serious obstruction to less capable neighbors who are on the same quest. I think that that is the trouble ... He was at in Egypt thirty-six centuries ago; he was at it in Rome when that Christian got persecuted by mistake for him; he has been at it ever since. The cost to him has been heavy; his success has made the whole human race his enemy.[216]

Thus does Mark Twain explain practically all the persecution of the Jews throughout history as due to the inferiority and consequent envoy of other races, who have resented the superior intelligence of the Jew which has enabled him to make money faster than his neighbors and excel them at their trades. The Jewish ability to make money is always a result of his superior intelligence, according to Twain. That he is sympathetic to the Jewish side of the question is evident in his statement that:

> Ages of restriction to the one tool which the law was not able to take from him -- his brain -- have made that tool singularly competent; ages of compulsory disuse of his hands have atrophied them, and he never uses them now. This history has a very, very commercial look, a most sordid and practical commercial look, the business aspect of a Chinese cheap-labor crusade.[217]

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215. Ibid., p. 260.

216. Ibid., p. 264-5.

217. Ibid., p. 261.

Twain next takes up point no. 4 and here a note of resentment, which he has heretofore criticized, appears. He addresses the lawyer in accusing terms:

> Point no. 4 -- 'The Jews have no party; they are non-participants.'
> It seems hardly a credit to the race that it is able to say that; or to you, sir, that you can say it without remorse; more, that you should offer it as a plea against maltreatment, injustice, and oppression. Who gives the Jew the right, who gives any race the right, to sit still, in a free country, and let somebody else look after its safety?[218]

Twain urges that the Jews take upon themselves political responsibility, saying that "With all his splendid capacities and all his fat wealth he is today not politically important in any country.[219] His use of the adjective "fat" in regard to wealth carries an unflattering connotation, a suggestion of greed.

Twain's indifference to accurate use of statistics is apparent in his discussion of point no. 4. He writes:

> As to your numerical weakness. I mentioned some figures awhile ago -- 500,000 -- as the Jewish population of Germany. I will add some more -- 6,000,000 in Russia, 5,000,000 in Austria, 250,000 in the United States. I take them from memory; I read them in the Encyclopedia Britannica about ten years ago, Still, I am entirely sure of them[220]

Twain ends his discussion of point no. 4 with a reference to the large Jewish population in America which could, he feels, make itself felt politically:

> Look at the city of New York; and look at Boston, and Philadelphia, and New Orleans, and Chicago, and Cincinnati, and San Francisco -- how your race swarms in those places! -- and everywhere else in America down to the least little village.[221]

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218. Ibid., p. 265.

219. Ibid., p. 266.

220. Ibid., p. 267.

221. Ibid., p. 268.

Again Twain's choice of words, this time "swarm", has an unflattering implication. He is in danger of contradicting himself when he points to New York as one of the places where the Jewish race "swarms", having previously written the "in the matter of numbers the Jew counts for little in the overwhelming population of New York."[222]

Taking up point no. 3, "Can Jews do anything to improve the situation?", Mark Twain offers some definite, practical advice, namely, organize:

> (1) In England and America, put every Jew on the census book as a Jew (in case you have not been doing that). (2) Get up volunteer regiments composed of Jews solely, and when the drum beats, fall in and go to the front, so as to remove the reproach ... that you feed on a country but don't like to fight for it. (3) Next, in politics, organize your strength, band together, and deliver the casting vote where you can, and where you can't, compel as good terms as possible ... (4) And then from America and England you can encourage your race in Austria, France, and Germany, and materially help it ...[223]

Twain's suggestions about organizing remind him of a plan he has heard of to get all the Jews together in Palestine, with a government of their own. He objects to the idea, advanced by a Dr. Herzl, thus repudiating the validity of his own suggestion to the Jews to organize. With the inconsistency typical of him Twain fails to realize that Dr. Herzl's plan is merely a logical extension of his own advice. His opinion on the subject of a Jewish homeland, however, is extremely interesting in the light of events which have taken place just thirty-eight years since his death:

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222. Again later, he writes, "I may, of course, be mistaken, but I am strongly of the opinion that we have an immense Jewish population in America" (Ibid., p. 270), a remark that reveals once more his indifference to exact statistics.

223. Ibid., p. 270-1.

> I am not objecting; but if that concentration of the cunningest brains in the world was going to be made in a free country (bar Scotland), I think it would be politic to stop it. It will not be well to let that race find out its strength. If the horses knew theirs we should not ride any more.[224]

In answer to point no. 5, "Will the persecution of the Jews ever come to an end?", Twain writes that he believes it already has on a religious basis (since in his opinion this was only a small factor), but that in terms of race prejudice and trade, it will continue, at least among lower civilizations:

> Among the high civilizations he seems to be very comfortably situated indeed, and to have more than his proportionate share of the prosperities going.[225]

Twain's answer to the final point, "what has become of the golden rule?" is phrased in his familiar humorous style:

> It exists, it continues to sparkle, and is well taken care of. It is Exhibit A in the Church's assets, and we pull it out every Sunday and give it an airing ... It has never been introduced into business; and Jewish persecution is not a religious passion, it is a business passion.[226]

The conclusion of "Concerning the Jews" is a dramatic tribute to the Jewish race, expressing the full measure of Twain's admiration:

> To conclude. -- ... The Jews constitute but one per cent of the human race ... Properly the Jew ought hardly to be heard of; but he is heard of, has always been heard of ... He has made a marvelous fight in this world, in all the ages; and has done it with his hands tied behind him. He could be vain of himself, and be excused for it ... other peoples have sprung up and held their torch high for a time, but it burned out, and they sit in Twilight now, or have vanished. The Jew saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no

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224. Ibid., p. 272.

225. Ibid., p. 273.

226. Ibid., p. 274.

> slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass but he remains.[227]

"Concerning the Jews" is unique among Mark Twain's essays as his most successful attempt to examine a question impartially. He does discuss both the points in favor of the Jewish race and those against it but his interpretation is colored by his high regard for the Jews. His habit of dwelling on one factor and viewing all the others in the light of it (In this case, the Jewish race's intellectual superiority), oversimplifies the question and makes it, instead of an objective study, a vehicle for one of Mark Twain's pet ideas. Despite this flaw, it is a remarkable effort on Twain's part. The tine of his remarks is unusually free from humorous asides or violent accusations. There is a methodical handling of the various points, perhaps because he is replying to a lawyer and wishes to prove his ability to discuss the matter in a clear and logical way. Only once or twice does he indulge in criticism of the Jewish race. Only once or twice does he suggest the resentment on which he places the blame for prejudice and persecution and that seems to be an unconscious repetition of traditional expressions.

It would be tempting to believe that the unemotional tone of the essay is because it was written in Mark Twain's old age, the supposition being that he had mellowed enough to allow him to write without rancor. Though his Autobiography is proof that Twain had mellowed somewhat, still there are sufficient passages in it and in other writings of the last years which show Mark Twain as aggressive as ever. King Leopold's Soliloquy (1905) and "A Defense of General Funston" (1902) reveal him attacking with

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227. Ibid., p. 275.

all the old powers the mistreatment of native minorities by conquering white men. No, "Concerning the Jews" represents Mark Twain in a rare mood and re-emphasizes how unpredictable his moods were.

"Concerning the Jews" is not a comprehensive study; Twain does not examine the many factors involved in the complicated question of race prejudice but he believed he had the answer. His essay was not dashed off in the heat of the moment; Twain wrote it thoughtfully and devoted time to it, as his letter to Henry Rogers testifies, and it remains a sincere expression of his almost unqualified admiration for the Jewish race. De Voto tells us that Twain made many similar statements in his unpublished writings, so "Concerning the Jews" may be considered a crystallization of one of Mark Twain's lifelong attitudes.

Mark Twain's attitude toward the Jewish race and his literary treatment of it contains some of the sympathy for the underdog so marked in his discussion of the Chinese minority in America. In common with his personal acquaintance with the negro, Twain had many friends among the Jews, and so his remarks stem, in part, from a reliable source, and not, as in the case of the Indian, from report and reputation. Significantly, however, his Jewish friends were representative of the cultivated, talented, well educated members of the race, and so they increased his already profound admiration for the intellectual energy of the Jewish people. He was right when he said that he was not prejudiced against the Jews but he <u>was</u> prejudiced for them and tended to view them solely in the light of abused, unfortunate peoples. It is to his credit that he did not subscribe to the prevalent antagonism against the Jew in Vienna, but rather sought, in his own way, to understand the reasons behind the antagonism.

The emotional element, it has been noted, is surprisingly lacking in

"Concerning the Jews." The tone is dispassionate throughout and there is no attempt at theatrical effect. Twain's democratic nature compels him to look upon the Jew as an abused minority, but over and above all, Mark Twain pleads the Jewish cause because of his tremendous respect for their intellectual ability. This is the reason for his bias in their favor, far more than a personal affection (as in the case of the negro) or a democratic sympathy for the underdog (as in the case of the Chinese). It is the ultimate explanation of his relatively calm, unemotional treatment of the subject. He is able to assume the role of detached observer because his attitude is based on an impersonal factor; his personal reaction is not involved. It is one of the few times in his life when this was so. "Concerning the Jews" offers a Mark Twain unfamiliar to most readers, accustomed only to the humorous artist. He was a man of constantly changing moods and "Concerning the Jews" is one of the best reminders of the many facets which made up his complex and brilliant personality.

Conclusion

In Mark Twain's lifetime, the concept of racial minorities as a collective group had not yet been formulated. A war had been fought in which the rights of one racial minority was an issue, but Mark Twain, in common with other Americans in the nineteenth century, was not thinking in terms of the rights of racial minorities as a whole. It is important to make this distinction in considering his attitude toward racial groups; otherwise there is a temptation to interpret him from the twentieth instead of the nineteenth century point of view.

Mark Twain's own particular attitude toward racial minorities was a result of the emotional and democratic factors that shaped his point of view on all subjects. He was not inclined to objectivity or impartiality; temperamentally, he reacted according to impulse and momentary interest. He reduced everything to personal terms as far as possible[1] and his measure of judgement was the simple standard of right and wrong that prevailed on the frontier of his youth. He was predisposed to take the side of the underdog whether he knew the facts involved or not. Twain's sympathy toward the Chinese minorities in Virginia City and San Francisco was for a group unable to protect itself against abuses. It was the democratic principle at stake, more than the particular minority, that he was defending. The defense of the underdog was also a factor in his eloquent plea for the Negro

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1. He once wrote in his notebook, "If you attempt to create a wholly imaginary incident, adventure or situation, you will go astray and the artificiality of the thing will be detectable, but if you found on a fact in your personal experience it is an acorn, a root, and every created odornment that frows up out of it, and spreads its foliage and blossoms to the sun will seem reality, not inventions." (Paine (ed.), Mark Twain's Notebook, p. 192-3).

race but here his intimate knowledge of the race combined with his fierce espousal of democratic ideals to make his most successful statement of the rights of a racial minority. His defense of the Jews again was based on the championship of the underdog but admiration for one quality of the Jewish people, their intellectual ability, was the keystone of his argument, and the principal reason for his siding with them. These three racial minorities Mark Twain defended. Sympathy for the underdog may be called the unifying factor present in his attitude toward all three, but personal bias, different in each case, made each defense take a different form. When it came to the American Indian, the democratic factor in his makeup deserted Twain completely, and only the emotional remained. It is a perfect example of how his personal reactions swayed his opinions and blinded him sometimes to the facts.

So much for Mark Twain's attitude toward the four racial minorities. His literary treatment of them, with the exception of the Negro, exists mostly in his essays and travel books. He invented a Chinese character, Ah Song Hi, in the "Goldsmith" letters, but Twain was not interested in him as an artistic creation. He was merely a name; the important thing was the description of abuses he endured. Injun Joe has become a classic figure in American literature and is a truly artistic creation. Drawn with simple forceful strokes he is more convincing as pure melodrama than as an example of type. Mark Twain translated the negro race most fully into his art. Uncle Dan'l, Nigger Jim and Roxy are the outstanding characters but there are occasional glimpses of Negroes all through his writing. Nigger Jim is the better known because he is a principal figure in Twain's greatest book, but Roxy is the most perfectly realized racial type in all of his fiction. Mark Twain never created a Jewish character. His writings on that race are the most thoughtful and the most objective in all his literary

treatment of racial minorities.

Inevitably, because he was above all else a humorous artist, much of Mark Twain's characteristic humor is present in his literary consideration of racial minorities. It is least evident in the remarks on the Jews and Chinese, most evident in the comments on the Indian, and about equally present with the serious tone in his picture of the Negro race.

It is possible to detect a pattern in Mark Twain's literary treatment of these four groups, although as stressed earlier, this does not indicate a conscious intention on his part. In the period of the early 1870's, when his literary career was just well launched, Mark Twain wrote mostly about his adventures in the west and so the two racial groups that impressed him in those early years figure in his work, the Chinese and the Indian. They do not appear again, with the exception of Injun Joe (and he occurs as a memory of Hannibal, not the far West), because Twain did not write again about the environment that called them to mind. In the middle period of his life, roughly 1875 to 1895, the most productive from the standpoint of art, Twain turned often to the days of his childhood as a subject for his fiction. Negroes were a part of the era which was to become his most successful raw material and as he repeatedly turned his enriched perception backward on that era his portrait of the Negro slave type he had known took on a profundity which his characterizations of the Chinese and Indian never achieved. Twain's remarks on the Negro and his artistic portrayal of him extend over his whole life and a gradual change from the thoughtless, though still affectionate, attitude of the pre-war South to a more discerning, democratic attitude as the western influence replaced the Southern, may be discerned. Because Negroes in his childhood were almost as close to him as white people, and were consequently an inseparable part

of the childhood he preserved in his best art, Twain was more concerned with them as a mistreated minority than with the other three groups. Almost all of his writings about the Jewish race occurred in his old age. Apparently Twain had never had sufficient contact with the race until then to feel the urge to write about them. When he did turn his attention to them it was a specific incident that inspired him to express the admiration he had always felt for them. The fact that he had such a deep respect for their intellectual powers must also have acted as a restraining influence. He had respect and sympathy for the Chinese and Negro, too, but it was of a different kind, a kind which permitted him to make them the object of his humor.

Although Mark Twain's subjective point of view and emotional reactions invalidate some of his observations on racial minorities, he was never less than honest in the expression of his ideas. He was liberal in what he advocated (with the exception of his remarks on the Indian!), although his personal reactions were sometimes of equal motivation with his democratic idealism. He was naturally not concerned with how social injustice could be eradicated. He was a great satirist of human nature and was therefore concerned with the fact of social injustice in American democracy. The democratic spirit in Mark Twain's writing has significance for our time and an examination of his life and work compels the admission that were he alive today he would be in complete accord with the civil rights movement which has become so prominent in the thirty-nine years since his death. As one of his critics has written:

> We must take it for granted that he had little insight into the objective state of society and that he lacked the contemplative faculty. But the weaknesses of 'the Great Youth' are nothing but the weaknesses of young America. He was a typical

American; the characteristics of modern Americans are seen in him in a crude form. The popular advocate of social justice has been dead a quarter of a century, and among the Americans of today, 'social justice' is becoming more and more a catchword. His opinions against despotism, racial prejudice, the corruption of public men, and the formality of religious faith are of fresh interest in the light of the existing facts of the world.[2]

2. Hamada, op. cit., p. 615.

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