

## Twain Mark: Quotes and Notes

"It is curious that physical courage should be so common in the world and moral courage so rare."

Patriotism is supporting your *country* all the time, and your *government* when it deserves it.

"Write without pay until someone offers. If no one offers within three years, the candidate may look upon this as a sign that sawing wood is what he was intended to do."

from *Roughing It*:

On the Mormon Bible: "chloroform in print." (Vol. I, 110)

"Three months of camp life on Lake Tahoe would restore an Egyptian mummy to his pristine vigor, and give him an appetite like an alligator. I do not mean the oldest and driest mummies, of course, but the fresher ones." (Vol. I, 158)

"We found him standing on a table in a saloon, with an old tin lantern in one hand and the school report in the other, haranguing a gang of intoxicated Cornish miners on the iniquity of squandering the public moneys on education 'when hundreds and hundreds of honest hard-working men are literally starving for whiskey.' [Riotous applause.]" (Vol. II, 10)

"They are a kindly-disposed, well-meaning race, and are respected and well treated by the upper classes, all over the Pacific coast. No Californian 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 elsewhere in America." (Vol. II, 112)

"Writing is easy. All you have to do is cross out the wrong words."

"I bring you the stately matron named Christendom, returning bedraggled, besmirched, and dishonored from pirate raids in ..., with her soul full of meanness, her pocket full of boodle, and her mouth full of pious hypocrisies." via Zinn, p. 321

"It is inexplicable that God would endure all this with lightning so cheap.

Man was made at the end of a week's work, when God was tired.

There are patriots who cannot love God because he was a foreigner.

I wonder if God invented man because he was disappointed in the monkey." via Holbrook

"As if there was much of anything in any human utterance *except* plagiarism!... For substantially all ideas are second-hand, consciously and unconsciously drawn from a million outside sources." Twain in letter to Helen Keller

"In religion and politics people's beliefs and convictions are in almost every case gotten at second-hand, and without examination, from authorities who have not themselves examined the questions at issue but have taken them at second-hand from other non-examiners, whose opinions about them were not worth a brass farthing."

"Twenty years from now you'll be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than by the ones you did do. So throw off the bowline, sail away from the safe harbor. Catch the trade winds in your sails. Explore, dream discover."

"Nowadays everybody is doing something about the weather but nobody is talking about it."  
Mark Twain via Stephen Schneider

"We'll drag the Natives down to our level."  
Mark Twain in Pipe Springs film

"Banks will lend you money if you can prove you don't need it."

"All you need in this life is ignorance and confidence; then success is sure."

"A mine is a hole in the ground with a liar on top."

"Beware of health books. You might die of a misprint."

Mark Twain (via R Gesteland)

The elastic heart of youth cannot be compressed into one constrained shape long at a time. in  
The Adventures of Tom Sawyer

"Facts are stubborn, but statistics are more pliable."

"In the first place, God made idiots. This was for practice. Then He made School Boards."

"The main distinguishing characteristic between man and the lower animals is the desire to take pills."

"A man who carries a cat by the tail learns something he can learn in no other way."

"It's not the figures lying I'm worried about, it's the liars figuring."

Mark Twain pointed out over a century ago, the only truly prominent community that  
fundamentalists have so far established in any world, real or imaginary, is hell.  
Go to Heaven for the climate, Hell for the company.

"There is a kind of bad citizenship which is taught in the schools, but no real good citizenship  
taught ...Patriotism, yes...but patriotism is usually the refuge of the scoundrel. He is the man who  
talks the loudest. ...place citizenship above mathematics and literature...that is where it belongs."

"There is something fascinating about science. One gets such wholesale returns of conjecture out  
of such a trifling investment of fact."

"In the West, whiskey is for drinking. Water is for fighting over."

"Buy land. They're not making it anymore."

" a writer ought to comfort the afflicted, and afflict the comfortable. "

"The only difference between fiction and nonfiction is that fiction should be completely  
believable."

"The seventieth birthday! It is the time of life when you arrive at a new and awful dignity; when  
you may throw aside the decent reserves which have oppressed you for a generation and stand  
unafraid and unabashed upon your seven-terraced summit and look down and teach –  
unrebuked. You can tell the world how you got there. It is what they all do. ..."

"What a little part of a person's life are his acts and his words! His real life is led in his head and is  
known to none but himself...His acts and his words are merely the visible, thin crust of his  
world...The mass of him is hidden...Biographies are but the clothes and buttons of the man – the  
biography of the man himself cannot be written."

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

Comments and quotes by Fishkin – see pdf:

"My father was a St. Bernard, my mother was a collie, but I am a Presbyterian."

writing great opening sentence.

'He knew that our feet often danced to tunes that had somehow remained beyond our hearing; with perfect pitch he played them back to us.'

"...there is only one thing that can be called by the wide name 'American'. That is the national devotion to ice-water."

'Mark Twain listened.'

Comments and quotes by Arthur Miller in Fishkin pdf:

"I suppose we must expect to drift into monarchy by and by....in our blood and bone we carry the seeds of which monarchies and aristocracies are grown: worship of gauds, titles, distinction, power...We have to be despised by somebody whom we regard as above us, or we are not happy; we have to have somebody to worship and envy, or we are not content...we worship money and the possessors of it – they being our aristocracy..."

'the artist is a liar...who tells lies that are like truth.'

'...the human mind loves the lie which ironically can be made beautiful in the shape of art.'

"How easy it is to make people believe a lie, and how hard it is to undo that work again!"

"When I was younger, I could remember anything, whether it had happened or not; but my faculties are decaying now, and soon I shall be so I cannot remember any but the things that happened."

"Supposing is good, but finding out is better."

"Man is the Deity's favorite, you know...after the housefly."

"I have been through some terrible things in my life, some of which actually happened."

The difference between the *almost right* word and the *right* word is really a large matter—'tis the difference between the lightning-bug and the lightning.

If you tell the truth you don't have to remember anything.

Humor is the great thing, the saving thing. The minute it crops up, all our hardnesses yield, all our irritations and resentments flit away and a sunny spirit takes their place.

A powerful agent is the right word. Whenever we come upon one of those intensely right words in a book or a newspaper the resulting effect is physical as well as spiritual, and electrically prompt.

Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it sorely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one's lifetime.

You can't depend on your eyes when your imagination is out of focus.

'My country, right or wrong, my country!' How absolutely absurd is such an idea. How absolutely absurd to teach this idea to the youth of the country.

Never let your schooling interfere with your education.

It ain't those parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand.

"...noble poetry...some clever fables; and some blood-drenched history; ... a wealth of obscenity; and upwards of a thousand lies." on the Bible  
"It is perhaps the most damnatory biography that exists in print anywhere." on God in Old Testament

A lie can make it half way around the world before the truth has time to put its boots on.

Fiction is obliged to stick to possibilities; truth is not.

There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics.

Golf is a good walk spoiled.

A banker is a fellow who lends you his umbrella when the sun is shining, but wants it back the minute it begins to rain.

Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things you didn't do than by the ones you did do

It is better to keep your mouth shut and appear stupid than to open it and remove all doubt.

The secret of getting ahead is getting started

Often misattributed to Twain, this is actually by [Blaise Pascal](#), "Lettres provinciales", letter 16, 1657:

*Je n'ai fait celle-ci plus longue que parce que je n'ai pas eu le loisir de la faire plus courte.*

Translation: I have only made this [letter] longer, because I have not had the time to make it shorter.

"The source of all humor is not laughter but sorrow."

There ought to be a room in every house to swear in. It's dangerous to have to repress an emotion like that."

"I think I can say, and say with pride, that we have some legislatures that bring higher prices than any in the world."

'The two **most important days** in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why.'

'**Education**: the path from cocky **ignorance** to miserable uncertainty.'

"He is said to have bought legislatures and judges as other men buy food...By his example he has so excused and so sweetened corruption that in Montana it no longer has an offensive smell."

Mark Twain on copper tycoon W A Clark

"The human race has unquestionably one really effective weapon – laughter...Against the assault of laughter nothing can stand."

"...they vanish from a world where they were of no consequence; where they achieved nothing; where they were a mistake and a failure and a foolishness; where they left no sign that they had existed – a world which will lament them for a day and forget them forever."  
from What is Man?

"I scatter from one interest to another, lingering nowhere. I am not a bee. I am a lightning bug."

"Satirize all human grandeurs and vanities."

Twain had '...a burning hatred of all forms of intolerance, tyranny, and injustice, an abhorance of cant and pretension, a passion for human freedom, a fierce pride in human dignity, a love for people and for life, a frank and open contempt of the mean, the cruel, the selfish, the small and petty....

He was convinced that the best way to fight evil, dogmatism and bigotry was by exaggerating their excesses and painting them in colors of lurid absurdity...

His humor ... cuts through social and political pretenses, defended and enriched the democratic heritage of the American people, and helped Americans understand themselves and their world.'

Philip S Foner in Social Critic – see pdf

The text had "clarity of statement, directness, simplicity, manifest truthfulness, fairness and justice toward friend and foe alike and avoidance of flowery speech"—to quote Mark Twain on the memoirs of another nonprofessional writer, Ulysses S. Grant.

It was a time of great and exalting excitement. The country was up in arms, the war was on, in every breast burned the holy fire of patriotism; the drums were beating, the bands playing, the toy pistols popping, the bunched firecrackers hissing and spluttering; on every hand and far down the receding and fading spread of roofs and balconies a fluttering wilderness of flags flashed in the sun; daily the young volunteers marched down the wide avenue gay and fine in their new uniforms, the proud fathers and mothers and sisters and sweethearts cheering them with voices choked with happy emotion as they swung by; nightly the packed mass meetings listened, panting, to patriot oratory which stirred the deepest deeps of their hearts, and which they interrupted at briefest intervals with cyclones of applause, the tears running down their cheeks the while; in the churches the pastors preached devotion to flag and country, and invoked the God of Battles beseeching His aid in our good cause in outpourings of fervid eloquence which moved every listener.

from The War Prayer

"None but the dead are permitted to tell the truth."

"The difference between the *almost right* word and the *right* word is really a large matter."

Don't part with your illusions. When they are gone you may still exist, but you have ceased to live.

Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don't mind, it doesn't matter.

Samuel Clemens' father (from autobio):

"Cling to the land and wait."

Twain apparently said (jokingly?): I have no liking for novels or stories.

from autobio:

"*The side excursions are the life of our life voyage, and should be, also of it's history.*"

“...it does seem such a pity that Noah and his party did not miss the boat.”

From Bio by Suzy:

“... mentally dead people brought their corpses with them for a long visit.”

“...and as for a flag for the Philippine Province, it is easily managed.

...a special one ...just our usual flag, with the white stripes painted black and the stars replaced by the skull and cross-bones.

Lust of conquest had long ago done its work ... There was no principle but commercialism, no patriotism but of the pocket.”

Twain via Dawkins:

‘I do not fear death. I had been dead for billions and billions of years before I was born, and had not suffered the slightest inconvenience from it.’

via Richardson and Boyd pdf:

“We know why Catholics are Catholics, why Presbyterians are Presbyterians, why Baptists are Baptists, why Mormons are Mormons, why thieves are thieves, why monarchists are monarchists, why Republicans are Republicans, and Democrats, Democrats. We know that it is a matter of association and sympathy, not reasoning and examination; that hardly a man in the world has an opinion on morals, politics, and religion that he got otherwise than through his associations and sympathies.”

on plagiarism:

I know one thing--that a certain amount of pride always goes along with a teaspoonful of brains, and that this pride protects a man from deliberately stealing other people's ideas. That is what a teaspoonful of brains will do for a man--and admirers had often told me I had nearly a basketful--though they were rather reserved as to the size of the basket.

on liberals:

‘The radical of one century is the conservative of the next. The radical invents the views. When he has worn them out the conservative adopts them.’ via Henrietta Hay, GJ, CO.

Huck Finn:

‘Hain’t we got all the fools in town on our side? And ain’t that a big enough majority in any town?’

Twain on journalism, via James Burke:

“In the real world the right thing never happens in the right place at the right time. It is the task of journalists and historians to rectify this error.”

Twain on aging..

Age is an issue of mind over matter. If you don’t mind, it doesn’t matter.

How easy it is to make people believe a lie, and how hard it is to undo that work again.

on photography:

1905 satire King Leopold’s Soliloquy...mad king of the Congo rails against the “sore calamity of the kodak,”...The camera... is the only witness . . . I couldn’t bribe. . . .

we do not wish to look... most people will “shudder and turn away from the evidence

“That is my protection,” the king crows. “I know the human race.”