

The
RESURRECTION
of
SAMUEL CLEMENS

by Blackbird Crow Raven

FOREWORD

Who really was Mark Twain? Perhaps it's easier to define this complex man first in terms of who he *wasn't*: Mark Twain was not a one-dimensional person, a specialist who concentrated all his time and energies on one area of expertise.

Who was he, more specifically? Twain was a humorist; he was a social commentator and critic; he was a philosopher, known for his wise aphorisms; he was a lecturer and world traveler; he had been a Mississippi riverboat pilot, a prospector and miner, a newspaper reporter, an inventor and an entrepreneur, and--albeit very briefly, and only as an 'irregular' (as a member of the "Marion County Rangers")--a soldier in the civil war. Probably most important, though, Mark Twain was a writer of prose.

And what prose it was. As a book author, Twain is best known for *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Those two novels, as great as they are, by no means represent the bulk of Twain's efforts, nor do they accurately depict the flavor and nature of the whole body of his work.

Mark Twain has enhanced, and still enhances, the lives of millions through his irreverent, insightful, and incisive writings. Twain's style, built from hyperbole, meiosis, self-deprecation, unexpected contrasts, wry understatement juxtaposed against wildly exaggerated burlesques, his conversational style, and 'his ability to write humorously about issues that made him seethe with anger,' helped forged a body of literary work that remains a unique international treasure.

Even if you haven't read any of Twain's work (which would be strange, indeed, given the immense popularity of 'Tom Sawyer' and 'Huck Finn'), you've doubtless been exposed to artists who have been strongly influenced by him, such as writers Langston Hughes (especially his 'Simple' stories), Ernest Hemingway, Jack Kerouac, Bill Bryson, O. Henry (Sidney Porter), Hunter S. Thompson, songwriters Bob Dylan and Jimmy Buffett, cartoonist Chuck Jones, comedian Dick Gregory, the hippies (Twain spoke out against police brutality in the '60s—the 1860s, that is—in San Francisco, and against war in general and the war in the Philippines in particular), as well as many others, including entire publications such as *Mad* magazine. Many movies based on Twain stories have been produced, including but not limited to *Crossed Swords*, *The Double-Barreled Detective Story*, *The Million Pound Note*, *A Million to Juan*, *The Prince and the Pauper*, and *Unidentified Flying Oddball*.

At his core, Mark Twain was a very serious-minded man. He was able to gain a wide and appreciative audience partly due to his knack for finding a way of making his soapbox sermons entertaining, using humor as a vehicle to disarm readers by first thawing and tenderizing their hearts, and then sowing the seeds of his message in this aerated soil.

Mark Twain was a man's man—he lived a rough & tumble boyhood full of the playing of pranks and hooky, and performing the lead role in all sorts of adventures.

Twain was called 'The King' long before Elvis Presley was born. He was also known as 'The Wild Humorist of the Pacific Slope' (a nickname he acquired while working as a newspaper reporter in Virginia City, Nevada), 'The Moralist of the Main', and later 'The Belle of New York.'

Mark Twain is an American icon. Will Rogers said 'I never met a man I didn't like.' Mark Twain probably wouldn't have said that. Nor would I, for that matter, but what I *can* say is: I've never met a man (or woman) who does not like Mark Twain, at least to some extent. I'm sure such an animal exists, but I'm not sure that I'd want to cross paths with it.

Besides 'Tom Sawyer' and 'Huck Finn,' Mark Twain wrote many other entertaining and important works, including but not limited to *Roughing It*, *Life on the Mississippi*, *The Innocents Abroad*, *A Tramp Abroad*, *Following the Equator*, *The Prince and the Pauper*, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, and *The Diary of Adam and Eve*.

The main figure of this book, though, is not Mark Twain the author, adventurer, lecturer, and businessman. Rather, it is Twain's alter ego, the family man Samuel Langhorne Clemens.

Samuel Clemens was above all else a husband and father. His wife Livy bore him four children: a son, Langdon, and three daughters: Susy, Clara, and Jean. Samuel was also a man of many sorrows. Clemens survived practically every member of his family and most of his closest friends. His daughter Clara was the only member of his immediate family still living when Sam died.

Samuel Clemens was born in 1835.

In 1839, Sam's sister Margaret died at nine years of age (Sam was four).

In 1842, Sam's brother Benjamin died at ten years of age (Sam was seven).

In 1847, when Sam was eleven, his father John died at forty-eight.

In 1858, Sam's younger brother Henry died at twenty years of age from injuries received in a steamboat accident.

In 1870, Sam's father-in-law Jervis Langdon died.

In 1872, Sam's son Langdon died. Langdon was only 19 months old at the time.

In 1890, Sam's mother Jane died at eighty-seven.

In 1896, Sam's daughter Susy died.

In 1897, Sam's older brother Orion died.

In 1904, Sam's wife Livy and sister Pamela died.

In 1909, Sam's daughter Jean died. He didn't attend her funeral, but watched the hearse leave from an upstairs window, as he had vowed earlier that he would never again see someone he loved lowered into the ground.

Clara was his only child to survive him; she lived until 1962, when she passed away at the age of 88.

Sam felt responsible for the death of his brother Henry because he had encouraged him to go into the Mississippi steamboating business, and had helped him get the job on the steamship which exploded, mortally injuring Henry. Sam also considered himself culpable in the death of his infant son Langdon, because he took Langdon out on a carriage ride on a cold winter's day, and his son's blanket blew off, exposing his leg for an undetermined length of time before it was noticed. Langdon died a few days later.

Clemens also suffered business reversals, as well as successes. He made a mint as the publisher of Ulysses Grant's memoirs, but lost even more money investing in various technologies, such as the infamous Paige typesetting machine.

Although plagued with more than his share of tragedy and heartache, Samuel Clemens didn't emotionally implode, and resisted the temptation to become self-absorbed and obsessed with only his own problems. He always showed compassion for others—the downtrodden, the disadvantaged, and the dispossessed.

That—one's response to adversity—is the litmus test that shows what is truly in a person's heart. Do they perpetuate the pain, wanting others to suffer along with them (the 'misery loves company' or 'one cloud is lonely' syndrome), or does their suffering make them more cognizant of and sympathetic to the pain of others, moving them to show empathy by doing whatever they can to alleviate, rather than augment, the pain that others bear?

Samuel Clemens fought for justice, fairness, and equality; he fought against oppression, arbitrariness, and phoniness. He waged this fight using the instruments on which he was an incomparable virtuoso—the pen and the typewriter (lover of science and technology that he was, Clemens was one of the first authors to use a typewriter).

Halley's Comet was visible when Clemens was born in 1835 and again when he died in 1910. Its next appearance will be in the year 2061. This story takes place in that year, when 'The Moralists of the Main' is resurrected back to life in a world which, after drastically deteriorating on many fronts, has finally improved dramatically.

CHAPTER I

“Mr. Clemens? Samuel Clemens?”

The long-awaited personage is sitting under an oak tree in a sunlit meadow, with a whole beautiful and broad country landscape arrayed around him. The look on his face reflects alert anticipation mixed with a certain bewilderment.

The middle distance is decorated with rolling green hills dotted with handsome houses perched atop this hill and that and along the creek that wends its way through the valley. Each house is no closer than a hundred yards or so to its nearest neighbor—close enough for borrowing flour and eggs and such, but distant enough to protect privacy and preclude inadvertent participation in one another’s lives. In the far distance, snow-capped mountains surround the valley, and the neighboring valleys, in a protective band. The sun’s beautiful and benevolent rays extend earthward between an evenly distributed accumulation of cumulonimbus clouds. Even where the sun’s rays reach the earth unfiltered, the light is diffuse—the direct sunlight indeed casts shadows, but not harshly. It is not necessary to squint when looking sunward.

It is moderately warm, perfect weather for any kind of outdoor activity—not so cool that you would be tempted to retreat indoors, and not so warm that physical exertion is superfluous to induce perspiration.

No power poles mar the view, nor do any bombastic billboards, gaudy neon signs, or even traffic lights. In fact, the only roads visible are walking paths that connect each house to its neighbors in a network of meandering light brown ribbons. A pair of horses graze in a glen a quarter mile away; a Border Collie pup frolics on the lawn of the nearest home.

It is in this milieu that Sam Clemens finds himself. Dressed in gray pants and a forest green shirt, and resplendent with a luxuriant crop of curly red hair and bushy eyebrows to go along with those fiery blue eyes and that trademark florid mustache, Clemens is an imposing figure, even now when he appears to be—understandably so—more than a little baffled about his surroundings. His eyes now reveal a distinct trace of enjoyment; he seems pleasantly bemused with his situation.

“Yes?” he responds, obviously confused about who I am, what I want,

where he is, and how he got here.

The newcomer looks up at me expectantly, waiting for me to provide him with answers to these questions, which he assumes are obvious and do not require explicit verbalization.

I extend my hand to him and say, “Mr. Clemens, my name is Grant Wakeman. Please call me Grant.”

He stands up, shakes my hand, and replies, “Nice to meet you, Grant. Call me Sam, if you like.”

“All right, I will. Sam, you have reached the starlit strip’s northern terminus.”

Sam shoots a somewhat startled glance at me, then smiles wryly. He looks down for a few seconds, with his chin in his hands. He looks deep into my eyes, trying to read them. Then he gazes into the distance and wonders aloud, “Is it Heaven...or Hell? It must not be heaven, for I see no angels, and the clouds are still above us instead of we being on a level plane with them. And it certainly must not be hell, unless this is some colossal practical joke... I hate practical jokes, you know, Grant.”

“Sam, this is not a practical, nor an impractical, nor a theoretical, nor any other kind of joke. Now if, instead of asking if you were in heaven or hell, you instead asked, ‘Am I in Perdition or Paradise?’, I would be glad to reply ‘Paradise.’ Because such it most certainly is now, this earth you knew so well. Come on in, the water’s fine. You have been given a chance to live here, as I have.

“At death, all sins are paid in full. The highest price you can pay you have already paid. For that reason, those deemed worthy of being resurrected are starting over again with a fresh slate. Not all *are* resurrected—only those who are teachable and would fit in here in our society. And for those that wouldn’t fit in, they wouldn’t like it here, anyway, so it is actually a kindness to them to not bring them back. To us it is a dream come true, but to them it would be nothing more than an irritation and a frustration. You were right not to be afraid of it, Sam—the ‘hereafter,’ that is. You will indeed find things most comfortable here.

“Now you will find out what it’s all for and what the use of it all is: Why we are born—to what and for what. Not all men are driven purely by self-interest, as you—and many others—sometimes asserted. This will be proved to you, and you will also have the opportunity to prove that it is

not true *in your case*.

“From my point of view, you have actually already proved it as regards yourself: In your previous life, you cared for the comfort of others, and since you yourself were not driven by self-interest—at least not always—you of all people should know that it is not always true of all men. You were a very hospitable man, Sam, and not only to those who could reciprocate or do you favors in return—and that’s an important quality. You weren’t the only one like that, either, and so were wrong in lumping all men together in such a way.”

“Grant, I really didn’t mean *everybody*. Don’t you know that I didn’t mean that about Livy, Henry, ...and many others?”

“You’re right, Sam. I knew; or I should have known. I take it back, and I apologize.”

Sam wonders to himself: *So, I’m on the earth still—or again...But where on earth am I, exactly? It is much too beautiful to be a place I have not heard of, and yet it doesn’t look entirely familiar. It could be Switzerland—but no, something tells me otherwise. It could also be Vermont, I guess, but there again I don’t feel at all confident in that supposition.*

Again he bores those eyes—those piercing and fiery, yet kindly, blue eyes of his—into mine. “Where *am I*, Grant?”

“Sam, this is ‘The Undiscovered Country’.”

“I kind of reckoned that. But where, or what, is the Undiscovered Country?”

“The general answer is: you’re still on the earth. The more specific answer is: it’s not Missouri; nor is it Connecticut; nor is it Tennessee, Nevada, California, New York, or New Hampshire. You’re not in the ‘old country,’ either. As you can see, Sam, you need no harp, wreath, halo, hymn-book or palm branch here—and even if you were in heaven, you wouldn’t need those accouterments.”

“You’ve told me where I’m *not*. Where *am I*?”

“This particular spot was under water when you previously lived. The ratio of land to water on earth’s surface has reversed: whereas previously 71% of the earth was covered with water, now it is 71% land—and the oceans are *much* smaller and shallower than they used to be. Rivers and streams are virtually everywhere, but the oceans are now more like large

lakes.”

“This valley was under water! You could knock me down with a feather.”

“Why, Sam?”

“I don’t know, I just didn’t ever expect to live under water.”

“Well, as you can see, it’s not under water any longer. Where did you expect the ‘Undiscovered Country’ to be?”

“Well, nowhere, I guess; I mean, nowhere in particular. I guess I hadn’t really thought about it before. I’d thought about conditions, and heaven and hell, but not a specific location on earth.”

“You’ll get over it, Sam. The surprise, I mean. And once you see what’s in store for you, I expect you will be very glad of your return. The painful things no longer make inroads on our happiness.”

“Why, then, is my pain still remembered? For instance, I can remember each family member and friend—when they died, where I was at the time I heard the news, and how I felt.”

“You can recall painful memories for two reasons, Sam: one is to learn from painful experiences, where applicable, and the second reason is that those things eventually no longer matter anyway.”

“What the dickens! Why do you say they don’t matter?”

“Bad events are reversed. Any pain you experienced can be undone. For every loved one lost in death, he or she is brought back—as you were. And once that is the case, the memory of the pain of their loss, and missing them, no longer seems all that relevant. You don’t really care about pain in the past when you have a paradise in the present that you’re sharing with your loved ones.”

“Do you mean I can see my loved ones again?”

“Sam, do you remember when you said: ‘Marriage—yes, it is the supreme felicity of life. I concede it. And it is also the supreme tragedy of life. The deeper the love the surer the tragedy. And the more disconsolating when it comes.’ I’m glad to tell you that it won’t be long and you can welcome Olivia back again.”

“Livy? When? I would have never thought such a thing was possible.”

“Soon. I can't tell you exactly when, because I don't know myself, but it will be soon. In the meantime you will have time to adjust, acclimatize yourself to your new surroundings and milieu, and prepare for her arrival. And not only Olivia's arrival, but also Jean's, Susy's, and Henry's. The crew will never change...and never die. So you see, Sam, you *can* die only temporarily. The best is yet to come.”

“Please do not say such things if they are not true, Grant. I barely survived losing them once; I won't be able to stand losing them a second time. Don't give me hope or courage unless it is absolutely assured.”

“Assured it is; you can bet your heart on it, my friend. You cannot talk to Jean, or Susy, or Livy, or Henry, or anyone else before they're resurrected, though—the claim by some that you could was worse than quackery. It was a cruel and diabolical hoax.”

Sam is speechless for a time, and turns away from me. When he turns back, his eyes are beaming and his countenance is that of one who has awakened from a beautiful dream to discover that—it wasn't a dream at all, but reality.

These seem to be impossibilities to my reason—but to my heart they ring true, Sam thinks. “All right; I'll buy that,” he says.

“No need to, Sam. It's a free gift,” I reply, smiling and giving him a reassuring pat on the shoulder.

“Just who exactly are you, Grant, if you don't mind the question?”

“I am going to be a teacher, of sorts, to you, Sam. It is for that reason that I didn't call you by your whole name. You once wrote that ‘...when a teacher calls a boy by his entire name it means trouble.’ You are not a boy, but at any rate I thought sandwiching in Langhorne might get us off on the wrong foot.

“The next question that comes to my mind is: When are we? Are we still in 1910?” Sam asks.

“No; you died in 1910...”

“Yes, that's what I thought. That's the last year I can remember, anyway. My very last memory was reading *The French Revolution* in bed in Stormfield.”

“It is now a century and a half—plus a year—since your death. The year is 2061.”

Sam is stunned. His jaw drops open, and it is all he can do to blurt out, “Blame my cats! Time flies when you’re...when you’re...”

“When you’re unconscious, yes. A lot has happened in the meantime—most of which you were actually pretty fortunate to miss.”

“I was afraid of that—what happened?”

“For starters, we experienced world wars—the first one, in fact, began a scant four years after you died. It was called ‘The Great War’ at first, until another global slaughtering took place 25 years after that first one. The second global bloodbath caused the earlier one to be renamed ‘World War I.’ In terms of widespread death and destruction, the world had never seen any war on the scale of the ‘Great War.’ The ogre of war was even more ferocious in the Second World War, though. Statistically speaking, World War II ‘improved’ on the record the previous World War set—the number of dead was quadruple that of World War I. The upheaval unleashed by this unbelievably gory and grotesque experience paved the way for a precipitous decline in manners and morals, thus leading to horrific onslaughts of sexually transmitted diseases (one specific mutation of which caused the death of *millions* of people in the last decades of the old system), and terrorist attacks—well, there’s time to go into that later...”

“It sounds as if all restraint was cast aside.”

“That was pretty much the case, yes.”

“Where were the lights and guides and shepherds?”

“Asleep, or joining in and making common cause with the unrestrained revelers.”

“I’m disgusted, but I guess I’m not really surprised.”

“Sam, if those from your generation had been resurrected into the final decades of the old system, and had seen just how far man had fallen and how low morals had plunged, and how few men of integrity there were, the lion’s share of you probably would have dove head first right back into the crypt.”

“Based on your description, that sounds plausible enough. Tell me,

though, Grant: How is it that *you* ended up with the dubious distinction and unenviable task of edifying me about all of these things? Did you lose a bet or draw the short straw?”

“Not at all. I volunteered to do so, Sam. I have a special interest in you and your writing, and am considered to be somewhat of an expert on you and them, and so I was allowed the *privilege* of being the one to meet and greet you, and introduce you to this magnificent new system of things. Besides, we have a few things in common that you may find interesting, or at least will help explain my interest in you.”

“What sort of things do we have in common, Grant?”

“We both lived in Angels Camp, California (it’s the first town my wife and I lived in); we are both writers—that is to say, I am a writer, too—of sorts, though certainly not of your stature or caliber. Admitting that is not false modesty on my part, but the plain truth and a simple fact. That’s one of the reasons why I was given the privilege of being your ‘go-between’: we share the same profession; and also because I am a great admirer of your work. Also, before taking up writing as our primary vocation, we were experts in what could be termed a ‘technical’ field: you as a Mississippi riverboat pilot, and I as a computer programmer; we both tend to be a little high-strung and very goal-oriented—and this despite both of us having been diagnosed by others early in life as lacking in ambition; we were both born prematurely (I was born with asthma and was in an incubator for the first couple of days after I was born); we both worked in a printery (and the one in which I worked was in New York, in which city you, among others, also plied that trade); the issue of race relations intrigued us both from an early age; we both have a niece named Jenny; we both lived in Humboldt County (I in California, you in Nevada, or ‘Washoe’); we both love baseball—by the way, speaking of baseball:

“You said that baseball was ‘the very symbol, the outward and visible expression of the drive, and push, and rush and struggle of the raging, tearing, booming nineteenth century.’ By the latter decades of the old system, baseball was considered by many to be a tame, staid, plodding sport, an ‘old man’s game.’

“Basketball, a game invented in Massachusetts, is manic and frantic compared to baseball. As a matter of interest, the vast majority of the professional basketball players were Negroes. And most of them earned *millions* of dollars per year playing the sport. What would the slaveholders of your time have thought of that if they could have peered scarcely more than one hundred years into the future? Some of these millionaire athletes may have been the grandchildren of slaves...

"But leaving even basketball in the shade, as far as symbolism for aggression goes, is another sport invented in America, namely football. This is not the same as European football (which we Americans called soccer). American football is quite different. Some of the collisions incurred in this type of football were so violent that the athletes had to protect themselves with thick, sturdy padding, and strong helmets. Even with such precautions, injuries were not uncommon, including but not limited to concussions and broken bones. A full week was required between games, partly to prepare the strategy and tactics that were to be used against the next opponent, and partly to recuperate from the rough play. Determining the other team's weaker points and exploiting them was the key to being successful in football. Ulysses Grant would probably have been a superb football coach. His combination of being a good strategist, motivator and judge of talent was the perfect blend of talents for that profession.

"Anyway, getting back to some of the things we have in common: our children call us 'papa' as opposed to father, dad, old man, Billy-Bob, or what have you; we both love Switzerland, cats, and children; our excelling in school was pretty much limited to the winning of spelling bees; we have a mutual—apparently inborn or inherent—irreverence toward human institutions and their titular heads who place themselves above their fellow humans; we both love the German language (although you lampooned it often enough); we both worked in gold mines in Calaveras County, California (I outside of Copperopolis—not far from Bret Harte's Poker Flat, you a few miles away in Angels Camp); we both lived in areas where Huckleberries were native (you in Connecticut, I in northern Idaho). And we both love fruit pie—it's our favorite dessert.

"There is also a comparison to be drawn between our lives in that we were born in one place, lived there only a short time before our families moved elsewhere—but not too far away—and ended up living in a number of places far away from those original locations. In your case you were born in Florida, Missouri, then your family moved a few dozen miles to Hannibal, then as an adult lived and worked in St. Louis, Missouri; New York, New York; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Keokuk, Iowa; Virginia City, Nevada; San Francisco, California; Buffalo, New York; Elmira, New York, Hartford, Connecticut, etc. In my case, I was born in Fort Bragg, California; then moved to Eureka, not too far away; after that I lived in San Jose, San Andreas, Mokelumne Hill, Angels Camp, and Jenny Lind (all in California, in case you don't recognize some of those names); then Brooklyn, New York; on to Helena, Montana; then Anchorage, Alaska; Bethany, Oklahoma; Brookfield, Wisconsin; Coeur d' Alene, Idaho; and finally back to Wisconsin—Oconomowoc, to be precise."

“Ah, Oconomowoc—I believe I spent the night there once. But what about Europe—did you ever live in Europe?”

“No, in that way we do differ. I only *visited* Europe: Switzerland, Germany, and Austria, anyway—I traveled all over Switzerland on the train, and fell in love with it. I haven’t seen anyplace on earth that can match Switzerland for beauty. I also visited what was then called the Czech Republic (which was part of Austria-Hungary during your first sojourn on earth).”

“All right, it does seem as if we have a few things in common. At the risk of sounding egotistical, I’m curious about which of my books you are familiar with. I didn’t expect that my fame and my books would live on more than a decade or two after my death. I hoped so, I must admit, and at times it seemed as if they would, but at other times I wondered, especially when peers like Artemus Ward were so quickly forgotten.”

“On the contrary, Sam, you not only retained your fame, it expanded. You may well have been the most beloved author ever. And your popularity was extremely broad: all age groups, and all throughout the earth, you were a favorite humorist and revered philosopher. I think one of the first names American children throughout the twentieth century heard was Mark Twain—after George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, perhaps, but probably before Ulysses Grant, and definitely before Grover Cleveland. In fact, some of my earliest and fondest memories are of your writings. As a very young child, I had a phonograph recording of *The Prince and the Pauper* to which I never tired of listening. Not long afterward I read *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and then *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*—on my mother’s recommendation. They have always been among my favorite books. Those two best-known books of yours I’ve read several times—and each time I read them, they were ‘different’, depending on my age at the time: When I read them as a boy, they were great boy’s books; as a teenager and as an adult, they fit right in with those stages of development, too.

“I’ve read most everything else you wrote at least once, such as: *The Innocents Abroad*, *Roughing It*, *Life on the Mississippi*, *A Tramp Abroad*, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*, *Following the Equator*, *The Prince and the Pauper*, as well as countless of your short stories and essays. Come to think of it, being such a prolific author, it seems as if you must write faster than you speak.”

Sam ignores that reference to his slow manner of speaking, and asks,

“So what time period are we talking about? I mean, when you were a child?”

“I was born a century, a year and a day after the Mountain Meadows Massacre; one year, less a day after Huck Finn was censored by the New York Times; and on the very day that Robert Service died. You don’t know Robert Service; he was a poet from Scotland who moved to Canada and immortalized the life of the Yukon prospectors in verse. My arrival on the scene was also precisely a century from your brother Henry’s tragic death.”

“Maybe I didn’t hear you right, Grant. One hundred years after Henry’s death would be 1958. Could that be true? *What* year were you born?”

“As you deduced, 1958.”

“1958! And this isn’t a dream?”

“No, this is not a dream.”

“If this is 2061, and you were born in 1958—well, blame my cats! Did you ever die?”

“No.”

“Then you’re--”

“Yes, I’m 103 years old.”

“But you don’t look to be a day over 25!”

“Physiologically, that’s about right. I’m in the prime of life from a physical standpoint; and yet I also have the advantage gleaned from those one hundred and three years of living. It is the perfect combination. People used to say that youth was wasted on the young, ‘if only I knew then what I know now,’ and so on. That frustration is gone, because we now simultaneously enjoy both the sagacity of experience and the suppleness of youth. As you said in *The Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*, ‘a strong mind needs a healthy body for its rightful support.’ By the way, Sam, you haven’t looked in a mirror yet. How old do you feel at this moment? How old would you imagine *you* look?”

“Grant, I hadn’t thought about it, but now that you mention it I feel downright spry and energetic, instead of worn out and brittle—which is how I felt the last thing I remember, laying there in bed.”

“You look it, too, Sam—spry and energetic, I mean. Actually, the word ‘spry’ doesn’t really fit a *young man* like yourself. Let’s take a walk over to this creek and take a gander.”

We walk the few yards to the creek that slowly rolls its foot-wide trickle along. I point to the calm surface near the edge, and Sam peers in at himself.

“Well, blame my cats! I haven’t looked this young since I was...that young! I mean, I don’t know—thirty?”

“Nor have you felt this young in quite awhile, have you?”

“You’re right about that, Grant. You could knock me down with a feather! My hair is red again, and my wrinkles have smoothed out.”

“Auburn, actually,” I correct.

“What?”

“Your hair—it’s auburn, not red.”

Sam looks at me blankly for a second, and then gets the point. “Ah, yes, thank you...auburn it is—if you say so.”

“At any rate, that too is something I haven’t seen in more years than I care to admit. My hair has been white for eons, so it seems.”

“And now it will be auburn for untold eons, and on and on,” I reply.
“Trouble and infirmities of mind and body being a thing of the past, we do not age—in a physiological sense—past the physical prime of life.”

“And when is that?”

“It’s a different age for each individual.”

“Can you be more specific?”

“The perfect physical age is usually between twenty and twenty-five, and always between eighteen and thirty. Living at the perfect age—that is to say, staying at that age once reaching it—allows everyone the opportunity and the capacity to enjoy life to the full.”

“What about those who had already passed that age when this ‘new

system of things,' as you call it, began?"

"As they improve in other ways, they also improve physically—that is to say, juvenescence sets in: the person grows younger physically. By the way, I'm sure you've noticed these walking paths that connect all the houses to one another?"

"Yes?"

"Each house is connected to its neighbors by a pathway. Anybody can freely walk the pathways—they are public land, even though they go through people's private property. Because of this arrangement, a person could walk all the way across the earth (taking a boat at appropriate points) on paths such as these."

I see Clara peek out from behind the tree. Understandably, she is wearing a huge smile and looks quite impatient. "Sam, I want to reintroduce you to someone who has been preparing for your return and longing to see you—that is to say, someone who, unlike me, knew you in your past life."

Sam looks at me with a mixture of anticipation and questioning in his eyes. I lead him to the other side of the stately tree where his daughter Clara, a little nervous and growing ever more impatient, is waiting.

When Sam sees her, he stops dead in his tracks and seems not to trust his eyes. "Clara?"

"Yes, papa, it's me," she responds, and steps forward, placing her hands in his. She looks into his eyes, smiling, and then lays her head on his chest. His arms envelop her, and tears of joy spill down his face.

"I've been waiting for you, Grenouille," she says.

Sam is temporarily speechless. I'm sure you can imagine how he feels: overwhelmed with joy and surprise. It is a good shock, a good kind of stress. When he finally recovers—to some extent, anyway—he tells her: "I'm sorry I kept you waiting, Clara. I didn't know you were expecting me, or I would have been here sooner."

Clara chuckles through the tears that are also flowing freely down her face. "I guess I should've known time wouldn't change you, papa. That's all right. That's good. I wouldn't want you to change; I'm glad you didn't. Everything is going to be alright now, papa—you'll see. Mama's coming back, too!"

“I know, dear. I can hardly wait.”

I’ve been standing back, unable to resist watching this scene, the likes of which I’ve already witnessed many times before in recent years, but never tire of. I don’t want to intrude in this personal moment any more than I have to, though. I’d already taken a couple of steps back, and now I tell Sam, “I’ll leave you two alone for awhile. I’ll come back later and attempt to dispel your confusion—a little at a time, that is.”

Clara has prepared a picnic for her father and herself, and she leads him over to the spot she has selected to serve it. Sam marvels at the spread, but then pauses, looks up into the sky to gauge the position of the sun, and says, smiling slyly, “Now Clara, you know I don’t eat lunch.”

“Papa, just because it’s late morning doesn’t mean this is lunch—this will be your breakfast. After all, you haven’t eaten in quite awhile, you know.”

Unable to refute that logic, Sam shrugs his shoulders and sits down, no longer despising the festive board, especially when he sees that it includes a fresh huckleberry pie and a jug of milk with which to wash it down.

CHAPTER II

When I return about an hour later, Sam is gazing into Clara's eyes with a look of wonder and affection. Noticing my presence, he turns to me and nods.

"When you're ready, Sam, I can start to fill you in on some more things you will need to know—your 'orientation,' you might call it. I'll show you the way to your house while I'm at it."

Sam and Clara consult one another briefly. Sam looks up and says, "There's no time like the present, Grant."

"You gentlemen go on ahead," Clara says. "I have an errand to do on the other side of the village. I'll meet you over at papa's after awhile."

"Fine," I say. Sam turns to her and gives her a hug. "Clara, don't be late; although I don't recall missing you while I was gone, it somehow seems like so long, and I don't want any more long separations like that."

"Don't worry, papa. My errand will not take me long, and then I'll come over directly. Besides, this will give Grant a chance to tell you some things you need to know without your being distracted by my presence."

"All right, dear. See you soon."

It is true that Sam doesn't recall missing Clara, because she died after he did—fifty-two years later, to be precise. Since Sam was not conscious of anything the entire time he was asleep in death, the amount of time he was separated from her *seemed* to him only to be a short period. For Clara, though, the separation was quite different. Since she lived until 1962, she had missed her papa for fifty-two years after his death, and then several more from the time of her resurrection until his.

"Now Grant, you said something about my house. Of the many houses I've lived in, which one were you referring to? I've lived so many places—Hannibal, Virginia City, San Francisco, Buffalo, Elmira, Hartford, Redding, various places in Europe—and things have obviously changed a lot since I was here..."

"It's not one of your former houses, Sam. This is actually a new house that's been provided for you. All new 'arrivals', such as yourself, receive an allotment of land and a new, furnished house. Don't expect *too* much,

though—it's not a mansion. Everybody receives the same basic house. At your leisure, though, if you so desire, you can build another one more to your liking on your property.

"Your existing house has been furnished with a few extras by Clara and some of your friends who arrived before you. All those resurrected receive not only a free gift of land, with a furnished house on it, but also a generous amount of starting capital, which is held for you in the Time Bank. The denomination held in the time bank is hours."

"Ours? I thought you said it was mine."

"No, I mean *hours*, h-o-u-r-s; that is, the division of time of which there are twenty-four in a day and which are comprised of sixty minutes each and..."

"Oh, *those* kind of hours. I see."

"All right, then. You start out with 10,000 hours in the Time Bank."

"What can I buy with hours?"

"Other people's time. That is to say, various services you would like them to perform on your behalf. As you eventually deplete your savings, you make deposits to the Time Bank (increase your balance) by performing services for others. Until you get your garden planted, you will probably spend some of those hours at restaurants and grocery stores."

"My garden?"

"Yes; everybody grows their own food here. At least a good portion thereof."

"That sounds fine to me. I must admit I'm more than a little curious about it. Can we get going?—I'd like to see my house."

"Sure! Would you like to raft or walk? A small river rolls its fraction-of-a-mile-wide tide along behind your house. We can make shore near your back door by raft, or we can walk to the front door."

"Both options sound excellent, but I think it would be fitting for the front door to be the first view I see of my new abode."

"That sounds good, Sam. I should tell you, though, it is a couple of miles or so to your house. Do you mind walking that far?"

“Bosh! I once walked from Angels Camp to San Francisco. Blame my cats if I can’t walk a couple of miles on a beautiful day like this.”

“Excellent choice, Sam. The path is this way. By the way, I did know that you made that walk, but I didn’t think that it was really a pleasure trip... I thought you walked more out of necessity than a burning desire for peripatetic activity.”

“Maybe so, but my point was that I *can* do it; I’ve done it before. And again, why not, on such a wonderful day as today, and with so much to discuss?”

“Fine. I’m always in the mood for walking, myself. You know, speaking of walking from Angels to Frisco: Angels Camp was the first town in which my wife and I lived after we were married.”

“Yes, you told me that earlier. What years were you two there?”

“From 1982-1984. The Calaveras County fair, held outside of Angels Camp (at a collection of buildings called ‘Frogtown’) is called the Frog Jump, and there was a statue of you in the park in Angels Camp. My younger son was born in Mark Twain hospital, in San Andreas, eleven miles to the north. By the way, the highway that passed through all those towns—Sonora, Columbia, Tuttletown, Angels Camp, San Andreas, etc.—was named Highway 49, after the ‘49ers.

“You may also be interested in knowing that in Angels Camp the elementary school was named *Mark Twain*. The high school mascot was the Bullfrogs. Oddly enough, though, the high school itself was named *Bret Harte* instead of *Mark Twain*. For that reason, the school’s sports teams were called the *Bret Harte Bullfrogs*, although the *Mark Twain Bullfrogs* would have made much more sense. It seems as if they wanted to affect a compromise, and in so doing created a monstrosity. Perhaps the *Bret Harte Outcasts* would have been more apropos (residents of Poker Flat lived within the Bret Harte school district). There was even a town up the hill from Sonora named Twain Harte.”

“Really? That’s flattering. I haven’t been in California in a long time.”

“That’s an understatement if I ever heard one. Well, if you’re ready, let’s go.”

“Fine! Lead the way, Grant—you’re the one that knows where we’re going.”

CHAPTER III

We walk along the path that leads through the verdant countryside to Sam's house. Every few minutes we pass by a house that lies near the path. Each one pours out a human contribution as we near it. This is normal for any new arrival, but in Sam's case--being the celebrated personage that he is, who has brought so much joy to others via his insightful satire, burlesques, commentary and social criticism--the usual joy seems to be superannuated.

Even dogs, cats, and horses approach and seem to want to wish him well. Sam is almost embarrassed by all the attention from the happy faces that stream out of the immaculate houses; embarrassed because he doesn't know any of these people who seem to know him so well and call him by name, but also for the effusive affection which is so freely proffered. These people are obviously affluent, based on the appearance and condition of their houses and land, and yet they seem so humble, sincere, and down-to-earth.

As was noted, most representatives of the human contribution are strangers to Sam. Finally, though, he does recognize a face, and yet the familiar person is different from when he knew her before. She now has full use of her eyes, ears, and tongue. That is obvious because she runs right up to him, looks him directly in the eyes, and says, in a voice clear as air, "Mr. Clemens, it is so good to see you again! How are you doing?"

Now it is Sam's turn to be struck dumb. It is only temporary, though. He is so happy to see Helen with full use of all her senses. "Miss Keller, you have accomplished the virtually impossible: I was speechless there for awhile. But I've recovered now, at least somewhat. It does my heart good to see you again; I was doing very well before I saw you, and now I'm doing even better. How are *you* getting along?"

"I've never felt better—and I'm feeling better all the time. You are really going to love it here, Mr. Clemens—may I call you Samuel?"

"You can call me Samuel, Sam, or anything you like—within reason, that is."

"Thank you, Samuel. Please call me Helen. And by the way, I am no longer Miss Keller; I have married; my surname is now McAvoy."

"Congratulations! How long have you been here?"

“Right about eleven years now. My husband and I have two children, Matthew and Melissa. Matthew, Melissa, come up here and say hello to a dear old friend of mine.” Helen addresses her children: “You remember that book I read to you, *The Prince and the Pauper*, don’t you? This is the author of that, as well as many other, priceless books.”

“Hello Mr. Clemens,” the two children chime in unison. “Thank you for the books!”

“You are certainly welcome. Helen, your children are beautiful.”

“Thank you, Samuel.”

“Will I get a chance to meet your husband soon?”

“Yes, you will; he’s away at work right now, but you can meet him tonight at the banquet the community is preparing for you. He is certainly looking forward to meeting you, Samuel, I can tell you that. I’ve told him all about you.”

“A banquet for me?” Sam inquires.

“Yes,” I interject, “it is customary for a banquet to be held for all new arrivals. It is a sort of formal 'welcome home' party.”

Sam now responds to Helen's statement about her husband hearing all about Sam. “And he still wants to meet me?” Sam teases.

“Of course,” Helen replies, ignoring Sam’s rather lame attempt at self-deprecating humor.

“I’m looking forward to it—very much so. It is so great seeing you again, Helen. When I think of the things you were able to accomplish *without* eyesight and hearing and speech, I can only joyfully imagine the things you will be able to accomplish now. I always admired—“

“Please, Samuel, don’t embarrass me. I prefer being an ordinary person now. *Everyone* here has great potential and accomplishes much. Well, I have to run home now, but I’ll see you tonight.”

“Goodbye, Helen. Yes, I’ll see you all tonight.”

“Goodbye, Samuel. Enjoy your new house!”

In between these impromptu meetings with his new neighbors, I broach my intention of quoting and commenting on several of Sam's more well known aphorisms. "Sam, I'm thinking perhaps the best way to give you a feel for just exactly what type of arrangement we are living in here is if we discuss a few of your quotes."

"My quotes?"

"Yes. I'll recite something you said or wrote, then give a response to it—sometimes in affirmation, always at least a reaction. At the very least one or both of us will be edified, and in most cases you will be happy to hear my confirmations and even refutations of opinions you held and predictions you made."

"All right, that sounds fine with me, Grant."

"Sam, you said 'What a man misses mostly in heaven is company'. As already established, you are not in heaven. However, this is for all practical purposes a 'promised land'—it is paradisaical, and it is your 'reward'. That being the case, it is my duty and pleasure to tell you that there will be no dearth of company for you here. As already intimated, many of your friends have preceded you here. In this place of meeting and remembrance, the arrangement of arrivals here is in reverse-chronological order. Actually, it's a little more complicated than that, but that general rule will suffice for now. Generally, those that died nearest the end of the old system were the first to be resurrected back to life; those who died prior to that were the next batch resurrected, and so forth.

"In this regard I actually have two pieces of good news for you: first, that very soon you will be reunited with many of your friends—at the banquet to commemorate your arrival this evening, which Helen Keller MacAvoy mentioned to you—and second, others will arrive in due time.

"By the way, Halley's comet, that tramp and derelict of the skies, will be visible tonight."

"I'm more than willing to amend my quote, Grant. It appears that those resurrected have been given the 'life disk'. Tell me, though: who is here that I know?"

"Most everyone you would hope to see are here, from Abe Curry to Zeb Leavenworth. To be specific, those that come to mind (besides those two just mentioned) are: Neal Champ, Dick Hingham, Horace Bixby, Albert Bigelow Paine, Henry Rogers, William Wright ('Dan de Quille'), John

MacKay, Charles Browne ('Artemus Ward'), Dr. John Brown (as well as the 'other' John Brown), Clement Rice, Joseph Goodman, William Claggett, Steve Gillis, Smiggy McGlooral, John Kinney, Denis McCarthy, William Barstow, Ben Coon, Ned Wakeman, Charley Langdon, William Dean Howells, Charles & Susan Warner, Will Bowen, Joseph and Harmony Twichell, Tom Nash, Wales McCormick, J.H. Burrough, Thomas McGuire, John McComb, Rudyard Kipling, Frank Burrough, John Klinefelter, Tom Lyman, Calvin Higbie, Robert Howland, Moses & Emma Beach, Mary Mason Fairbanks, William Swinton, David Gray, Frederick Douglass, Patrick McAleer, Katy Leary, John Lewis, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Oliver Wendell Holmes, John and Helen Garth, Murat Halstead, Robert Ingersoll, Robert Louis Stevenson, Joel Chandler Harris, Edwin Booth, Ulysses (Hiram) Grant, Finley Peter Dunne, Andrew Carnegie, George Bernard Shaw, Henry Shaw, Ralph Keeler, George Griffin, Thomas Edison, Nikola Tesla, John Briggs, Edward Bunce, Carl Gerhardt, George Robinson, Henry Irving, Edward Everett Hale, Clint Levering, James Riley, Charles Stoddard, Clarence Rice, Isabel Lyon, Anson Burlingame, Dan Slote, Thomas Beecher, John Quarles, Laurence Hutton, Norman Hapgood, Martin Littleton, Daniel Frohman, Peter Dunne, Richard Gilder, Helen Hamilton, Marjory Clinton, Poultney Bigelow, Chauncey Depew, Abbott Thayer, and Jervis Langdon.

"To get the full complement of them, though, you will have to wait until the banquet tonight. I guarantee that you will not be disappointed. Those of your friends just named are obviously already here; of those left unnamed, some will be brought back shortly and others later—including people you have never met but admired, such as Miguel Cervantes."

"Excellent! But what about David Locke?"

"David Locke?"

"Petroleum Vesuvius Nasby."

"Oh, yes—how could I forget? Yes, he'll be there, too!" After a pause, I ask, "Are you ready for the next quote, and my comment on it?"

"Sure. I've still got my mind working on that lovely tribe of people you mentioned. I never realized what a treasure trove of friends I had—I mean, I was aware of their quality but didn't fully appreciate the quantity—the sheer volume of numbers."

"And there will be many more to come, I assure you, Sam."

"I'm looking forward to it, Grant. Anyway, on to the next point: why don't

you start up your word mill again.”

I laugh again, amused—as usual—at Sam’s way with words, and the oblique references to his writings. “All right, as you wish, Sam. Here’s the next one on the list: You said ‘Life would be infinitely happier if we could only be born at the age of eighty and gradually approach eighteen.’ To expand on a subject we’ve already touched lightly: that is almost precisely the situation you *are* in now. You are seventy-five, as far as your mind and your collection of experiences go. Rather than continuing a downward trend physically, though, you will continue to grow in knowledge, experience, and wisdom, while reversing, or regressing, physiologically—that is to say, your body will get younger.

“Eventually you’ll reach the perfect physical age—fresh of flesh and full of energy, stamina, and radiant health. To this pristine condition add in wisdom, discernment, and insight, and you have a recipe for a perfectly happy circumstance in life. And once your body reaches the ‘prime of life’—that condition in which you have reached backwards to full maturity but before the deleterious and debilitating effects of old age set in—the reverse progression will stop. Your body will forever remain at that perfect age.”

“So how far am I from that perfect age now? I feel downright good already, and I would guess I’m around thirty, based on how I look.”

“Sam, even a rheumatic, arthritic centenarian would feel pretty good under your circumstances: resurrected back to life on a paradise earth; reunited with one of your daughters; preparing to attend a banquet at which you will be the guest of honor and be reunited with dozens of your friends; about to arrive at your newly-acquired property and into your new house...to answer your question, though, you don’t have too far to go—to reach backwards to physical perfection, that is.

“It wouldn’t make sense to resurrect people to the exact same physical state they were in at the time they died—they would simply die again, or at the very least not feel all that chipper.”

“That’s sensible. You didn’t exactly answer my question, though.”

“Well, Sam, I can’t tell you a ‘physiological’ age because age really doesn’t mean that much here and now. Everybody reaches their physiological apex at a different time in their life. As we discussed earlier, for some people born here, they stop ‘aging’ at twenty. For others, they’re closer to thirty before the aging process stops for them.”

CHAPTER IV

“Sam, you once said that ‘Unlimited power in safe hands is the absolute perfect government.’ That’s what we have here—omnipotence safeguarded by the Most Trustworthy. All are on a footing of most perfect equality. And no governmental successors are needed because our leader never dies. Nor must we.”

“What if I could have foreseen these things and written of them? People might have said that my overtaxed imagination had at last upset my reason.”

“No doubt many would have said that. Let’s discuss the various forms of governments with which men experimented—they *were* experiments, you know. All of them turned out to be failed experiments, but the mad political scientists behind them often viewed them as the end-all, be-all, cure-all of all mankind’s ills, without a doubt—not an experiment by any stretch of the imagination. But regarding the lion’s share of human governments, it would have been apropos to say ‘I don’t see no p’int about that guv’mint that’s any better’n any other guv’mint.’ Some were better than others, yes, but in the long run they were all found to be sadly wanting.

“Regarding the afterlife, you said, ‘I am silent on the subject because of necessity. I have friends in both places.’ By ‘both places,’ you doubtless meant heaven and hell. Actually, there is a third place—where you are now, the paradise earth. Heaven may be somewhat similar to what you imagined, and you may have an acquaintance or two there. Very few humans go there when resurrected, though, as it is restricted to those who are coworkers in the heavenly governmental administration, and only a rather small number, and a very small percentage, are needed to fulfill those offices. Hell, though, is nothing like what you were taught—hell is actually simply the grave. In fact, you were there yourself from 1910 through just a couple of hours ago. You don’t remember anything about it, do you?”

“No.”

“That’s because you were unconscious the whole time. Hell is simply the grave, or death, and is like a deep and dreamless sleep. It is a prolonged state of complete inactivity, including inactivity of thought (‘that vast mysterious void,’ as you called it). Suspended animation. Almost everyone who has ever lived, then, has gone to hell. As you can attest,

hell is not hot. And even if it were, those there are not conscious and would not experience any discomfort regardless of the temperature.

“Some return from hell, as you have, and some don’t. Those who wouldn’t fit in here, who wouldn’t like it here anyway, remain there. In the end, everybody gets what they want: if they would like it here, they get to enjoy it; otherwise, they don’t. And they’re not tortured if they don’t; they simply remain unconscious forever. Those that are not here are simply not here—they no longer exist, and thus are not conscious *anywhere*. Some will be here in time. Others—those who would not like it here and would not fit in, will remain forever as they are—unconscious and nonexistent. They go on sleeping, forever. They are in the exact same situation as they were before they were born—with the exception that before they were born they had a future but no past, and now they have a past but no future.”

Although deep in thought and engrossed in the conversation, the ever-observant Sam Clemens is processing the scenery and all his surroundings as he walks the path to his house. There is no sign of poverty or neglect anywhere; rather, all signs point to the contrary. The scenery varies with every bend in the road, but is in every place exquisitely beautiful. The very ambiance of the region, and the emotional warmth of its inhabitants, dispels most of the apprehension Sam initially felt.

After allowing my explanation of heaven, hell, and “the other place” to sink in, I proceed with the next quotation. “You spoke with great insight—greater even than you normally did, that is to say—when you said: ‘It is just like man’s vanity and impertinence to call an animal dumb because it is dumb to his dull perceptions.’ Men are fundamentally different than animals, and *are* a higher form of life. That being said, animals are more intelligent and important than many people gave them credit for.

“Speaking of mis-perception of intelligence in others, though, that was also the case often times with people in their relationships with one another. It is common for people to view their own abilities as supreme, their own interests as of primary importance. For example, if a person excels in math, he tends to assume that someone who is not interested in math is stupid—although that person may be superior to him in many other areas of knowledge. Someone who is good with language thinks others dim and dull if their vocabulary is only average, and so on and so forth ad infinitum.

“Even when you take the entire gamut of areas that were normally taught and tested in school (language, science, mathematics and its

various categories, subcategories and specialties), a person may just happen to excel in many of these areas, but be a complete idiot in areas that are also important but for whatever reason were de-emphasized in the classroom. And the opposite is true, too: a person may be a genius in a number of areas, but language, science, and mathematics do not come easily to him—and so the academic world classified him a dummy.

“We like to view ourselves as being far more enlightened now. Everybody has strong points and comparatively weaker points. *Everybody* has areas in which they excel, things that come naturally to them, areas wherein they are gifted. We assign each of these equal weight, and promote them all, emphasizing all skills, abilities, and gifts. Judging people’s intellect on a small subset of all the areas that truly define intellect was bogus and self-defeating. For this reason, many intelligent people were labeled dull, and some that were actually somewhat shallow intellectually were considered top-notch in that respect. As you said, ‘Thousands of geniuses live and die undiscovered—either by themselves or by others.’ When people are made to feel that they are chuckleheads, whether by their parents, teachers, schoolmates, or siblings, they tend to believe—and sometimes even to live up (or down) to that assessment.”

“I have no arguments with that, Grant. Judging a person’s intellect, or for that matter their character or worth as a human being, based on a small number of events or scenarios or opinions, is unfair and shortsighted. Evaluating a person by examining just this and that area of expertise is like looking at a painting through a giant piece of Swiss cheese, seeing only the parts where the holes in the cheese allow a peek, while disregarding the rest.”

“Yes, this enlightened viewpoint is one of those things which seems so obvious once it’s generally accepted, but the old, limited viewpoint was blindly accepted for so long that anybody who proposed a different way of evaluating people was viewed as a wacko. Oh, well—that was the case with a lot of things, actually: many today can hardly believe things that were accepted in the old system ‘just because’.

“When the vast majority of people are against you and something strikes you as totally illogical, plainly wrong, manifestly unjust, you might tend to wonder if you’re crazy—either you are, or everybody else is, you reason.

“All right, enough of that. Here’s another one: You said: ‘When I am king, they shall not have bread and shelter only, but also teachings out of books, for a full belly is little worth where the mind is starved’.”

“Yes, I did say that—or, to be more precise, I wrote that. Of course, you know I never really expected to be made king, president, or anything else of that ilk—in actuality, I wouldn’t *want* to hold any of those offices, or live under a government where a person like me was in control.”

“I agree. I mean, I understand; that is to say, I wouldn’t want to live under a government where *I* was in a position of great power, either. And you don’t have to worry about either of those scenarios. There are no kings—no earthly kings, anyway—nor presidents, nor anything else of the kind here any longer.

“Nevertheless, I’m sure you were serious when it comes to the *spirit* of that quote, namely that you would like to see everybody have the necessities of life: that which will feed their bodies, but also education to feed their minds and spirits. That, my friend, is exactly what everybody here now enjoys.”

“If that is the case, Grant, then I may just have to change my writing style—I may not have much to satirize or lampoon anymore.”

“Does that disappoint you?”

“Not in the least; there are other things to write about, I’m sure. And there are other things besides writing to do. I don’t care whether school keeps or not.”

“You said it—there’s really no limit of exciting things to learn and do here—and there are no time limits, either. You have infinity—unlimited time—to pursue anything that interests you, from astronomy to zoology and everything in between.”

“I’ve always wanted to have the time to indulge my curiosity by delving even into arcane subjects such as cowbells, brickbats, flint hatchets, Aztec inscriptions, stuffed whales, and echoes--and all that truck.”

“Right. And nobody will stop you from satisfying your curiosity on those scores.”

“Keep talking, Grant; I’m feeling younger all the time.”

I laugh. It’s good when everything is going your way. The future is bright, and all is right with the world. Nothing but blue skies ahead. And it’s not a dream; it’s reality.

CHAPTER V

I continue my onslaught, edifying and commiserating with my new friend. “Sam, you argued very logically and forcefully in *Roughing It* just how impractical the jury system eventually became, although at the time of its inception it was a pretty decent idea. That entire method of assigning blame and meting out justice or retribution has been replaced. We do not use juries here, and in fact, jails do not exist. Just as you also argued against debtor’s prison—how it made no sense because a debtor was unable to make restitution or take corrective steps towards getting out of debt if he were in prison—incarceration was actually impractical and even counter-productive for *all* types of crimes.

“By the way, no one is in debt, nor does anybody hear their family cry out in hunger. Getting back to the inanity and insanity of incarceration, though: how was the injured party aided by the perpetrator being locked up? The offended party was still ‘out’ their stolen or damaged property, or still stuck with the doctor bills incurred by the crime and criminal. To add insult to injury, taxpayers had to support the criminal as he sat in jail—sometimes in rather swank accommodations, while hardworking citizens dealt with more stress and lesser quantities and qualities of food and other necessities while walking the ‘straight and narrow’.”

“With jails, though, at least the criminal is unable to continue his lawless course.”

“True; however, oftentimes prisons proved to be training grounds for further criminality—a school for crime, of sorts. A person may go into prison a vandal and come out a murderer-in-waiting.”

“So what is the alternative?”

“We don’t have the problem here, as there are no criminals. In the old system, when there always was such an element, a better solution would have been to force the perpetrator to make reparations to the victim. Jails here would be a waste of time and resources. In the extremely rare event that somebody infringes on the rights of another, they are required to make restitution—and then some. And so, the victim of the offense is repaid for his losses and then some for the attendant aggravation.

“There are no violent crimes here—they simply don’t happen. Hate has been eradicated, and therefore no crimes of hatred are ever committed. There is no racial prejudice here. In fact, there is no prejudice of any sort

—no prejudice based on gender, age, skin color, profession, or anything else.”

“Grant, I understand the equal standing of the two genders, the entire range of ages, and certainly skin color, but...no prejudice based on profession? By that do you mean to say that an organ grinder, congressman, or burglar is accepted as being equal to a man who plies an honest and beneficent trade? Perhaps things are a little *too* egalitarian now for my taste,” Sam replies, frowning his brow and peering out at me beneath those great bushy eyebrows.

I don’t know Sam well enough yet to be able to tell for certain if he is really serious about that comment. I reply, “I’ll assume you’re pulling my leg about organ grinders. As to congressmen and burglars, there are none—or is that redundant? These, as well as many other professions, no longer exist.”

“That’s very intriguing. Let me ask first about the burglars—how is it that they have been abolished?” Sam asks.

“Sam, burglars only exist in three circumstances: One, there is an extreme gap between rich and poor, that is to say a monetary polarization where one group of people have much more than they need while another group has less than they need in order to survive; Two, a person makes himself into a burglar due to a lack of moral character and integrity—in other words, he is simply a ne’er-do-well; or Three, a combination of those two circumstances. The first circumstance, the breeding ground for burglary and the like, does not exist here: everybody has all they need to live. Poverty has been eradicated. There is no such thing as unemployment. Everybody is employed,” I explain.

“But how can that be? How can you have full employment without runaway inflation and undermanned mines, mills, factories, newspaper offices, etc?” Sam wants to know.

“We’ll go into that in more detail later, but the short answer is: everybody is at least self-employed, as each person is a farmer and orchardist—each family grows its own food. As you know, each family is given a plot of land on which to live and raise crops. And so, you see, the necessities of life are ‘there for the taking,’ or at least ‘there for the working’.

“Depending on how many ‘extras,’ or luxuries, a person wants, they can do additional work above and beyond the subsistence farming they do on their own hallowed, sacred, and—you might be tempted to call it—ancestral, ground. And if you want to enhance your home, or even build

a new one on your land—your ‘dream home,’ that is, you do it yourself.”

“You know, Grant, I’ve never done anything of the kind. I don’t really see myself as a carpenter *or* a farmer. I had planned to do some farming in Redding, but never quite got around to it.”

“I know exactly what you mean. Sam, when you were a boy, approximately 90% of Americans were farmers. By the end of the old system of things, less than 4% were. That was what made the last depression so difficult: in the depression of the 1930s, most people had farms, or relatives had farms, and so they had food, even if they had no money. By the end of the old system, though, when things got very bad economically, very few even had gardens any more. Instead of pulling up a turnip from the garden when they got hungry, many felt it necessary to rob a store—or their neighbor—to get their food. Most people wouldn’t have known how to care for a garden even if they had access to land to grow one. By the time things really got bad, it was too late to plan and plant and wait to cultivate, anyway.

“I actually enjoy growing things, now, and then processing what I grow: making fruit pies, preparing salads, brewing beer from my hops and barley, making wine—not only from grapes but from all sorts of fruits. There was a time, though, when I thought being a farmer would be a fate worse than death. Many thought that we would all be farmers in this system, and my response to that was, ‘I don’t think so; but if so, I don’t want any part of it’.”

“How old were you at the time you felt that way, Grant?”

“I was a teenager. The crux of the problem was I thought what they meant was that we would all be full-time farmers, and not have the time or circumstances to pursue much of anything else. That sounded awfully drab and dull to me. At the time I was also a victim of my own prejudices and stereotypes. I thought farmers were of necessity dimwitted, boring creatures.”

Sam laughs at my former shallowness as a callow youth. “When did you change your attitude about farming?”

“It was a gradual process. After I had spent several years working in the ‘artificial’ corporate world of computer programming, I began to yearn for something more substantial, more ‘real’. I first had to mature to the point of realizing stereotypes are an illusion, and a person can be more than one thing at the same time: A farmer *and* a musician, for instance, or an athlete *and* a writer, etc. Even if a particular combination had never been

tried before, I—or somebody else—could be the first one. There's nothing mutually exclusive about farming and—any other activity anybody might do here.

“My fears were pretty unrealistic, anyway: it really doesn't take that much time to care for a garden and orchard that produce enough for a family. There's plenty of time for other interests and pursuits. So yes, we all farm, but we're not farmers in the sense people were in the old system (that is to say, there are no large-scale farming operations, where a farm grows enough of a crop to feed hundreds or thousands of people).”

“Earlier you mentioned building our own houses, too—if we want a bigger or different house than the one we start off with.”

“Yes?”

“What if a person has no experience in building, like me?”

“Or me? I was in the same boat. Remember, there are no time constraints here, so if it takes a year, five years, ten years, or longer to build your new house, it doesn't really matter. In the meantime you have a utilitarian house in which to live. You can take your time, working on your house as much or as little as you like. There are, of course, people with experience around whom you can hire to help show you how to do the work. They can help get you started, point you in the right direction, and answer any questions you might have.”

“Excellent! As long as I have somebody to prevent me from making foolish mistakes, building my own house actually sounds kind of interesting.”

“That's how most of us view it, or at least have come to view it.”

“Who would you recommend to show me the ropes, if and when I decide to build a larger or more elaborate house on my property?”

“Eddie J. Nelson comes to mind. He's a friend of mine, and a master builder. He can build a house from the ground up. He can do it all: the foundation, the plumbing, the electrical, all phases of carpentry, roofing, painting—you name it. He's your man. And I think you'll really enjoy working with Ed, too. In fact, I would gladly work with you two gents—free of charge. You two would keep me in stitches all day long, and it would be a lot of fun. I wouldn't miss it for the world, in fact.”

“This Ed D.J. Nelson sounds like quite a character.”

“He is, believe me. And you might be able to write a book based on the experience—a humorous account of learning carpentry and building your own house; perhaps your early farming and gardening experiences could be included in that, too. I’m sure it would find a ready audience. I certainly had a lot to learn when I took up those fields—I had never even dabbled in them before.”

“So who builds the utilitarian houses that we all start out with?”

“Professional tradesmen. Carpenters, plumbers, electricians, roofers, painters, etc. build up credits in the Time Bank while working on these houses. They can build them very quickly because they are so familiar with the plan—they know exactly how each one should be built and they have all the necessary materials on site as they are needed—no under-ordering or over-ordering of materials; very few if any mistakes are made.”

“Doesn’t it get boring for them? According to my lights it would, building the same house over and over.”

“I don’t think so. The procedure they use is a perfect balance between efficiency and boredom control: there are actually several different plans. Few enough that each tradesman is familiar with each plan, but not so familiar as to bring on an onset of total boredom.”

“Who determines which plan is used in each particular case?”

“It depends on which one fits the surrounding landscape best, and taking into consideration the best guess as to which house plan would be preferred by the eventual inhabitant. Sometimes a good assumption can be made based on writings they’ve left behind, pictures of houses they previously lived in, or interviews with family members or friends who might know the person’s preferences. At any rate, as we’ve already discussed, even if the person isn’t thrilled with the house they receive, it is only temporary: they can build one according to their wishes at their leisure.”

“Tell me, Grant: if everybody enjoys the easy life you’re describing, what’s the incentive for people to work hard?”

“What do you mean?”

“Previously, many people worked hard because they *had* to in order to provide themselves and their families with the essentials. With the

removal of that carrot, and the reduction of much of the profit or prestige motive involved in work, what will motivate people?”

“Pride—a good kind of pride. There is both a good kind of pride and a bad kind of pride, Sam: sensible, healthy, balanced pride and the opposite. The good pride motivates people to do their best so that they can hold their head up among their fellows and be confident when their work is inspected for quality.

“People like to be well thought of and well spoken of. There’s nothing wrong with that. ‘He’s done a good job’ is what people want to hear; not ‘He doesn’t really seem to care about his work, and his workmanship is shoddy.’ Even if the same amount of money is paid a person whether he does a good job or not, the great majority of people want to be good at what they do, and want others to respect them for that. Most people will gladly do well if given half a chance. To believe people must be cajoled and harangued and threatened with poverty before they will do their best is cynical and displays no trust in human nature.

“Going back to the stereotyping that we were discussing, it’s interesting to note also that people would sometimes even stereotype themselves. They would often adopt a certain persona, or ‘look,’ and then see themselves as, and dress up as, that thing, whether it was a cowboy, a biker, a clown, a tough guy, an artiste, or some other ‘type’.”

“This is getting more interesting all the time, Grant; at the same time it raises ever more questions. Before I forget, though: what about the congressmen? You said they also are a species that has gone extinct. What form of government prevails here? If there are no congressmen, who perform the task of cheating the taxpayers by siphoning off tax funds to amass personal fortunes? Certainly you can’t function as a nation without someone to perform this necessariest of all government services. And wait! If you have no congress, then you must have also somehow found a way to abolish asses, chuckleheads, and tumblebugs from your gene pool!”

I laugh, enjoying Sam’s ramblings; he hasn’t changed, obviously.

“Congressmen are no more needed here than you need an injection of cynicism, Sam. The reason being: they were congress*men*. That is not to say that congress*women* would have been any better—or worse—than the male variety.”

The picture of rapt concentration, Sam is intently looking at me now. I imagine gears turning inside his head. Man is not a machine, but that is nevertheless the metaphor that comes to mind. Seeing his impatience for

further explanation, I continue: “People are now perfect. That is to say, some are, and others are well on the road to reaching that state—continually progressing toward that end. Notwithstanding that, there are some things that humans are simply incapable of doing. Some examples are: flying (as a bird does, I mean); living underwater (as fish do, that is); and governing himself.

“Although just as absurd as the others, man kept thinking he had the right and the ability to rule over himself, and yet proved over and over again, through six millenniums of every conceivable permutation of government, that successfully and unselfishly governing himself is something that is simply beyond his grasp. We weren’t made to fly in the heavens or breathe water, nor were we made to play the lord or the serf, the governor or the governed. Some forms of governments were, naturally, better than others. Some leaders within those forms of governments were better than others working inside the same framework. Nevertheless, man is out of his element when trying to bring peace, security, and prosperity to all. All governments failed to make their subjects truly happy—satisfied, with peace of mind.”

Sam has lost a little of his normal calm demeanor—or should I say facade. It is apparent that he is a little stunned at what I have told him. After allowing him a minute to ponder, I say, “Sam, you possess a very insightful mind. I’m not going to tell you everything all at once. Many things will make more sense and be less of a shock to your system—hopefully a pleasant shock, a good kind of stress, but nevertheless a shock and a stress—if you gradually draw the conclusions for yourself.”

“So,” Sam says, after scratching his head, and more or less talking to himself, “there are no burglars, no congressmen...what other professions have fallen by the wayside in this increasingly intriguing society?”

I’m not sure if Sam is just talking to himself, or his question is rhetorical, or if he really wants an answer. After a few seconds of looking off into the distance, though, he turns his gaze in my direction, and I see the question was neither rhetorical nor self-directed—he is really expecting an answer from me.

“Well, Sam, let me put your mind at ease first. There *are* writers of all sorts—and riverboat pilots, and a multitude of other professions. To be more specific now, here are a few professions that you may find conspicuous due to their absence: *doctors*, as there is no more sickness; *lawyers*, as there are no more bitter disputes—cooperation instead of competition prevails here; *soldiers*, as there are no more wars or threats thereof, nor is there any hatred, prejudice, or fear; no *morticians*

(undertakers), as death is no more, either; no *real estate agents*, as everybody owns their own home and remain in it, and on their land, forever; no *locksmiths*, as locks are unnecessary where there are no burglars, and no *burglar alarm manufacturers and installers*, for the same reason; no *policemen*, as there are no lawbreakers; no *politicians*, as human politics have been discarded; no manner of *advertising*, as—again—competition has given way to cooperation; nothing *automobile related*, from design and manufacture to road building and maintenance, no mechanics, highway patrolmen, signmakers, etc., because these have been replaced with better methods of transportation, namely walking, bicycling, Maglev trains, all manner of water-going vessels, and airplanes.”

“Airplanes were just coming into use during the last years of my life, so I know what *they* are, but you’ll have to explain Maglev trains to me.”

“Maglev is short for magnetic levitation. By using giant powerful magnets on the cars and on the rails, the trains ride on a cushion of air. The reversed polarity of the track magnet and the magnet on the bottom of the train are calibrated to the perfect degree to keep the train above the track—not on, but *above* the track. The advantages of MagLev over the conventional type of train design are smooth rides and virtually noise-free travel. The bumping and rocking and clickety-clack are replaced by movement almost indiscernible, with scarcely an auditory clue that the train is in motion.

“Airplanes have grown in complexity, size, and relative ease of operation since those first ones you read about. Navigation is especially easy, now: the pilot can simply enter the coordinates of his destination, and follow a needle to that location—it’s like using a compass, and changing your destination to North. Automobiles are no longer used, which solves a lot of problems all by itself—they were noisy, dangerous, impractical, and cost a fortune in auxiliary support in the infrastructure.

“If a person wants to travel a short distance, he can walk or bicycle; if a long distance, he can ride a train or take a canoe or a raft or an airplane—most people have a small airplane. To move large quantities of goods, trains, barges, and large airplanes are used.

“Going on with some other jobs which no longer exist: *social workers* of all sorts, as there is no longer a disadvantaged class, or even a single disadvantaged individual, that needs to be given special attention; any occupation related to *prisons*, as there are no criminals to lock up—in fact prisons themselves, as already discussed, were a rather useless institution even in the old system when there *were* criminals. There are

no more *butchers*, as we no longer eat animals—nor do we use them for painful laboratory experiments, by the way—against which you so rightly protested. We humans are now taking seriously our responsibility to practice ‘animal husbandry’—to look after them, take care of them, and watch out for their welfare. Speaking of which, you will notice a fundamental change regarding man’s relationship with animals here: You will see no cages. None are needed. We no longer eat animals, nor do they eat us, or each other. The whip is handled expertly no more. There are no whips at all, and so whips are not even used against animals here. It is not necessary. If animals are treated well and trained right, it is never necessary to be cruel to them, or to force them to do something against their will. When treated right, they willingly help us.”

“Jean, especially, will be glad to hear all this.”

“Yes, she will. And, speaking of animals, I agree with your assessment of the Bengal Tiger, which creature, along with the dolphin, to me represents the epitome of grace and beauty. Along these lines you said, ‘as for style, look at the Bengal Tiger—that ideal of grace, physical perfection, and majesty.’ The pensive poet and the gladsome gorilla are coexisting like never before.

“Also, no jobs that have anything to do with the manufacture and sales of *tobacco*—”

“Wait a minute, did you say no tobacco?” Sam asks, patting his pockets. “Where’s my beloved pipe, by the way?”

“Sam, let me ask you: Do you really feel an urge to smoke right now?”

Sam considers. “No, actually not, surprisingly. The urge is not there.”

“That’s as it should be. Once a person is resurrected back to life, any addictions they may have had remain buried in the grave. By the way, you were right about Ulysses Grant, and the doctor was wrong: it *was* tobacco that caused his cancer, and Grant’s illness should have been taken as a warning to all smokers, as you said at the time.”

“Hmm. All right, then. I will have to find something else to help me relax, I guess. Let it go.”

I grin, and reply, “The conditions here are in themselves conducive to calmness. Other professions you won’t find represented here are the manufacture of any other types of *drugs*, as they are at worst harmful and at best no longer necessary; also the manufacture of *chemicals*, as

their side-effects are usually worse than the ill they purport to fix—they are really just poison; no more *collection agencies*, as debt is no more; no more *insurance companies*, as there are no more disasters—and insurance companies were more often than not just a terrible racket, anyway—”

“Wait a minute—what is your beef about insurance companies—don’t they make recovery from a catastrophe possible where it otherwise might not be? For example, how could a family financially survive a fire that burned their house down if they didn’t have insurance?”

“The concept of insurance in that sense—shared risk—is not a bad one. My complaint is with the way the profession was usually practiced, not the theory behind it (similar to the way governments were run, which were always much worse in practice than they were in theory). At the latest by the end of the old system of things (I don’t know how it was prior to my lifetime), most medical insurance only covered a certain percentage of ailments, and of those that *were* covered, the patient still had to pay a sizable sum up front, and even after that, only a percentage of the remaining balance was paid for by the insurance company. So it turned out that a total bill for a medical emergency or planned surgery could end up costing \$10,000 or \$100,000, and the insurance company—typically only after much wrangling—would eventually pay out maybe half of that.

“So the patient would still have to come up with perhaps five or fifty thousand dollars—or more—and also get back to work as quickly as possible. The last straw was that the person’s insurance company would commonly thereafter either cancel the person’s insurance (they were too much of a risk) or exorbitantly increase the cost of their insurance premiums. The premiums paid were pure profit to the insurance companies, because if you ever dared to actually get sick or require medical attention, the amount the insurance company paid was actually, in effect, a loan from them to you: You would usually end up paying for it over time via an increase in your rates.

“And this did not apply only to medical insurance. All types of insurance operated in this manner. The insurance company had a three-pronged gauntlet you had to make it through in order to get any relief from them:

- 1) ‘We don’t cover that particular circumstance.’
- 2) ‘Your deductible is \$500 (for instance), so you have to pay that \$450 in damage out of your own pocket.’
- 3) ‘Aren’t we generous? Here’s the 50% of your claim; we will now get it back from you, by hook or by crook, by raising your rates accordingly.’

“For some people, securing protection for themselves and their families via insurance at all was similar to the situation with borrowing money from a bank: you could only do so if you could prove you didn’t really need it. In the case of medical insurance, a person often had a very difficult time obtaining it—assuming they could at all—if they were already sick. Only a healthy person had an easy time getting approved for medical insurance—and even in that case, ‘an easy time’ meant only if they had plenty of money to pay the exorbitant premiums.

“Anything else? Any other jobs that have gone by the wayside?”

“Yes; there are also no more *nursing homes* (‘old-age homes’), as there aren’t any people who are ‘old’ in that sense—everybody has the vigor of youth; there are no more *employment agencies*, as there is full employment; there are no more *wig and toupee makers*, as there is no baldness; there are no professions that have anything to do with the *handicapped*, such as the manufacture of mobility devices—“

“Mobility devices?”

“Wheelchairs.”

“Oh. Let me guess--because there are no more crippled people.”

“That’s right, Sam—there are no more handicapped people; also, there are no more religious ‘professionals’, including occult practitioners such as palm-readers, seers, crystal-ball gazers, séance-leaders, and the like. Religion was never meant to be a profession in the first place, and each person has the privilege and responsibility of educating himself and one another in spiritual matters.

“By the way, in connection therewith the old mainstay of newspapers everywhere—the horoscope—has also become extinct; no more nonsense about categorizing people and their personalities and actions based on the time period during the year in which they were born; additionally, there are no more *stock market analysts*, nor *stock brokers*, etc., as there is no more stock market (*everybody* benefits from the labor of everyone else based on a ubiquitous spirit of cooperation); there are no more *labor unions*, as everybody is treated fairly and there are no longer ‘employees’ and ‘employers’ in the old sense of the word; the *sexploitation* industry is gone—we can talk more about that later, but I’m sure you’ll be shocked at the scope and ubiquity it had taken on by the end of the old system of things.

“There are no more *detectives*, as there is no more deception—if you want to know something that you have the right to know, simply ask the person involved; there are no more *pest control* professionals, as organic gardening and farming and other methods keep ‘pests’ in control; *suicide prevention* is no longer needed, as life is a joy to all and only an insane person would want to miss anything the future holds—and there is no mental sickness here, either; there are no more *weight control and wellness programs*, as perfect health and a balanced life-style—including exercise that is simply a part of the daily routine, as well as healthy eating habits—make them unnecessary.”

“If all those things are no longer needed, then conditions must have changed, to put it mildly, *very* dramatically.”

“Yes, no prior ‘revolution’ had ever produced a change nearly as far-reaching as this. Former changes simply changed administrations from one sort of human rule to another, or from one ruler to another within the same type of human rule. Sometimes there was a temporary improvement, other times the revolutionists caused conditions to deteriorate—as they say, from the frying pan into the fire.

“Every human ruler eventually proved disappointing. Former U.S. presidential advisor Bernard Baruch said, ‘Vote for the man who promises least; he’ll be the least disappointing.’ But this change, the one that has led to these radical departures in the very social fabric and foundation, *is* fundamentally different. It might indeed be called a revolution, but it was not like any other that preceded it. The citizens of this new system shed no blood, nor did they lift weapons of warfare against their fellowman—in fact, they never even raised their *voices* in anger.”

CHAPTER VI

“Sam, there are many things that happened between the time you died in 1910 and the end of the old system of things which will doubtless shock you—not the least of which is an expansion of something I already mentioned: a world war broke out in 1914 and lasted until 1918. Fourteen million fatalities, an unstable world political scene, and the invention and implementation of new weapons of mass destruction were some of the results of that war. Less than twenty-five years after its end, though, another—and even bloodier—world conflict arose. That time fifty-five million combatants and civilians lost their lives. And those were just the victims who literally died as a result of that ogre. Countless millions of others lost their lives for all practical purposes but kept on breathing for another year or two or ten or fifty.”

Judging by the look in his eyes, Sam seems to know exactly what I mean by that. I continue on, barreling right ahead with the ugly news. “Once the world had experienced a second world war, the first one, formerly called ‘The Great War,’ was re-christened ‘World War I’.

“Sam, you wrote about the continual advancement of man’s ingenuity in ways to kill his fellow man in wartime, and predicted that such inventions would continue to get deadlier as time wore on. You were certainly right about that. Atomic and hydrogen bombs were invented not too many decades after your temporary departure; they were used in World War II, and countless non-combatants were killed by them.

“Swords and guns were replaced by bomb-dropping airplanes, tanks (which were like armored automobiles, with a huge gun barrel on a turret which propelled shells of prodigious size and lethality), and all sorts of wicked weapons of inhuman and inhumane invention and intent.

“The exclamation mark to the Second World War was the dropping of those aforementioned super-deadly bombs on Japan by the United States. The extent of the destruction, both immediate and eventual, was almost incomprehensible. Pandora’s box had been opened. Germ, biological, chemical, and electronic warfare followed. There was seemingly no end to man’s imagination when it came to ever-deadlier, ever-ghastlier ways to obliterate his fellow man—and woman, and child—not to mention dogs, horses, and microbes.

“One of the men behind the invention of the technology that made the unleashing of such ungodly fury possible was the noted scientist Albert

Einstein, who said this about it: 'The unleashed power of the atom has changed everything save our modes of thinking and we thus drift toward unparalleled catastrophe.'

"Instability, hatred, violence, misunderstanding, intolerance, selfishness, greed, and all the other negative trends mixed together, fed off each other, and created a world that eventually became almost unlivable.

"I don't want to seem squeamish, Grant, but do you mind if we change the subject to one a little more...positive?"

"By all means; there are far more positive than negative things about which we can converse. When we refer to the past, there is a lot of pain involved. The present and the future, though, are nothing but rosy."

CHAPTER VII

I think about telling Sam there are no more cases of emotional depression, no anxiety attacks, no post-traumatic stress syndrome, etc. etc. and so on and so forth ad infinitum, but I realize that he probably wouldn't even recognize most of that terminology. So I let it go. Instead, I press on with the next quote and my two cents about it: "Sam, you wrote a lot about slavery. Not just the southern-style civil-war-instigating type of slavery, but also economic slavery, slavery to customs and tradition, slavery to public opinion, and so on. Referring most specifically, I believe, to political slavery, you said: 'The blunting effects of slavery upon the slaveholder's moral perceptions are known and conceded the world over; and a privileged class, an aristocracy, is but a band of slaveholders under another name.'

"Yes, sometimes they consider themselves benefactors, nevertheless they are, at least most of the time, oppressors of their subjects," Sam said.

"I couldn't agree more—except to add the past tense to your statement: they *considered* themselves benefactors, etc.--all that's in the past. Everyone on earth is part of the privileged class, now, and there is no aristocracy except all of us. No man is subject to another—men weren't made to be subject to other men, nor were men made to dominate over other men. In both cases the person is damaged in the process—the dominated and the dominator in equal measure. Each man is free and independent of other men. That is to say, nobody is directly and completely dependent on another for his livelihood; nobody must kowtow to another, claim to espouse opinions he secretly considers to be repulsive or just simply wrong, or any of the other things that were 'expected' of a person in the old system lest he be stripped of some privilege or lose his employment.

"Literal slavery in the United States was abolished, but various forms of slavery persisted throughout the world: slavery similar to what you saw—people of one race enslaving people of another race, sexual slavery, and—

"Sexual slavery?"

"Yes. Many women—and girls, too—were captured, kidnapped, or purchased in order to serve as prostitutes. Some of the girls misused in this way were pre-teens, and sometimes the ones selling them into slavery were their own parents."

“That’s inconceivable! How could a parent ever even *consider* doing such a thing? What sort of an ass could ever harm his own offspring?”

“I can’t comprehend it myself, Sam, but apparently some felt it was the only way that *some* of their children could survive. They couldn’t afford to feed all their children, so selling one meant one less mouth to feed and money in their pocket to buy a little food for the others.”

Sam is speechless; he shakes his head in disbelief, anger, and pity. I remind him, though, that such misery and heartache are things of the past, and that all those who suffered are suffering no longer. “The victims of such have been resurrected, and any physical, mental, and emotional pain they suffered has been undone. In their case they don’t even *remember* the things they suffered. Forgetting your *own* mistakes would not be good, because you must learn from them, but forgetting things like those, which are no fault of your own but which could otherwise hurt and haunt you forever, is a very good thing for them.”

“Thank goodness for that, Grant. I shouldn’t be, but I still manage to be shocked at the extent of man’s cruelty to his own kind; in fact, almost shocked beyond comprehension when such savagery is directed toward their own kin. Bother the extra bit of food that could be gained from selling a child! Would a person cut off his arm in order to have a little more food? That’s how parents should have viewed their children—parting with them should have been unthinkable and non-negotiable. A family should be like the Three Musketeers: ‘one for all, and all for one’.”

“Yes, I know what you mean, Sam. We can be thankful that such things have been relegated to the past. When it comes to slavery, though, a lesser form of it persisted for almost everyone. An economic stranglehold was imposed on practically all then living. You had to engage in the commercial game that the governments and commercial interests set up, or be frozen out of normal life. If you refused to ‘play’ you were at a huge disadvantage economically and emotionally. Economically because it took dollars (or Marks or Shillings or whatever, depending on where you lived) to purchase needed items; emotionally because when you didn’t play the game, others didn’t respect you or they perceived you as being bizarre or *incapable* of playing the game (rather than *unwilling* to play the game), or perhaps even questioned your sanity. This then affected one’s self-respect and peace of mind. If you didn’t look like them, walk like them, talk like them, you were considered a freak, and nobody wants to be viewed in that way—peer pressure is extremely strong. Nobody wants to be the only one in a crowd doing something differently; nobody wants to stand out like a sore thumb. If everybody else says the sun is cold, and seriously and adamantly sticks to that belief, a lone dissenter would

find it difficult indeed not to give in to the findings of the rest and say the same thing, though he be perspiring profusely while standing in its golden rays.”

“No more slavery of any kind, then, Grant? That puts my mind at ease.”

“As odd as it may sound, sometimes slavery was self-imposed. Many slaves, or subjects—the ‘common folk’—internalized the Weltanschauung of their ‘masters’ and became willing and enthusiastic collaborators in their own oppression. Or to put it as you did, ‘...the trade-marks of poverty, misery, oppression, insult, and the other several and common inhumanities that sap the manliness out of a man and make him a loyal and proper and approved subject and a satisfaction to his masters...’

“The general slavery most suffered from at the end existed in a less direct and pronounced sense than the slavery with which you were familiar. Most people couldn’t be independent, for example by farming, as had been an option for many people previously, as only a minority of people owned land. The average man (or woman) usually couldn’t pursue his or her dream; it wasn’t always possible or practical to work at what they were best at. So, they didn’t have true freedom, no matter what the media reported or their government spokesmen claimed.

“A huge percentage of people lived hand-to-mouth. In most families both parents had to work; this led to untold additional social ills, as many children spent much of their time at home alone—without a parent there with them, at any rate.

“Because of the economic straightjacket the system had put people in, it was practically necessary to grovel before the ‘boss’ to keep ones job in many instances. The result was a sort of emasculation of men; a too-strong dependence on other humans for ones livelihood; and the end result was oftentimes depression (I’m speaking of emotional, not financial, depression in this case). This often led to more serious mental problems and social ills—alcohol abuse, drug abuse, family violence, and any number of other problems radiating outward from those and connecting and intersecting with one another.”

CHAPTER VIII

“You wrote about how churchmen in Hannibal used scriptures from the Bible to supposedly validate or support slavery. I don't know which Bible texts they may have pretzeled, but here's one you may find interesting from Deuteronomy 23:15, 16: ‘You must not hand over a slave to his master when he escapes from his master to you. With you he will keep on dwelling in among you in whatever place he may choose in one of your cities, wherever he likes. You must not maltreat him.’”

“I don’t recall ever hearing or reading that scripture.”

“I'm not surprised you never heard it from the pulpit.”

“Tell me more, Grant; keep those magic words coming.”

“Thank you; I’m glad you like them, and I will. How about this one: ‘There has been only one Christian. They caught him and crucified him--early.’ That, I’m sure, was a use of hyperbole on your part. Nevertheless, it is a point well taken. Although grossly exaggerated, untold millions did use Christianity—and other religions—as a front for wicked deeds. Wearing religion as a mask, hypocrisy abounded. Religions were actually behind most of the wars ever fought—something Christ—who Christians claim as their leader—would never have engaged in. Paying lip service to the light while groveling in the dark, and loving it, was the course of the majority of church leaders. Those ones are not here—they would not fit in here in the ‘Land of Straightforwardness.’ As you said of such ones taken as a whole, ‘with its banner of the Prince of Peace in one hand and its loot-basket and its butcher knife in the other.’

“‘The Land of Straightforwardness’—I like that. If there’s one thing I hate, it’s phoniness.”

“You won’t get any arguments from me on that, Sam. In a similar vein is this one: ‘My idea of our civilization is that it is a shoddy, poor thing and full of cruelties, vanities, arrogances, meannesses and hypocrisies.’ The reason for that situation was, again, that ‘civilization’ was run by fakes, frauds, imposters, quacks, and charlatans. Cruelties, vanities, arrogances, meannesses and hypocrisies existed—no, abounded—because of selfishness and greed.”

“I can’t wait to see civilization in trueness and fullness.”

“You won’t have to wait long, Sam. Do you remember writing this: ‘The church is always trying to get other people to reform; it might not be a bad idea to reform itself a little, by way of example.’”

“It sounds familiar; I certainly don’t doubt that I wrote that—it sounds like me, at any rate. I mean to say: I agree with that sentiment.”

“The truth is it got to the point where religionists didn’t even try very hard or often enough to reform anything, as they felt they may lose constituents and customers that way. It certainly was true that the examples it set were in the overwhelming number of cases bad ones. Due to its self-exaltation as representing God, they brought even more culpability upon themselves than if they would have kept quiet and not made any claims for having divine guidance.

“In a similar vein you wrote: ‘If Christ were here there is one thing he would not be—a Christian.’ The spirit of what you said was, as usual, dead on the money. To split hairs, though, it might be inaccurate to say that Christ even *could* be a Christian, since a Christian is by definition a follower of Christ, and Christ *was* Christ, and could not rightly be expected to follow himself. In the same way Israel (or Jacob) was not an Israelite, as an Israelite is a descendant of Israel. For that very same reason his ancestors—such as Abraham and Isaac—were certainly not Israelites, either.”

“I see your point; let it go.”

“Sorry—sometimes I get a little carried away with technicalities and nitpickings. Anyway, to get back to the reaction to your quote about Christ: as to the spirit of your meaning, you were accurate: Jesus Christ certainly did not approve of the actions of Christendom, the religious organizations who claimed to serve and represent him and simultaneously involved themselves in politics and the amassing of great wealth, oftentimes at the peril or at least disregard of the welfare of others.”

“Amen.”

CHAPTER IX

“Here is one of my favorites of your quotations, Sam: ‘Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to reform (or pause and reflect)’. At the risk of sounding like a prima donna, or ‘high-toned’ as they used to say—“

“*Used to?*”

“Yes, ‘used to’; that’s not an expression you would normally have heard people use more than fifty years or so after your death. Anyway, when you look at the most popular of anything, it’s usually of low quality, whether it be in literature, painting, bread, beer, or any other product to be found under the sun—but that reminds me of another of your quotes about classic books being like wine and your books being like water, and everybody drinks water—your books were one of the very few exceptions where public taste and high quality coincided. Very few artists have been so fortunate and talented to possess both genius and be popular with the masses.”

“To get back on track, though, things only deteriorated as the old system wore on. Stage presentations (we’ll talk about television later, an invention something like the ‘telectrophonoscope’ that you wrote about in *The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg*--but for now think of it as a play or an opera) that were rude, crude, and unrefined were hailed for their supposed humor and/or ‘sophistication’; books that were devoid of fresh thinking sold by the millions; art that was either insipid and derivative or not much more than a visual temper tantrum was all the rage; even in the realm of edibles (food), the flat, tame, and banal more often than not was preferred to the strong, intense, and original. Bread that was more paste than grain was sold by the millions of loaves—and people, as a mass, preferred that to the genuine article. Beer that had been watered down and robbed of its flavor, and then made ‘light’ to make it less fattening, stripping out thereby any remaining semblance of ‘beerness’, sold by the millions of barrels. As if that is not bad enough, to add insult to injury they spelled ‘light’ l-i-t-e.

“The point is, if you in the waning years of the old system had examined the most popular books, television presentations, or movies (a derivation of television, and sort of like a captured, or recorded, play), you would find that almost all of them were practically devoid of any merit or redeeming value.

“Well, you get the point: mediocrity, or worse, was king, and excellence was often unrecognized and ignored. Scoundrels rode in comfort while princes trudged through the mud. That is not to say that *all* things that were popular were of poor quality—but in most cases it was so. Artificial this and artificial that; “lite” and “diet” versions of every type of food imaginable.

“Many people would forsake moderation and exercise and eat themselves into blimpdom, thinking they were doing all they could to stay fit and trim because they were eating ‘lite’ and ‘diet’ versions of food which contained no or virtually no nutrients—‘foods’ that were an amalgamation of fat, plastic, chemicals, and artificial flavoring; meat that contained so much preservatives that it wouldn’t decompose. ‘American’ cheese, for example, didn’t deserve to be called cheese any more than assembly-line American beer deserved to be called beer or spoken of in the same sentence as Hop Ottin’ IPA or Pilsner Urquell or any of the other great beers; ‘American’ cheese was really just a form of very pliable plastic.

“And the intellectual ‘food’ that people ingested was basically a reflection of the literal food they took into their bodies: it looked good and sounded good to them, but was really void and vapid and vain. Well, enough of that.”

CHAPTER X

We have now reached the center of the village. Each village is comprised of a grouping of houses clustered around a town center, or 'commons'. The commons contains a school, a library (where any book in existence can be borrowed--or printed on the spot if no copies are available for lending), a sports complex which includes baseball diamonds, football fields, basketball, tennis, and volleyball courts, a large meeting hall which could accommodate all 500 or so residents of the town, a post office, a hotel, several stores, and a handful of restaurants.

I point out these buildings to Sam; he is especially interested in the 'Print on Demand' books available from the library. "Do you mean to tell me I can walk out of the library with any book I want?"

"That's exactly it—the more popular books are represented with numerous copies, and thus a copy will probably be already available for lending, but if that's not the case, you can have the book you desire printed right there in the library on their own printing machine—it only takes about 10 seconds for an average-sized book to be printed and bound, complete with a cover."

"Wow! I like it here more all the time."

After we had paid a quick visit to some of the establishments—to satisfy Sam's curiosity and to introduce Sam to some of his new neighbors—we resumed our trek to Sam's new digs.

"Grant, I have what might sound like an odd question for you, but it *is* a serious one; I mean to say, I *am* truly interested in your answer. You said that there is no prejudice, and everybody here is equal—this is a completely egalitarian society."

"Yes... So what's your question, Sam?"

"Grant, would you want to be a Negro yourself? Would you be black if you could?"

"Sam, I would neither choose to be a Negro, nor choose not to be. I definitely wouldn't have chosen to be a Negro in the old system, though."

"Why not?"

"I didn't have the self-confidence for it; dealing with the prejudice would have been extremely difficult for me. It was hard enough being an American white male, the most privileged and spoiled type of human on the planet. No, I don't think I would've had the intestinal fortitude required to bear up under that kind of treatment."

"What do you mean?"

"The bigots derided the blacks for being poor after placing all sorts of economic obstacles in their way; they made fun of them for talking different than them—for having their own dialect; they skewed everything their way and then used specious reasoning to 'prove' that they were inferior; they told them they were mentally inferior, morally inferior, and dirty. If I was told that all my life, I might be inclined to begin believing it, and be ashamed anytime I didn't exhibit an immaculate genius, character and integrity, and bodily cleanliness."

"You mean you would have believed the chuckleheaded bigots?"

"I'm afraid I might have, Sam; it would take either an inborn treasure trove of self-confidence—which I didn't possess--or a superlative support group—which I don't know if I would have had—to endure that type of water torture: 'you are inferior, you are inferior' over and over and over again, permeating everything they do and say. *They are in power; they have the money; are they right after all?* I'm afraid that's how I might have thought; I wouldn't have been able to withstand the constant batterings and barrages without losing my self-esteem. I would have always wondered 'might they be right?' As a white person, and therefore by default part of the 'ruling class', I had enough self-doubts about my mental capacity, morals, and general goodness as it was. And that was with the advantages and benefit of the doubt I received as such."

"That's terrible. But I imagine you wouldn't have been the only one to feel that way about it."

"Yes, it was tragic, as were many things in the old system. The weird thing about racial prejudice, more specifically prejudice against black people as expressed by many white people, is that they tried to stereotype blacks as possessing the following attributes: natural rhythm; natural skill at sports, singing, dancing; and being especially well-endowed in certain physical characteristics. These always struck me as being an odd way of putting someone down, as these were things that I would have given my eye-teeth for. Aren't those attributes actually to be admired, even envied? What could be better, from a hereditary physiological perspective, than to have a natural tendency to excel at

sports and music, and to be a fine physical specimen?

Katy Leary made such a comment herself in her book *A Lifetime with Mark Twain*. She wrote: 'You know the colored people are musical'."

"Katy wrote a book?" Sam asks, incredulous.

"Oh, yes. So did Howells. Howells' was entitled *My Mark Twain*."

"You could knock me down with a feather! Howells I can see as he was a man of letters—even though I didn't expect there would be enough interest in me after my passing to warrant such a book. But Katy? I never thought of her as a writer."

"She did have help in writing the book. Mary Lawton interviewed her; the book is basically a free-flowing monologue—actually, it's not so unlike your own autobiography in its general 'feel'. Your grammar is better than hers was, though.

You know, Sam, you had *dozens* of biographers, from analyzers to sanitizers, from Paine to Clara, and beyond—over one hundred years after your death people were still poring over all your writings, all accounts of your life, your letters, trying to psychoanalyze you—to find the real you and expose some new tidbit of information or insight into your innermost self. There were also dozens upon dozens of Mark Twain impersonators who would travel the country lecturing 'as you'. You had an incalculable effect on innumerable writers—even a cartoonist cited you as his main influence."

"All right; let it go, Grant. Getting back to our conversation about racial prejudice: perhaps it is based more on envy than anything else."

"How do you mean, Sam?"

"Well, you said it—the natural abilities that Negroes are supposedly born with are things most people would be glad to possess, right? You said you would be glad to have those gifts, and I'm sure you're not alone there. Who wouldn't want to excel in sports, music, dancing, and all that truck?"

"You're probably right. The puny-minded bigots just can't stand being inferior in any way, and they've convinced themselves they *are* in these specific ways, and so they strike out against those they secretly admire and envy. I do think, though, that simple old-fashioned ignorance and misunderstanding play a big role also."

“No doubt about it.”

“Some of the same inane ideas—stereotyping a certain group of people—was still common in Australia until very late in the last days of the old system. It was said by some there that the Aborigines grieve briefly, and then get over it, when their children are taken away from them, a practice that was carried out supposedly for the Aborigine's own good. That was similar to what was said of black slaves in America, too.

“Thomas Jefferson (who, as you know, is famous for saying that ‘all men are created equal’) also said practically the same thing, by the way, about the African-American slaves of his day. He said ‘Their griefs are transient.’ These families, too, have been reunited here. The joy they express at these reunions is no less fervent than that shown by any other group, class, race, or nationality you may care to mention.”

CHAPTER XI

“Sam, in the interest of thoroughness, I’d like to proceed with the rest of your quotes and my commentary on them.”

“Carry on; as long as you continue to agree with me, or at least give me food for thought, I’m willing to listen,” Sam grins.

“The next up to bat is this: ‘The approach of Christmas brings harassment and dread to many excellent people. They have to buy a cart-load of presents, and they never know what to buy to hit the various tastes; they put in three weeks of hard and anxious work, and when Christmas morning comes they are so dissatisfied with the result, and so disappointed that they want to sit down and cry. Then they give thanks that Christmas comes but once a year.’

“You wouldn’t believe how fanatical things got towards the end—Christmas was played up and people were bombarded with an incessant barrage of bombastic advertising for two months and more prior to the date. One was made to feel it was their duty to God, country, and family to spend as much as they could afford—no, more—on Christmas presents for every person they knew over a mere passing acquaintance with. Emotional depression was a serious problem at that time of year due to people overextending themselves financially in their efforts to please everyone and keep up appearances (and also simply out of a generous spirit oftentimes, too, it must be admitted), and this depression was also felt acutely by those who had no family to celebrate with, or who lived too far away from them to gather together with their loved ones.

“The media (the commercial interests, aided and abetted by their partner in guilt mongering where guilt didn’t belong and guilt assuaging where it did, the religionists) portrayed Christmas as a supremely happy time of year. If for any of the above reasons it wasn’t in reality a happy time for people, they would feel as if something must be wrong with them—they were misfits or failures. A great many who celebrated Christmas ‘religiously’ did not even claim to be Christians—for example, Christmas was a wildly popular celebration in Japan. Why? It was fun! It was Western! It made money for the merchants.”

“Very interesting. Some of the things you say, Grant, are, I must admit, somewhat shocking, even for me, and I thought I was pretty close to being unshockable. And yet I will try to keep an open mind.”

“That’s all I can ask, Sam; and I’m confident that after you allow things to sink in, settle, and ferment, after your mind and heart have processed the totality of things you will see and hear in the next few days, you will have more peace of mind than you ever imagined would be possible.

“Another of your sayings that struck me especially was: ‘There are those who would misteach us that to stick in a rut is consistency—and a virtue; and that to climb out of the rut is inconsistency—and a vice.’ That could be applied to so many things; change for change’s sake is silly, but following tradition that isn’t grounded in truth or at least good sound reason is even sillier.

“Besides the more serious examples in religion and politics, there existed even relatively inconsequential, insignificant things that were quite maddening in their universal acceptance ‘just because’. A prime example of this is men shaving their facial hair. Shaving is a tradition that really defies all logic. But once it became the norm—the fashion—people got so used to the look of a man without a beard that the natural look seemed strange or radical—or even ‘dirty’ to some people--hence the term ‘clean-shaven’. A beard or mustache *can* be dirty, of course, but so can a face without such ornamentations.

“Facial hair on a man is the most natural thing in the world—God obviously created men with the capacity to grow facial hair—and yet to do so in many cases invited scorn, ridicule, and even exclusion from employment and acceptance into various organizations, either formally or informally, explicitly or implicitly. I myself do not like the look of a *bushy* beard, any more than I like the look of never-clipped fingernails or a messy house, but *requiring* a naked and bald face of men who possess the ability to cultivate luxuriant beards, florid mustaches, and verdent sideburns is really ludicrous.

“There were two occasions in man’s history when shaving became the ‘rage’: When Alexander the Great did so to appear more ‘boyish’, and when men were required to shave their beards in World War I so as to get a tight fit on their gas masks. When the Vikings fought an army of men who practiced the custom of shaving their facial hair, the cognitive dissonance of seeing men without beards was so great that they couldn’t process it mentally—they assumed they were battling fierce women who had chopped off their breasts. That is to say, it seemed more likely to them that a woman would chop off her breasts than that a man would chop off his beard.

“Traditions should never be followed blindly. If there are traditions whose

perpetuations are truly good and beneficial, by all means continue them. But traditions shouldn't be followed for no reason, or without knowing why they came to be and why they are still of benefit. If they no longer serve a purpose, by all means dump them; let them go. If they never did serve any real purpose, or worse yet, were founded on falsehoods and originated in ignorance, reject them out of hand. If they were and still are of service to those engaging in them, magnify and explain the good purpose they serve. Tradition for tradition's sake, though, is a form of self-imposed slavery and a manifestation of mental laziness, or even cowardice, which can lead to inadvertent participation in vain acts and counterproductive ways of thinking.

"One admittedly rather inconsequential example illustrating the unquestioning acceptance of a tradition being simply a waste of time is the wearing of neckties, a bizarre and now laughable practice carried on by many in the old system. Neckties have got to be the most idiotic fashion ever conceived: they are a pain in the neck—literally—they prohibit a free flow of air down your neck, resulting in overheating and unnecessary perspiration—which can lead to dehydration, which can lead to other problems, including but not restricted to bad humor, loss of composure, loss of consciousness, heat strokes,...well, OK, maybe I'm exaggerating a little, but as far as I'm concerned neckties make you look as if you're in a noose—they are just downright goofy looking—unless you've gotten so used to them by their incomprehensible ubiquity that you don't really 'see them' anymore. Now if somebody else wants to wear a necktie, fine—I'll try to suppress my laughter. But you'll never catch me wearing one! What irked me about them was that in certain situations you weren't taken seriously unless you had wrapped one of those flaccid pretzels around your neck and dangled it outside of your shirt."

"I was certainly never a slave to fashion myself, and I can see your point, Grant, but I'm not *quite* as rabidly anti-necktie as you are," Sam said.

"You're probably right—it's not really that important, and I'm obviously overreacting. But I think we all have some pet peeves—things that just rub us the wrong way—that are not completely rational; nevertheless, we feel strongly about them and will probably never change our opinion about them."

"And these are your two 'pet peeves'—ties and beards, or the lack of beards?"

"Two *of* them, yes. Perhaps my level of enthusiasm against and for them, respectively, is a little overdone; nevertheless, that is how I feel about

them. If somebody wants to wear a tie, fine. If a man wants to shave, let him go ahead. Just don't expect me to do those things because 'tradition' demands them. What right did the business community—a community that was responsible, directly and indirectly, for the deaths of millions of innocents—have to impose their dress code on everyone? Big business, and sometimes small--and certainly many of the small would have been big if they could have, and then would have acted just as badly as the big—too often put profits above people. In the same way, most of the smaller governments would have behaved as badly as the bigger ones if only they had had the opportunity (that is to say, if they were as big and powerful as the big ones were).

“Making their stock look attractive was more important to big businesses than keeping people employed, and even more important to them than keeping people safe. Everything was done for the investors, the stockholders. Take advantage of the defenseless, if that means another penny in the coffers! Wipe out entire species, if that makes the stockholders happy! Lay off thousands of workers if it will save a buck!

“Ever increasingly so at the end, the common people—not just the wealthy, as had traditionally been the case—were stockholders, and agreed with this cutthroat competition (when they were not themselves the ones being laid off). The stockholders were part owners, and therefore shared responsibility for what the companies did. That was a terrible responsibility to take on, even though—or maybe especially because—they could not, in most cases, control what the company did. Rape the land? ‘It's not my fault, I wasn't there in the boardroom when that decision was made’. Dispossess the native people? ‘I didn't know’. Destroy the environment? ‘Don't look at me—it's not my fault.’ Nevertheless, the stockholders did bear a measure of guilt and culpability.

“That monkey suit they wore was termed a ‘business suit’. Why would anybody want to dress like, look like, and be associated with, big business, ‘greedy commerce’? I guess I should have been glad nobody foisted upon a gullible public a required garb that consisted of a pink-and-orange beanie, frilly midriff shirt, knickers, and oxfords.

“As you can see, Grant, I still have the capacity to fume over those asinine fashion straitjackets of yesteryear. As you've probably noticed after meeting several people, there is no dress code or even common fashion or style here. People wear whatever clothes they like, which are more often than not things that they find comfortable above all other considerations, and men shave or not depending on their own taste. Everything in that line is accepted, and nobody slavishly follows an

artificially induced and propped-up fashion. The marionettes of Madison Avenue, London, Paris, and Hollywood have lost all their influence. In fact, those places don't even exist any more."

"I don't quite understand all of what you're saying, there, but—"

"No matter; maybe I should have kept silent on that score. But while I'm on a roll, I may as well mention my other pet peeve: what I perceive as one of the most asinine customs of the last part of the old system: the puritanical pooh-poohing of the enjoyment of liquor during the workday. That you couldn't enjoy an ale, lager, pilsner, or glass of wine—which does so much to enhance the meal's flavor—with your lunch was really a culinary travesty. Thinking themselves reasonable and pious for doing so, people would drink valueless 'hummingbird juice' instead—sickeningly sweet concoctions of water, sugar, and chemicals. And you thought ice water was bad, Sam! Imagine the irony of it: society rejected drinking something healthful while they were 'working', but replaced those beverages with ones that had absolutely no nutritional value, and thought themselves wise and temperate for doing so!

"It is no wonder people had so many health problems, the way they abused their bodies with such unnatural swill. These same people would then, as soon as they were no longer 'working', oftentimes overindulge in the very types of beverages they had sanctimoniously avoided and shunned while they were 'at work'. 'Going from one extreme to another' would perhaps have been a good motto for the way they did things. Nothing in moderation, everything in excess, or not at all. From celibate to fiend and back again, over and over. The Untied States of Pleonexia is what it became.

"Those are pretty much just my own opinions on those relatively meaningless matters, things that gnawed at me for years, and are really not of grave consequence—certainly not any longer, as those artificial trappings of respectability have been exposed as shallow and have expired. They have been as if dislodged by explosives—after all, you also said: 'Custom is petrification; nothing but dynamite can dislodge it for a century'. Customs are kept only if they have a valid *raison d'être*; otherwise they are removed or replaced."

"Finally! I don't mean to steal your thunder stealing my thunder, but as I wrote in 'Tom Sawyer', 'Often, the less there is to justify a traditional custom, the harder it is to get rid of it.'"

"Superbo responsio, Sam! And so true! Those of moral courage are the ones that are here—those that are 'mentally tough', you might say. Not

those who follow the dictates of fashion, flow with the winds of change, sniff the breeze to see which way the majority are going, or monitor the trend-o-meter.”

“If this life is all you make it out to be, wouldn’t everybody want to live here?”

“Sam, as surprising as it may sound: No, not everyone has wanted to be here. What is desirable is a subjective thing. For example, some people like chocolate, others don’t. Neither preference proves or disproves that chocolate is good or enjoyable; both are just a matter of opinion. Many want to be here, because the overall conditions and ‘feel’ appeal to them; others wouldn’t be satisfied without a framework in which they at least had a *chance* to lord it over their fellowmen, to take advantage of them, or to practice any number of unsavory things.

“Since selfishness is not allowed here, selfish people don’t want any part of it. So, as wonderful as life here is, it doesn’t seem so to everyone. For that reason many people—in fact, the majority—opted out; they got what they wanted, namely no part of this life. And we get what we want: the real life, where we can develop all of our abilities to their full extent, continue to learn forever, and contribute to the happiness of everyone else.

“The selfless, those who love to serve others, could imagine no better life than this one—because there is none. Both the climate and the company are superb here.”

CHAPTER XII

“Let’s change the subject. Sam, you didn’t expect your books to have staying power. That *was* true, to one degree or another, of the writing of so many of your contemporaries, including but not limited to William Dean Howells, Artemus Ward, Henry Ward Beecher, and even Bret Harte to a great extent (in the last days of the old system almost everybody knew who ‘Mark Twain’ was, and the majority knew who Samuel Clemens was, but it was only a decided minority who knew who Bret Harte was (outside of the gold rush country of Calaveras county, where you and he were the two co-heroes of the area from a literary standpoint)—and you could probably count the number of people who knew Harte’s first name on your hands and feet).

“Your books, on the other hand, lived on and on, especially ‘Tom Sawyer’ and ‘Huck Finn’. The others did also, albeit to a lesser extent, especially *The Innocents Abroad*, *A Tramp Abroad*, *Roughing It*, *Prince and the Pauper*, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, *Life on the Mississippi* and *Following the Equator*. It seems everybody loved you, regardless of political or religious affiliations or sentiments (or lack thereof). That was really amazing, as you did not hold back your opinions, oftentimes very outspoken ones *against* some of the very tenets these lovers of you held. It is as if people didn’t read your arguments against their own way of thinking. They either only ‘saw’ those directed against their adversaries, or somehow glossed right over any criticism of their own beliefs. They saw only their enemies, not themselves, in your satires and burlesques.

“As an example of this, you were beloved in North as well as South America, Russia, China, India, by democrats, republicans, socialists, across all sorts of lines and borders and doctrines and beliefs. They all seemed to view you as their proponent and sponsor, or even as their patron saint.

“Another personage of your day whose popularity endured was Abraham Lincoln. Most people considered him to be one of the best presidents to ever serve the United States. In his eulogy of you, Howells called you ‘the Lincoln of our literature’.”

“Howells may have been going a little too far there—although I appreciate it. Let it go.”

“I think not; actually, I think you were a better writer than he was a

president; but that is also just an opinion, added to his.

“All that having been said, you *were* a little hard to understand at times, Sam. I guess that’s true of most of us. You seemed very progressive in some ways, and yet sentimental and nostalgic at other times. What I’m thinking of in particular here is your yearning for the days of the steamboats and railing against the trains that had usurped them as king of transportation. It is understandable that you would mourn the faded glory of the steamboats, growing up along the Mississippi as you did, and especially since you worked as a riverboat pilot.”

“Excuse me, Grant, but I don’t seem to recall what negative thing I said or wrote about trains.”

“You disparaged railroads as a noisy, romanceless blight. I don’t mean to poke fun at you, but it *is* somewhat amusing to get a glimpse of how at least some felt about trains at the time (the 1880s) compared to the common view about trains a century or so later. By the time I was a boy, trains were no longer viewed as “modern” at all—instead they were beloved by many due to their being viewed as exactly what you said they were not: they were seen as old-fashioned and quaint; they had thereby acquired a romantic aura. Ironically, this viewpoint was very similar to how you felt about the steamboats. Just as the steamboats were displaced by stagecoaches, and then by trains, as the major mode of long-distance travel, trains were eventually supplanted by jets.”

“Jets?”

“Jets are large airplanes—some of which can carry hundreds of passengers. These flying ships can fly from coast to coast—from New York to San Francisco, for example, in five hours. More often now, though, people have ‘reverted’ to the earlier methods of travel, as time is not such a factor any more, and people want to enjoy and see and experience as they travel, not just see how fast they can get from point A to point B. Ships have regained some of their popularity, and the opulence of some of them rivals and even surpasses that of those of old. Trains and small airplanes are also very popular now.”

“Trains I can live with. Are airplanes really safe, though?”

“Oh, yes. Technology and aircraft design have improved to the point where it’s virtually impossible to crash. Even in the old system, air travel was the safest mode of all, mile for mile.”

“Hmm. All right, I’ll give them a try—sometime.”

“Maybe this will open a whole new chapter of life for you, Sam. You could become a pilot anew—this time weaving your way through the upper atmosphere.”

“We’ll see.”

CHAPTER XIII

“Moving onward, Sam, you once said: ‘...a man's first duty is to his own conscience and honor; the party and country come second to that, and never first.’ Truer and wiser words were seldom spoken. A terrible and horrific shirking of this duty took place on many occasions, especially in war time, when soldiers were directed to kill innocent people—and did so, simply because they were ‘ordered’ to do so. Conscience and right meant less to these soldiers than following orders, no matter how senseless or diabolical those orders were.

“At the risk of shocking you back into the ground, I must tell you that in World War II, millions of innocents were killed by a demonic world ruler who ordered his soldiers to eliminate an entire race of people. Almost to a man, they obeyed—that was what they were trained to do—obey at all costs, any cost, no matter what. They didn’t need to understand why, or agree with, the orders—just obey them.”

Sam winces when he hears this and starts to ask a question. He catches himself, hesitates, seeming as if maybe he doesn’t really want to know the answer, but finally gets up the courage to ask: “Tell me, then, Grant—Who was it? What ruler, where? What people were assigned to extermination and extinction by him?”

“It happened in Germany, Sam. A demonized maniac maneuvered and manipulated his way to the chancellorship, and then gradually brainwashed and hoodwinked the majority. Most of them allowed themselves to be gradually lured into a process of grotesque self-deception. A variety of ethnic groups were targeted, but the primary target, in terms of numbers arrested and systematically killed, were Jews.”

Sam shakes his head and looks at the ground. “I can’t believe the Germans—or anybody, for that matter—would do such a thing, to anybody. Why did they?”

“No reason; no good reason; a lot of convoluted and nonsensical ‘reasons’. But don’t think that if the maniac had come to power in another country, it could not have happened there, too. Germans (like Jews) are no worse—or better—than any other ethnic or national group. We have large numbers of both here, and they get along like brothers.”

“There are no hard feelings between Jews and Germans any more?”

“None whatsoever. Just as there are none between Hutus and Tutsis, blacks and whites, or anybody else.”

“Hu-who?”

“The Hutus and the Tutsis were tribes in Rwanda who fought a vicious and bloodthirsty civil war with one another.”

“Is there another kind of civil war?”

“Good point.”

“It seems a lot happened while I was away.”

“You could say that; most of what happened following your death was very missable, though. With the outbreak of World War I in 1914, things really started going downhill.

“Between the two world wars, in 1929, there was an economic crash. What came to be known as the Great Depression followed. Work was scarce, and many people moved from one part of the country to another in an oftentimes vain effort to find work. Those who lived through those times were usually imprinted with an exaggerated and perhaps inordinate fear of material want and a great...respect, let's call it, for money.

“Money was deified by many people in many places in many times throughout history, but its deification was perhaps never stronger than in the final decades of the old system. The difference between the Depression generation and the relatively affluent generation of those closing decades was that those who experienced the Depression wanted to be assured of having the necessities of life, while the latter generation took the necessities for granted and demanded all their eyes could see—all the luxuries that the covet-machine called commerce seduced them with.”

“I guess I picked a good time to die, and a good time to sleep.”

“You always did have impeccable timing, Sam.”

“Thank you; not always, but I'm not going to argue with you too much on that score. Let it go.”

“Speaking of death, that reminds me: Once you have gotten a chance to

look around and note the changes, I hope and believe that you will change your mind about death and come to realize that it is an enemy, not a friend. In fact, more than merely hoping, I am confident you will see it that way.

“History has finally ceased repeating itself, as man’s character is being constantly refined.”

“Refined?”

“Yes; and eventually perfected. Getting back to our discussion about duty and conscience and honor and orders: as you said, everyone’s first duty is to his own conscience. People’s consciences can be seared, though. If you’re taught wrong is right long enough, you may eventually come to believe it.

“People need to be trained to have a properly functioning conscience. At any rate, there are no more political parties, nor are their sovereign countries in the political sense. Parties are superfluous, unless you’re talking about dinner parties; it makes no sense to speak of countries, as there is only one—the entire land mass which encompasses the earth.”

“I’m still thinking about the genocide, or attempted genocide, about which you spoke. Why didn’t those soldiers simply refuse to comply?”

“Remember what you acknowledged about that: ‘It is curious—curious that physical courage should be so common in the world, and moral courage so rare.’ Going to war, especially for a young man, was often an easier thing to do than standing up for his principles and refusing to go. After all, what are the chances, really, of being killed in war? Obviously many were killed, and many died bravely. But the fact remains that the vast majority of soldiers return home when the war is over. Going and doing the ‘patriotic’ thing brings kudos, acceptance, and admiration from the majority. People are proud of you. You are thought to be brave. You are among the majority—that is, those who obey the government or fall prey to its propaganda mill of subtle manipulation—those who sadly become willing participants in their own oppression. It is always easier to be with the majority than to buck them.

“As easy as it may sound when you are not the one involved or when removed from the situation, taking a stand against a classroom full or a shop floor full or a town square full of people is one of the most difficult things for a person to do. If all of your friends or buddies or schoolmates or workmates or comrades are doing or saying one thing, it is infinitely easier to suppress your own conscience and realign it to the conduct of

the others, no matter how wrong or stupid you know the conduct of the majority to be, than to go 'against the grain' as the lone dissenter.

"Imagine this situation: Is it easier for a person, when drafted into the military, to go down to the recruiting station to report for duty, or to—at the risk of being thought a coward, a traitor, or insane—refuse to do so? The weight of public pressure, peer pressure, is very heavy. Friends and relatives may not understand and may try to convince you that you are wrong. Others yell at you, scorn you, spurn you, reject you, spit on you with their eyes and sometimes literally, too. In that kind of situation, it is certainly true that moral courage is much more difficult to muster and maintain than the physical courage required if you simply follow through in doing what's expected.

"In fact, what young man isn't somehow darkly attracted to the prospect of glorious cacophonous chaotic battles waged on foreign soil with blood brothers—The glory! The excitement! The camaraderie! The easy abnegation of responsibility for one's own conduct—the burden of deciding between right and wrong is lifted off your shoulders, and all you need do is act; it is not necessary to think for yourself. What a relief! What exquisite frivolity! The stress of evaluating everything before proceeding melts away. And when there's a cause to fight for—what young man can resist a cause?

"Yes, going to war is the easier of the two battles—although both are admittedly difficult. As you once said: 'Each man is afraid of his neighbor's disapproval--a thing which, to the general run of the human race, is more dreaded than wolves and death'."

"Interesting perspective. I'll have to sleep on that."

"That's fine. Just don't sleep as long as you did last time. Which reminds me of another of your maxims: 'A human being has a natural desire to have more of a good thing than he needs.' I don't know if it's a '*natural* desire', but greed is certainly a *common* desire or impulse. Greed is wanting more than you need; perhaps more accurately, more than you can reasonably use. I once read the results of a poll related to this, and they were quite telling: People who were paid \$20,000 a year said that \$24,000 would be enough for them to live comfortably. Those paid \$25,000 said they needed \$30,000. The ones receiving \$30,000 in pay thought \$35,000 would be about right, and so on. In other words, no matter what people have, they think they need more. And most people tended to live a little beyond their needs rather than within or a little below their needs.

“People can only expand their possessions within the boundaries of their own land now, though—and their land cannot be expanded, so that places an unavoidable limit on acquisitiveness. Individuals and families own the land now, not nations and corporations. And once ownership is conferred or assigned, it is immutable. Nobody can colonize anybody else’s land. The assignation of land is an infinitely lasting and unbreakable covenant. The family land will never pass out of the family, can never be diminished, nor can it ever be augmented.”

“And so it has been possible to breed that greed out of our tribe?”

“It has been more of an *educating* it out of ourselves, coupled with circumstances that obviate the need for the amassing of wealth: The future is always secure. Nobody needs to worry about where their next meal is coming from or where they will sleep tonight or whether they will have shoes to wear on the morrow.

“An atmosphere and milieu that discourages avarice prevails. Even the idea of leaving something behind for posterity no longer applies, as we never die—we will live on to see our great-grandchildren, and their great-grandchildren, and their great-grandchildren, and so on.

We can prepare for those yet to be resurrected, to make them comfortable, but there’s a limit to how much needs to be done, and the time will come when that will totally cease once all who would enjoy this life and fit in here have been resurrected.”

CHAPTER XIV

“Sam, another obstacle to happiness and stability all through man’s history has been war. This exercise in futility has also been discarded as unfit, unbecoming, and unnecessary.”

“How can it be that there is no war? There has always been war; war seems to be part and parcel of men’s personality, an integral part of the fabric of society. There have always been a passel of asses fomenting and proposing wars, and an even greater number of chuckleheads willing to defend and perpetuate them.”

“That fabric wore out and has been discarded, Sam. You once said in relation to this: ‘All war must be just the killing of strangers against whom you feel no personal animosity; strangers whom, in other circumstances, you would help if you found them in trouble, and who would help you if you needed it.’ Such is the case—would you take up arms against your son or your father or your best friend, even if you had a serious disagreement with them? Of course not; and in this system, neither incentive for war exists: first, we are all friends and there *are* no real strangers extant; additionally, we do not disagree on anything of grave import.

“Sure, we may differ with one another as to preference regarding styles of dress and grooming, what art, music, and literature we enjoy, even the type of weather and scenery and food we prefer, but none of these things generate animosity one toward another. The most violent reaction to these differences of opinion is an occasional raised eyebrow, sigh, or shake of the head. Now and then we may have a misunderstanding or even a slight verbal argument, but if anyone on earth is ever in need, all the others would stampede to his aid—therein would lie the greatest danger in human interaction: an accidental shove or bump or trip in a mob rushing to help a mutual friend.

“You also wrote of war: ‘Who gets a profit out of it? Nobody but a parcel of usurping little monarchs and nobilities who despise you; would feel defiled if you touched them; would shut the door in your face if you proposed to call; whom you slave for, fight for, die for; whose existence is a perpetual insult to you and you are afraid to resent it; who are mendicants supported by your alms, yet assume toward you the airs of benefactor toward beggar, who address you in the language of master to slave.’ That was one of your masterstrokes, Sam.

“Sam, you also turned the phrase ‘Hideous drenchings of the earth with blood’. Although the majority admitted war was bad and wrong, and almost everybody wanted to live in peace, somehow people just couldn’t stop engaging in bloody combat. It was as if they were addicted to it. The ‘slaughters more terrible in their destruction of life, more devastating in their engine of war’ of which you spoke did indeed come about, with the two World Wars I delineated earlier.”

“We have finally overcome that addiction to bloodshed. What would we fight for, over, or about? There is only one government, and no individual can augment the size of his allotted piece of land. Who would we fight against, for we are all partners, brothers, and friends of everyone else on earth? There exists neither reason nor inclination to wage war or conduct conflicts.”

“You could knock me down with a feather, Grant! I have no reason to doubt you, based on what I’ve seen thus far, but at the same time it seems a little hard to believe—‘too good to be true’, that this terrible addiction has finally been licked.”

“Yes, I know it does seem hard to believe at first, Sam, but you’ll gradually get used to it. Hearing your response helps me to appreciate it to the full and not take it for granted. Just as people got used to bad things in life and eventually regarded them as being normal and said such things as ‘such is life’ and ‘that’s life’, even when death was involved (‘death is a part of life’), so too now it is sometimes altogether too easy to forget just how good we have it compared to what it could be—and what it used to be.

“On to your next quotation: ‘The rain is famous for falling on the just and unjust alike, but if I had the management of such affairs I would rain softly and sweetly on the just, but if I caught a sample of the unjust out doors I would drown him.’ That certainly was true (rain was equally distributed to the just and unjust) during the entire duration of mankind’s failed experiment with self-rule, but since then it is no longer the case. The beneficent rain falls on all, and no destructive rain falls at all.”

CHAPTER XV

“Sam, we’ve talked in length already about the egalitarianism of society which now prevails—no man is ‘better’ than another. There are no master/slave or royalty/serf or even employer/employee relationships here. In cases where people work together, they are equal partners.

“That having been said, and explained somewhat thoroughly already, I would also like to tell you about a prevailing situation that brings to mind your thought: ‘Titles—another artificiality—are a part of clothing. They and the [clothes] conceal the wearer’s inferiority and make him seem great and a wonder, when at bottom there is nothing remarkable about him.’

“We *do* have Princes among us, Sam—but these are men who truly have our interests at heart. They own no more land than we do. The house they are provided is no larger or statelier than our own. They do not dress differently than anyone else. Nor do they live in certain ‘neighborhoods’ apart from the ‘common rabble’. They do not expect, and in fact would vigorously object to and outright reject, any worshipful attitude expressed toward them. They do not consider themselves to be holy relics. Respect them, yes we most certainly do, for they actually *serve* us rather than vice versa.

“We need no human lords or masters, but we do need direction and we do need to be organized in order to accomplish the most we can the best we can without a duplication of effort. That’s what these men are, really: organizers, facilitators, and voluntary benevolent representatives of the Supreme authority.

“You cannot identify these princes by their garb or manner of speech or deportment; they are humble men, and do not demand or curry favors because of their position. As a matter of fact, you’ve already met the Prince who is assigned oversight over our village, and I’ll be very surprised if you can guess who he is.”

“You have me there, Grant; that’s too many for me. If I *had* to guess, I would say perhaps Spencer O’Claire or John Merrick, but I really couldn’t say.”

I smile at Sam and say, “As I said—not to embarrass you, as I wouldn’t expect you to ferret it out by any way except pure chance—you weren’t able to guess correctly.”

“Don’t worry so much about embarrassing me, Grant. I’m not that sensitive. I do not take myself *that* seriously, and in matters such as these I don’t mind being wrong from time to time anyway. In fact, there are many opinions I expressed in the past, especially in the last few years of my--earlier--life, that I hope you *will* overturn and bury forever. They seemed sensible and logical to me at the time, but there’s no denying they were dark and depressing, negative and cynical.”

“Fine. As to the identity of the Prince in our village, it is in actuality John Pomranky. He has a long record of humble and selfless service, and so he proved to be perfect for the office. The upshot of the whole matter, everything having been heard, is this: some do bear titles (such as ‘Prince’), but these designations are not a sign of superiority, but rather simply show that the person with the title is suited to do the job that goes with that appellation.

“Titles are few and far between, but those that shoulder them deserve them and live up to them to the best of their ability and to the benefit of the entire community. They do not show off or blow trumpets or march at the head of parades, nor do they seek accolades and prominence. They are satisfied with the fulfillment of their duty and the helping of the community. The point is (and I think it is something that is very nice), that you can’t tell by *looking* at somebody whether he is the Prince or not. Princes do not wear any specific garb; they wear no kissable rings; nor do they ride in processions; nor do they employ bodyguards—they don’t need to, because they are loved by all and hated by none; respected, but not resented.

When it comes to working together, it is often necessary for a person to take the lead in a project. Your neighbor, for example, may have experience in construction, and in a community building project you submit to his direction. On another occasion, where joint effort is needed, you may be the one with experience in that area, and in that case you might be the one to take the lead and your builder neighbor will submit to your direction. So it is not a 'class' thing; when one takes the lead over others, it is simply for expediency and efficiency.”

CHAPTER XVI

“Onward. We’ve discussed grooming, and touched on clothing, but let’s delve a little further into that subject. You once wondered aloud why all men don’t wear long, loose fitting clothing, as such are so comfortable. That *is* a fairly popular fashion now. But then again, so are many other styles. In fact, since so many styles are accepted, nothing can really be said to be ‘in fashion’--or ‘out of fashion’, for that matter.

“You can’t predict how a person will be dressed or groomed before meeting them; at the same time, practically no style of dress seems odd or out of place. People dress in their own favorite and preferred style. Nobody has to wish that a certain type or article of clothing or manner of cultivating their hair is currently ‘in style’--it doesn’t matter. However a person wants to decorate herself, or express himself, is what he or she does. Swallowtail coat? Fine, if that’s what you want to wear—nobody is going to find fault with it. Mutton chops? No problem. A long, loose fitting brightly colored robe? Why not? What a person wears now has nothing to do with ‘fashion’ as prescribed by Madison Avenue or Hollywood or London or Paris or what so-and-so is wearing or the state of the economy.

“Rather, what a person wears has everything to do with the individual’s personality and what activities they will be engaged in during the day. For example, I might dress more or less as you are now when I attend a banquet, but when playing basketball that sort of clothing would not be nearly as appropriate. There is plenty of room for variety here—you can build the house of your preference, wear the clothes you choose, etc. You won’t provoke scorn, envy, or jealousy by ‘following the beat of your own drummer’. Others may not understand why you build the style of house you do or dress as you do, but they won’t censure you for it.”

“Grant, that’s the sensiblest thing I’ve ever heard on that subject.”

“I thought you would concur. Sam, you sagely said once: ‘Only he who has seen better days and lives to see better days again knows their full value.’ You saw many good days, and then things took a turn for the worst as you gradually lost most of your loved ones to the Worst Enemy. You are now receiving a passport to unlimited days of wonder and bliss—I hope you will have the wisdom to appreciate its full worth.”

“If I have my loved ones back, my health, and can see the complete emancipation of man, I don’t see how I could be anything but joyful and

appreciative.”

“And that’s certainly the way I feel about it, too, Sam. I may not have lived as exciting a life as you did, and I most certainly didn’t experience the breadth and depth of pain you did, and still I thrill at the magnificent cornucopia of life.

“Each day brings new experiences and adventures. Whereas there were certainly times in the old system when I dreaded facing the day and would have preferred to continue sleeping so as to avoid life and its abrupt and insensitive batterings, now I wake each day fully refreshed and exultant with anticipation for the things that the new day will bring. Instead of begrudgingly dragging myself out of bed with a scowl, I verily leap out of bed with a broad smile and a beaming countenance. I haven’t begun to esteem it as ordinary yet—nor do I expect ever to—and I’ve been here several decades already.”

“That’s good to hear. What else do you want to indirectly teach me?”

“Well, Sam,” I chuckle, “I don’t know how indirect I am, but another topic is in response to this statement of yours: ‘The political and commercial morals of the United States are not merely food for laughter, they are an entire banquet.’ My response to that is: You could have easily replaced ‘United States’ with just about any other country on earth, and been just as right—or even more so—about that.

“Moreover, you would need to have a taste for gallows humor to consider those morals humorous. I would say, though, that you neglected to add the third element of that atrocious triumvirate: religion. The things those three partners affected in concert with one another are shameful even to relate.”

“You make some of my statements seem tame by contrast.”

“Only because you couched yours in humor. I wish I had the cleverness and skill to accomplish that as well as you do—I’d even settle for half of your genius, skill, and talent. I just don’t have that gift. I was never able to write as you have—clothing your protests in irrefutable logic presented tongue-in-cheek, simultaneously provoking laughter and almost blindingly illuminating the true essence of a matter.

“As you wrote happened in Italy way back when, the ‘domains of the church were confiscated’ again in the latter part of the old system. As surprising as it must have been in ancient Italy, it was even more so in this case, as the whole world was involved. Not just Christendom, but

Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Mormonism, and all the rest.

“Once the political leaders finally realized that much or most of the strife and violence in the world could be laid at the doorstep of religion, and that religions had been robbing both their parishioners and the governments and thereby amassing unbelievably immense piles of money, they plundered and then obliterated them.

“I shed no tears for the organizations themselves, as they were corrupt and saturated with blood, nor did I feel any compassion for the leaders, as they misled the people, either deliberately or through their malfeasance and malpractice. After all, they were professionals and set themselves up as experts in their field, but were in actuality phonies, quacks, and charlatans—counterfeits. Those that I did feel sorry for were the adherents of those religions who had been led down the garden path, led by the blind into a pit.”

“That is really a stunning account. How did the people then satisfy their inborn need to worship something after religions were disassembled and banned?”

“For the most part, they turned their devotional attention to the political groups, most particularly the United Nations, which had taken a leading role in destroying what had been the very object of their devotion up to that point. The demolisher of their idol became their new idol. It was quite ironic, actually, as leaders of false religion had hailed the U.N. as the only hope for concord and peace.

“One of the great ironies of how things eventually shook out is that many religionists pointed first to the League of Nations and then its successor the United Nations to bring true peace and security. This very organization—the United Nations, that is—was instrumental in dismantling and destroying those very religious powers.

“The political machinery those religionists endorsed, supported, courted, and even worshipped (by touting them as the sole hope for concord and peace) turned on them and devoured them. Putting no faith in God’s Kingdom (the very thing they should have been espousing and promoting), they turned the minds and hearts of their adherents instead to their future annihilator.

“But, of course, no human institution or government or conglomeration or amalgamation of governments, no coalition whatsoever that they could form, could achieve the establishing of peace and security.”

"All right," Sam says, with a puzzled expression on his face. "The United Nations—the U.N. What was that?"

"After World War I (at that time called "The Great War"), governments set up an organization to hopefully prevent another world war from ever happening again. They called it the League of Nations. Scarcely twenty years later another world war did break out, though. Since the League of Nations had proved to be a failure, it was dissolved.

"After World War II, though, a reformulated permutation of it arose, and this Phoenix was named the United Nations. On the surface, it may have seemed like a noble experiment, but in reality it claimed to be able to accomplish something that was well beyond its capabilities; thus, like false religion, they were phonies, quacks, charlatans, and counterfeit—a fraud.

"Additionally, the U.N.'s goal was to perpetuate human governments, which, just like the false religions and the United Nations itself, were fakes and failures. People could no longer afford such a situation."

CHAPTER XVII

We are now close enough to Sam's house to see it in the distance. It is situated in front of a stand of eucalyptus trees that line the river that runs behind his two-story Victorian house. I point it out to him. "See that white house over there, drowsing at the edge of that meadow? That's yours."

Sam drinks in the scene for a long minute. His eyes smiling, he turns to me and says, "I'm almost home, and I'm anxious to get there. Let's go, and you can fill my ear with some more of your tutoring as we approach."

I nod, gesture for him to take the lead now, and fall in slightly behind him and to his right.

"Sam, do you know why you're here, and some aren't?" I ask him.

"I was wondering that myself, Grant. I feel almost guilty that I should be chosen while others were not."

"To quote you once again: '...there is a good side and a bad side to most people, and in accordance with your own character and disposition you will bring out one of them and the other will remain a sealed book to you.' Those that are here are those who chose—yes, *chose*, because each person is responsible for his own actions, conduct, and character—to emphasize their good side and try to choke out, as best as possible, the bad. Eventually the effort pays off, as the bad invades our thoughts less and less the more we combat it, eventually atrophying into nothingness. Those who are not here deliberately cultivated and reveled in their bad side."

"But," Sam says, many who were thought to be bad were actually good, and untold many more who men thought good could more accurately be defined as bad."

"That's the truth, Sam. Those that are here, or not here, did not have their presence or absence determined by outward appearances or popular opinion. What they *really* were, at the core—the condition of their hearts—was the deciding factor.

"That was one of the problems with rule by men, decisions made by juries—which you so eloquently assessed--and human judges, and the like: we cannot read another person's heart. That is to say, *humans*

aren't able to do it. We were—and still are, to some extent—a mystery to each other. As you said (to again quote you): 'Let us consider that we are all partially insane. It will explain us to each other; it will unriddle many riddles; it will make clear and simple many things which are involved in haunting and harassing difficulties and obscurities now.'

"That is manifestly true, since just as no man was physically perfect, nor were any mentally or emotionally perfect. And thus all of us, yes, lack full sanity to one degree or another—so far. We are working in that direction, just as we are physically, mentally, and spiritually striving ever upward also, but until then we are 'all partially insane'. I am, and so are you. And so we will remain, for awhile yet. You yourself said it: 'no man is entirely in his right mind at any time.'

"This lack of perfection, though, does not have to be debilitating, just as my not yet reaching physical perfection does not really seem to me to be a malady, affliction, or handicap. I will appreciate getting better, but I don't feel hindered at present. Nevertheless I am, a little.

"There will always be things to look forward to, because we will always be improving, and even after we have reached perfection in all of those areas (physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual), there will still be things to do and things to learn—and indeed forever, on into infinity—which will be even more enjoyable once we reach full maturation, that is to say, perfection."

"So you're admitting to me that you're insane?" Sam asks me, with a twinkle in his eye.

"No," I smile back, "not exactly—because I'm more sane than insane—as are you. Until we reach perfection, we are all partially insane. It devolves upon each of us to take advantage of the provisions that enable us to reach full sanity and a holistic balance. Our gradual, stepwise refinements lead to physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual perfection—perfect balance and harmony. The salubriousness of life here is unequaled by any prior human experience."

CHAPTER XVIII

“Sam, one of the most common themes explored in your writing was something variously called bigotry, discrimination, intolerance, partiality, or prejudice. As you know, prejudice is a predisposition either for or against something or someone. Blind allegiance, blind loyalty, is a flavor of prejudice *for* something—an idea or concept, a person, a government, or anything else.

“Regarding such a predisposition manifested toward governments, you said: ‘The very ink with which all history is written is merely fluid prejudice.’ Yes, each government controlled its historians to one extent or another, directly or indirectly. People were so devoted to their governments that they oftentimes—more often than not, probably—viewed the government itself as sacred, and its human rulers as gods. They felt their life stemmed from these governments, that they owed their lives to them, as if these governments had somehow created and birthed them, and they were merely bums who should have been eternally grateful for being allowed to live on the soil—soil that was in reality intended for *them*, not for political entities who demand so much and give so little in return.

“A medal and a mention for giving your life—but those in power would not usually put themselves in harm’s way, nor would they allow their children to court danger. Of course not! They loved their children. But they despised the love other parents had for their children. Offering up your son on the altar of war is a noble sacrifice, they told them. Like the religious leaders, they weren’t willing to make the same sacrifice they called for, or even budge it with their fingers, but for others—those they considered beneath them, although giving them lip honor and respect—it was supposed to be viewed as an honor and a privilege. Sacrificing in such a way would propel them forward on the road to glory--they were their benefactors in allowing them to make such a sacrifice! They could be proud of their patriotism, when they were really just being hoodwinked and suckered.

“Paying homage was a cheap price for them to pay for the cannon fodder they needed to help them fill their coffers and stroke their egos, positioning themselves to go down in history as great warrior-kings. They imagined their busts and portraits would stand forever, being portrayed with steely eyes focused on the horizon, jaws clenched and jutting forward, their hair combed perfectly; exuding a resoluteness seldom seen. Certainly none from the common clay could muster such a mien.

“And the parents willingly sacrificed their children to this god of war. Over and over, again and again, no matter how many times they watched movies such as ‘All Quiet on the Western Front’ and in a more lucid moment agreed that war was preposterous and absurd.

“As you so ably and aptly said, Sam, ‘It is not worthwhile to try to keep history from repeating itself, for man’s character will always make the preventing of the repetitions impossible.’ They willingly subjected themselves to their oppressors. They weren’t just resigned; they weren’t just willing; they *clamored* for the privilege of being quickly forgotten slaves killing other slaves soon lost from memory. As P.T. Barnum noted, every minute such ones came into the world. As for the war-god priests, their busts have been broken up, smashed to smithereens, and their portraits set ablaze. They are no more cherished than used-up bath water, no more fondly remembered than an old whip is to an abused horse.

“Before I finish this diatribe, let me tell you the situation as it stood when I was a schoolboy, and see if it matches your experience during your school days in Hannibal: In History class, it seemed to me that everything the United States had ever done (the country in which you and I both happened to grow up) was good—no, perfect, or at least superlative. And amazingly enough—coincidence of coincidences!—every good invention ever invented just happened to be invented by an American. Those Germans are clever, but not on a par with us Americans. The Japanese are certainly intelligent, but don’t have the Yankee ingenuity, apparently. And so on and so forth. Anyway, that’s an example of your ‘fluid prejudice’.

“Because I was just cynical enough to doubt that everything the U.S. had ever done was good, and everything good ever done originated in the U.S., I questioned *everything* taught in school. My reasoning was thus: since some of the things taught in history class are not true--or are at best gross exaggerations and sanitations--how do I know what *is* true? I *can’t* know which is true and which is fabrication, so why pay attention to *any* of it, since I may be wasting my time by ‘learning’ something which isn’t, after all, factual. I didn’t want to be anyone’s fool. And since I knew I couldn’t trust what was taught in history class, I also tended to doubt everything, or at least question everything, that was open to question. If something could not be proved empirically, I questioned it. As you said, ‘It is a free press...There are laws to protect the freedom of the press’s speech, but none that are worth anything to protect the people from the press.’ Anyway, was that how it was with you in your schooldays in Hannibal?”

“Yes, Grant, pretty much. But then again, we didn’t delve too deeply into history. Not that I remember, anyway. My interest in such things was not really awakened until after I had left school.”

“Same with me, Sam. Proceeding further, and touching on a subject we’ve already flirted with, you said: ‘The offspring of riches: Pride, vanity, ostentation, arrogance, tyranny.’ Depending on how you look at it, either everybody is rich now, or nobody is. In actuality, everybody is, but since that is the case, there are no class distinctions. Since no one is poor, wealth does not produce pride, vanity, or arrogance.

“Ostentation here is superfluous, as anybody could possess or display anything anybody else could—or something just as impressive, at any rate, even if not literally the same thing. Tyranny cannot be imposed, even if someone were to want to tyrannize over someone else, because wealth, being evenly distributed, contains no longer any such power or influence. All here are wealthy in an *absolute* sense, but none are in a *relative* sense.”

“That is certainly good news, Grant. Tell me, I have this uneasy feeling—as if I’m expecting the other shoe to drop. What is the bad news? Surely there is a catch somewhere. God help you if this is some sort of a practical joke.”

CHAPTER XIX

“I assure you, Sam, it is not a joke. And if you are looking for bad news, I’m afraid you’ve come to the wrong place. You said once that ‘When the human race has once acquired a superstition, nothing short of death is ever likely to remove it.’ Sadly, that was true in the case of most people. It seemed that it was easier to turn a person inside out than to get them to see the logic of changing an opinion—no matter how absurd or hellish it was—once it had taken root.

“It was as if they were tired of thinking, tired of deciding complex matters, and their personality froze into shape after their body reached maturation. Adolescence was the time for formulating a *Weltanschauung*, one’s ‘view of the world’, and once that was done (after much struggling and concentrated effort), a person would almost rather die than alter; they would rather fight than switch. Those who are here—those who fit in here—are willing to change, willing to learn and adapt, and truly *want* to live in such a place as this, The Land of Straightforwardness, where phoniness, quackery, and charlatanism are not rewarded, nor even tolerated.

“The superstitions that were the most popular dealt with the unholy trinity: political systems and parties; religious denominations and doctrines; economic theories and models. What you called ‘an unholy alliance of Christianity, cash, and colonialism’ I call the unholy trinity of hypocritical religion, greedy commerce, and corrupt politics. This is not a place for the faint of spirit. A certain mental toughness is required. Depending on your rate of decay, you go through one degree or another of self-reinvention.”

“How much re-inventing will I have to embark upon?”

“Not as much as some; a little more than others. I wouldn’t worry about it, my friend. It comes naturally, gradually. It is gradual enough to be almost imperceptible. You will always be you, don’t worry about that. Your friends and family will never doubt who you are.”

“Just a smoothing off of some of my rough edges, not a brainwashing?”

“Exactly; no personality transplant necessary. Actually, it may be that some of your previously smoothed out rough edges need to be reinstated, or re-roughed.”

Sam smiles at that. He will always remain youthful at heart. Some of those edges that Livy and his daughters wanted to smooth over should have actually been retained—they should have remained inviolate. In every direction people have tended to go to extremes, whether it be towards the Puritanical or towards the opposite end of the ideological and behavioral spectrum.

“Sam,” I say, breaking the silence, “here we are; we’ve made it. Why don’t you walk into your house and take a look around?”

Without replying, Sam takes a deep breath, turns the handle on the front door, and enters. There is a cat purring at the hearth. On the table sits a basket of freshly picked peas. In the middle of the living room stands a piano, donated by Sam’s friends.

Sam steps into the living room. He looks around at the furnishings, and is obviously pleased. It is not the Hartford house, nor Stormfield, but it is well built and tastefully appointed. If he decides that he wants to, he can later build a larger and more stylish home—perhaps using this one as a guest home.

I still have a few things to discuss with Sam before I let him rest and prepare for the banquet this evening, so I tag along with him as he explores his house. Our last stop is the billiard room. Clara and some of Sam’s friends have pitched in to acquire a billiard table for him. Sam is thrilled when he sees it, and also on discovering that the wall is lined with books and that a telescope has been set up on the balcony. He looks around the room with an air of satisfaction.

There is a knock on the door. Sam looks at me with a puzzled expression on his face. “Aren’t you going to answer it?” I ask.

“Oh, yes—I guess I should.”

Sam goes downstairs and opens the door. It’s Clara. They embrace again, and Sam says, “Now, Clara, you don’t have to knock at *my* house. Just come on in, anytime! My house is your house—so to speak.”

Clara smiles and thanks her papa. She enters the house carrying a basket under her arm. She strides to the music system, and switches on Handel’s *Largo*. Sam is puzzled about the music—where it’s coming from and how it can sound so full and clear, but he decides to wait to ask about it. There are many things, he knows, that are going to be new to him, and he may as well concentrate on the most important things first. Clara reaches into the basket and removes a bottle of wine.

“Papa, Grant...may I offer you some wine?”

We both readily agree to sample the wine. I expect it to be excellent; in fact, I haven’t tasted any that has been otherwise since the old days. Sam, though, is having his first glass of wine in the new system—organically grown on land that receives perfectly pure rain in soil devoid of blights and chemicals. Sam expects the wine to be good, but isn’t prepared for its superlative excellence. “The wine Jesus miraculously produced from water couldn’t have been better than this!” he exclaims. I just smile.

“Would you like to play a game of billiards, Grant?”

“Sure; I’m willing to find out what it is that you find so fascinating about this game.”

“You don’t mean to tell me you’ve never played billiards.”

“That’s it exactly.”

“Well, dog my cats! Now I know the world really deteriorated after I left if a man didn’t learn to play billiards! Well, Grant, you don’t know what you’ve been missing. Here, I’ll show you how to play as we go along—no need getting all involved in rules and regulations and theory when it’s just as easy to dive right in.”

“That suits me fine, Sam. Don’t expect much of a challenge from me, though—I’m a rank novice.”

“Well, we’ll see—those sound like the words of a billiard shark to me.”

“Oh, no—I don’t believe in false modesty, Sam. This is just plain old-fashioned genuine modesty. If I was a billiard phenom, I’d tell you so up front.”

“All right, then. Here’s how you start...”

And so Sam explains to me the rudimentaries of billiards, a bit at a time, as we play. During the game, we continue discussing the world, the weather, life, family (mine and his), politics, taxes, religion, death—traditionally safe subjects as well as ones that were formerly thought to be best avoided if you don’t want to ignite skirmishes.

“Who is behind all this?” Clemens asks.

“The ‘Monarch of the Old Masters’, you might say, Sam. “The ‘Master Mind’. It’s not ‘Nature’, as you once described it. Nature is not a concrete, living thing. The Master of the Game is at last a benevolent one.”

CHAPTER XX

“Grant, you say that everybody grows their own food, and if they want a larger or different house than the one they are provided, they build it themselves. What about other needs? Surely you have some sort of industry here. How are these run? That is, without one group of people doing the work while the others benefit from their labor?”

“Factories that are needed for necessities not easily fabricated at home or by local craftsmen are run by the government. Factory work, being by its very nature noisy, uncomfortable, boring, and dangerous, is performed by robots.

“The factories are becoming more automated all the time; at present the only people that work there are a few maintenance men, usually—to work on the robots when they break down, and so on. But in time all the kinks will be worked out and the robots will be self-maintaining, self-cleaning, and people will virtually never have to even visit the sites.

“Logging is also performed by robots. Automatons are even used to construct the very factories in which other robots work. The factory blueprints are downloaded into the robots’ software, and voila! The robots go to work erecting, riveting, bolting, welding, and whatever other operations are necessary to construct the factory.”

“Blame my cats! What are some examples of the types of factories that exist?”

“Well, the example that comes to my mind first—the other necessity after food and housing—are our clothing factories. It is as if we all have a personal tailor. You design the piece of clothing yourself, so to speak, by making selections based on size, color, style, material, and so on, and after this data is downloaded into the robot’s software and the work is carried out, the factory ships you the end result—a perfect-fitting garment that is quite possibly the only one of its exact style and color anywhere.

“Another example of factories are those that produce farming and gardening implements. Even these products are custom-fit to the individual purchaser: Based on your height, if you order a hoe or a shovel or something like that, it will be the right size to be most comfortable to someone of your stature. Similar customizations exist for almost anything imaginable.”

“So who is behind these factories? Who makes the profits?”

“There are no profits, per se; the cost of the item covers the amortized cost the government paid to the engineers involved in setting up the factory (electrical engineers, computer programmers, etc.) and for the materials used.”

“So there are people who work professionally as engineers?”

“Yes; taking care of vegetable and herb gardens and an orchard large enough to feed your family can be done and still leave quite a bit of time to spare. Some people pursue hobbies, such as hiking or some other physical activity. Others earn hours in the time bank by working away from home so that they can have the wherewithal to do things like build a bigger home, take vacations to other areas of the earth, etc.

“Nobody is *forced* due to circumstances to work away from their property, but those that want to can amass extra hours in that way. If a person doesn’t already possess a needed skill, they can first invest the time necessary to learn it (as you’ve already seen, we’ve got an unsurpassed library system) and proceed from there. There are always apprenticeship possibilities. Many people are more than willing to mentor others in their area of expertise. So to sum up: Yes, some work as engineers of various kinds, computer programmers, or any number of other things.”

“There you go again—computer programmers. What is that? What is a computer and how do you—and why would you—program it?”

“In a nutshell, a computer is a device which allows you to store, retrieve, and manipulate data. A computer can’t do anything that people can’t do, but it can perform the retrieval of data, and the processing of data—that is to say, performing mathematical operations and the like—extremely fast. You can enter data via a keyboard—similar to a typewriter’s keyboard, but instead of using sheets of paper, the various ‘pages’, if you will, of data are displayed on a monitor.”

“A lizard?”

“No...A monitor—in the computer context—is a box, or panel, that displays graphics.”

“What do you mean, exactly, by graphics?”

“Images. Pictures. If you’re typing a manuscript, the graphic looks like a sheet of paper.”

Sam shakes his head and says, “That’s a little too much for me right now. Give me a little time to ponder on that. A typewriter that conjures up pictures, and a box that stores the words you type! Blame my cats, what an ingenious-sounding contraption!”

“Yes, and that’s not all—wait till you see how you can ‘magically’ remove words, move words around on the monitor—all without using up a single piece of paper until you have finished your draft and want to print your document.”

“Print your document?”

“Yes. The representation on the monitor is simply that: a visual representation of your manuscript. If you want to actually have a physical specimen of the manuscript—an actual piece of paper with your prose—you need to print it. When you do so, it is printed by a peripheral machine, a printer.

“Sam, I think you’ll really like computers, once you get used to them. You always were on the ‘cutting edge’ when it came to technology. For example, you were one of the first to have a telephone in a private residence—in Hartford, Connecticut (which house was, by the way, turned into a museum of sorts—‘The Mark Twain House’); and you were one of the earliest users of the fountain pen.

“Your ‘Memory Builder’ product was actually similar to a computer software program in some ways. If it were undertaken one hundred years later, it almost certainly would have been created as a computer program. In fact, it was somewhat similar to a very popular board game called *Trivial Pursuit*.

“In computer programming lingo, ‘table-driven methods’ would work very well for that invention of yours. The data contained in the memory builder’s rows and columns could easily be stored and retrieved from a computer’s internal storage.”

Sam shakes his head; he appears to be simultaneously confused and intrigued. I ask him: “Do you remember how Ulysses Grant worked on his memoirs at the end?”

This question seems a non sequitur to Sam, but he responds, “By dictating his remembrances, you mean?”

“Yes. Using a computer, you can do the same thing if you prefer that to

typing your manuscript. Rather than waiting for a stenographer when you are ready to dictate, all you have to do is turn on your computer. Thus, you can write any time of day or night, without having to inconvenience a sleeping or off-duty stenographer.”

“That sounds like a huge improvement. How does it work?”

“As is the case anytime you use a computer, software is the key. Software is to a computer what the perforated roll of music is to a player piano—it tells it what to do, and when. Software can also be designed to respond to input, such as a voice.”

“So all I have to do is turn on the computer, turn on the software, and start talking?”

“Yes—after you get it set up initially.”

“I’m not surprised—there’s a catch.”

“Yes, there is, in a way: you have to, in effect, ‘train’ the software to recognize your voice. The software, like some animals, will only respond to its ‘master’s’ voice.”

“How do you train it?”

“Simply by reading to it a series of words. In this way it ‘learns’ how you pronounce various letters and groupings of letters. As the software program knows which words are going to be read to it (and in which order, of course), it stores information on how you pronounce letters and specific representative words. After it learns to ‘recognize your voice’, so to speak, it can understand your speech. For example, after being set up to understand your Missouri drawl, it wouldn’t be able to make heads or tails of my ‘plain’ northern Californian speech inflections and patterns. Of course, if you were to use the version of the software on my computer—which recognizes my manner of speech and inflection—it wouldn’t be able to discern what you were saying.”

“Very interesting.”

“Yes, it’s a real time-saver, after the initial setup. It really makes typing obsolete—if you so desire. When you think about it, typing words letter by letter was a pretty inefficient way of writing: Unless you were an extremely fast typist or an extremely slow thinker, you were always out-thinking your fingers. Being able to talk freely allows you to unload your thoughts a lot faster.”

“With the time I’ll save, I can learn to play the bagpipe.”

“As you wish. That’s not the only time-saving software, though. Another thing I think you’ll enjoy is home automation.”

“That sounds kind of scary. What is it?”

“It is a branch of computer programming. Actually, it’s kind of a marriage of electric and electronic devices.”

“That’s too much for me.”

“You’ll get it soon enough, Sam. Your inquisitive nature and love for technology will compel you to study this stuff. Next month at this time you’ll probably be teaching other people about it. Here it is in a nutshell: you can write a computer program that controls the devices you have in your house, such as your lights, coffee maker—“

“Coffee maker? Do you mean your maid? Or do you mean the coffee pot itself?”

“I apologize again, Sam. I should walk before I run with this. Semi-automatic coffeepots (‘coffee makers’) were invented; the next step was the complete automation of them. Well, they weren’t completely automated—you still have to add the coffee. You can now ‘tell’ the coffee maker when you want it to turn itself on. In that way, you can have a cup of coffee ready as soon as you get out of bed—without having to make the coffee yourself when you’re still half asleep or having to bother somebody else to make it for you.

“You can also set up the individual rooms in your house so that lights turn on automatically when you walk in, and switch themselves off after everybody has left the room; or they can respond to voice commands when you want the light out when you are in the room—such as in your bedroom at night when you are ready to go to sleep.”

“Grant, the fascination I have for this device you call a computer foreshadows a long relationship between it and myself. I suppose it’s too late to make any investments in it?” Sam jokes.

I laugh, and confirm Sam’s supposition. “The inventors and investors have long since cashed in, sorry. Of course, there is always room for improvements. Maybe you’ll be the man to come up with some.”

“I *am* looking forward to experimenting with it; maybe I will run across some limitations, or ideas for enhancements. Again, though, you mentioned computer programmers. What are they—the people who operate these beautiful machines?”

“Not exactly; most people can and do *operate* computers, but only a small minority of them are programmers. Almost everyone uses computers regularly to write letters and so on. A computer programmer communicates with the computer, in a sense. He instructs it what to do with the data it receives—how to process, store, and display the data. A computer operator (a computer user) is to a programmer what an automobile driver was to an automotive engineer.”

“Are you a programmer, Grant?”

“Yes, sometimes. It’s more of a hobby to me now than anything else, but I used to make my living that way. Now that you mention programming, though, that reminds me of something you wrote in *Life on the Mississippi* about steamboat pilots that reminded me of programmers. You probably couldn’t find two jobs that were much more different in the actual nature of the job than riverboat piloting and computer programming, but the way the pilots were viewed and treated was, in fact, quite similar to the way programmers used to be viewed and treated.

“Here are some of the things pilots and programmers had in common: intimate knowledge of a vast amount of details; the necessity of constantly maintaining and upgrading one’s knowledge, and in connection therewith, the exchange of knowledge with others ‘navigating the same route’.

“The relationship between the riverboat pilots and captains can also, without too much stretching of the imagination, be viewed as similar to that between programmers and their managers and employers. This is what you said in “Life on the Mississippi” regarding that relationship:

A pilot, in those days, was the only unfettered and entirely independent human being that lived in the earth. Kings are but the hampered servants of parliament and people; parliaments sit in chains forged by their constituency; the editor of a newspaper cannot be independent, but must work with one hand tied behind him by party and patrons, and be content to utter only half or two-thirds of his mind; no clergyman is a free man and may speak the whole truth, regardless of his parish’s opinions; writers of all kinds are manacled servants of the public. We write frankly and fearlessly, but then we “modify” before we print. In truth, every man and

woman and child has a master, and worries and frets in servitude; but in the day I write of, the Mississippi pilot had none. The captain could stand upon the hurricane deck, in the pomp of a very brief authority, and give him five or six orders while the vessel backed into the stream, and then that skipper's reign was over. The moment that the boat was under way in the river, she was under the sole and unquestioned control of the pilot. He could do with her exactly as he pleased, run her when and whither he chose, and tie her up to the bank whenever his judgment said that that course was best. His movements were entirely free; he consulted no one, he received commands from nobody, he promptly resented even the merest suggestions. Indeed, the law of the United States forbade him to listen to commands or suggestions, rightly considering that the pilot necessarily knew better how to handle the boat than anybody could tell him. So here was the novelty of a king without a keeper, an absolute monarch who was absolute in sober truth and not by a fiction of words... When a captain got hold of a pilot of particularly high reputation, he took pains to keep him. When wages were four hundred dollars a month on the Upper Mississippi, I have known a captain to keep such a pilot in idleness, under full pay, three months at a time, while the river was frozen up. And one must remember that in those cheap times four hundred dollars was a salary of almost inconceivable splendor.

“Programmers weren’t *quite* that independent. They weren’t quite ‘masterless’. They did have employers or customers that they had to please. But still, they were pretty much unsupervisable because hardly anybody really understood what they were doing, so couldn’t ‘look over their shoulder’ to gauge the speed or quality of their work. All they had to go by was whether the program worked or not—and computer programs usually took months or years to complete, so the ‘captain’ was just wasting his time in the ‘pilothouse’. They were more often than not a distraction, or worse—an obstruction.”

“You sound a little bitter, or frustrated, about that, Grant.”

“No, not really; it doesn’t matter now. I just remember how it was, that’s all. Let it go.”

“That’s my line.”

“I know. I like it. So I ‘stole’ it.”

“Fine; I’ll be glad to share it with you. If everybody earns the same amount of money, how do things work for artists? I mean, does that mean that anybody, regardless of talent, can paint a picture and earn the same amount from it as say, Vincent Van Gogh would?”

“Good question.”

“Bad answer.”

“Maybe so, but I’m not through yet. As far as hourly pay goes, everybody is paid the same, that’s true. When it comes to arts and crafts, though, where a finished product changes hands as opposed to a certain number of hours of work being performed as a service, things are a little different.

“The reason for this is that two artists may paint the same subject or scene, and one could take two or three times as long to paint it as the other. Should the slower worker be paid more because he spent more time on it? Not necessarily. Should the one who painted the better picture be paid more than the other? Maybe, but who *did* paint the better picture? The answer to that question would be hard to determine, because ‘beauty is in the eye of the beholder’. There are just too many variables and complications to strictly apply the standard wage in such cases.”

“So how does it work?”

“Similarly to how it always has in the past: the pieces or works of art are assigned a price by the artists themselves. That doesn’t mean they will necessarily sell at that price, though—nobody is obligated to buy them. In that way it is the same as you remember it being.

“Art can also be commissioned. For example, I might decide that I want Van Gogh or Dali or Picasso or Homer to paint a picture of...whatever, and if the desired artist is available, and willing to paint the picture, he will receive the same money for it, based on how many hours it took him to paint it, as Katy Leary, or you, or I, or anybody else would get if we were the ones commissioned to paint it—per hour, that is. In this case—commissioned artwork—artists do get the same hourly wage as all other hourly workers receive.

“Poets—and other artists—can now live ‘easy and comfortable’—they don’t have to die to get appreciation. All the ‘Millets’ can live and thrive without resorting to tricks to support themselves. Of course, a person could always pursue art as a hobby—either with the intention of eventually becoming a professional, or simply to create things for their own enjoyment, and perhaps to present as gifts to friends.

“When people perform services for each other, the denomination used is not Dollars, or Marks, or Shillings, but time. What is life, but time? To

say one person's time is more valuable than another's is to say that person's *life* is more valuable. You would be saying they are more valuable, more important, as a person. Such a thought is repulsive and obscene.

"We all stand on equal footing as people, one toward another. So when services are performed, the time spent is what is counted. If I commission you to write an article on our waterways of today—assuming you choose to accept the assignment, of course—the number of hours you spend researching and writing are transferred from my account to yours in the Time Bank system. I would then have N hours fewer in my Time Bank account, and you would have N hours more. At any time in the future, you could then spend those N hours for the same number of hours of service performed by somebody else.

"The day may come when we no longer need to—or want to—keep track of the hours expended, but for now, at least, it is a convenience. Once we all reach perfection, we may voluntarily perform services for one another without caring about whether we are reimbursed or not. In that way everybody's talents would be used to the full. Perhaps that's unrealistic. Maybe we'll stay with the Time Bank method forever. I don't know. We'll just have to wait and see.

"In the old system a person thought he was better than his fellow if he was paid more money than that one, whether that other person was his brother, a coworker, a neighbor, or whomever. For example, computer programmers sometimes felt themselves to be more important than janitors; many lawyers thought that their work was more necessary than cooks. Not so! The janitors, cooks, farmers, etc. were actually underpaid, if anything, as were teachers, school bus drivers, and those in many other professions.

"And when *prima donna-ry* wasn't based on the amount of money one was paid, it stemmed from mastery of specialized knowledge. People who had acquired such knowledge felt themselves superior to those who lacked such knowledge, regardless of why the uninitiated remained so—whether from lack of interest, lack of opportunity, or any other reason.

"Again, though, such reasoning was erroneous! The most important things, such as farming, cooking, and cleaning, are easier precisely *because* of their importance—they are doable for all of us so that all can perform these most important of tasks. All can share in these kinds of tasks.

"Sam, you once said: 'There are wise people who talk ever so knowingly

and complacently about “The working classes” and satisfy themselves that a day’s hard intellectual work is very much harder than a day’s hard manual toil, and is righteously entitled to much bigger pay. Why, they really think that, you know, because they know all about the one, but haven’t tried the other.’

“You and I know better, Sam; and now *everybody* knows better since all of us—including those who formerly didn’t work at all or only did office work or ‘brain’ work or ‘creative’ work—now do gardening and farming and building.

“Both types of work are hard, in their own way, and enjoyable and satisfying in their own way, too. The big difference in work of all types now is that we really benefit from the work we do; we and our families are both benefited by our work; the fruits of our labor aren’t reaped primarily by someone else—no corporations rape and reap from our sweat and blood and tears anymore.

“And since wages are the same for every job, we no longer have to worry about which person to tip, or how much we should tip. Waitresses and redcaps are paid the same as computer programmers and river pilots, so it is not necessary or sensible to tip anybody.”

“If wages are the same everywhere, for every type of work, what about the prices of goods? Aren’t peaches cheaper in Georgia, USA, than they are in Georgia, Russia? Isn’t kangaroo meat cheaper in Brisbane, Australia than it is in Brisbane, California?”

“No, actually prices are the same everywhere and always. Prices are a constant, not a variable. By the way, neither Georgias exist by that name anymore, nor do the Brisbanes. Geography has changed. Maps have changed; not only political maps, but even geological maps—no place on earth is farther than a few miles from a river, the oceans are smaller and shallower than they used to be, and therefore you wouldn’t even recognize the shapes of the continents anymore.

“Also, we no longer eat meat. We have hearty foods that ‘stick to your ribs’, but we no longer eat animals. Some animals are pets, some animals are wild, but none are dangerous to humans or each other; nor are we humans dangerous to them in any way.

“One of the old inequalities revolved around people being paid different wages for the same job based on gender. Within a particular type of job the unfairness seems the most obvious. Presumably this two-tiered gender-based wage scale first came into practice due to the thought that

women didn't really need to work. A man was supporting his family with his pay, whereas a woman was simply earning 'mad money'.

"At any rate, people generally looked askance at a woman doing a 'man's job'. It doesn't take an especially in-depth investigation to expose the lack of logic in those assumptions, though: not all men being paid the higher wages were married, for one thing; and not all working women were simply doing so for an auxiliary or frivolous income. In many cases they were just as much in need of money as their male counterparts were—or more so. They may have been for whatever reason the chief or sole breadwinner in the family—their husband was disabled, refused to work, or couldn't hold a job due to being an alcoholic or for some other problem.

"And in some cases these working women were single parents—their husbands had died, abandoned the family, divorced them, given their wives excellent reasons to divorce *them*, or whatever—and were struggling much harder to make ends meet than their average male counterparts were."

"I get the picture. Such a situation—a woman with children being in such a position, that is—was fairly rare in my day, though."

"By the end of the old system of things it was all too common. The so-called 'nuclear family'—husband, wife, and children--had actually come to represent a *minority* of households. If a child had both his or her biological father *and* mother living in the same house with him during his entire childhood, he could count him or herself fortunate--and consider himself an endangered species, or so it seemed at the time.

"At any rate, as I said, I'm sure you can see that in such situations wage differentials were obviously flawed and unjust on their face."

"Yes, that seems plain enough."

"Something that made the gender wage gap more insidious was when certain jobs that were traditionally performed by males paid more than other jobs which were traditionally filled by the feminine gender. Wage-setters simply said, in effect, 'that's what the skills involved in that job demand (as compensation)'. And yet, it was rare to find a woman acting as construction foreman, CEO of a large corporation—"

"CEO?"

"Chief Executive Officer. The 'big cheese'. The 'head honcho'. The 'boss'."

“Ah, so.”

“Anyway, it was even somewhat rare to find women doing computer programming, which was a pretty high-paying job, although there was nothing about the job which required exclusively male traits.”

“And the professions traditionally plied by women?”

“Things like waitressing, nursing, administrative assistants—“

“Administrative what?”

“Oh, sorry—secretaries.”

“Ah.”

“The professions in which women represented the vast majority of the workers normally paid far less than professions which were primarily peopled with the traditionally rowdier gender. This was not due to these jobs actually being of lesser importance, or because they were easier to perform than ‘male’ jobs.

“Frankly, women, like all less-powerful groups, were simply taken advantage of. Even the public sometimes bought into the scam by treating members of the same profession differently based on gender. A waiter was likely to receive a better tip than a waitress, for instance, because ‘the poor man is working hard to support his family’; the waitress received a token tip because ‘she will just buy some bangle or knick-knack with it’. Once men started invading some of the professions traditionally dominated by women, such as nursing and the secretarial world, those wages ‘coincidentally’ went up.”

“I’m not surprised.”

“And the funny thing was—that is to say, the strange thing—that many of these ‘macho’ jobs, traditionally associated with big, burly men, did not require any ‘male-ness’ on the part of the workers: driving trucks required more skill and precision than brawn; operating heavy equipment, also, more often involves intricate finger movements as opposed to brute force gear-jamming.

“The point is that people were oftentimes paid more for ‘men’s’ jobs than ‘women’s’ jobs, even though there was no reason that the performance of these jobs was limited to one gender or the other, or even necessarily

better performed by one gender or the other. And, of course, the stereotypes about why people worked and what they spent their money on were fatally flawed.

“I personally worked with a man—at a mine in Calaveras County, as a matter of fact—who complained about some situation at work where he felt ‘people were taking bread from his children’s mouths’. This argument was accepted by many, and they rallied behind him in his complaint, although he was not married and never had been.

“It may indeed have been the case that he had some children somewhere, but even if he did, I would be shocked if he had anything at all to do with their bread intake—while their mother was probably having a very tough go of it trying to feed and clothe them.

“Returning to the thought about wildly varying wages for different jobs: in addition to the many problems mentioned earlier, this also led to class distinctions—I should say, they reinforced these distinctions which have existed almost since the beginning of man’s history.

“Again, a person earning N dollars per hour felt himself superior to his neighbor, sibling, or even spouse who was paid a fraction thereof. The greater the pay differential, the more superior he felt. ‘I’m an important person, because I do such-and-such and earn so-and-so much. I’m more important than you are, because you’re *just* a (whatever) and only earn (whatever)’.

“Life is time, and if a person’s time was considered of less value than another’s, then their life, too, was considered of lesser value; they themselves were simply inferior, and there was the proof, in black and white (supposedly). ‘I won’t do that menial task—my time is too valuable’ (‘I’m too good for that’ is what they were really saying). A bitter enough pill to swallow under any circumstances, the pain and indignity were most acute when the ‘superior’ person was a close family member, such as a spouse (usually the husband, as discussed earlier).

“The opposite side of the coin was, of course, that a person felt inferior to others if he was paid less money than they were, or if his job title sounded less impressive than that of a friend, neighbor, or relative. When a person’s job circumstances changed, he was often affected acutely by it one way or another (besides in the obvious financial way): either he felt degraded and cheapened, and his self-esteem plummeted (if the job was considered a less prestigious one), or his self-esteem soared, he felt he was finally being accorded his due respect and recognition, his talents finally being assayed correctly by a hitherto unappreciative world, and he

tended towards megalomania (in the instances where the position was a more prestigious, or lucrative, one).

“Which brings us, Sam, to this phenomenon: It got to the point where it seemed to matter not a whit *how* a person attained his money; all that mattered was that he had gotten it somehow.

“A ne’er-do-well layabout scalawag rascalion tramp with money was more respected than a hard-working hod-carrier who, despite his best efforts, could barely feed and cloth his family. The hod carrier and his ilk would often force themselves to go to work even when sick because they knew if they didn’t they would not be paid, and if they were not paid they could not make their rent or buy the needed groceries for their family.

“A man who had inherited his money from his hard-working father, grandfather or great-grandfather, and didn’t need to work himself, was better received than a mother who worked two menial jobs to provide for her children and did her best to be both a father and a mother to her children while also taking care of the household chores.

“If a person were to win a lottery and retire ‘in style’, he was looked upon with awe and admiration—and envy—while the farm laborers, performing back-breaking work long hours in the fields in all weather for small pay and under poor working conditions, were dismissed as a great unwashed and unwanted rabble.

“As you noted in your time, too, Sam, money was worshiped. And that too, only got worse—more acute—as time wore on. People equated ‘success’ with whether a person had money, not whether they lived a life of integrity or were truly an asset to their community.

“When the question ‘How much is he worth?’ was asked, what was being referenced was not the quality of a man’s character and good influence, or whether he was a good husband and father and neighbor, but simply: ‘How much money does he have?’ It was a perverse way of looking at things--really an obscene one--but that attitude prevailed to the extent that nary a soul questioned it; if you did, you were at best a boat-rocker and at worst it was likely to be perceived as sour grapes if you yourself were not wealthy. Only those who already were wealthy could speak out without this charge being leveled against them, but few of them did, and when they did, they were just viewed as eccentric or relatively harmless troublemakers. ‘They don’t appreciate what they have; they would sing a different tune if they lost it all.’ And so it was one of those ‘Catch-22’ situations.”

“‘Catch-22’? The Levin brothers, you mean?”

“Oh, sorry, ‘Catch-22’ was after your time, too. Levin brothers? Oh—no, not that ‘22’. *Catch-22* was a book wherein a situation was described, the like of which most of us have faced from time to time, where to accomplish something conditions A and B must be met, but fulfilling either condition mutually excludes the other, and so the thing is impossible. It’s a ‘can’t win’ situation.

“The pendulum continued to swing back and forth: one generation was materialistic, perhaps because they had experienced hard times, and then their children responded by being overtly non-materialistic. One generation was anti-violence, the next addicted to gratuitous violence. The war-protesting, materialism-eschewing generation of the 1960s begat the super-greedy warmongers who had their heyday at the turn of the 21st century.

“Due to the equality in the economy here—with everyone having the exact same *opportunities*, and only having more or less than another based on how hard they work, there arises a natural respect and acceptance between all people.

“Adding to that mutual respect and acceptance is that we all share a set of very fundamental things in common. In our daily life, we have many things in common, both big and small. We all tend to gardens to care for our family’s food needs. We all take part in the upkeep of community buildings, and we all agree on the basic standards of conduct and behavior that keep our society clean, peaceful, secure, and satisfying for all.

“The entire earth is beautiful. That being said, it of course differs in appearance from place to place. If you think of Switzerland, and then Missouri, then Connecticut, Hawaii, Bermuda, and so on, you will see what I mean—all exquisitely beautiful, but all unique.”

“Hawaii? Where is that?”

“I’m sorry, I’ve done it again—you know Hawaii by another name: the ‘Sandwich Islands’. As you had advocated, the islands were admitted as a state in 1959—Alaska also became a state in that year. Alaska was made the 49th state, and Hawaii became the 50th.

“Anyway, the areas that are particularly beautiful are set aside as parks, or recreation areas, for use by all peoples. John Muir—in case you don’t recall the name, he was a naturalist who was born three years after you

were, in Scotland, and who died four years after you did—has been here a little while and is helping us with designating the most appropriate places for preservation as ‘set-aside’ areas. Yosemite, perhaps not surprisingly, was the first place he made sure to designate as such—and he also added Hetch Hetchy to the list, draining the reservoir there to expose the grandeur of that valley.”

“*He* drained a reservoir?”

“Not personally, no,” I concede, “but he was instrumental in persuading the body responsible for the final decision in such matters—the ‘Park Committee’—to do so. Let’s say he was the driving force behind it, and its primary proponent.

“Good for him; a man should have a cause and be willing to fight for it.”

“Yes, especially in such a case where the *raison d’être* of his cause is to preserve the beauty of the earth and enhance mankind’s enjoyment of it.

“I may have already mentioned that the ratio of land to water on the surface of the earth has been reversed—there is water everywhere, so to speak, and so everybody has access to lakes and rivers in their area, but the oceans are now not much larger than the largest lakes used to be. *Of that augmented land area*, 50% is set aside for human habitation (villages and cities, that is), 25% is earmarked for parks, and the remaining 25% is allocated for factories, commercial forests, and things of that nature.”

CHAPTER XXI

“Sam, we have no ‘heroes’ in the sense that we used to. There are no human heroes here because we can be satisfied with ourselves. Not self-satisfied, or over-satisfied, but content: at peace, with peace of mind and heart.

“Formerly, heroes were either fictitious or, if not entirely fictitious, at best exaggerations that were perhaps loosely *based* on a real person, but which hyperbolized his good points and meiosisized the less attractive elements of his character.

“People are now better—the average person here now has the character of the best of the best from back then—but there are no heroes in the sense that there is no hero *worship*. You won’t see statues of people here, for three reasons: one, anybody worthy of such honor is alive or soon will be, and why do you need a statue when you can look at and talk to the real thing?; two, the person involved would not permit such, out of modesty; and three, the realization that if we were to make statues of excellent people we would eventually have to have one for everyone...”

“I see what you mean. And sculptors would have a very hard time keeping up with the demand...”

I smile. Leave it to Sam to uncover the ridiculous in the logical conclusion of the matter, carried to its extreme (reduction ad absurdum). “That’s a fact. And since we formerly made heroes of people who accomplished things we could not, those who possessed qualities of character which seemed above and beyond anything we could (or would want to) do, that sort of admiration or jealousy also no longer exists, because anything anyone might attain can usually be attained by anyone else as well.

“The time and the opportunity are there for us to do anything we want—that is, of course, anything that’s possible for mortal humans. We will never be able to fly like a bird (that is to say, by extending and flapping our arms), but if we admire J.S. Bach and want to play the organ like he does, we can apply ourselves to the attempt and, with enough time and practice and devotion, we can at least reach a point where we can play his works. We may eventually have the opportunity to be taught by him. Now whether you or I could ever write music as complex and beautiful as he has—and no doubt will again—is not assured. Herr Bach had a gift which is bestowed on but few of us. But there is nothing to stop us from

trying, and who knows, maybe—just maybe--we could give the old master a run for his money.

“We don’t know what talents lie latent within us until we draw them out of ourselves. We have an eternity to experiment and practice and pursue. We can even invent new musical instruments and new genres of music, if we want to. There are really no limits in that way. So whether it is J.S. Bach, or Vincent Van Gogh, or Galileo Galilei, or William Shakespeare, or Frank Lloyd Wright, or anyone else, you can ‘hitch your wagon to a star’ and try to match—or even surpass—their accomplishments in the arts or any other area of human endeavor.”

“I recognize all of those names but the last.”

“Frank Lloyd Wright was an architect. His buildings were striking and yet blended in with their surroundings. His style was original; like most artists, he was a perfectionist, perhaps even obsessively so. For example, when creating the plans for a hotel, he would sometimes design *everything*, even down to the china that would be used in its restaurant.”

“Perhaps he felt the difference between the right service and the almost-right service was like the difference between lightning and a lightning bug.”

“No doubt.”

CHAPTER XXII

“Sam, one of the most heart-rending accounts I ever read was your description of the slave woman whose children were sold ‘down the river’. I can only imagine how emotionally devastating such a thing would have been. And the terrible thing is that the account was true—you were an eyewitness to it. And you only saw the tiniest fraction of a percentage of the times such a thing happened: mates losing one another; parents their children; children their parents; siblings one another; bosom buddies, best friends who were closer than brothers and would die for one another if necessary and possible had to watch one another disappear beyond the horizon, bound for distant plantations.

“A great many of those long-sufferers are here; those separated from loved ones have been reunited. What scenes of unspeakable joy these have produced! That is the only good thing that has come from these separations—the joy of the reunifications.

“Being allowed to view these reunion scenes—from a respectful distance, not interfering with the moment—is a great privilege and a joy beyond compare. The emotions they felt then, when their hearts were being ripped out of them, stomped on, stretched apart, squashed and twisted, are reversed: their hearts are restored to their chests, so to speak, and soothed, massaged, put back in place and restored to their original shape—revivified. The exact reciprocal of that excruciating agony is a joy so strong, so intense, that those granted that gift are often overcome to the point where they cannot stand, or even talk, for minutes upon minutes afterward.

“When they finally gain their legs, like a newborn fawn, they are soon off frolicking and running, laughing and screaming for joy, tears streaming down their face—a veritable Niagara Falls of ebullience, each tear washing away anger, sorrow, regret, and pain, until those terrible emotions are remembered no longer and their petrified hearts are made supple once again. It will make your day—no, your week, your month, your year! when you witness such spectacles of reunification and revivification.

A high percentage of those who in those long-gone days were thusly ill-treated are here; a very low percentage of those responsible for their plight are here, and of those that are, they have done all they can to make amends, restitution, and reparation to those they wronged in the old system.

“Although death pays all debts, they usually still feel guilty and *want* to do everything they can to make their old slaves as comfortable as possible. One of the greatest acts of human kindness you’re ever liable to see is when these resurrected former slaves forgive their resurrected former owners. They could berate them, look down on them, and refuse to forgive, or make them ‘jump through hoops’ and crawl on their knees, so to speak, before forgiving them, but when you see such ones show respect to their former persecutors and allow them the dignity of friendship, even—*then*, Sam, you have really seen something.”

Sam allows this to sink in. “That is truly amazing, such a spirit of forgiveness. I don’t know if I would be able to forgive such an injury myself. I don’t feel like forgiving those people at this moment myself, and I was only a spectator and not a sufferer of those indignities.”

I remember when I felt the same way. “Sam, the thing to keep in mind is that those who are brought back, those who are resurrected, are ones that *will*, if taught and re-educated, learn to fit in with this new world society. Those that were wronged realize that, also: if their former persecutors have been brought back, something good was found in them—they deserve a second chance. They *have* been given a second chance. For that reason they are willing to ‘let bygones be bygones’ and forgive in a large way. It surpasses human understanding, perhaps (such compassion and willingness to forgive), but you can’t deny it happens once you’ve seen it.

“You’ll be glad to know that the slaves your parents owned are also here, every last one of them: Jennie, Uncle Ned, Uncle Dan’l (your model for Jim in ‘Huck Finn’, so everybody said--).”

“‘Everybody’ was right on that score—but go on: who else?”

“Sandy, too. In fact, you already met Uncle Dan’l today, now known simply as Daniel—he lives in the first house on the left that we passed by as we were walking out of town. You didn’t recognize him because he is now physiologically a lot younger than he was when you knew him. He’ll be at the banquet being held in your honor tonight, along with at least most of the others I just mentioned.”

“Excellent! I really look forward to seeing them. So Sandy has been reunited with his parents?”

“Yes, he has been. The whole family lives over in Pearl Falls, a few villages away. He’ll probably come down the river in his canoe tonight—

he really gets around in that thing.”

CHAPTER XXIII

“Sam, you spoke out against police brutality in the 1860s in San Francisco. You reported that some of the members of the police force would simply look on, or even participate in the action, as Chinamen were harassed and sometimes even brutally beaten. One hundred years after that there was a group of people who spoke out against police brutality, but the violence was—at least allegedly—usually perpetrated against this group themselves.”

“Who were they?”

“Anti-war protesters. They were called ‘hippies’.”

“Which war were they protesting?”

“The one in Vietnam.”

“Vietnam?”

“My apologies again—French Indochina.”

“Ah.”

“In some ways, the war in Vietnam was not unlike the war in the Philippines at the turn of the century.”

“I see; a damned crying shame, then.”

“Yes. It was damned. As a matter of fact, all war has been damned—as well as dammed.

“It has been said you were influenced by Miguel Cervantes, and that ‘Tom Sawyer’ was a retelling of Don Quixote, with Tom Sawyer in Don Quixote de la Mancha’s role and Huck Finn in Sancho Panza’s.”

“Interesting. Don Quixote is a great book, despite its coarseness in places; I would love to meet Señor Cervantes.”

“In this matter you will have to exercise patience. He died in 1616, and so it will probably be several decades before he makes his reappearance.”

“Too bad I’ll have to wait so long. He’s a very interesting person. I look

forward to meeting him.”

“As do I. Besides Señor Cervantes, and many other men of letters of yestercenury, you will also eventually get a chance to even meet men such as Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Of these, Japheth is your closest relative (as he is mine, by the way).

“As you once said, Sam, no artist can claim complete originality, as everyone builds on what has come before, borrows from here and there, this person and that, and then extends and appends. In other words, you were influenced by others, and, as one of the most popular authors of all time, have also influenced reams of others yourself. Would you like to know some of those you’ve influenced?”

“I have to admit I’m curious, but will I recognize any of their names?”

“You won’t recognize most of the names now, but you will eventually meet some of these people. It might interest you that they are not all writers—people in other professions have either cited you as an influence or clearly show by their work that they were, even if subconsciously, influenced by you.”

“All right; I’m listening.”

“I’ll start with the writers: Ernest Hemingway, who said ‘All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*’; humorous travel writer Bill Bryson; African-American poet and prose writer Langston Hughes, whose “Simple” stories (about Jesse Semple) bore elements of your style of humor; Hunter S. Thompson (who often mixes fact with fiction, without always letting on or making obvious which is which; by the way, this ‘style’ garnered the appellation ‘gonzo journalism’)--by the way, it was said that you wrote autobiographical fiction and a fictional autobiography; Jack London, who, like you, lived an adventurous life. He prospected in Alaska, worked on a whaling ship, and ‘rode the rails’ as a tramp. As you did, Mr. London built a signature mansion. His he named the ‘Wolf House’; he was very lavish with his guests and generous to many people in need.

“Additionally, Mr. London lost his fortune. In his case, the riches-to-rags transformation came about due to the loss of his mansion, which burned down, and the sad fact that some of his supposed friends took advantage of his generosity; O. Henry, a contemporary of yours (he also died in 1910); and Jack Kerouac, among others.”

“All right. I look forward to meeting them—I guess.”

“Some are here and some are not; some that are not here yet will be here later.”

“Since you are speaking on a subject that interests me very much (me), please go on—who else did I influence?”

“Before I continue along that vein, let me quickly mention your funeral while I’m thinking of it. Your services were attended by multitudes of your friends—many of which you knew personally, others whose friendship with you was one-sided, so to speak, as they had only come to know and understand you—to some extent, anyway—through your writings. At your funeral service, Twichell offered up a heartfelt prayer and was then summoned away to Harmony’s deathbed before your services had even ended.”

“Poor man! First he lost me, and then his wife right afterward. When can I see him?”

“Tonight.”

“At the banquet?”

“Yes.”

“Magnificent! Go on, please, Grant.”

“Besides authors, there are comedians, musicians, and even a cartoonist who cited you as a pivotal influence on their work. And, of course, there are those mentioned earlier who were influenced by your boldly speaking out against war, and against the trampling of civil rights.”

“Oh, yes, the hippos?”

“Hippies.”

“Ah, yes.”

“I forgot to mention that there was at least one periodical that *as a whole* was influenced by your satire, irreverence, and alternating hyperbole and meiosis: *Mad Magazine*.

As far as musicians go, the work of Bob Dylan and Jimmy Buffett show unmistakable traces of Twainisms.”

“What type of music did they play? Hopefully nothing like Wagner. I would hate to—“

“No, they were not at all Wagneresque. Dylan was one of the original and quintessential ‘hippies’, in fact, and was at the forefront of the war protestations.”

“Good for him.”

“Buffett’s persona was somewhat akin to that of a Huck Finn from the Caribbean.”

“That’s evocative.”

“And provocative. He also followed the equator. And, like you and London, he was a boatsman--and an airplane pilot, to boot.”

“That may be something I’d like to take up myself, some time—now that you’ve assured me it is safe.”

“You’ll get your chance. If you can learn to pilot a steamboat on the Mississippi, learning to fly an airplane should be a piece of cake. After all, as I said, navigation is a ‘breeze’ now.”

CHAPTER XXIV

“Sam, you were a ‘comet’. That is to say, you were both a **comedian** and a **poet**. You oftentimes hid your poetic side, or tried to. It showed through often enough, though, in spite of your attempts to squelch it.

“You certainly weren’t the only person to ever try to hide in such a way, though, Sam. Many people have hidden their artistic, or sensitive, side, because they thought it revealed ‘weakness’. Men, especially, have often wanted to hide their emotional side, as many viewed such as ‘soft’ or ‘feminine’.

“At other times, such concealment displayed a lack of self-confidence: the person didn’t want to reveal their sensitive nature via the offering up of serious artistic works—whether these be writings, paintings, music, or anything else—at the risk of being weighed and found wanting by others—whether those others be family members, critics, neighbors, schoolmates, workmates, or the public in general. It was easier for them to clothe their artistic expressions in jokes—implying that they weren’t to be taken seriously, so they shouldn’t be judged or critiqued.

“One example of this psychological phenomenon is a musician whom you won’t know, as he lived after your time. He was viewed by other musicians as a good songwriter, but always ‘cheapened’—so these colleagues thought, anyway—his music by marrying silly or even ludicrous lyrics to his music. This man, Frank Zappa, was also noteworthy for his belief, which I think may find some resonance in you, that one of the great enemies of mankind is nostalgia, another enemy is tradition, and yet another is sentimentalism.

“People waste so much time and energy mooning over the past, and seeing the past through a rose-colored filter, a soft-focus filter, a print made from black & white infrared film.”

“Wait a minute there, Grant—black & white film? Are you talking about photographic film?”

“Yes.”

“Isn’t it redundant to say ‘black & white film’. Isn’t such film always black & white?”

“No; we now have color film. Black & white film is now used primarily for

‘artistic’ effects. In reality such film is actually grey-scale and not ‘black & white’ anyway. There is a type of film (lithographic) that reproduces only pure black & white, but the type of film that people normally call ‘black & white’ technically conveys multiple shades of *grey*, not just black and white.”

“Blame my cats! Color film! So what do you mean by ‘infrared’?”

“Infrared black & white film is a specialized type of film—as is black & white lithographic film. Black & white infrared film imparts a ‘dreamy’ feel to a photograph.

“Anyway, getting back to sentimentalism: Even if the past was better—which it usually isn’t--, there’s nothing that can bring it back. We must live in the present and the future—make the most of today, plan as best as we can for the future. And times certainly are getting increasingly better; the past was not as good as the present is, and the present is not as good as the future will be.”

“My life seemed to be a roller coaster—up, then down, back up, down again; in the last years, it was pretty steadily downhill,” Sam said.

“Unfortunately true, Sam. Even now, people have ups and downs in their lives. But the downs aren’t nearly as low or long lasting as they used to be—they are just short dips instead of extended steep descents. Speaking of your life, one of your many biographers—“

“Many? I thought there were only two--Katy and Howells.”

“There were more than just those two; more than a few, in fact. Actually, there were so many that I don’t know *how* many exactly. Anyway, one of your biographers said that you were ‘...an unparalleled biography-enhancer’ and continued: ‘A word of warning...He wrote autobiographical fiction and fictional autobiography.’ But then again, it can’t be said that you hoodwinked anybody thereby. After all, you admitted you weren’t sure of the details, didn’t care, and what you said would serve just as well as the specific explicit details anyway. In other words, ‘caveat emptor’.

“It was written (in *Readings on Mark Twain* edited by Katie de Koster) that you ‘found war abhorrent, tyranny unforgivable, and imperialism unjustifiable.’ There you showed, yet again, your good instincts and heart. War is abhorrent. To call any war ‘civil’, no matter what the context, is absurd, and to institute rules of war was also macabre. ‘Rules in a knife fight’—nonsense!”

“Knife fight?”

“Oh, sorry, that was a reference to a movie—one of those plays recorded on film. By the way, movies were made of several of your novels and stories. Examples are *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *Unidentified Flying Oddball* (based on *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*), *A Million to Juan* (based on *The 1,000,000 Pound Note*); and several versions of *The Prince and the Pauper*.”

“I would like to see them sometime.”

“I don’t see why that can’t be arranged. Sam, besides your satire, you are also well remembered for your more direct social commentary and criticism. Your scathing attacks against churches and clergymen were not works of the devil, as some claimed; they were works of art. And you were right—those blind leaders leading the blind claimed to know and understand, and didn’t. What they did know they kept hidden, and what they thought they understood they understood falsely. They set themselves up as leaders, and thus received their reward in full for the short term: honor from men. They also brought responsibility upon themselves, and heaped a heavy load of debt upon their own head and reaped a bitter whirlwind.

“But it wasn’t just those who dressed in robes and spoke melodramatically and sanctimoniously who made themselves guilty. You also ragged politicians endlessly—and were right about them, too—for more or less the same reason: they claimed to have the ability to rule effectively, but didn’t. Again, it was a case of the blind leading the blind, and those who took it upon themselves to garner the quick praise and glory paid the price for their failure.”

“Tyrants is all they were.”

“Yes, and tyranny is unforgivable, imperialism unjustifiable—that should be self-evident. Imperialism is thievery, plain and simple. Many people thought it normal and right that those who could take something from those less strong should do so. It was an extension of the ludicrous and incomprehensible, leap-of-faith-demanding theory of evolution, or ‘evil-ution’, as I call it: the survival of the fittest. I pronounce it ‘evil-ution’, because that theory was not only preposterous and pathetic, but also pernicious.

“People who believed that survival of the fittest is natural and fitting tended to turn a blind eye to the oppression of the weak and the poor as

that was--according to their inhumane theory--natural and to be expected. The next step, after accepting such, was to become a participant in such oppression. To those who believed the various families of life forms came about via evil-ution, imperialistic bullying seemed a natural course of events, and so it was only to be expected, and natural, and therefore forgivable—and even promotable and supportable—that the strong oppress the weak.

“Evil-ution was an evil theory because of the evil justifications and rationalizations that it led to. Besides being simply wrong, it was also wrong-headed. Besides being illogical, it was mean-spirited and immoral. The strong oppressing the weak was not inevitable; it was mean and selfish and indefensible. You said ‘evidence is the bones of an opinion’. Evil-ution had no solid evidence to back it up. It had no bones; nothing to fill it out and enable it to stand. You also said: ‘Science only needed a spoonful of supposition to build a mountain of demonstrated fact’. Evolution was a theory where this was proved to a most absurd degree.

“Even more pointedly, you said of evil-ution: ‘No one who thinks can imagine the universe made by chance. It is too nicely assembled and regulated. There is, of course, a great Master Mind...’ Bravo to you!”

CHAPTER XXV

“Sam, it’s quite possible that more has been written *about* you and your writings—biographies galore, critiques, analyses—than you wrote yourself. You may very well have had the most recognizable name (your pen name, anyway) and face on the earth in the 20th century.

“Lest you think I am here only to unbury you (so to speak) and to praise you, I would like to lodge a complaint, of sorts, or point out an error in your judgment.”

“Yes?”

“You made a mistake in judging ‘The Book’ by its cover-uppers. The churches and clergy were indeed frauds, phonies, fakers, charlatans, quacks, and counterfeiters, but you shouldn’t have rejected The Book they *claimed* to know and represent along with them. You ‘threw out the baby with the bath water’. You should have known better, Sam—you’re brighter than that.”

“Grant, I don’t recall really feeling that way about it; at least not all the time—not even most of the time.”

“I’m glad to hear that, Sam. I especially enjoyed your short story, or essay, or treatise, or whatever you’d like to call it, named “The War Prayer”. It clarified the other side of the coin of patriotic fervor; when people work and hope and pray for victory in war, they are also simultaneously, unavoidably, implicitly working, hoping, and praying for the death and suffering of those they fight against—not just victory for themselves, but ignominious and debilitating defeat for their counterpart.

“And it is not only the soldiers who suffer: Directly, oftentimes, and indirectly always, the others who happen to have been born and reside in the vanquished country are affected. Some economically, others in an even more heartrending way, when sons, husbands, fathers, brothers, uncles are killed as a result.

“War is a widowmaker and a heartbreaker. It tears down, rather than builds up; it increases tension and misunderstanding and hatred between peoples, rather than alleviating them. Differences are emphasized, while commonalities are de-emphasized and ignored. Orphans, widows, and all manner of broken people are the end result,

the bottom line, the natural outcome of the ultimate hatred and violence expressed in war. People broken in body, mind, spirit, and faith. Faith in God is shaken, and love for their fellow man, which should be as natural as air, are shattered.”

“War really is something that has no redeeming features, isn’t it?”

“Right you are; nobody here would want to war against one another. We are all one, anyway. All of us here have rejected warfare, and so it has ceased to exist.”

“That’s the sensiblest thing I’ve ever heard—rejecting war. I am still surprised, though—shocked, even—that man was ever able to finally lay down his weapons, though.”

“It was certainly a magnificent change. Sam, you were called ‘a master of horse sense and nonsense.’ That was your gift. The entertaining nonsense attracted the audience, which gave you a forum to dispense your horse sense. Once attracted, entertained, and enlightened, the horse sense drew them back, even when nonsense as entertaining as yours could possibly have been obtained elsewhere. Others could do nonsense perhaps as well or better—just perhaps; others could do horse sense perhaps as well or better—just perhaps; but nobody combined the two like you did. You are, indeed, a comet.”

“Thank you, Grant.”

CHAPTER XXVI

“Sam, let’s talk about money. As you wrote, both riches and poverty produce bad fruit. The problem with statements like that is—that is to say, not with the statements themselves, but with how they are perceived—is that first we need to agree on a definition of both poverty and riches.

“I submit the following definitions of the two: poverty is a state in which a person’s basic needs are not met. And by needs, I mean true necessities. What your neighbor has—whether or not it is a necessity for him—is not necessarily a necessity for you. A true need is something that corresponds to our human nature of mortality.

“Mortality means we cannot live without a physical support system. Our fleshly body and its requirements make us mortal. We need air to breathe, water to drink, and food to eat; an argument can also be made as to the necessity of clothing and shelter. That is really where our necessities, our needs, begin and end—from a physical, or material, standpoint, anyway. Anything beyond those things are luxuries, and so if we have those things, we cannot be considered to be impoverished. On the other hand, a specific type or quality of food, drink, and clothing are not prescribed.

“In other words, a person can’t say ‘I’m impoverished, because I don’t have caviar in my pantry, Cabernet Sauvignon in my wine cellar, and haute couture raiment in my wardrobe’. Not legitimately, anyway. Bread, burgundy, and burlap britches are enough to satisfy one’s mortality and keep alive. If a person has less than the genuine necessities in the quantity required to maintain good health, he is impoverished—otherwise, he is not. In a nutshell, poverty is not having enough to live a healthy life. Do you accept that as a sensible definition of poverty?”

“I do.”

“Now my definition of riches, actually two types of riches—bad riches, and good riches. What both sort of riches have in common is that being rich is a state in which a person has a superabundance of things—either a superabundance of necessities (for example, having the food necessary not just to survive, but also to thrive), or the necessities plus a goodly supply of luxuries.

“Now, as to bad riches, quantity comes into play—a person has ‘too much’—more than they can use, and so their ‘extras’ go to waste or lie

idle. That situation describes an extravagant sort of wealth. If others are in poverty especially, such wealth is a shame and is even obscene. Nobody should have extravagant amounts of necessities while others have less than enough on which to live. Bad riches are exclusive and mean oppression of the poor.

“With good riches—which are, by the way, enjoyed by *all* of us here—a person does not have so much *quantity* that a thing goes to waste, but we enjoy no limit to *quality* of all sorts of good things. Our riches include the necessities of life, and not just the lowest quality possible, but the converse: the choicest foods; the best wines, beer, coffee, and juice; clothing matching our own preferences; and the house of our choice (provided we are willing to build, maintain, and clean it ourselves).

“All of us here are rich in the good sense. Wealth is not based on a comparison of one’s circumstance to another’s, or only possible if a greater number are impoverished, or only possible if the weak are oppressed; nor is wealth enjoyed by any who are not willing to work to attain it. There are no irresponsible playboys here, living a life of ease and luxury while their superiors (as to morals and character and integrity) have to work themselves to a frazzle during the day only to be forced to sleep in a hovel at night. Nobody is rich in a comparative sense.”

“And nobody is poor in a comparative sense.”

“Right again, Sam. And nobody is poor in an *absolute* sense, either; on the contrary, everybody is rich in an absolute sense.

“Another area where the majority of ‘commoners’ were ignored and even discarded, while the minority of wealthy and influential were venerated, was with regard to business decisions to lay off workers for the sake of a slight increase in profitability for the company owners or corporation shareholders.

“When a person neared retirement age, and the company would soon be liable to pay his pension, it was not unheard of—or even rare—for a company to find a way to lay that person off, thereby throwing him out of work at a stage of life when he was unlikely to find other work. He had depended on his pension to live out his days, but now, after giving his blood, sweat, and tears to the company, possibly for decades, had been discarded—the door slammed in his face. Why? So the stockholders would have a few more cents per share to show on their dividend check, thus making the stock more attractive for other investors.

“In this way a vicious circle was put into place: the more investors there were, the more intense the desire to please them, retain them, and attract new investors became. Always bigger. Never satisfied. Enough is not enough. Pleonexia. And for what? To make the minority rich, while those actually in the trenches and on the front lines were worn to a nub—discarded, sacrificed, and made fools of. They didn't deserve that, and those that treated them thusly deserve nothing but exposure and censure.”

CHAPTER XXVII

“You know, Sam, one of the funny—that is to say, droll—things about your writings is: Although you didn’t expect your popularity to last, you probably wouldn’t have guessed that *if* it did, many passages therein would end up as head-scratchers for people, as you took the reader's knowledge of the Bible for granted—something that was not safe to do in the latter half of the 20th century, and even less so in the first part of the 21st.

“Most churches did not even read much from the Bible during their services, and these services were, for the most part, very poorly attended, anyway. Even religious training was sometimes grounded primarily in human philosophies and church traditions rather than Bible principles and teachings. The plowboys of your day knew the Bible *much* better than the average professional cleric in mine. The clergymen of the last days may have been experts on Darwin, Freud, Jung, Spock, and—sorry—Twain, but you couldn’t rely on them knowing Cyrus from Sarah, Rachel from Ruth, or even Jonah from Job. The intimate acquaintance and familiarity with the Bible that was a part of American culture in your day atrophied at an alarming rate of acceleration in the last decades of the old system. In God they did not really trust—they honored him with their lips only—and even in that way less and less often, and less and less eloquently.

“American culture declined gradually at first, and then the decline accelerated and picked up steam. Like a snowball racing downhill, picking up hangers-on and bandwagon-jumpers along the way, the popular taste degenerated to a deplorable, and sometimes despicable, state—a very low level of debauchery.

“Ironically, in its negative critique of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the *Arkansas Traveler* wrote ‘The reading public is becoming more refined.’ If such were the case at that time, the trend was certainly reversed shortly afterwards, for by the early 21st century the public’s tastes were primarily rude, crude, coarse, unrefined, and, in the vernacular of the day, ‘gross’. Men no longer refrained from using vulgar language in front of women and children, whether in public places or private.

“Even more shocking, perhaps, was the speech of those latter two groups (women and children) themselves—women sometimes seemingly in competition with men to see who could use the roughest, coarsest, most

vulgar and ‘ignorantest’ of language—to borrow a word from ‘Huck Finn’--and young children, some barely old enough to walk, using speech so foul it was virtually impossible they understood the meaning of what they were saying—words and phrases they had learned, apparently, from their parents.

“Homosexuality and lesbianism were considered normal—just an ‘alternate lifestyle’ as opposed to a deviancy. To take a stand against such ran you the risk of being branded ignorant, insensitive, and intolerant.

“I could go on and on, but there’s really no benefit in doing so. Suffice it to say, if you had been resurrected into *that* world, into that time period, you may have either voluntarily returned to the grave or been shocked right back into it. Spending one day amidst that rabble may have given you the impression that the majority of men were convicts, congressmen, or addicts of one sort or another; and a goodly portion of the remainder were insane, whether criminally or otherwise.

“Instead of the culture of the pure gradually spreading to those needing improvement, the opposite was consummated: the culture of the crass and crude and criminal infiltrated that of those who had previously been (relatively) pure, and the mass of men ended up with the culture of the most vile classes—but instead of finding it vile and feeling loathsome or ashamed, they felt they were being sophisticated and open-minded by embracing such speech and attitudes. They were open-minded, all right: their minds were open like a sewer pipe, welcoming all manner of filth, inviting in all the offal imaginable.”

“That’s sad; depressing, even.”

“And that is not all. You might have a hard time believing—I hope you would not think I was lying to you, but I mean you might have a hard time *imagining*—some of the things that went on in human society towards the end of the last days: it was very common for people to take illegal drugs to alter their emotional state and create an artificial, chemically-induced stimulus. These self-medicated people knew, for the most part, that what they were doing was bad for them in the long run, but life was so miserable and overwhelming for them that they gave little thought to future consequences and lived only for the moment.

“We’ve already discussed the world wars. Other catastrophes included extensive and prolonged food shortages that resulted in the deaths of many millions; plagues that killed other millions; and earthquakes that increased in intensity, frequency, and damage. Besides these outward

changes and events, people as a body changed, too: they became ever less amenable to compromise, not being able to agree on win-win situations, but always looking for an unfair or weighted-grossly-in-their-favor advantage; they became obnoxious, vicious, brutal, greedy, unsympathetic, disloyal, disrespectful, fierce, out-of-control, unreasonable; even the things people did to themselves would probably shock you right back to the crypt if you had seen it: people of both genders and practically all ages who tattooed themselves all over their body.

“Many also pierced all pierceable body parts--and many you might not consider pierceable--with rings. As if it weren't gruesome enough to bore a hole in your ear lobe and hang a piece of colored stone in it or attach a slag of metal to it, they took up gouging body parts such as navels, cheeks, nipples, eyebrows, even lips and tongues—”

“What?! That's really too much for me; I can't believe anybody would actually do that to themselves.”

“I don't deny you your disbelief, Sam—I probably wouldn't believe it myself, if I hadn't seen it—more than once, more than twice, more than a hundred times—with my own eyes.”

“That *is* truly bizarre. To me, piercing some of those body parts you mentioned would be the worst possible nightmare and torture. I defy anybody to conjure up a more fiendish and agonizing torture—and people did this to themselves *voluntarily*?! You could knock me down with a feather!”

“Not only did they willingly submit to such tortures—and the pain was not a one-time ordeal, either—eating and talking with rings in your lips and tongue has got to be a colossal nuisance at the least and a real pain—literally—at worst. Imagine, too, the hygienic challenges and problems inherent in such unnatural self-transformations. The only thing that might begin to explain such behavior is the extreme hopelessness such ones must have felt. Their bodies were a living canvas that expressed their deep disillusionment and utter hopelessness.”

“And poking holes in their bodies and fastening themselves back together with rivets helped matters?”

“Naturally it didn't, but contrariwise exacerbated, the pain of these dispossessed ones.”

“The younger generation has always wanted to shock their parents’

generation, especially their parents themselves, I suppose.”

“Yes, but as in all other things, this tendency reached a crescendo and a manic fever pitch in those last days.”

“You’re not just whistling Dixie, Grant.”

“The propaganda machine was running full bore at the end, too. People always campaigned for a separation of church and state, but they seemed to forget that a marriage of commerce and state could also be extremely hazardous and dangerous. Commercial imperialism or colonization was often the result.

“The wealthy corporations, some of which were more rich and powerful than entire countries, would extract the wealth from weaker countries, building up their assets and those of their stockholders, while taking advantage of the small, voiceless, defenseless, countries.

“Who would expose these things to the masses? Only a handful of megacorporations controlled all commerce, and had a stranglehold on the media due to their power—their breadth of operations and the depth of their pockets. This psyops mill ground out whatever spin they wanted to put on their activities—and in their sleight-of-hand, carnival-mirror way, they could make bad look good, good bad, black white, and white black.

“While they were killing people, they hushed that up and made sure the spotlight shone on the relatively few dollars they pitched to charities. The vicious gargoyle behind the scenes wore the mask of a clean-shaven, smiling man, well- and soft-spoken—wolves in sheep's covering. As the churches were, for the most part, also involved in the commerce—owning big pieces of the pie while weaseling out of paying taxes on it, the unholy trinity formed its circle yet again.”

“I haven’t been in a conversation this one-sided since the one with Winston Churchill.”

I just smile, choosing to ignore the good-natured barb, and forge onward: “The unholy trinity of hypocritical religion, greedy commerce, and corrupt politics was divisive. That moldy, crusty, brittle, worn-out band of kindred swindlers excelled in getting people to categorize themselves into a seemingly endless array of mutually exclusive groups and subgroups. Catholics against Protestants; so-called Christians against pagans; capitalists against communists and socialists; democrats against republicans, republicans against democrats, and all against mugwumps.

“The crucifix protection finally failed them. The political spinmeisters and dupesters were expert at propaganda and psyops.”

“That’s the second time you’ve used that word. What does it mean?”

“Psyops?”

“Yes.”

“It’s short for psychological operations. In a nutshell, it is psychological warfare—aggressive propaganda. Misleading statements, half-truths, and downright lies used as weapons.

“Depending on how you define the nature of a category, you can make any sort of division you want. For example, if you take a selection of fruits and vegetables, and divide them into two categories, say those that are red and those that aren’t, you will have the reds against the non-reds. You can divide them based on size, shape, where they grow, when they ripen, how much citric acid they contain, whether they grow above or below ground, on trees or not, or whether you would add them to a vegetable salad or a fruit salad.

“You see, no matter who you’d like to see take a stance against whoever else, you can manipulate most of the people most of the time by changing the rules of who is ‘with us’ and who is ‘against us’, pitting one against another based on some arbitrary feature or characteristic.

“In those divisions mentioned, a tomato, for instance, could first be *in* the group (because it is red); then *out* of the group (because it has a rounded shape); *in* again (because it grows in the area of the world previously called the United States of America); *out* (because it doesn’t grow in the winter); *in* (because it contains citric acid); *out* (because it grows above the ground); *in* (because it doesn’t grow on trees); *out* (because you wouldn’t add it to a fruit salad).

“You can manifestly perform the same polarization with people, which is what the manipulators of men, the marionettes of mankind, deliberately did when they pushed our buttons to get us to think and talk and react any way they wanted us to. Masters of deception they were; disciples of P.T. Barnum they were; fortunately for us and unfortunately for them, they did not get the last laugh and are not here.

“Those who would take advantage of their fellowman, mislead and abuse them, have no place here. The exploiters and harassers and oppressors,

the fabricators and prevaricators, need not apply for a position with us. Those dogs had their day and their payment in full. Even the memory of them is fading and will continue to dwindle and dissipate. Their memory serves as an example of attitudes and motives to avoid, but nothing more—they were good examples of bad examples. Eventually we won't even need those.

“The politicians of the world were spinmeisters and dupesters. Some had good intentions, but even those who *began* their careers with good motives oftentimes got entangled in the web and morass of psyche games and corruption. At best they were *unintentional* spinmeisters and dupesters—nevertheless, they *were* such, because they were champions of a form of government which was doomed to failure—that is to say, government by man, over man.

“As has been said, power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. I would have been an abject failure as the ruler of a nation; so would you have. I'm not ashamed of that, and you shouldn't feel disappointed, either, because that judgment fairly applies to all men who have ever lived. Some did, or would have done, a better job than others did or would have done, but even the best were not able to do what was hoped, or even expected. Jimmy Carter was a far better leader, and person, than Adolf Hitler was, and even better than many—”

“Jimmy Carter? Adolf Hitler?”

“I'm sorry, Sam, I forgot myself again.”

“That's all right, Grant. But who were they?”

“Jimmy Carter was a President of the United States, from Georgia. He seemed to be a good man with a good heart. Like all the others, though, he was unable, due to his own limitations and that of those around him—friends and enemies alike—to accomplish all that he would have liked to do. By the way, he is now an assistant overseer of our home building projects.

“Adolf Hitler was at the other end of the human spectrum: he was as malevolent a dictator as there has ever been on the earth. You thought King Leopold of Belgium was bad? He had nothing on Hitler when it came to pure wickedness.”

“Who did he murder? He must have been a monster on a grand scale.”

“That he was. Hitler was the genocidal leader of Germany about whom

we spoke earlier. He developed an intense hatred for many groups of people, but the group for which he demonstrated the most vitriol and demonic hatred were the Jews—killing millions of them in concentration camps throughout Europe during World War II.

“All the political rulers—the relatively good along with the utterly wicked—wanted to retain not only their nation’s sovereignty, but also their own position of power (just like their brothers in the ornate churches and in the ivory towers of commerce), the spoils they had extorted from the gullible and extracted from the powerless, and their affluence—regardless of how the maintenance of it affected others.

“Especially if they could poison the land of another nation, they considered that a coup and even a jolly good joke on them; but even poisoning their own was not beyond them—as long as they weren’t directly affected themselves. If the bad effects would not come to full fruition until later, after they themselves had died, fine. Their children and grandchildren would have to suffer, but hey! They’ll think of some way to remedy matters. After all, they have inherited our intelligence, haven’t they? At any rate, we must maintain our present standard of living; heaven forbid that we go without our daily rations of everything rare and precious and envy-inspiring!

“The mainstream religions were hate-mongers, egging on the people at the behest of the political machine, paving the way for the military arm of the government. Governments usually had imperialism as their motive, but used a perverted form of worship to whip up the masses to a fever pitch of religious fervor to get them to the point of being out of control, seeing red, losing their heads, and blindly storming forward into battle against their fellow oppressed. Meanwhile, sitting on their thrones and lacking in no dainty delicacies, their cynical oppressors ‘laughed all the way to the bank’, so to speak, and averted any personal danger.

“False religion was finally destroyed for being the shameless hussy it was—amassing wealth without paying taxes, and for spreading all manner of base lies while its adherents suffered. As a Christian is by definition a follower of Christ, those organizations which claimed to be such yet chased after money proved their claim false: Christ had not even had a place to lay down his head; they supported and fomented wars, although Christ preached and practiced peace. Everything he taught they twisted or rejected outright. When he was a lamb, the Jews were expecting a lion, and rejected him; when he returned as a lion, the so-called Christians were unprepared for that, as they were still viewing him as a cute and innocuous baby, or as a helpless martyr, malnourished and passive.

“Wolves in sheep’s clothing is what they were, and blind guides. The other religions were also part of the problem, but Christendom bore the bulk of the blame, as it claimed to represent Jesus, and did not even genuinely attempt to do so.”

“You said that mainstream religion was loaded with bloodguilt. Are you saying there was a *non-mainstream* religion that wasn’t—that didn’t make itself culpable and bloodguilty like the mainstream ones?”

“Yes. Christendom and Christianity are two completely different things. Christendom was reprehensible—it claimed to represent Christ, but was an extremely poor reflection of Christ, his personality, and his teachings. True Christianity, on the other hand, was everything Christendom wasn’t—and wasn’t anything that she was.”

“Who then represented Christianity?”

“That is one of those questions I will leave for you to conclude for yourself, as you assimilate knowledge, interview others, and become familiar with life as it is here and now. If I were to just tell you outright, you would either be confused or possibly initially taken aback. Rather than shock you, I’ll allow you to gradually come to the conclusion yourself.”

“How could the true form of Christianity be distinguished from the false?”

“We could argue doctrine until the cows come home, Sam, but the quick and easy way of identifying true Christians is based on deeds, not words. Jesus himself said, speaking of his true followers: ‘You will know them by their fruits’—that is to say, their fruitage, or what they produced. He also said his followers would have love among themselves.

“We don’t need to go into all the nitty-gritty details and delve into ancient Hebrew and Greek—although you are certainly free, and even encouraged, to do so, if you wish. What it really boils down to is this: Which group showed love among itself? Which organization helped one another in times of need and trial, and refused to kill each other in war when the nations in which they happened to be honest, law-abiding, tax-paying citizens fought against each other for whatever reason? Those that put worship in its proper place—first—refused to obey the state when the state’s edicts contradicted those of their heavenly ruler.”

CHAPTER XXVIII

“As time went on, Sam, there was a polarization based on commerce—the gap between the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’ continued to increase. There was a time when there was a minority who were so wealthy they didn’t need to work, and a minority—although large in absolute numbers—at the other end of the spectrum who were so poor they had a hard time even surviving.

“By the end, though, the majority who had made up the middle class (those that had to work, but had no real worries about survival), decreased—many of them had moved either upwards into the elite wealthy class or had spiraled the other direction, landing with a thud amid the impoverished classes.

“The unholy trinity cooperated in many things, perhaps not the least of which was in the celebrating of holidays: for many key players of the commercial system, these holidays constituted the bulk of their business; the religious element especially cooperated by roping in their constituents to come to church during those periods. This meant they would continue to support the church and drop money into the treasury chests. The political element took part because these traditional happenings kept the people at least partially united with one another and promoted a certain sense of unity among them.

“The population of the earth had reached upwards of six billion by the end; the earth can easily accommodate that many people, but the problem was—just as the problem with food and material things in general—that people left huge tracts of land uninhabited and crammed so tightly together in other areas that there was scarcely room to even hear yourself think in some of those areas. The congestion and population density created noise pollution, stress, and a lack of opportunity to simply be alone and enjoy a peaceful moment—great aids in minimizing stress and maintaining emotional balance.”

“Grant, you said the earth could easily accommodate more than six billions of people. If that is the case, how many more billions could it hold until we run out of room?”

“With 50% of the earth’s surface being used for human habitation (for our homes and land, that is), and an acre being allocated for each person—each man, woman, and child—the earth can accommodate over forty billion people. Again, that’s with 25% of the earth’s surface set aside as

parks, and 25% set aside for commercial purposes: factories, commercial forests, etc.”

“Blame my cats! Forty *billions* of people?”

“Yes, indeed.”

“But isn’t it true that to get along, we need to get to know one another? And how would that be possible if that many people are going to live on the earth?”

“With perfect memories, and no lack of time, we can gradually get to know everybody. Eventually everyone will know everyone.”

“Is it really possible to do so?”

“Yes, for two reasons: one, we can develop a perfect memory; and two, earth will eventually be filled to capacity, and then procreation will either stop or other planets will be colonized. Even before that point, some may know everybody, and then just need to add to their ‘repertoire’ when new ones are resurrected or born. That is to say, if you already know billions of people, a few thousand more now and again probably won’t strain your mental bandwidth to the breaking point. And we won’t need to take their fingerprints to positively identify them.”

“Fingerprints? Bandwidth?”

“Yes. Although other people didn’t see the sense in it at the time, you were right about being able to use fingerprints to identify people. As you know, you wrote in ‘Pudd’nhead Wilson’ about fingerprinting as a way to positively identify people. Although rejected at the time, that exact method eventually became de rigueur by police forces and private detectives everywhere. This method of identification was indeed later augmented by breath, voice, and eye analysis, but these alternate methods never superseded fingerprinting as the most common and ubiquitous method for determining, beyond the shadow of a doubt and without any recourse from the bearer of the fingerprint—due to the demonstrably unique nature of his print—the identity of its owner.

“In a related vein, the fact that environment plays a large role in a person’s development (of which you also wrote) was not then widely acknowledged or accepted, but later it was.

“As for my use of the word ‘bandwidth’—please forgive me again: that was a word that came into usage after your day (your first ‘day’, that is to

say). Replace it with ‘capacity’, and you’ll get the point.

“I don’t want to be too nit-picky, Sam, but I do want to comment on your famous quote about knowing all men because you had met them all on the river. More specifically, you said ‘...acquainted with all the types of human nature...I have known him before—met him on the River.’ I hope I am not taking your words too literally, but depending on how you meant them I could respond one of two ways: either ‘Yes, I know what you mean’ or, ‘Now wait a minute—you can’t categorize people that way; all people are unique.’

“If I have taken your words too literally, I apologize. But even to the extent I could agree with them, I think it still may be a mental trap to think that way. People are good at recognizing patterns and categorizing. It is easier, and saves time, to categorize. We don’t have to process so much information; we simply use a type of mental shorthand to tell ourselves, ‘Oh, he looks like so-and-so, or sounds like so-and-so, or dresses like so-and-so, or belongs to such and such a nationality, or is from such and such city, state, or country.’ And then you imagine him actually being like that person he resembles in some way or has some relatively insignificant thing in common with, and you ascribe that other person’s personality traits to him or her. It’s easier that way—you don’t have to analyze, observe, or even listen to and interact with the person. We *think* we know the person, but we don’t *really* know anybody without spending a lot of time with them, discussing a variety of subjects and scenarios, and seeing how they act in different settings and react to different situations.

“Siblings are examples of that—they may look a lot alike, especially to someone outside the family, but oftentimes their personalities—the sum total of their character, their essence, are more different than alike.

“A person who looks like the prince may not be like the prince, nor does the pauper-lookalike necessarily have much in common with the pauper. So we may unwittingly and unfairly ascribe certain traits and tendencies to a person which they do not possess, simply because in some way they—perhaps only superficially—tend to resemble a prior acquaintance of ours. We may be drawn or repelled by someone because they physically resemble a beloved friend or a despised enemy.

“To judge each person by their true self, rather than their shell, or outward appearance or similarity to another soul we know, is difficult and time-consuming, but it is the right thing to do. There are no short cuts to sizing people up accurately, but the time and effort are worth while—both for the joy we get from meeting new friends, and the

embarrassment and misunderstanding we avoid and avert by not assuming and taking things for granted which we should not.”

CHAPTER XXIX

“All right, Grant. You may think I’m a little slow for not asking this question until now—How did this Utopia I find myself in and that you’re explaining to me come about?”

“That is another one of those things that will gradually become apparent to you, Sam—that is to say, you will eventually figure it out on your own. If I were to tell you outright, it might be too much for you to take all it once. Let it seep into your conscious a bit at a time.

“Stress can be good or bad, depending on its cause, nature, and degree; so can shock. Remember the shock you received—and survived, to your own amazement—when you heard of Susy’s death? The shock of too much knowledge too soon would likewise be an overburden, an overtaxing, of your cognitive system. Although it would not be a bad shock—it is not negative news, like that of the death of a loved one—it would be enough of a shock that it could be hard on your system. Your brain will make small stepping-stone leaps until you’re across the river. Being catapulted over in one bound would result in broken legs when you landed on the other side, though.”

“If people who lived before are brought back to life, I would assume that means that they live forever. Am I right?”

“Yes.”

“With an eternity in view, is it possible people would ever get bored?”

“I don’t see how they would. There will always be new things to learn, as we will never come to know everything. In many areas of knowledge, the more you learn, the more you realize there is that you didn’t even know was there to *be* learned. It’s like entering a cave, and thinking the cave consists only of the first room you enter. But then you discover another, larger room. While exploring that one, you find several more. And so on. And that’s just in one subject area.

“Even if you narrowed your interest down to flora only, or fauna only, or anything else, for that matter, you would never know it all. And everything you learn you can compare and contrast and apply to the things you’ve learned before. So each piece of information, each insight, each discovery, becomes more illuminating, enlightening, and awesome as time goes on and your knowledge, understanding, insight, and

wisdom increase.

“In the arts, too, there are always new things to say: New books to write, new scenes to paint, new poems to scribe, new songs to compose and perform. Even if you were to read all the books, there are more being written all the time. And many books are as good or even better when re-read (such as ‘Tom Sawyer’ and ‘Huck Finn’).

“If you were a musician and happened to learn to play every song, there will not only continually be more being written, and more for you to write yourself, but also entirely new genres of music to be invented and learned and expanded on. Whatever your favorite genre of music is now, it may be that a new one will take its place later, and this new favorite will be relegated to second place sometime later, and so on and on.

“The same goes for styles of painting, and so on and so forth etc. ad infinitum. There will be no end of discoveries: new things to see, feel, learn, and hear.”

“So you’re saying that only an incurious person could ever get bored.”

“That’s right, Sam; or a depressed one. And there’s no reason to be depressed here. Life is grand. Conditions are ideal and situations are perfect. We do experience stress, but it is good stress and limited in duration and intensity. There are no chemical imbalances, as people get better and healthier and wholer by the day. Our food is natural and perfect, and the environment is healthful. The sun’s warmth is healing; the food, water, and air are pure; and the exercise that we all naturally get in the course of our daily routine improves our health, and thus our quality of life.

CHAPTER XXX

“Thomas Wolfe, a renowned writer who was born ten years prior to your death—and who died only twenty-eight years after your death—once wrote an oft-quoted line, namely, ‘You can never go home.’ At first blush, that statement might seem nonsensical: if you’re from Biloxi, and you go to Pascagoula for a time or a season, certainly you can return to Biloxi and be home again. But on deeper reflection, I’m sure you’ll see there is a certain profundity and fundamental truth in those words of his. Home is not just a geographical location. ‘Home’ is a time period as far as the world and nation and community are concerned; also, a range of time in an individual’s life; a set of circumstances; a group of people; and who knows how many other transient and unrepeatable blends of emotions, aromas, and flavors.

“So it’s true that you can’t go home, because you can’t go back *anywhere* any more. In the example above, the Biloxian cannot go back to Pascagoula, either. Not the same Pascagoula he visited earlier, anyway. Things change; people change; places change; circumstances and perspectives change--constantly.

“Sam, what I want to say here is that Hannibal is no longer the white town drowsing of your youth; it gradually became a shrine to you, or perhaps more accurately, to its version of the character ‘Mark Twain’ (not necessarily Samuel Clemens) and to ‘Tom Sawyer’ and his cronies. Hannibal became one big never-ending Tom Sawyer festival. Deplorably, in the midst of the Sawyer shrines and the miles of smiles, a rabid racist organization (now defunct, of course) named the Ku Klux Klan held rallies in Hannibal—at *Clemens Field*, of all places.”

“The Coo Clucks Clan? It sounds like an amalgamation of Scotch doves and chickens.”

I don’t quite know what Sam means by that, so I inwardly shrug my shoulders and respond, “Chickens, to be sure; Doves, unfortunately not. You know, Sam, sometimes the strangest things are those that are true. As goofy as the name sounds, yes, that is the designation those inbred morons chose for themselves.”

“In that case they must have been a passel of jokers.”

“They *were* almost laughable for their idiotic, pathetic, and detestable ideas, their outrageous garb, and their sophomoric moniker, but some of

the things they did were downright despicable, and for that reason they had to be taken seriously—after a fashion. They were a dangerous pack of cowardly jerks. The Ku Klux Klan was a terrorist organization who hated, intimidated, persecuted, tortured and killed Negroes, Jews, and Catholics—in that order. No members of the Ku Klux Klan are here.”

“Too stupid?”

“Morally stupid, yes. Stupidity of the brain can be reversed; an ignorant or dull person can be taught or sharpened. A morally stupid person, though, is responsible for himself, because he is such because he chooses to be such. Being ‘raised that way’ is not an excuse. You’re a prime example of that, Sam: your parents owned slaves, and yet you ended up fighting against slavery and prejudice, writing some of the best and most effective anti-slavery literature ever, most notably ‘Huck Finn’.”

“Thank you.”

“Unfortunately, ‘Huck’ was misunderstood by some—many, in fact. Not a *majority*, by any means, but a large *number* of people took offense because of the existence of the word ‘nigger’ in it.”

“I wasn’t calling them niggers. Some of the characters in the book were—out of ignorance or malice, and—“

“I know—it should have been obvious that the use of the word was meant to display the character—the heart—of the ones using the term. In some cases, as you inferred, it was at least partly due to ignorance, as in the case of Huck himself. We can see from the book that Huck was a diamond in the rough: He had a good heart. He was good on the inside, no matter how uncouth he appeared on the outside, or how unrefined his speech was.”

“Thank you again.”

“You’re welcome, Sam; and actually, I’m defending myself a little at the same time, because my first novel *Twisted Roads* also contains the word in one or two places—emanating from the mouth of a most undesirable and contemptible character. If you consider the source, the use of the word condemns the speaker, not the group of people he is referencing.

“In the case of my book, the reader already knows he’s a miscreant, and his usage of the epithet proves him to be a bigot, to boot—and because of who it is that says it, usage of such an appellation is condemned even more. In other words, if a person were to use such a slur, he puts himself

into company with people like *that*—in the case of my book, a real degenerate of enormous proportions, and in the case of ‘Huck Finn’, the speaker stamps himself thereby as ignorant at best and evil at worst.

“At any rate, to get back to the ‘you can never go home’ thought, Hannibal is no longer Hannibal anymore than the Hiroshima today is the Hiroshima of yesteryear, or Angels Camp today is the same as the Angels Camp of your day (or mine), or the New York or San Francisco you remember are the same as the cities that bore those names a hundred years later.

“If somebody wanted to live a life like you did in Hannibal, they would have had to search out someplace else to get as close as possible to doing so. Hannibal itself would have definitely been the wrong choice—after your fame changed it, it had virtually *nothing* in common with the Hannibal in which you grew up—excepting its longitude and latitude and location relative to the Mississippi.

“Just as you can’t go home, because what was home is no longer home as it constantly changes, and your memories of it become more and more idealistic and unrealistic, as you recall the pleasant and tend to forget the unpleasant memories, it is also a fool’s errand to try to emulate and mimic another person or their life. If I were to deliberately follow your path through life as best I could, it wouldn’t make me more like you—because you didn’t follow somebody else’s path through life. Trying to relive life as someone else did is mimicry, and leads to nothing. It is futile—vanity, and a striving after the wind.

“A purer, more accurate, form of imitation for someone trying to copy you would be to find—or make—his or her own Hannibal. The town that in 2006 (to pick a year at random) was the most like the Hannibal of your youth may have been Ocracoke, Maine; Lost Nation, Iowa; Quincy, California; Camptown, Pennsylvania, or—anywhere—but it certainly wasn’t Hannibal. Mimicry is vain. *Imitation*, though, makes it possible (although not necessarily advisable or healthy) to follow another person’s ‘spirit’.

“Mimicking you—or anybody else—would be foolishness. Imitating you—or someone else—may be less foolish, and also more difficult, because then you have to discern the similarities and make the mappings to try to determine what the person imitated would do in each situation. That’s the only genuine way to imitate someone—and what they might do in 2062 will almost certainly be different from what they did in 1862.

“One small example should suffice to prove this point: If a person were to

mimic you—Samuel Clemens—as closely as possible, they would become a writer and submit their first several manuscripts handwritten, and thereafter switch to typewritten manuscripts. And yet, early adopter of new technology that you always were, if a person were to imitate—as opposed to mimic—you, they would use a computer with word processing software to write the manuscripts—as that is almost certainly what you would have done if such had been available to you.

“If someone were to try to mimic you as a writer, they would write books as much like yours as possible. You, though, if living in their time with their milieu and Zeitgeist and influences, would not have written the same books. The American and world cultures were different when you lived, and the English language has changed, too. These and other factors would have caused you to write different books, perhaps even about totally different things. Your style would still be recognizable, and some of the general themes still explored, perhaps, but after that ‘all bets are off’.”

“Before I can agree to that wholeheartedly, I will have to see computers and word processing software, but—“

“Software.”

“What?”

“Software, not software.”

“Whatever. Software, then. Let it go. At any rate, you’re probably right: I imagine I would have used the latest technology.”

“And now, writers can—and most do—use computer programs to quickly and easily revise text. You can make a piece of text of arbitrary size seemingly ‘disappear’ from the page and then cause it to reappear again elsewhere on the page—Inserting your transient piece wherever your whim desires. In this way you can enter all your hand-written or dictated notes, flesh them out, and then rearrange their relation to one another in a logical fashion.

“You can even look up a list of antonyms and synonyms for a particular word without hunting for your thesaurus. The software can spell check your document—which is handy, but must be abetted by after-the-fact ‘manual’ checking as ‘their’ is a validly spelled word, but perhaps should be spelled ‘there’ or ‘they’re’, depending on its context.

“You can print N copies of your manuscript at the ‘flick of a switch’, so to

speak. Your data can be stored for future use or reuse. It can be compared to setting type for a newspaper, and then saving that layout as opposed to taking it down after the paper has been printed—as if there were practically no limit to the number of daily editions you can indefinitely save.”

“Doesn’t that take up a lot of space?”

“Not at all; the medium on which the data is stored borders on microscopic. You can store thousands upon thousands of pages of data on a space the size of your fingernail.

“You are making me more and more curious about this ingenious device.”

“As far as printing technology went, the Paige typesetter never did become a standard. The linotype machine became transcendent, then offset printing, and then electronic.”

“Offset? Electronic? I’m assuming ‘electronic’ has something to do with computers.”

“You assume correctly. Offset printing is not one of my areas of expertise, although perhaps it should be, as I did work in a book bindery for a year where that technology was used. But that was a long time ago and, although I’m a technical person in a certain sense of the word—being a programmer, after all—I’m not at all mechanically oriented or inclined and so understanding the concepts of such things are not my forte. Therefore, remembering these vaguely understood concepts would be expecting a little too much—from me, that is. Others can tell you all about it when you meet them, if you’re interested.”

“Of course I’m interested.”

“Good; I’ll introduce you to Roger Hugi tonight at the banquet. He has the perfect mind for such things. He discerns the intricacies of such things very quickly, and can relay the concepts and inner workings of such with enthusiasm and precise insight.”

“Fine; I look forward to meeting Roger, then.”

“Which reminds me—Henry Rogers is now involved in the production and implementation of solar, wind, and tidal power. Using coal and oil and gas to run factories and operate vehicles, heat and illuminate our homes, and so on, is passé. Solar, wind, and tidal power have supplanted the

use of coal, gas, and oil. The sun's rays, the wind, and the tides are available in infinite quantity: using them doesn't use them *up*. Gas and oil are the exact opposite, being finite resources. Moreover, they were the cause of much pollution, contributing to the disintegration of the ozone layer, changes in the weather, and all sorts of problems. The only reason they were ever used at all was to make the fat cats fatter and the powerful even more potent.

"As our economic system is no longer based on competition, and our motives are not profit-oriented, but rather the desire to be productive without harming fellow humans, animals, or the environment, these natural sources of fuel and energy are 'no-brainers' as choices for us.

"People born in this system of things have a very hard time understanding why anybody *ever* used oil and gas once it was understood how harmful they were and how beneficial it would have been to use the other options. We need to remind them that people, for the most part, were not unintelligent, simply uninformed and, although in the right race, had perhaps bet on the wrong horse.

"The situation is similar with war—those who never experienced it simply cannot comprehend it. 'People actually hurt one another *on purpose*?' they ask; and although they believe you from an intellectual standpoint—because they know you wouldn't lie to them—it is just such a foreign concept to them that they never quite assimilate it. They just shake their head in bewilderment and give up—it is beyond them. I guess that can be said of a lot of things besides using coal, oil, and gas for fuel and waging war. Eating animals is no longer done, and to those who never did engage in it (those who were born here in the new system of things), doing so seems indescribably barbaric.

"Anyway, Henry is doing a very fine job of helping us all with these 'new' technologies."

"This is so good, it's almost frightening. It sounds too good to be true; or too good to last. Every throne ever set up has been overthrown and trampled. Might that not happen to this one, too?"

"No. This throne is completely different than those that have come and gone before. This one will not be overthrown, for two reasons: one, nobody will want to; and two, nobody *could* overthrow it, even if they *were* crazy enough to want to.

"To finish my prior thought, another example of misplaced mimicry is that 'back to basics' aficionados did not really emulate the pioneers (such

as those who moved out west in the 1800s to settle the wild, uncivilized country), as they thought they were doing, because doubtless many of those pioneers would have welcomed technological advancements with open arms if only these had been available to them at the time. Many of the pioneers lived a Spartan life more by circumstance than by choice.

“Here we enjoy the perfect blend of the tranquility people came to associate with the ‘simpler times’ (after being bombarded with too much hurry and hustle and bustle and too much noise and too much to do too fast and too soon) and the efficiency of the modern marvels (time- and labor-saving devices).

“The pace of life is whatever you want it to be--you control your own pace, rather than having it dictated to you or imposed on you by outside forces. If you like to take things slow, do so; if you’d be bored at somebody’s else’s slow pace, there’s nothing stopping you from escalating your own gait.”

CHAPTER XXXI

“This may seem to be a silly question, Grant, but I’m compelled to ask: even though I saw so much bad during my lifetime, and despite my reputation as a pessimist and cynic at the end, I also saw a lot of good. There really were a lot of good, pure-hearted, stalwart people—people I would trust with everything I had. Was the old system really *that bad* that it needed to be completely removed and replaced?”

“You probably can’t really imagine how bad it was, Sam. Just like the ancient Roman civilization, which collapsed from within—eroded, corroded, and imploded—so too it was in those last days. Street gangs terrorized citizens in their own communities. Almost everybody locked their doors, and many lived with bars on their windows—a self-imposed imprisonment. Burglar alarms, security services, and the like were huge industries in those waning years.

“Your house was burglarized once, but let me tell you: things only got worse—much worse—after that. Burglar alarms were even attached to people’s cars, so that if anybody tried to break into them, a loud moaning and wailing and honking and beeping ensued. Oftentimes, these were accidentally triggered, and these irritating noisemakers usually had the effect of the boy who ‘cried wolf’ once too often.”

“How did people cope with the pressure such an environment brought about?”

“Many didn’t, or they did so artificially.”

“Artificially? Do you mean by becoming drunkards?”

“Sometimes, yes, but probably more often through the use of drugs to calm them down or to give them a feeling of euphoria and/or disconnectedness so that they could ‘escape’ the stress and the rigors of the day. These, of course, were just an evasive measure that solved nothing in the long run. The problems were still there when they ‘came to’; the drugs created problems of their own, such as costing money which was sometimes got by ill measures, triggering a domino effect of moral compromising and social corruption.

“Additionally, the number of those who suffered from emotional disorders skyrocketed, and the number of residents of mental institutions (‘asylums’) was dwarfed only by the number of those who rightly should

have been ensconced there but were not. Cocaine, made from coca leaves, was one of the principal culprits. While misusing certain plants, such as coca, hemp, and tobacco, in their greed and shortsightedness mankind oftentimes destroyed plants that could have been very beneficial for medicinal purposes. It had been determined of many of these squandered plants that they would have been of benefit to mankind, but were allowed to become extinct. Other plants would doubtless also have been found to be advantageous, but went extinct or even undiscovered before their healing qualities were even ascertained.

“Like the people who have been resurrected, though, so too have these necessary plants and animals—those that were made extinct as a result of man’s mismanagement of the earth—been brought back.

“As you yourself said, Sam, Satan was the spiritual head of most of the human race and the political head of the whole of it—that explains the devilry and pandemonium, the confusion, hypocrisy, and disunity that prevailed for so long in the political arenas. Fine-tuning and tweaking did not help matters—the machine was totaled. Trying to fix the old system was like trying to put Humpty Dumpty back together again. The progress of our race was not satisfactory. It is to have another chance now.

“In being reticent to condemn the entire lot, though, you’re right. Many individuals did their best, and oftentimes under very trying circumstances. There were countless excellent men and women, and children, too, for that matter, all through the ages. And they are here; or will be, in due time. As for the system in general, though, it was beyond repair. The system was irreparable and its stalwart proponents incorrigible. It was so bad, so broken, that it just couldn’t be put back together again.

“It saddens me to mention just how debased society became in the last days regarding how they treated each other—including in many cases how people treated members of their own families. Family violence became very prevalent. Policemen spoke of how the most dangerous situations for them was responding to domestic disputes: tempers would be at a fever pitch, and since people were mad at each other and yet oftentimes loved each other, too, their behavior under these circumstances was very unpredictable. A person being abused by a family member could turn on the policeman if the officer subdued the abusing family member—as illogical as that might seem. And oftentimes they would drop the charges against their family member rather than press charges, so the same acts of violence would occur over and over again.

“The ugliest side of family violence was child abuse. Parents, usually fathers, but also other family members, more often than not males (brothers, uncles, etc.) would physically abuse their female relatives. If that were not bad enough, they would alternatively or additionally sexually abuse these pitiable girls. The very people who should be the most concerned about protecting the female members of the family were too often themselves the attackers—the ones from whom the girls needed protection. And it wasn’t always females that were the victims. In fact, it wasn’t *always* males who were the perpetrators.

“Speaking of sex: It has always been ‘big business’. Any new technology used sex to sell itself. That happened in your day, before your day, and afterwards, too, to an even greater extent. And speaking of sexploitation: what you saw at the performance of ‘The Black Crook’ in New York was ‘nothing’ compared to what could be seen in magazines and newspapers, television, and even just walking down the street—on billboards, signs, and even on fellow pedestrians.

“Just in the general priorities that society manifested, the degree of off-kilteredness was made evident: lip service was oftentimes given to things that were genuinely important, but they usually failed to ‘put their money where their mouth was’ in promoting, supporting, and protecting these things in actuality.

“As has been said, every man has two faces: the one he shows to the world, and his real one. I don’t subscribe to that in every case—I don’t think every person is insincere--but all too often it did seem to be true.

“An example of this was related to schooling. In one sense, education was considered very important: if you were trying to get any job which required brainpower, you had to be able to prove that you had spent several years in college learning the theory and practices and particulars related to that endeavor. It wasn’t like in your day, Sam, when, after you wrote a few clever letters to a newspaper, your future employer realized you had talent and potential and offered you a job at the *Territorial Enterprise*. By the end of the old system, you would have needed to have a degree in journalism before you could have gotten such a job—and they probably wouldn’t have pursued *you*--you would doubtless have had to approach them for a job.

“On the other hand, schooling was not adjudged as being of much importance by the government when it came time to spend the money that the taxpayers had been assessed purportedly for such services. Instead of providing all children with a school they could be proud of, and the quality of teaching which would give them the best chance for

success, many schools looked like giant shoeboxes, as utilitarian as possible, with no character, and teachers were grossly underpaid in relation to other professions.

“The decision makers proved what they really felt when they voted with their wallets—or, rather, the tax payer’s wallets—to position education as being less important than such things as research into how to most effectively kill fellow human beings, and weapons and other hardware to put such research into practice. Relatively unimportant professions paid extremely well, but schoolteachers did not earn much in relation to the importance of their role in society.

“Others who dealt with children in a responsible capacity were also underpaid: school bus drivers, etc. These valuations sent a very strong message to children, and everyone else, as to how they were really evaluated. Millions and billions of dollars for ‘better’ weapons to kill everybody on earth many times over—*no problem! We can afford it. We’ll find a way to pay for it.* But educating the children and making sure they’re safe? *You’ll just have to make do with what’s left at the bottom of the barrel at the end of the day.* The powers that *were* proved by their dissemination of resources where their heart really was, what really took precedence in their estimation.

“What priority does education take now?”

“Extremely high; it is considered to be very important. Education is conducted in this way: through the eighth grade, all children are taught the same subjects, namely things that all of them will need to know. They are exposed to all cultures and art forms, also. They spend half their time outside of the classroom, observing and participating in various jobs so they can come to understand their own likes and dislikes, abilities and proclivities, and learn to know themselves better as to what sort of career would be best for them.

“Additionally, aptitude tests are administered to see the areas in which each person is most likely to excel. In those areas where aptitude and desire meet, it is like a match made in heaven. In those rare occasions where they do not (a person wants to pursue a profession in which he has little aptitude, or a person doesn’t want to pursue a profession that comes natural to him), the person is made aware of the ramifications: if they pursue subject A when it is really not something they are best fitted for, they will have to work extra hard at it to excel; whereas their strong point is subject B, and if they pursue that, they are likely to excel with less effort.

“The choice, though, is ultimately left to the individual in question. At any rate they know what they are getting themselves into if they opt to pursue something which does not come naturally to them.

“Since there are no time limitations, if a person wants above all else to become a painter, it doesn’t really matter if it takes them one hundred years to become a master painter—although a person with exceptional natural talent may reach that plateau in five years. If the person is willing to spend the hundred years at it, there is no reason why they shouldn’t pursue their dream. However, if a person would almost as soon do something else, and they do have natural ability in that something else, they may very well decide their second choice is actually a better one for them.

“Even in such a case, no regrets are ever necessary. If the person opts to become, say, a riverboat pilot instead of a painter, and pursues that course for fifty years and then feels he wants a change, and is willing to now invest those necessary hundred years to become a master painter, there’s no reason why he or she can’t or shouldn’t do so.

“In my case, there are many types of work that I’d like to pursue—I’m sure the same is true of you, and I know it’s true of many others. I want to pursue music, sports, computer programming, writing, zoology—and that’s just a beginning.

“The beautiful thing about it is, each time I cycle through my interests—after spending, say, fifty years each concentrating first primarily on music, then fifty years on sports, followed by computer programming, then writing, etc., I will bring added insight and knowledge and wisdom to the table when I come back around to a previous area of interest.

“For instance, when I come back around full circle to music again, I can use the experiences gained in all those other fields to expand the width and breadth and depth of my musical expressions. Things I learned in zoology and sports can be expressed through music. Things I learn in music and writing can be applied to computer programming, and so on, and so forth—everything connects with everything else. The more you know about a variety of things, the better you can make synaptic connections. It expands your horizons. Your thinking becomes clearer and more creative, inventive, intuitive.

“The more you know in a general sense, the better computer programmer you are. The perfect computer programmer would know *everything*. The same can be said of all the other areas: all forms of art, perhaps especially writing, benefit from an increase in experience and intellect on

the part of the artist. If you know a lot about one thing, you can write well on it. If your knowledge base expands, you are more versatile in your writing. If you can get to the point where you know a little about everything, your writing is superb; when that little becomes a lot, you can capture the attention of even a person who is not especially interested in your subject with the winsome words thereby produced.

“After a direction is chosen—that is, after the student determines where his strengths and interests lie and makes a decision as to which career to pursue first, the individual is routed to a school that is geared more specifically toward his chosen area. Each year thereafter, his education becomes more specialized to the subcategory he eventually gravitates towards. When he or she is ready, the student leaves the academic world and enters the ‘real’ world.

“This departure from the former and immersion in the latter is done gradually, though: each year more and more work is done outside the classroom. Working hours increase while school hours decrease, until working hours prevail. People never stop learning altogether, of course. There is always more to learn, and everyone continues his education, at least informally, forever.

“Eventually these students participate in teaching others, and in fact can do both at the same time; that is to say, they simultaneously learn and teach. While learning specific techniques or arcane niceties, they can also be instructing beginners. Intermediates can teach beginners; masters can teach intermediates; and gurus can teach masters.

“In jobs that require more than one craftsman of a particular stripe, a master usually has one or more apprentices that he mentors for whatever period of time is necessary for them until they are able to work independently. Once they reach this stage, they become masters and mentors themselves.

“Everyone is taught; and then returns the favor by teaching those who know less than he or she does. It may be that the master in one area is an apprentice to his apprentice in another area. For example, you may teach me by critiquing my writing and giving me pointers, whereas if you were to take up computer programming, I could mentor you for a time. It may be that eventually your skill therein would eclipse mine, depending on your native ability and the amount of effort you expend.

“Everyone here strives to be both a good student and a good teacher, also a good leader and a good follower: all depending on the needs at the time and the particular situation.

“Remember that work is no longer a dirty word here. The stress of having to go to work each day, oftentimes or most of the time at a hated job, is a relic of the past. As everyone has a house and land on which to grow food, shelter and food are available to all; ‘extras’ beyond that (non-necessities, luxuries, things that are nice to have but not necessary to sustain life) are obtained through working in your chosen field.

“Working schedules are much more flexible than they used to be. Instead of six twelve-hour days, or even five eight-hour days, three six-hour days per week are more typical. In this way the other things people like to do can get done, without people having to rush around like headless chickens. You can work; tend your garden and orchard; do a little painting; play the guitar, piano, harpsichord, bagpipe, or tuba; do some writing; engage in sports; spend time with friends and relatives, etc.

“No longer is every day so jam-packed full of things that *have* to be done that there is no time to unwind, relax, and do things you want to do just for the pure joy of doing them.

“Another area—in addition to education—that revealed topsy-turvy priorities was in farming. What is more important than farming? All people need to eat. The case could be made that farmers are performing the most important work of anyone, and yet at the end of the old system many farmers were driven from their farms because they were simply considered expendable. More money could be made by paving over their farms with parking lots and movie theaters and fast-food restaurants and so on.

“Farmers shouldn’t necessarily have made *more* than everyone or anyone else, but they certainly shouldn’t have been impoverished or driven from their farms by necessity to work elsewhere in order to make a living. At the same time that many farmers were being relegated to the scrap heap, scads of entertainers raked in so much money that they couldn’t have spent it all themselves even had they made that their full-time endeavor.”

CHAPTER XXXII

“Now, returning to general conditions in the last days: Beginning in the latter part of the 20th century, there was a widespread need for two breadwinners in a family. Wages had not kept pace with the cost of living, and wives usually had to go to work to supplement their husband’s income. This led to a bevy of other problems, as children oftentimes came home from school to an empty house. You can imagine the widespread problems that this caused.

“Add to this the problems stemming from lack of time on the part of the parents to spend with their children—helping them to deal with their problems, etc. Some parents were so busy with work and then working around and in the house that time was tight, tempers were short, and the children oftentimes got shortchanged.

“There were also wide-scale changes from ‘nuclear’ families (father, mother, and children) to single-parent families due to widespread births of children to unwed mothers and to couples who entered marriage without a genuine feeling of commitment, oftentimes giving up on each other and their marriage and moving on when things got difficult.

“By the end of the old system, there were even children with zero parents—and I’m not talking about orphans who had lost both parents; rather, there were children who were ‘cloned’ and grown in laboratories. They did not have a father or mother in the traditional sense. No one to raise them. No mama. No papa. No siblings in the usual sense. That is certainly not how childhood and life was meant to be. Children who came to life in such an unnatural way had even more mental and emotional problems than the rest of us who simply had to deal daily with a dysfunctional society. They had no support group, no haven, no home sweet home, or even home bittersweet home, to give them support and stability. They were rudderless, anchorless, adrift, and homeless in the truest sense of the word.

“Another terrible manifestation of the overall moral bankruptness of the old system was environmental pollution of all sorts.”

“What do you mean by that—environmental pollution?”

“At one time, man thought they *couldn’t* ruin the earth. The seas were so huge, man thought they would assimilate and dilute any amount of waste and sewage man could possibly dump into them; The sky so vast,

any amount of industrial smoke would dissipate into near nothingness. That, though, was unfortunately faulty thinking. The result was a massive ruination of the health of the earth's atmosphere—air, water, and land pollution eventually killed off many species of plants and animals, and provoked death in humans, too.”

“How so?”

“Both by commission and omission. Directly and indirectly. The pollution itself made people sick, sometimes to the point of killing them. The making of flora and fauna sick, and especially the making of some species thereof extinct, prevented people from being as healthy as they could have been, leading in some cases to their eventual demise.”

“What caused this pollution?”

“Avarice, ignorance, and negligence. Technological advancements in and of themselves were not to blame for pollution, but rather the tenacious avarice exhibited by the greedy companies which caused a gross inequality in the dissemination of the fruits of these advancements.

“The rapacious and insatiable manufacturers and speculators destroyed landscapes to win riches at any cost. Instead of working on such technologies to the betterment of the lot of all mankind, the motive was all too often greed. They said to people who could most benefit from their improvements: ‘Can’t afford it? Can’t have it.’ That was bad enough when the thing not affordable was a labor-saving device or a quality-of-life enhancer, but when it was something necessary for the sustaining of life—that is to say, food, clothing, or shelter (and I’m not talking about caviar, purple robes, and million dollar mansions) it was downright immoral to shut out the disadvantaged so that the fat cats could grow plumper yet.”

CHAPTER XXXIII

“A device which has great potential but was for the most part a colossal waste of time, and worse yet a purveyor of propaganda and baseness, was the television (the device that was somewhat like your fictional ‘telectrophonoscope’, about which we conversed earlier).

“To expand a little on the previous description of this device, the television combined moving pictures with sound. These pictures and sounds were transmitted to a screen, or a box—not at all unlike the computer monitor I described earlier. Viewing television is like watching a miniaturized version of a real-life drama—a short story or novel come to life, so to speak. A sequence of pictures are taken of actors and actresses in very rapid succession, which are then transmitted from the broadcasting point to television sets in peoples’ homes—somewhat like a telegraph transmission, except that what is being transmitted is pictures and sounds instead of Morse code signals.

“At first the pictures were only in grayscale (‘black & white’) like the photographs of your day, and the screens were only a few inches in diameter. Later on, life-like colors took the place of gray scale (as they did in photography), and the size of the screens both shrunk and grew. You could purchase a very small television, so as to watch it unobtrusively or house one in cramped quarters; at the same time, you could purchase huge television screens to enlarge the protagonists to life size, or even larger. Besides the visual recording of plays and acted-out novels (called ‘movies’), television was also used to broadcast news events as they occurred.”

“As they occurred?”

“Yes; if a plane were to smash into a building in New York, for example, within minutes people in California—and in fact, in most of the world—would see live pictures from the scene.”

“You could knock me down with a feather! That’s amazing!”

“Yes; it was almost like being on the scene—almost like time travel—at seven a.m. in California, you could see something that took place at ten a.m. in New York—which was really the same time, due to the three-hour time differential between the two states.”

“Instantaneous news delivery! That’s too much for me. I don’t see how

the signals could travel that fast.”

“New technology allowed transmission of this information at practically the speed of light. And satellites that orbited or hung in space were used to receive and then transmit—repeat and relay—these impulses to other places around the world.”

“And I remember when we thought the pony express was fast!”

“The Pony Express was certainly sexier.”

“Sexier?”

“I mean to say, the Pony Express was more glamorous.”

“Glamorous?”

“Maybe I should simply say exciting, intriguing, and picturesque.”

“All right, I guess I’ll buy that,” Sam says, but he casts a rather perplexed look at me from beneath his thick knitted brows. I choose to ignore it, and continue.

“Sam, you know how sometimes you might assert something and yet ‘hope against hope’ that someone will prove you wrong? For example, in your story ‘The Mysterious Stranger’, when the preacher finds the money, decides he can’t keep it, and disagrees with his friends who try to talk him into keeping it, but really hopes that they will yet be able to change his mind? I think you probably felt that way regarding some of the things you wrote. At any rate, are you prepared to have some of your postulations debunked—or at least challenged?”

“I’m always willing to change my mind if given solid evidence that refutes my previously held views. I may not exactly *welcome* it, if the view being challenged is one I happen to be especially fond of, but nevertheless I do hope that I have the courage and fortitude to either stick to my beliefs no matter who or how many are against me if I believe them to be right, or change them if it is proven to me that they are inaccurate after all.”

“Well said, and that’s how we all should feel. Onward, then. Misdirected hatred was a big problem: instead of hating hypocrisy, greed, corruption, and artifice, many hated truth, straightforwardness, and anything that made them think, or anything that was different from the beliefs they had adopted and found comfortable.

“Once somebody gets comfortable with a philosophy that fits their skin, they will fight tooth and nail to prevent it from being disrupted. It’s as if people get tired of thinking: when they’re adolescents they are willing to think and challenge and analyze and formulate their worldview. But once their Weltanschauung has been forged, watch out—it hardens like a clay vessel, and they are unwilling, sometimes seemingly *unable*, to change it. They stay that same shape, or break. They get in a mental rut. And, as my old friend Eddie Nelson always said, a rut is simply a grave with the ends kicked out of it.”

CHAPTER XXXIV

“As far as inventions that were used by sexploitors, one of the last ‘big’ ones was the Internet—a huge phenomenon in the last few decades of the old system.”

“What is the Internet?”

“The Internet was created by connecting computers together so that they could share data with one another. For example, any person with a computer could connect to a large computer that contained the latest news, and read it almost as soon as the reporter had written it. Similarly, you could send a letter (which you had written with your word processing software) via the Internet to any other person on earth who had their computer hooked up to the Internet—no matter whether they were in California, New York, Alaska, Hawaii, Switzerland, the Philippines, or anywhere else.

“As is true of almost any human invention, the Internet could be used in good ways (and sometimes was) but as often as not—or perhaps way more often than not—its capabilities were applied to evil ends. Beneficial information was easily shared, but deleterious information was dispensed in the same way. Despite its power for good, the Internet was more often used as a come-on, a recruiting ground for criminals, and a meeting place for perverts and psychopaths of all stripes.”

“We never learn, do we? As far as the technology itself goes, it makes the Paige typesetting machine sound like a child’s plaything.”

“We have finally learned, and continue to do so, but yes, it certainly took us long enough. As to the technology, we certainly saw some marvelous inventions and advancements in the last days of the old system—and continue to marvel at new ones. In your day, the Pony Express was replaced by the telegraph, and the Overland Express by the railroad. Railroads were eventually primarily used for freight, not passengers. And even as far as freight goes, trains eventually took a back seat to trucks.

“The telegraph is gone, replaced by Bell’s telephone. Telephone lines, in addition to their original use to transmit human voices, were eventually connected to computers and used to dispatch information—information which was converted from data to sound, sent from transmitter to receiver, and then converted back again, from sound to data, after it had been received. This is actually how the Internet worked—how computers

were connected to one another. Computers eventually all but replaced typewriters, as they made writing far more easily modifiable, and storable.”

“Imagine how productive I could have been with a tool like that!”

“No worries; the past doesn’t really matter, and you can use the tool from now on and perhaps surpass even your own prolific output.”

“I’m willing to give it a go.”

CHAPTER XXXV

“Sam, you said that you ‘enjoyed’ the ‘great’ San Francisco earthquake in 1865. Although living far from the west coast at the time it occurred, you doubtless heard about the even bigger quake that struck there in 1906.”

“Yes.”

“There was another big one in 1989. I was in Lake Tahoe at the time; in fact, I was about to watch the World Series between the two baseball teams from the bay area, the San Francisco Giants and the Oakland Athletics, when it struck.”

“San Francisco had a professional baseball team? And Oakland?”

“Yes; the Giants moved to San Francisco from New York, and the Athletics (known simply as the ‘A’s’) came to Oakland from Kansas City.”

“A baseball club from New York moved to California? Why? Did baseball lose popularity in New York?”

“Oh, no, but there were already several teams in New York, such as the Yankees in the Bronx and the Dodgers in Brooklyn—and later the Mets. The Dodgers also eventually moved to California—to Los Angeles, to be specific.”

“Next you’ll be telling me the Boston Red Sox moved to Tuttle town!”

I laugh. “No, that’s about where it ends for the California teams. There were also teams named the San Diego Padres and the Anaheim Angels cum California Angels cum California Angels of Anaheim, but they didn’t move there from elsewhere.

“Anyway, during the 1989 earthquake, I was laying on a motel bed in Lake Tahoe (the town, not the actual lake), when I felt a vigorous shaking. As I was resting with my eyes closed, I thought a friend of mine was playing a trick on me—I thought he had snuck into my room and was hiding at the side of the bed and was giving it a shake. I looked to one side of the bed—nobody there; I checked the other side with the same result. Then I looked up and saw the lamp swinging back and forth, and I realized it must have been an earthquake that had disturbed my repose. I immediately guessed it had probably struck the bay area, and said, ‘if that was Frisco, it was a big one.’ I jumped up and turned on

the television set. A picture appeared, but it was simply the station's logo—no live picture was yet to be seen. The television station was experiencing 'technical difficulties', as they call it.

"Eventually, though, the announcers for the World Series game came on, and they, shaken and stirred both, recounted what they knew about the event as it unfolded. Double-decker highway spans had collapsed, trapping and crushing people that had been driving on the lower deck when the earthquake hit. Bridges had also collapsed, dumping cars and their occupants unceremoniously into the bay. Fires broke out, people panicked, and pandemonium reigned."

"I'm glad I wasn't there to see that. I've seen enough pain and suffering."

"Yes, those are good things to avoid. And, as you might guess, we don't suffer from such disasters any more."

"What? Even natural disasters? 'Acts of God'?"

"That's right. We don't need flood, fire, earthquake, or any other kind of insurance, because those things never befall us."

"What a weight off the collective shoulders of mankind!"

"Yes, indeed. And speaking of the masses, you were originally against women voting, and later changed your tune, perhaps influenced by Helen Keller, Harriet Beecher Stowe, et al. Women did eventually 'get the vote'. Not only that, they achieved high political office on numerous occasions, went into space,--"

"Went where?"

"Oh, sorry—into space. Flying through the air didn't end with airplanes. Rockets that were able to burst earth's bonds into the upper atmosphere and into outer space were invented, and—"

"What?! That is truly amazing! It sounds like something out of a Jules Verne novel."

"I guess it would. Yes, not only into outer space, but these rockets orbited distant planets, such as Mars."

"Mars?!"

"Yes, and even landed on some of those planets."

“Dog my cats! What did they do up there? What did they find?”

“Not to be flippant, but they found a lot of things; they took photographs, and gathered rocks, and such. In some cases the flights were manned.”

“Are you telling me that *people* actually traveled to other planets in rockets?”

“Yes.”

“Such as—to which planets did they travel?”

“The first and most popular destination was the moon.”

“Men orbiting the moon!”

“And women, too. They landed on it, too—and got out to go for a little stroll.”

“They landed on the moon and got out and walked around on it?”

“Yes.”

“How long did it take to get the news back to the earth?”

“It was instantaneously broadcast on television.”

“This is really amazing! If men were able to walk on the moon...”

“Why couldn’t they solve their more fundamental problems? They could send men to the moon but they couldn’t—(do this or that)? That’s right. Technological prowess and scientific advancements in abundance, but get along with one another? Find a way to avoid conflict? Real human progress lagged way behind scientific and technological progress; it’s quite possible—in fact I would say likely—that we actually went backwards in those areas from your day to the end of the old system.”

“It never ceases to amaze me the way people always seem to get their priorities backwards.”

“So they did; but no longer. In *The Innocents Abroad* you wrote, ‘In America, we hurry...we even carry our business cares to bed with us, and toss and worry over them when we ought to be restoring our racked bodies and brains with sleep.’

“This trend only worsened the further along we got in the old system. It eventually got to the point where people could not imagine themselves without a telephone at their side, in their hand, hanging on their belt, or stuffed in their purse, no matter where they were or what they were doing—even driving down the road in their cars they would simultaneously carry on telephone conversations. People would wear these electronic leashes—sometimes several of them at the same time—telephones, beepers, pagers, --”

“Beepers?”

“Devices that would emit a sound—a ‘beep’, and then you knew you had a call.”

“Pagers?”

“Nothing to do with royalty. Basically the same kind of device.”

“I might be interested in something like that.”

“I thought you might be; you were always one to enjoy the newest technology, wanting to be on the ‘cutting edge’.”

“Yes, I like progress. I like saving time. I’d rather be first than last.”

“Myself, I feel the same way about telephones that Alexander Graham Bell did—I hate them. When I want to be alone, I certainly don’t want a phone jerking me out of my reverie and jangling my nerves with its insistent ringing, beeping, or jingling. Answering machines at least make telephones tolerable—before them phones were anathema to me. They were despots: ‘I ring, and no matter what you’re doing, you’d better consent to the interruption and come running.’ Appalling!”

“Answering machine?”

“Again, my apologies. If you connect an answering machine to your telephone, a caller can leave a message if they call and you are not home—or when you, for whatever reason, don’t answer the phone.”

“How does it do that?”

“The answering machine records the caller’s voice—kind of like making a phonograph recording that consists of their message. You then listen to the message when you can or when it’s convenient to do so. Later you

can call the person back—again, at a time that’s convenient for you.”

“Very nice.”

“This makes the telephone an asynchronous instead of synchronous device. A convenience instead of a nuisance. A servant instead of a master.

“Anyway, while talking about phones and how people got so caught up in making money all the time, never really relaxing, never ever observing any kind of a Sabbath from work, you once said: ‘...We bestow thoughtful care on inanimate objects, but none upon ourselves.’ People would make sure their cars and computers were always perfectly cared for—oil changed, tires rotated, virus checkers ran and updated—“

“Virus checkers?”

I grin at Sam, roll my eyes, and wave my hand. “You don’t want to know. Anyway, we would make sure our machines were healthy and happy, greased, oiled, and lubricated, but wouldn’t take care of ourselves. Many of us were sleep-deprived, appraising the accomplishing of a little more work as being more important than getting our natural rest.”

CHAPTER XXXVI

“The ‘unholy trinity’ of hypocritical religion, corrupt politics, and greedy commerce were not three separate threats, but were in cahoots with one another--it was as if a legion of cobras, Kodiak bears, and rhinoceroses joined forces to hunt, harass, and terrorize all of mankind.

“Do you remember how something as plainly right as the abolition of slavery was viewed as sacrilege in Hannibal in the days of your youth, Sam? After World War II especially, socialists were to Americans what abolitionists were to residents of Hannibal in your youth. Somehow ‘socialist’ became a dirty word, a fighting word, something to make men’s blood boil and women run scared.

“Capitalists manipulated and purchased public opinion through their spin-doctors to misrepresent socialists as being devils—similar to how many of the clergy class labeled you a son of the devil when you exposed their idiocy and hypocrisy.

“The aristocracy was successful in turning the masses against their fellowmen who may have been less wrong than them--or more wrong than them, but nevertheless sincere in their beliefs--as to what was in the best interests of their fellowman. Why were socialists hated so? What a coup by big business to twist men’s hearts against their fellowman that way! Bravo to big business, whose love of money led them into all sorts of evil, desperate, unconscionable, and inexcusable deeds.

“Just as with abolitionists in the Hannibal of your youth (and suffragettes later), at the time it seemed as natural as breathing—of course socialists should be hated. But why? Could anybody answer that? Who were they hurting? Why did they elicit such passionate hatred? For the same reason abolitionists in Hannibal—and a thousand other drowsing white towns—were hated: they conspired to remove the indefensible advantage of those who had a stranglehold on the oppressed, disenfranchised, and dispossessed.

“Nobody seemed to question it at the time; but after the fact it is so obvious that the abolitionists were on the right side all along. The issue was what came to be termed a ‘no-brainer’. Abolitionists were progressive, enlightened, sometimes even heroic.”

“I’m not necessarily sold on socialism myself, Grant”

"All forms of man-made government proved ultimately to be failures, Sam, although some were certainly better than others. For example, the United States government was better than that of Nazi Germany; Costa Rica's government was better than fascist Italy's; Switzerland's better than Albania's, etc., nevertheless all of them failed: communism, socialism, monarchies, democracies, republics—the whole 'kit and caboodle'."

"So what form of government prevails now? It can't be anarchy, can it?"

"By no means! Anarchy is one of the two lamest ideas I ever heard (the other being evil-ution). The only way to accomplish anything, and to maintain order, is to be organized. Imagine an orchestra where every instrumentalist played whatever song he wanted to at the time, as the mood struck him. What a cacophony! It might be even worse than Wagner."

"That doesn't answer my question, though: what form of government has finally prevailed in this one-world government of yours?"

"Ours."

"What?"

"Shouldn't you say: 'this...government of *ours*'?"

"All right—ours."

"I still want you to guess—it may be too much of a shock to your system if I just tell you outright at this point."

"I thought you were to be my teacher. Why so secretive?"

"Sam, let me put it to you this way: You could safely eat twenty pounds of turnips in a year. Spread that pile of turnips out over a year's time, and everything's fine. But what would happen if you were to eat those twenty pounds of turnips at one sitting?"

"I get your point. Let it go."

"You see, I believe you're better off a spoonful at a time—a bite here, and a nibble there. A shovelful would get stuck in your craw and possibly cut off your airflow or give you indigestion, so to speak."

"All right, then, I guess I'll have to just be patient."

“I will give you a tidbit of information now that is interesting but not shocking, and see if you can guess *why* this is the case.”

“All right. Try me.”

“We no longer call the days of the week Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. Nor do we use the old month-names of January, February, etc. Can you guess why?”

“Not off the top of my head. I’ll have to give it some thought.”

CHAPTER XXXVII

“Sam, from the time you died until the end of the old system, when all national boundaries were abolished, the United States had more than trebled in population – it grew from 92,000,000 in 1910 to approximately 300,000,000 by the end of the old system.”

“Did people spread out, and begin to populate the wide open spaces out west, or did the big cities expand further?”

“A little of both, but it was mostly a case of people flocking to the cities, and swelling them with ex-farmers and their children and eventually *their* children, and so on. Places like Vermont and Wyoming were still very sparsely populated—especially when compared to the greater New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Houston, and Philadelphia areas.”

“That raises a question: If national boundaries have been abolished, it must be difficult explaining where a particular place is: in describing it you can’t narrow down its location by country.”

“Oh, we still have names for areas of various sizes: villages, cities, circuits, districts, and zones. These distinctions are made for the reason you are referring to—so we can understand one another when we discuss a particular location. So you might say we have ‘soft’ boundaries—but we have no more political or national boundaries.

“No passports are needed to travel anywhere. No currency conversions are necessary. No language difficulties, as we all have at least one language in common. There *are* differences in culture from place to place, but these differences do not pose a problem—they are simply interesting. As they say, ‘variety is the spice of life’.”

“Civilization as I knew it is gone.”

“As you knew it, yes; and as I knew it a few decades ago. But after you get used to the present arrangement, the old seems like a surrealistic, illogical nightmare. Isn’t it great? Civilization, as it was then with its vagaries of which you so ably wrote, is gone: there are no more despotic governments, no more inequality between or among peoples, no more of the numerous and brutal punishments for crimes and pseudo-crimes, no more of the universal and ubiquitous superstitions and nostalgia-deceptions and sentiment-based anti-logic. No more of the baby-killing ignorance, or the dirt and poverty which consumed so many. And there

is no more slavery.”

“I never could quite fathom how such a system—slavery, that is—was ever instituted and then perpetuated for so long.”

“Nor could I. Although literal enslavement was abolished, racial prejudice and discrimination continued throughout the old system. Of course, there were all sorts of prejudices. Not only was there a very real racial prejudice which endured despite advances in other areas of society, but there was also gender prejudice (which worked both ways—men against women and vice versa), income level prejudice, prejudice against men who wore beards, prejudice against people who rode motorcycles, etc. and so on and so forth ad infinitum.

“There were almost as many different prejudices as there were people. In this way, prejudice was similar to scientific theories: each scientist seems to want his own name attached to one, so he devises his own theory in the hopes it will be accepted and his name will become celebrated.

“Sometimes a person seemed to have as many prejudices as he had pores, and unless you were exactly like such ones—for instance, if you weren’t a Protestant Republican white male who only purchased goods manufactured in the United States and shaved all his facial hair and liked football and country music but not rock ‘n’ roll, baseball but not soccer, etc., there was something wrong with you—you were considered a dimwitted Philistine or a high-toned snob, and ought to be taken out and strung up—or at least slapped around a little.”

CHAPTER XXXVIII

“Some said that the poor were poor because they deserved to be, oftentimes because they were simply too lazy to work. As supposed evidence of such, one high-ranking politician pointed to the number of ads in the employment section of the Washington Post.

“This reasoning, though, just doesn’t hold water—it was specious. If a person was out of work, applying for a good number of the jobs advertised simply wouldn’t have helped him or her—not if the applicant didn’t meet the stated requirements.

“Did an ad for a microbiologist help a laid-off welder? Sure, many of the jobs advertised at any given time in a large newspaper were of the ‘entry-level’ variety, but that was a problem in and of itself: a very high percentage of these paid far less than even a person living alone could live on, no matter how frugal he was. How about that welder if he has four mouths in his household to feed? Of course he would have worked at whatever was available to him that would have provided his family’s necessities. His pride may have been hurt flipping burgers instead of welding, but it would have been better than seeing his family starve.

“The problem with the argument was that his family would have starved *anyway*. There was simply no way that family could have survived on the low wages most entry-level jobs paid. The entire family would have had to work full-time just to eke out the flimsiest type of existence! And even if that were practical (putting the entire family to work), it was not legal, as the children needed to attend school, and at least some of those children would have doubtless been too young to work at any rate.

“And even if it had been legal for them to go to work to help support the family, doing so would simply have ensured the perpetuation of their poverty—the children, having received no education, would have been doomed to more of the same when they eventually grew up and married.

“No, the self-satisfied who were born with silver spoons in their mouths, or got the right breaks, or were blessed with the skills and abilities necessary to thrive, were wrong in condemning all those who ended up in dire circumstances.

“And their overly simplistic ‘solutions’ for these people were at bottom uncaring, impractical, and unrealistic: a family head who found himself out of work, oftentimes through no fault of his own, could not have

hoped to land that microbiologist job—or retain it if by some miracle he *did* get it; nor could he have conscientiously accepted the burger-flipping job, as he had to do what was best for his family—and he could bring more money into the family, in the long run, by staying available for employment in the field in which he was already proficient, one which would pay more, and by beating the pavement to find such work until he succeeded.

“Sometimes it was advantageous for that welder to flip burgers for a time, but it was certainly not an easy and long-term solution to his problems.

“There’s nothing wrong with a kid flipping burgers and, if he wants to pursue that career, climbing the ladder and becoming a manager, and so forth, but to imply—or flat out assert—that people who were out of work were lazy freeloaders, was an ignorant at best and evil at worst attitude and opinion.

“There is more than enough to go around; when there is a distribution problem (as there almost always was in the old system) with the world’s riches to the extent that some people don’t even have enough to live decently, it is more often than not the fault of the politicians and the business leaders, those who manipulate the economy, not the fault of the individuals who themselves are suffering.

“Of course, there were cases where the individual himself was at fault: when he was fired for stealing from the company, coming into work drunk, etc., but for every such case there were dozens of others where the fault for their lack of employment could be laid more directly at the doorstep of the unholy trinity.

“Would those who recommended pursuing one of those low-paying jobs in the newspaper have accepted one of those jobs themselves? Would those situations had paid enough to satisfactorily feed, clothe, and shelter *their* families? I suggest that they would not have. And yet these ones felt it was their right and privilege to be entitled to more than others had. Just because they had grown accustomed to a ‘certain lifestyle’, they felt that it was only right for them to continue life in that fashion forever.

“Most of them received their reward in full then. If they had possessed half a heart, they would have perceived that if the poor can survive poverty, not willingly but out of necessity, they could, too, if necessity had required it—if circumstances changed for them. If they deserved more, then so did all the others—at least a fair chance to have it, to share in the wealth and prosperity.”

“I feel a little embarrassed about having had servants myself.”

“Katy, and George, and Patrick? Don’t be. They were employees—and you treated them very well. That was shown by how Katy missed your family during the entire interval when you continued to live abroad and she had to come back to the States.

“Katy pined for life with the Clemens family, and was ebullient when she received the letter from you asking her to return. She was happy, and proud, to be a part of your family.

“Although it is true that nobody has servants any longer, you have nothing at all to be ashamed of in your employment of these people. If they didn’t enjoy being in your employ, they could have left at any time—but none of them chose to do so.

“They will all be at the banquet tonight. If you really feel any remorse or embarrassment for their having served you—although any such remorse is not warranted, as far as I’m concerned—you can serve *them* tonight...a glass of champagne or something.”

“I am looking forward to learning more about this new way of doing and viewing things. It seems as if there will be constant new wonders—no end of them.”

“You judge aright, my friend—there is never a dull moment *here*.”

“I *am* looking forward to getting back to work—writing, I mean—but I’m also feeling a little overwhelmed by all the changes.”

“As far as getting back to work goes, Sam, take as much time as you find necessary to ‘renew your edge’—for ‘the tanks to fill up again’. We stay busy here, and like to accomplish things, but there is no longer a time element driving us. We have all the time in the world to accomplish and explore whatever we want.

“That is not to say that we disrespect time and sit around postponing everything until mañana, over and over while nothing gets done. But the liberation from oppressive deadlines does take the debilitating stress out of the equation. If we have multiple goals we want to accomplish, we don’t have to skimp or cut corners or choose only one of several—we can do them all, and take the time to do them right.

“In other words, we keep busy, but we take as much time as necessary to

give matters their proper attention. For example, in the old system, where a person normally had only seventy or eighty years—barring unforeseen occurrences which cut their life short—to accomplish everything he wanted to see and do, he or she had to cancel, instead of postpone, the pursuit of dreams which were simply impractical at the time.

“Now everyone who says they always wanted to learn to play the piano or guitar has no excuse not to—we have the freedom that everlasting life allows to pursue any of these types of things. Learning to play musical instruments is now within the reach of anybody who wants to do it, and after doing so opens the way to many hours of fun and camaraderie with the countless others who make music.

“Besides music, all who want to will have the opportunity to travel the world, excel in whatever sport or sports they enjoy the most, pursue any art form they’re attracted to, etc. etc. and so on and so forth ad infinitum.”

“It must certainly be nice for people to pursue their dreams—to do what they do best and not have to lead lives of quiet desperation.”

“You said it, Sam. There was a great movie that really demonstrated well that feeling of frustration that gnaws away at your insides when you’re unable to fully develop your capabilities.”

“And what movie was that?”

“*Raisin in the Sun*. There were actually two versions of it; both were excellent. Two of my favorite actors played the lead role, first Sidney Poitier in 1961, and then Danny Glover in 1988.”

“I’d like to see that sometime.”

“Then you will. I strongly related to that movie when I first saw it. I was so frustrated I felt I was about to burst. It is such a load off my mind to be able to stretch out and pursue whatever I want to pursue to the extent I want to pursue it.

“And the things I’m best at are the ones I tend to continue with, while gradually slacking off in those areas where it turns out I’m less gifted. In this way, not only am I benefited, but so is all society, as my time is spent doing what I do best.

“Multiply that by the billions of people who will eventually live here, all

doing what they do best—as opposed to doing what they happened to have fallen into (as it was in so many cases in the old system, with seemingly no way out of that dilemma), and you can imagine how well this system works.”

“I was fortunate that I didn’t have to spend more time than I did setting type and shoveling mining tailings.”

“Yes; in that sense you had a good life. You were able to spend the bulk of your time doing what you do so well and presumably like best: writing. By the way, the title of that movie came from a poem by Langston Hughes, the author of the "Simple" stories which bore resemblance to your style of humor.”

CHAPTER XXXIX

“Sam, I think you would enjoy reading *The Magic Mountain* by Thomas Mann. I had always hoped somebody would make a movie out of it, but it never happened. I must admit, it probably wouldn’t have been a success from a financial standpoint. It could have been an enormous success from an artistic standpoint, though.”

“What was it about?”

“You really need to read it; it’s an elaborate story about several complex characters. In a nutshell, though, it is about a sanitarium in Switzerland where two cousins spend time. One is sick and wants to be released so he can return to the military; the other is not *really* ill, but enjoys the routine and carefree lifestyle at the sanitarium, and so arranges matters so that he can stay. That’s all I will tell you, as I don’t want to spoil the story for you.”

“Why do you think it would not have been a financial success to make a movie out of it?”

“There was not enough action in it. The most violent part was a duel between Settembrini, the de facto ‘hero’ of the book, and his adversary.”

“Why would the lack of violence prevent it from being a commercial success?”

“In the fading decades of the old system, most people would not have had the patience to sit through a three-hour movie delving into the characters and psyches of these sanitarium-dwellers. In a time when people demanded instant gratification and non-stop action, I’m afraid the great majority would have found the movie dull. It would have been too slow moving, too ‘artsy’ for the average man on the street. But if the movie were true to the book, it could have been a masterpiece.”

“Duels are really the silliest of all traditions—and we had a truckload of silly ones.”

“Agreed—they certainly were senseless. You know, Sam, I thought the mention of a duel would conjure up memories from Virginia City for you,” I grin.

“It did. I am a little put out, though, that you seem to disrespect the

‘average man on the street’. Those are my people! They are the ones who bought my books, after all.”

“True; but so did the blue-bloods. Everybody seemed to find things in your writings to relate to. I must also say, though, that I believe the sensibilities and tastes of the average man on the street changed considerably from your day to mine. The everyman from your day may well have enjoyed *The Magic Mountain*—but not the average man from mine. If such a thing were possible, you would think from the common fare taken into men’s brains in those final decades—what they entertained themselves with, what they pondered and pursued—that man was *devolving*.”

“So are you saying that people in my day were *better* than people in yours?”

“Yes and no—after a fashion, yes. I do believe environment plays a huge role in people’s behavior. I don’t believe that ‘your’ crop of humans was inherently *better*, but rather that there were more men of character and honor *because* those qualities were held in higher esteem then, and there were fewer negative influences around.

“In other words, the good people fed off each other, so to speak, and spurred one another on, encouraging exemplary deeds. As time wore on, matters reversed in that sense. But I imagine that the crowd living in my day, if they could have been transplanted back in time to yours, would have done just as well as those ‘ancients’ had; and if those from your day had sped forward in time to mine, they would have been just as bad as we were.”

“I see. I have no way of knowing whether or not you are right, though.”

“That’s probably true. While I’m thinking about it, Sam, I think I should mention—and get this off my chest—that I have a bone to pick with you about your judgment of your brother Orion. You called him a failure, a fool, and a buffoon.

“On what do you base success and failure, foolishness and wisdom, buffoonery and dignity? Orion was not a failure. I haven’t read his essay *Man – the Architect of Our Religion* (which got him excommunicated from the church he was attending at the time he penned it), but it may have contained some incisive truths—it seems like it must have, with a title like that.

“People weren’t normally excommunicated for truly wicked deeds, but for

exposure of the profligate clergy class. Martin Luther was an example of that. Herr Luther wasn't excommunicated for something the Bible condemns, like adultery or homosexuality or greed; he was excommunicated for exposing areas wherein the Catholic church was not conducting itself according to The Book, to which they claimed to adhere. For his efforts and sincere attempts to improve his own order, he was slapped, threatened, and eventually kicked out.

"'Changing religions', as you said Orion did often, isn't necessarily a sign of flightiness. Perhaps Orion was searching for the truth, and never found it in any religion he joined.

"And why do you say he was a failure? Was he a bad person? Did he maltreat his family? Was he a coward? Did he refuse to help others when they needed help and he was in a position to do something about it? I hope you didn't assign him a place with the failures because he was not wealthy. Being a victor or one of the vanquished does not depend on what one acquired in a material sense.

"A fool? We all play the fool, at times. Certainly we all were back then, more often than not. Only a perfect man can claim otherwise. If an imperfect man were to claim he was never a fool, he would simply be underscoring the depth of his foolishness."

"I accept that. In fact, I thank you for defending my brother. At the same time, I'm a little concerned about having everything I do and say so minutely scrutinized, analyzed and criticized. That was one of the negative factors of being famous."

"I didn't mean to offend you, Sam. I certainly don't want you to feel that I'm attacking you personally. As far as the negative ramifications of fame, on that score, too, you are fortunate: There is no more fame and fortune—in the way you knew it, anyway—to aggravate you.

"Near the end of your life, you got to a point where you wanted to visit the Grand Canyon, but were afraid to do so because you didn't want to be roped into any more interviews or lectures. You wanted to travel incognito and didn't think it would be possible. A private car on the train would have made you conspicuous, and even if you disguised yourself, your voice would have given you away. So you stayed away.

"I have two pieces of good news for you about that: first of all, you can freely visit the Grand Canyon without fear of being disturbed. You can go any way you like: per pedes, by bicycle, on a train, or by airplane. Fame is not a problem, because we are all famous and, as all of us are wealthy

(in an absolute sense) and therefore none of us are wealthy (in a relative sense), so also all of us are famous in an absolute sense, at least to one extent or another, but none of us are so famous in a relative sense that it proves to be a disadvantage to us.

“Just about everybody knows who *you* are, but then again everybody here is known by at least thousands, if not tens of thousands, of people. And although you are loved, and your writings are respected and enjoyed, you will find—hopefully to your relief—that hero-worship is a thing of the past. Mutual respect is universal, but self-love and self-respect are only felt to the extent that they are balanced and healthy—in other words, no narcissists need apply.

“We all admire ourselves enough—without being egotistical—to avoid the need to adulate others or to be adulated by others. We all excel at something. And all it takes to expand the areas in which we excel is to devote the necessary time and effort to them.

“That being the case, a much more balanced view of everything is ultimately achieved by everyone, and so, instead of feeling misunderstood, everybody eventually finds out exactly what is involved in everybody else’s job—because they will inevitably perform that job themselves, enough to get a feel for what it entails, anyway.

“In this way both extremes are avoided: people come to respect one another’s job, instead of thinking there is nothing to what they do (since every job has its intricacies and difficulties). On the other hand, people no longer view any job as magic or superhuman, as everything is attainable by everyone. So, any former lack of regard changes to respect, and worship gets downgraded to respect. All jobs are respected; all people are respected.

“The writer is still smiled upon for his wit and wisdom; the musician for his ability to express emotions and tell stories in song; the chef for his ability to create succulent dishes that enhance the quality of our life. Every job has its purpose, and for that reason each one is well regarded.

“Speaking of expressing emotions through music, I can hardly wait for J.S. Bach to be resurrected; I don’t know if I’ll ever quite understand the full complexity of his works—the way he plays melodies backwards, upside down, at different tempos, all at the same time--and still makes it sound so beautiful. It’s like a combination of mathematical engineering and the most sublime art imaginable. I have no idea how he does it—I don’t know if that degree of composing genius is even teachable or learnable.

“With enough work I could *play* Bach’s music, but I don’t know if I could ever write music as beautiful and complex as he has. That measure of genius is a God-given gift.”

“Grant, sometimes you make it sound as if all you people do here is work, work, work.”

“On the contrary, Sam! Although it is true that we accomplish a great deal (especially since we all cooperate with--instead of compete against--one another), we have more free time to devote to relaxation, recreation, hobbies, or sightseeing than any other society ever has had. And isn’t that the litmus test for how well a society is doing, and how prosperous it really is?

“At any given time, one seventh of the population is on vacation. That is to say, once every seven years, each person gets the entire year free—they can travel anywhere throughout the earth, and all normal expenses are free: Hotel stays are free, restaurant meals are free of charge, and so are all other normal vacation-type expenditures. Naturally, not everybody goes on vacation simultaneously. Each person is assigned to one of seven groups. Families are assigned to the same group, of course, so they can vacation together. During their year of vacation, they leave their land, their gardens and orchards, fallow.

“As you said, Sam, ‘broad, wholesome, charitable views of men and things can not be acquired by vegetating in one little corner of the earth all one’s lifetime.’ Hence everyone here has ample opportunity to travel.

“The mansions that survived the end of the old system are resources that are shared by everyone. Many hotels are converted castles. It’s common for vacationers to make round-the-world trips, staying in these mansions in every corner of the globe. They use this time relaxing, seeing old friends, making new friends, eating and drinking—and, yes, being generally merry to boot--sightseeing, and simply enjoying life to the full.”

CHAPTER XXXX

“Grant, there’s something that is a little disturbing, or unsettling, about this utopian society”

“There is? What is it, Sam?”

“I’m wondering if perfection will conspire to make us all the same, causing us to gradually lose our individuality the closer we get to perfection.”

“Although we will all gradually reach perfection, that doesn’t mean we will become the same, Sam. We will not be robots or clones of one another. For example, what is the perfect color?”

“There isn’t one; they all are.”

“That’s right. Purple is *my* favorite, but that doesn’t mean purple is *the* perfect color, and red, blue, green, yellow, orange, cyan, magenta, or any other color is for that reason imperfect, or somehow a less important or beautiful color. Everybody’s different, and that’s as it should be—that’s how we tell each other apart.”

“That’s reassuring, Grant. So ‘perfection’ is not so much the attaining of a preconceived ideal or standard, but is rather...”

“Suitableness. To extend the color analogy, perfection may be defined as whatever fulfills the current need best. Something is perfect when it is suitable for its intended purpose. A peach pie can be perfect, as can a eucalyptus tree, and so can people. But one pie differs from another; so do trees; so do we.”

“Understood. Good. I can still be me; I don’t have to conform to some straight-jacket uniformity that has been adjudged arbitrarily ‘perfect’.”

“Exactly. You remain you; and please do, Sam.”

“So you won’t object if I argue with you about things I find that don’t seem sensible to me?”

“No, of course not. I welcome it. Sam, you were called ‘a bloodhound sniffing out injustice.’ You are welcome to go on the trail—start anywhere you like, and track as long as you like. But I’m ‘warning’ you in advance:

it'd be a fool's errand—a waste of time. There is no injustice here.

“At the same time, no harm is done by investigating. People *should* actually prove things to themselves rather than blindly accepting them or taking them for granted. A good, honest, well-meant and rightly motivated sincere investigation is actually a sign of respect and a sound mind.

“Arguing is one of those things, like so many others, where you can go to two diametrically opposed extremes, and they are both bad: you can argue nothing or you can argue everything.

“Argue everything, just for the sake of argument, and you will irritate everyone around you; argue nothing, though, and you will be untrue to yourself and miss out on opportunities to help others change a wrong and perhaps dangerous opinion they hold.

“Arguing nothing may be even worse than arguing everything. People won't usually get angry at you for arguing nothing, as they will when you argue everything, but such a person is really not contributing much to his fellows, by just going along with everyone else and the status quo all the time. Such a person, in the end, appears a dullard—never seeing any way to help, or act as an agent for positive change.”

“Do you have something specific in mind? What would you expect people to argue?”

“I don't really have a specific scenario in mind, Sam...By way of example, though, sometimes you hear people make statements such as: ‘99% of (bla bla bla)’—for instance, they might say: ‘99% of us believe such and such.’

“Usually in such a case that 99% figure so liberally trotted forth is something pulled right out of the air—the person is not citing some verifiable fact, but is rather just making an assertion and expecting others to swallow it whole. If the unverified claim sounds plausible to the hearer, or goes along with their own preconceived or already held ideas on the matter, they will rarely challenge it.

“Therein lies a problem. If the matter is a serious one, we *should* challenge such assertions. We can ask, ‘Where do you get that figure?’ or after any sort of claim which seems to lack evidence, we can ask, ‘How do you know that?’ This puts the burden of proof on the one trying to ‘slip one past us’. Maybe he's right, and he can supply the evidence. Good! Now we can agree with him, and hopefully he'll eventually learn to back

up his statements with facts, as opposed to simply spouting off and expecting everyone to believe him. Or, perhaps he is not right, or at least cannot prove himself right. Then the field is opened up to others, and the truth can eventually 'out' that way, without the use of superstition and mental bullying.

"As you said, Sam, 'Loyalty to petrified opinion never broke a chain or freed a human soul'."

"What do you mean by 'mental bullying'?"

"I'm sure you've seen it yourself, Sam: Someone tries to impose his opinion by talking louder than the others—shouting them down, in effect, or by using fifty-cent words calculated to impress and intimidate, even if it is really a sham, a façade, and cold hard facts are lacking. Or a person in a position of authority may abuse that situation to try to force his personal opinions on others.

"And speaking of individuals, and how we differ in our makeup, personality, preferences, life experiences, tendencies, etc., we have used technology to store our individual data in one convenient place. We use our fingerprints here to positively identify ourselves. A wide and voluminous amount of data is stored about us—but only if we so desire."

"Why do you do that?"

"To save time—we don't have to supply the same information about ourselves over and over again."

"Such as?"

"In any situation where you need to provide your address, for example, allowing the person to access your data for this information precludes your having to write down this information for the umpteenth time. It's a time-saver. Instead of having to re-enter the same data over and over, you simply allow whoever needs that data to retrieve it. Besides saving you time and aggravation, it can also help you when purchasing clothing."

"How so?"

"You can include in your data things like your shirt size, coat size, and the like. Instead of having to memorize this data, you can use your fingerprint to help the clerk or seamstress or tailor see exactly what size you need. Actually, any type of data you might ever need to divulge can

be stored in your personal information bank.”

“I don’t know if I like that idea. You mean when I buy a shirt the clerk can see what other items I’ve purchased, the names of my children, and other things I may opt to keep personal?”

“No. The only data a tailor would be able to access would be your clothing sizes—and any other information that would be helpful *and* you agree to release to him (or her). In other words, your personal information is available on a ‘need-to-know’ basis. Depending on the situation, you can elect to reveal and divulge whatever information makes sense at the time. The data stored relative to your fingerprint is a convenience for the bearer, not a gratuitous divulgence of private information to every Tom, Dick, and Harry you do business with.”

CHAPTER XXXXI

Sam now asks: “Grant, I’ve been thinking about the conundrum revolving around the names of the days of the week and months, and I have a theory as to why these have been changed.”

“And your theory is?”

“The old designations were named for pagan gods—Sunday for the sun, Monday for the moon, Wednesday for Odin, Thursday for Thor, January for Janus, and so on.”

“There you have it. Good job, Sam. And by the way, many place names had the same problem. ‘Hannibal’, for instance, meant ‘Baal’s chosen one’.”

I look at my watch and see that it is time to wrap up our discussion for awhile. “Sam, we still have a terrific amount of things to talk about, but that will have to wait for later. Now it is time for you to meet someone. Will you please come over here to the window?”

Sam, of course, doesn’t know what awaits him now. From our vantage point on the second floor, he looks down into the courtyard.

She arrives right on time, riding up on her horse. The equestrian is not rushing headlong as if an emergency is in progress, but on the other hand she is certainly not riding purposelessly either. The rider looks up toward the window where we are.

“Papa!” she calls out, having spotted Sam at the window.

Sam can hardly believe his eyes. His body tenses and he bends as close as he can to the window, wide-eyed. Staring at the rider with his penetrating gaze, it only takes him a second to confirm his supposition. “Why, it is Jean!”

Sam grabs me by the shoulders and gives me about as broad a smile as is humanly possible. “This is most certainly a dream beyond compare.”

“This is no dream, Sam. It’s real. It’s real, and from now on, my friend, you will only see them return to you—no longer will they be taken from you.

"You will never have to see another loved one ever again lowered into the ground. Next will be Livy, then Orion, then Susy—the eager and hasty hand *will* touch yours again; she will return to finish her 'arrested sentence'. Doubtless Susy will become a writer, and make you prouder than ever. Following that vanguard will be Pamela, your mother Jane, Langdon, Henry, and on and on, backwards to Clemens' you never knew in your prior lifetime.

"This is *not* a dream! Aaron Burr, too, will be reunited with his daughter--"

Sam is already at the steps. He bounds down the first few, but then pauses, turns around, and says, "Grant, my friend, I have some more questions for you. There are still quite a few things I would like to know."

"I look forward to them, Sam," I reply. "There will be plenty of time for us to discuss whatever you like. Enjoy your reunion with Jean—I'll see you tonight at your banquet. The doors open at 6:30, the trouble begins at 7."

Sam smiles, nods his head in acknowledgment, and resumes his headlong rush down the stairs, calling out, "Jean! Jeanie! Don't make me wait another moment. Come and give papa a hug!"

Sam bounds down to the landing, descending the stairs two at a time.

Jean has just reached the threshold as Sam flings open the front door. As erudite, loquacious, and clever as the man was and is, all he can think to say is:

"Jean!"

Sam and his daughter fall into each other's arms and remain in that attitude for quite awhile, clutching one another, smiling, rocking back and forth, alternately holding one another at arm's length and gazing deep into each other's eyes, and then burying themselves in each other's arms.

I time my exit as a cat might: I anticipate one of their side to side rocking motions, and then slip past them out of the door as they lean far enough to one side to give me just enough room to squeeze through. I don't want to disturb their reunion, or even ask them to take a break from their love fest in order to let me pass. I don't think they notice me as I make my way down the path.

At the end of the drive, I turn and say, "Sam, Jean, I'll see you tonight at the banquet." It seems that neither one of them hear me. That's fine, though—they will most certainly be there—Clara will see to that.

An unending sun-drenched vista lays spread before them.

~~~~~

© 2001-2003, 2006 Blackbird Crow Raven  
BlackbirdCRaven@aol.com