THE CONTRIBUTION OF MARK TWAIN
TO MODERN RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

by

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INTRODUCTION

1. Purpose

In writing this paper my purpose was to find what contributions Mark Twain has made to modern religious thought and what devices he used to bring religious dogma into question.

2. Method

To accomplish this end I have made a careful research through the author's works to find any references made to religious dogma and practices. I have also studied the works of his friends and critics to find how his religious life and views have been evaluated by those who knew him.

3. A Serious Writer

While Mark Twain is generally regarded as a humorist, in this thesis he is treated as a serious force in American literature—a writer with a serious purpose in his works, who frequently used his humor more as a means to an end, than as an end in itself. He considered humor a powerful weapon.

"For your race, in its poverty, has unquestionably one really effective weapon—laughter. Power, money, persuasion, supplication, persecution—these can lift at a colossal humbug—push it a little—weaken it a little, century by century; but only laughter can blow
it to rags and atoms at a blast. Against the assaults of laughter nothing can stand."

Many of his contemporaries recognized in him the serious writer. Archibald Henderson believes,

"Mark Twain's supremest title to distinction as a great writer inheres in his mastery in that highest sphere of thought, embracing religion, philosophy, morality, and even humor, which we call sociology. Mr. Bernard Shaw once remarked to me that he regarded Poe and Mark Twain as America's greatest achievements in literature; and that he thought of Mark Twain primarily, not as a humorist, but as a sociologist....But there is yet to come that greater posterity of the future which will, I dare say, class Mark Twain as America's greatest sociologist in letters."

Howells tells of a conversation with Thomas Hardy.

"One night I met Thomas Hardy, the novelist, at dinner; and he said, 'Why don't people understand that Mark Twain is not merely a great humorist? He is a very remarkable fellow in a very different way.'"

Albert Paine, Mark Twain's biographer, associated intimately with him in his later life, says:

"Always from youth to age he strove against oppression, superstition, sham, hypocrisy, evil in every form. He fought in the open, with that most powerful of all weapons, truth—unanswerable logic supplemented by ridicule. He believed that no abuse could withstand ridicule, and he went far toward proving it.

"He saw life at a quizzical slant, but he was not, first of all, a humorist. His phrase was likely to carry a laugh with it, but more

1. Clemens, S. L. The Mysterious Stranger and Other Stories, p. 132.
often than not it carried some deep revealment of human truth, or human justice."

4. A Reverent Man

While Mark Twain frequently used his humor for some serious purpose, he did not use it irreverently at the expense of sacred things. The accusation that he was irreverent can hardly be justified. In instances where he seemed to be irreverent, it can be shown that it was not true reverence at which he was aiming, but pseudo-reverence, or else a misplaced reverence for things which were not deserving of it—superstitions, oppressions, and shams.

In "Innocents Abroad", the book which called forth many of these accusations, he wished to show Americans how senseless and ridiculous their praise of everything European was. It was not their reverence, but their pseudo-reverence, that he was deriding, their fawning before European culture because it was the fashion to do so.5

He decried misplaced reverence. In the mouth of a character he puts these words,

"Think of the innumerable slaveries imposed by misplaced reverence!...There's manifestly prodigious force in reverence. If you can get a man to reverence your ideals, he is your slave."6

5. Clemens, S. L. Innocents Abroad, pp. 156-57 and 363-64.
6. Clemens, S. L. The American Claimant and Other Stories and Sketches, p. 80.
It was an irreverence toward false idols that he displayed. "Irreverence is the champion of liberty and its only sure defense." 7

Against the accusation of irreverence Mark Twain defended himself.

"I was never consciously or purposely irreverent in my life, yet one person or another is always charging me with a lack of reverence. Reverence for what?—for whom? Who is to decide what ought to command my reverence—my neighbor or I? I think I ought to do the electing myself. The Mohammedan reveres Mohammed—it is his privilege; the Christian doesn't—apparently that is his privilege; the account is square enough. Each says the other is irreverent, and both are mistaken, for manifestly you can't have reverence for a thing that doesn't command it." 8

He points out the rarity of true reverence.

"None of us are reverent—in a meritorious way; deep down in our hearts we are all irreverent.... There is probably not one person whose reverence rises higher than respect for his own sacred things, and therefore, it is not a thing to boast about and be proud of, since the most degraded savage has that—and, like the best of us, has nothing higher. To speak plainly, we despise all reverences and all objects of reverence which are outside the pale of our own list of sacred things. And yet, with strange inconsistency, we are shocked when other people despise and defile the things which are holy to us." 9

Dr. Van Dyke, who was for many years Clemens' spiritual advisor, wrote,

"No one who heard him speak with reverence of the simple faith of his dearly loved wife (as he often spoke to me) could think of him as being

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8. Clemens, Cyril, Mark Twain's Religion, p. 10.
indifferent to religion. His sense of humor made him keenly aware of its perversions and literal misinterpretations. At these he mocked, even as Elijah mocked at the priests of Baal. At times, perhaps, his high spirits carried this ridicule to an excess. But of genuine, simple Christian faith I never heard him speak without loving reverence."10

The following quotation taken from "Innocents Abroad" shows how deeply he respected the beliefs of other people:

"A little mosque stands upon the spot which tradition says was occupied by the widow's dwelling. Two or three aged Arabs sat about its door. We entered, and the pilgrims broke specimens from the foundation walls, though they had to touch, and even step upon the "praying carpets" to do it. It was almost the same as breaking pieces from the hearts of those old Arabs. To step rudely upon the sacred praying-mats, with booted feet—a thing not done by any Arab—was to inflict pain upon men who had not offended us in any way. Suppose a party of armed foreigners were to enter a village church in America and break ornaments from the altar railings for curiosities, and climb up and walk upon the Bible and the pulpit cushions? However, the cases are different. One is the profanation of a temple of our faith—the other only the profanation of a pagan one."11

5. Views of Mark Twain's Religion by Other Writers

The following quotations will show how his religious contributions have been evaluated by other writers—

Edgar Lee Masters:

"When he turned to the religious question he employed poison gas. In 'Joan of Arc' he showed what he could do as a protester against cruelty and superstition, and how amid the

10. Clemens, Cyril, op. cit., p. 11.
list of things that he hated he could still revere
love and beauty." [12]

Gamaliel Bradford:

"Mark Twain's speculative conclusions may be
found theoretically elaborated in 'What Is Man?';
practically applied in 'The Mysterious Stranger,'
and artistically illustrated in 'The Man That
Corrupted Hadleyburg'. They may be summed up as
a soul-less and blasting development of crude
evolutionary materialism, as manifested in the
teachings of Robert Ingersoll. Man's freedom
disappears, his morality becomes enlightened
selfishness, his soul is dissipated into thin air,
his future life grows so dubious as to be disre­
garded, and the thought of death is only toler­
able because life is not. The deity in any
sense of value to humanity, is quite disposed of." [13]

but

"Wrong, injustice, cruelty could always set
him on fire in a moment." [14]

and

"Also he did more than make men laugh; he
made them think, on practical, moral questions.
He used his terrible weapon of satire to de­
molish meanness, greed, pettiness, dishonesty." [15]

Howells:

"Mark Twain, indeed, arrived at the first stage
of scientific denial of the religious hope of man­
kind; he did not reach that last stage where
Science declares that she denies nothing." [16]

"There are no more vital passages in his

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fiction than those which embody character as it is affected for good as well as evil by the severity of the local Sunday-schooling and church-going. 17

6. Mark Twain's Familiarity with the Bible

With the Bible Mark Twain was thoroughly familiar. Albert Paine speaks of this knowledge and its effect on Mark Twain's works.

"He had bought a little Bible at Constantinople, and he read it diligently. That he was deeply impressed is certain—his writing shows that.... Something of the stately simplicity of the King James version crept into his style, and remained there." 18

"His notebooks fairly overflow with Bible references; the Syrian chapters in the 'Innocents Abroad' are permeated with the poetry and the legendary beauty of the Bible story." 19

In "Innocents Abroad" Mark Twain tells numerous stories from the Bible, and in several places quotes long passages, then humorously apologizes for doing so.

"I have given in the above paragraphs some more information for people who will not read Bible history until they are defrauded into it by some such method as this. I hope that no friend of progress and education will obstruct or interfere with my peculiar mission." 20

This familiarity with the Scriptures is shown in the frequency and the naturalness with which he used Bible stories and Bible quotations in figures of speech and

18. Clemens, S. L. Mark Twain's Notebook, a comment by A. B. Paine, p. 94.
other writing. An example follows:

"Seen moving about, far away in the dim arched aisles of the Great Bazar, they (Turkish women) look as the shrouded dead must have looked when they walked forth from their graves amid the storms and thunders and earthquakes that burst upon Calvary that awful night of the Crucifixion. A street in Constantinople is a picture which one ought to see once—not oftener."21

7. The Need for His Contributions

Mark Twain was living at the time when nineteenth century rationalism was raising its head as a reaction to the narrow dogmatic theology of the day. He had read Thomas Paine's "Age of Reason,"22 and was also influenced by Robert Ingersoll. At the same time he himself was an influence. When we realize how much the churches emphasized theology in his day, especially its more unpleasant aspects, we can appreciate the need for his particular type of contributions. Dr. H. K. Rowe, Ph. D., the professor of social science and history in the Newton Theological Institution, gives us a good idea of the narrowness of the religious thinking of the nineteenth century.

"Yet, while the religious mind broadened in the conception of its task, it was slow to change the content of its code. Like other social institutions, the church was the creature of tradition and custom...The most important part of the church code was its system of theological thought. Both organization and activity rested on certain cherished ideas. These ideas had been wrought into

a coherent system of belief by the theologians of the Reformation. Many of these ideas were survivals of mediaeval Catholicism...The theology of most church people had as its cardinal doctrine a belief in an absolute, unchanging God, perfect in his attributes, holy, just, and good. Transcendent in majesty and enthroned in the heavens, he made the earth his footstool and stooped to hear the petitions of his subjects, domiciled there by his creative act. The human race was tangled in a net of evil through the fall of the first man from the place of honor and opportunity for which he had been designed. The only means of salvation from sin was personal faith in God's grace as revealed and made dynamic through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, and sanctification by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, who with the Father and Son constituted the divine Trinity. Since in Adam the race had sinned against him, God was under no obligation to save its members from the consequences of their sin, but his gracious mercy chose to save a few through the merits of the blood of Jesus, which cleansed them from their sin, and made atonement for them with an outraged God. Those who were not thus cleansed were doomed after a day of judgment to suffer eternal punishment in a hell of torment....

The Christian must deny himself pleasures that might lead his feet to stray from the straight and narrow path that was marked out by the Bible, his infallible guide....Church worship was expected of him regularly, and it was his duty to participate in the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's supper....The church was a bond of Christian fellowship and an ark of safety. It was its task to rescue as many sinners as possible from an evil world that was doomed to destruction, to convert them to personal faith and hope in Christ as their Savior....Beyond these conceptions the religious mind of most Americans had not gone. Different denominations differed in minor details,....but the large majority of church people were orthodox."23

We note how the emphasis was placed on theology

and a preparation for the future life. Sociology was a thing completely apart from religion.

"In all these social movements the church took little part....The churches as institutions and most of the people who constituted the churches believed that religion did not include social affairs, and that the church should be as separate from business and industry as from the state."24

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CHAPTER I

THE BASIS OF MARK TWAIN'S BELIEFS
(teachings, experiences, and reactions)

A. In Early Life

1. Early Teachings: Mark Twain was reared in the Calvinistic doctrines—cold, hard beliefs that filled him with terror as a child, and left their stamp on his later thinking even after he had rejected the tenets of the faith.

His early impressions came from various sources. Of his mother's religion he says little, but we know she was a Presbyterian.

"On coming to Hannibal, she joined the Presbyterian Church, and her religion was of that clean-cut, strenuous kind which regards as necessary institutions, hell and Satan."1 And we know that she forced Sam at times to go to church.

"Whenever my conduct was of such exaggerated impropriety that my mother's extemporary punishments were inadequate, she saved the matter up for Sunday and made me go to church Sunday night—which was a penalty sometimes bearable, perhaps, but as a rule it was not, and I avoided it for the sake of my constitution. She would never believe that I had been to church until she had applied her test. She made me tell what the text was. That was a simple matter—caused me no trouble. I didn't have to go to church to get a text. I selected one for myself. This worked very well until one time when my text and the one furnished by a neighbor, who had been to church, didn't tally."2

She also worked on his sensitive nature to get him to live an upright life. Seeing his grief at his father's death, she took him by the hand, led him into the room where his father lay and made him promise to be a better boy. And when he left home at eighteen to go to St. Louis she made him hold one end of a Testament while she held the other end, and he repeated the oath, "I do solemnly swear that I will not throw a card or drink a drop of liquor while I am gone."  

While his father was not a religious man, he was not opposed to the faith of his wife.

"My father was a refined and kindly gentleman, very grave, rather austere, of rigid probity, a sternly just and upright man, albeit he attended no church and never spoke of religious matters, and had no part nor lot in the pious joys of his Presbyterian family, nor ever seemed to suffer from this privation."

In school little Sam also received religious training. The teacher "opened her school with prayer; after which came a chapter of the Bible, with explanations, and the rules of conduct."

In addition to these influences, the religious life of the negroes impressed him deeply.

"In a little log cabin lived a bedridden white-headed slave woman whom we visited daily and looked upon with awe, for we believed she was upward of

4. Ibid., p. 93  
5. Clemens, S. L. Following The Equator, p. 351.  
a thousand years old and had talked with Moses, and so we believed that she had lost her health in the long desert trip coming out of Egypt...

"Whenever witches were around she tied up the remnant of her wool in little tufts, with white thread, and this promptly made the witches impotent."7

What a great hold Bible history took upon his boyhood imagination is shown by the following quotation.

"In that school were the first Jews I had ever seen. It took me a great while to get over the awe of it. To my fancy they were clothed invisibly in the damp and cobwebby mold of antiquity. They carried me back to Egypt, and in imagination I moved among the Pharaohs and all the shadowy celebrities of that remote age."8

2. His Conscience in Boyhood: As a boy, Samuel Clemens suffered greatly from the fear of punishment of God. Because of this fear, as a child he even contemplated going into the ministry.

"'It was the most earnest ambition I ever had,' Mark Twain once remarked, thoughtfully. 'Not that I ever really wanted to be a preacher, but because it never occurred to me that a preacher could be damned. It looked like a safe job.'"9

Coupled with this fear was an extremely sensitive conscience. From the following quotations we can see how it tormented him in his childhood.

"I can remember how very dark that room was, in the dark of the moon, and how packed it was with ghostly stillness when one woke up by accident away in the night, and forgotten sins came flocking out of the secret chambers of the

memory and wanted a hearing; and how ill-chosen the time seemed for this kind of business."

"(The thought of the drunkard's death) lay upon my conscience a hundred nights afterward and filled them with hideous dreams... But no matter, mine was a trained Presbyterian conscience and knew but one duty—to hunt and harry its slave upon all pretexts and on all occasions, particularly when there was no sense nor reason in it."11

In Hannibal during his boyhood a number of tragedies occurred. With his fear of punishment, and his sensitive conscience, Samuel set these happenings down as warnings to him personally, designed to give him a taste for a better life. In various places he tells of these experiences.

"When I was a small boy, Lem Hackett was drowned—on a Sunday... Being loaded with sin, he went to the bottom like an avil... We others all lay awake, repenting. We had not needed the information, delivered from the pulpit that evening, that Lem's was a case of special judgment—we knew that, already. There was a ferocious thunder-storm that night, and it raged continuously until near dawn.... I sat up in bed quaking and shuddering, waiting for the destruction of the world and expecting it. To me there was nothing strange or incongruous in Heaven's making such an uproar about Lem Hackett.... Not a doubt entered my mind that all the angels were grouped together—discussing this boy's case and observing the awful bombardment of our beggarly little village with satisfaction and approval.... I endured agonies of remorse for sins which I knew I had committed, and for others which I was not certain about, yet was sure that they had been set down against me in a book by an angel who was wiser than I and did not trust such important matters to memory.... I resolved to cease from sin in all its forms, and to lead

11. Ibid., pp. 130-31.
a high and blameless life forever after." 12

Then after the drowning of Dutchy, an exasperating-
ly good boy, another storm came.

"Of course I never questioned for a moment
that the storm was on Dutchy's account, or that
he or any other inconsequential animal was worthy
of such a majestic demonstration from on high;
the lesson of it was the only thing that troubled
me; for it convinced me that if Dutchy, with all
his perfections was not a delight, it would be
vain for me to turn over a new leaf, for I must
infallibly fall hopelessly short of that boy, no
matter how hard I might try. Nevertheless I did
turn it over—a highly educated fear compelled
me to do that—but succeeding days of cheerfulness
and sunshine came bothering around, and within a
month I had so drifted backward that again I was
as lost and uncomfortable as ever." 13

"My teaching and training enabled me to see
deeper into these tragedies than an ignorant per­
son could have done. I knew what they were for.
I tried to disguise it from myself, but down in
the secret deeps of my troubled heart I knew--
and I knew I knew. They were inventions of Prov­
dence to beguile me to a better life. It sounds
curiously innocent and conceited, now, but to me
there was nothing strange about it; it was quite in
accordance with the thoughtful and judicious ways
of Providence as I understood them. It would not
have surprised me, nor even over-flattered me, if
Providence had killed off that whole community in
trying to save an asset like me. Educated as I
had been, it would have seemed just the thing,
and well worth the expense. Why Providence should
take such an anxious interest in such a property,
that idea never entered my head, and there was
no one in that simple hamlet who would have
dreamed of putting it there. For one thing no
one was equipped with it.

"It is quite true, I took all the tragedies
to myself, and tallied them off in turn as they
happened, saying to myself in each case, with a

13. Ibid., p. 386.
sigh, 'another one gone--and on my account; this ought to bring me to repentance; the patience of God will not always endure,' and yet privately I believed it would. That is, I believed it in the daytime; but not in the night. With the going down of the sun my faith failed and the clammy fears gathered about my heart. It was then that I repented. Those were awful nights, nights of despair, nights charged with the bitterness of death.... My repentances were very real, very earnest.... But as a rule they could not stand the daylight.... In all my boyhood life I am not sure that I ever tried to lead a better life in the daytime--or wanted to."14

The reactions of Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer were really those of the boy Sam. Listening to Injun Joe, the "stony-hearted liar," Tom and Huck expected

"every moment that the clear sky would deliver God's lightning upon his head, and wondered to see how long the stroke was delayed. And when he had finished and still stood alive and whole, their wavering impulse to break their oath and save the poor betrayed prisoner's life faded and vanished away, for plainly this miscreant had sold himself to Satan and it would be fatal to meddle with the property of such a power as that."15

He also imputed the sensitiveness of his own conscience to them.

"They said their prayers inwardly, and lying down, since there was nobody there with authority to make them kneel and recite aloud; in truth, they had a mind not to say them at all, but they were afraid to proceed to such lengths as that, lest they might call down a sudden and special thunderbolt from heaven. Then at once they reached and hovered upon the imminent verge of sleep--but an intruder came, now, that would not 'down'. It was conscience. They began to feel a vague fear that they had been doing wrong to

run away; and next they thought of the stolen meat, and then the real torture came. They tried to argue it away by reminding conscience that they had purloined sweetmeats and apples scores of times; but conscience was not to be appeased by such plausibilities; it seemed to them, in the end, that there was no getting around the stubborn fact that taking sweetmeats was only 'hooking,' while taking bacon and hams and such valuables was plain simple stealing—and there was a command against that in the Bible. So they inwardly resolved that so long as they remained in the business, their piracies should not again be sullied with the crime of stealing. Then conscience granted a truce, and these curiously inconsistent pirates fell peacefully to sleep. 16

3. His Faith in Prayer: Early in his life we get the first note of skepticism. When he was yet a small boy he believed that his prayers would be answered literally. Then when he prayed for something he longed for, and did not get it, his disappointment and disillusionment were so great that he actually looked haggard and ill. Seeing his look, his mother asked if he were sick.

"'No,' he said, 'But I don’t believe in saying prayers any more, and I’m never going to do it again." 17

B. Adult Reactions

1. Reactions to Early Teachings: The changes that Mark Twain underwent in his religious life and beliefs are told by Howells.

"'Mark Twain’s Letters' constitute the history of that philosophy of the world which became honestly his in its denial of a conscious Creator,

and its affirmation of the failure of whatever force wrought the creation of man. By birth and by marriage he was of the Calvinistic faith which bowed the neck of most Americans in the early 1870's and then began to break of its own impossibility and to substitute the prevailing scientific agnosticism. His personal unreligion went far back in his early life. The faith he had been taught in his childhood passed with his childhood, but it held against his reason and remained in his affection long after it had ceased in his convictions, and until his church-going became a meaningless form. Then when he turned from the form,...(he and his wife)... their Christianity ceased to be a creed and remained a life.... The gloom deepens around him to the end,... but the doubt that has always haunted him hardens into denial and effects itself at last in such an allegory as 'The Mysterious Stranger' who bedevils a world without reason and without pity."18

"So far as I know his beliefs, I should say that he never went back to anything like faith in the Christian theology, or in the notion of life after death, or in a conscious divinity.... At one period he argued that there must have been a cause, a conscious source of things, that the universe could not have come by chance."19

He reacted against Calvinism. After reading Jonathan Edwards' "Freedom of Will" he wrote:

"I wallowed and reeked with Jonathan in his insane debauch.... All through the book is the glare of a resplendent intellect gone mad--a marvelous spectacle. No, not all through the book--the drunk does not come on till the last third, where what I take to be Calvinism and its God begins to show up and shine red and hideous in glow from the fires of hell, their only right and proper adornment."20

And yet, his own deterministic philosophy is not far removed from the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination, except that he places no responsibility on man, as is seen in "What is Man?" and in the "Mysterious Stranger". Since this philosophy was influenced by his early Calvinistic teachings, it seems right to include a brief discussion of it.

a. Man is an irresponsible machine. In "What is Man?", a dialogue between an Old Man and a Young Man, Mark Twain discusses two fundamental questions—to what extent is man a free agent, and is he influenced from within or without. It is his contention that man has no more responsibility than a machine, and that the influences which determine his conduct come from the outside.  

This philosophy is also expressed in other places.

"We don't create any of our traits; we inherit all of them. They have come down to us from what we impudently call the lower animals. Man is the last expression, and combines every attribute of the animal tribes that preceded him. We describe a man by his vicious traits and condemn him; or by his fine traits and gifts, and praise him and accord him high merit for their possession. It is comical. He did not invent these things. God conferred them upon him in the first instant of creation."  

b. The morality of animals is superior to that of man, as the angel in "The Mysterious Stranger" explains:

"No it was a human (not brutal) thing. You should not insult the brutes by such a misuse of

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that word; they have not deserved it. It is like your paltry race—always lying, always claiming virtues which it hasn't got, always denying them to the higher animals, which alone possess them. No brute ever does a cruel thing—that is the monopoly of those with the Moral Sense. When a brute inflicts pain, he does it innocently; it is not wrong; for him there is no such thing as wrong; and he does not inflict pain for the pleasure of inflicting it—only man does that. Inspired by that mongrel Moral Sense of his. A sense whose function is to distinguish between right and wrong, with liberty to choose which of them he will do. Now what advantage can he get out of that? He is always choosing, and in nine cases out of ten he prefers the wrong. And yet he is such an unreasoning creature that he is not able to perceive that the Moral Sense degrades him to the bottom layer of animated beings and is a shameful possession."

c. There is no free will. Each act proceeds from an antecedent act in an unbroken chain. The angel speaks:

"If you could see into the future as I can, you would see everything that was going to happen to that creature; for nothing can change the order of its life after the first event has determined it. That is, nothing will change it, because each act unfailingly begets an act, that begets another, and so on to the end, and the seer can look forward down the line and see just when each act is to have birth from cradle to grave."

d. Instead of the "foreordination" of the Calvinists, Mark Twain believes that circumstances and environment determine an individual's life.

"Does God order the career?" (The angel answers) 'Foreordain it? No. The man's circumstance and environment order it. His first act determines his second and all that follow after... Now, then, no man ever does drop a link—the thing has never happened! Even when he is trying to make up his mind

23. Clemens, S. L. The Mysterious Stranger and Other Stories, pp. 50-1.
24. Ibid., pp. 81-2
as to whether he will do a thing or not, that itself is a link, an act, and has its proper place in his chain; and when he finally decides an act, that also was the thing which he was absolutely certain to do."25

His philosophy became very pessimistic toward the close of his life. In the allegory, "The Five Boons of Life," a fairy brings man five boons. After choosing first Pleasure, next Love, then Fame, and finally Riches, and losing them all, the disillusioned and broken man mumbles sadly,

"'Curse all the world's gifts, for mockeries and gilded lies! And miscalled, everyone. They are not gifts, but merely lendings. Pleasure, Love, Fame, Riches: they are but temporary disguises for lasting realities--Pain, Grief, Shame, Poverty.' The fairy said true; in all her store there was but one gift which was precious, only one that was not valueless (Death). 'How poor and cheap and mean I know those others now to be, compared with that inestimable one, that dear and sweet and kindly one, that steeps in dreamless and enduring sleep the pains that persecute the body, and the shames and griefs that eat the mind and heart. Bring it! I am weary, I would rest.'"26

From his Autobiography comes the following pessimistic paragraph.

"A myriad of men are born; they labor and sweat and struggle for bread; they squabble and scold and fight; they scramble for little mean advantages over each other. Age creeps upon them; infirmities follow; shames and humiliations bring down their prides and their vanities. Those they love are taken from them, and the joy of life is turned to

25. Clemens, S. L. The Mysterious Stranger and Other Stories, pp. 82-3.
aching grief. The burden of pain, care, misery grows heavier year by year. At length ambition is dead; pride is dead; vanity is dead; longing for release is in their place. It comes at last—the only unpoisoned gift earth ever had for them—and they vanish from a world where they were of no consequence; where they achieved nothing; where they were a mistake and a failure and a foolishness; where they have left no sign that they have existed—a world which will lament them a day and forget them forever. Then another myriad takes their place, and copies all they did, and goes along the same profitless road, and vanishes as they vanished—to make room for another and another and a million other myriads to follow the same arid path through the same desert and accomplish what the first myriad and the myriads that came after it, accomplished—nothing!"27

2. His Conscience in Manhood: In spite of his philosophy that man is not responsible for his acts, Mark Twain's conscience goaded and tormented him all through his life, just as it had done in his childhood. His daughter tells us that

"self-condemnation was the natural turn for his mind to take, yet often he accused himself of having caused pain or trouble when the true cause was far removed from himself."28

Following is an illustration of this tendency.

"He wrote another of his self-censoring letters on the idea that some of his frankly expressed criticism of Mother's religious faith might have caused mental suffering sufficient to bring on her serious illness. 'I drove you to sorrow and heartbreak just to hear myself talk.'"29

He always blamed himself for the death of his son

29. Ibid., p. 251.
because he had allowed the child to become uncovered
during a ride, and catch cold.

"I have always felt shame for that treachery
ous morning's work and have not allowed myself
to think of it when I could help it. I doubt
if I had the courage to make confession at
that time."30

In telling of his experiences with Mark Twain while
painting his portrait, S. J. Woolf relates the following
incident which shows what an extremely sensitive con-
science Mark Twain had.

"One day while I was there a prominent New
York paper called him up on the telephone and
offered to give $100 to any charity which he might
take for a fifteen-minute interview on a certain
subject which he did not care to discuss. The
refusal worried him during the rest of the after-
noon, and before I left he gave me a note to
mail to a certain hospital, enclosing a check
as contribution to its 'conscience fund'."31

In "Facts concerning The Recent Carnival of Crime
in Connecticut", a satire personifying his conscience, we
get his attitude toward the tormentor.

"Every sentence was an accusation, and every
accusation a truth. Every clause was freighted
with sarcasm and derision, every slow-dropping
word burned like vitriol.... With exquisite
cruelty he recalled to my mind, item by item,
wrongs and unkindnesses I had inflicted and
humiliation I had put upon friends."32

Conscience reviles him:

31. Woolf, S. J. "Painting the Portrait of Mark Twain,"
Colliers, Vol. 45, May 14, 1910, p. 44.
32. Clemens, S. L. "The Facts concerning The Recent
Carnival of Crime in Connecticut," Tom Sawyer
Abroad, p. 308.
"I am not your friend, I am your enemy... It is my business—and my joy—to make you repent of everything you do... Some of us grow one way and some the other. You had a large conscience once; if you've a small conscience now I reckon there are reasons for it. You used to be conscientious about a great many things, morbidly so, I may say,... and I kept pelting at you until I rather overdid the matter. You began to rebel. Of course I began to lose ground, then, and shrivel a little, diminish in stature, get moldy, and grow deformed."33

He finally kills the deformed miscreant, then turns to his Aunt triumphantly:

"You behold before you a man whose life-conflict is done, whose soul is at peace; a man whose heart is dead to sorrow, dead to suffering, dead to remorse: A Man Without a Conscience."34

3. His Faith at the End of His Life: The skepticism that had begun early in his life gradually increased and continued to the end. Albert Paine wrote in the biography:

"It has been written—I do not know with what proof—that certain dissenters have recanted with the approach of death—have become weak, and afraid to ignore old traditions in the face of the great mystery. I wish to write here that Mark Twain, as he neared the end, showed never a single tremor of fear or even of reluctance."35

34. Ibid., p. 325.
CHAPTER II

THE ICONOCLAST--HIS ATTITUDE
TOWARD THEOLOGICAL RELIGION

1. Introduction

When it came to the doctrines of conventional theology, Mark Twain was an iconoclast. In the following quotation we have what might be called his creed—a brief treatise giving his beliefs, also his doubts and denials of generally accepted beliefs concerning God, divine revelation, eternal punishment and morality. Other longer passages in his writings explain and amplify these convictions; and although written at various periods in his life, deviate little from them.

"At an earlier period—the date is not exactly fixable, but the stationery used and the handwriting suggest the early eighties—he set down a few concisely written pages of conclusions—conclusions from which he did not deviate materially in after years. The document follows:

'I believe in God the Almighty.

'I do not believe that he has ever sent a message to man by anybody, or delivered one to him by word of mouth, or made Himself visible to mortal eyes at any time in any place.

'I believe that the Old and New Testament were imagined and written by man, and that no line in them was authorized by God, much less inspired by Him.

'I think the goodness, the justice, and the mercy
of God are manifested in his works. I perceive that they are manifested toward me in this life; the logical conclusion is that they will be manifested toward me in the life to come, if there should be one.

'I do not believe in special providences. I believe that the universe is governed by strict and immutable laws. If one man's family is swept away by a pestilence and another man's spared it is only the law working: God is not interfering in that small matter, either against the one man or in favor of the other.

'I can not see how eternal punishment hereafter could accomplish any good end; therefore I am not able to believe in it. To chasten a man in order to perfect him might be reasonable enough; to annihilate him when he shall have proved himself incapable of reaching perfection might be reasonable enough; but to roast him forever for the mere satisfaction of seeing him roast would not be reasonable—even the atrocious God imagined by the Jews would tire of the spectacle eventually.

'There may be a hereafter and there may not be. I am wholly indifferent about it. If I am appointed to live again I feel sure it will be for some more sane and useful purpose than to flounder about for ages in a lake of fire and brimstone for having violated a confusion of ill-defined and contradictory rules said (but not evidenced) to be of divine institution. If annihilation is to follow death, I shall not be aware of the annihilation, and therefore shall not care a straw about it.

'I believe that the world's moral laws are the outcome of the world's experience. It needed no God to come down out of heaven to tell men that murder and theft and the other immoralities were bad, both for the individual who commits them and for society which suffers from them.

'If I break all these moral laws I can not see how I injure God by it, for He is beyond the reach of injury by me—I could as easily injure a planet by throwing mud at it. It seems to me that my misconduct could only injure me and other men. I cannot benefit God by obeying these moral laws—I could as easily benefit the planet by withholding
my mud. (Let these sentences be read in the light
of the fact that I believe I have received moral
laws only from man—none whatever from God. Con­
sequently I do not see why I should be either
punished or rewarded for the deeds I do here.)

2. The Bible

As a work of literary art, Mark Twain greatly ad­
mired the Bible.

"It is hard to make choice of the most
beautiful passage in a book which is so gemmed
with beautiful passages as the Bible; but it is
certain that not many things within its lids may
take rank above the exquisite story of Joseph.
Who taught those ancient writers their simplicity
of language, their felicity of expression, their
pathos, and above all, their faculty of sinking
themselves entirely out of sight of the reader and
making the narrative stand out alone and seem to
tell itself? Shakespeare is always present when
one reads his books; Macaulay is present when we
follow the march of his stately sentences; but the
Old Testament writers are hidden from view."2

But he did not believe that the Bible was the revela­
tion of God to man, nor inspired by Him.

"It took very little persuasion on his wife's
part to establish family prayers in their home,
grace before meals, and the morning reading of a
Bible chapter....After a while he could stand it
no longer.

'Lucy,' he said one day, 'you may keep this up
if you want to, but I must ask you to excuse me
from it. It is making me a hypocrite. I don't
believe in this Bible. It contradicts my reason.
I can't sit here and listen to it, letting you
believe that I regard it, as you do, in the light
of gospel, the word of God.'"3

To his great friend, the Rev. Joseph Twichell, he
made a similar confession.

"'Joe,' he said, 'I'm going to make a con-
fusion. I don't believe in your religion at all.
I've been living a lie right straight along when-
ever I pretended to. For a moment, sometimes, I
have been almost a believer, but immediately it
drifts away from me again. I don't believe one
word of your Bible was inspired by God any more
than any other book. I believe it is entirely the
work of man from beginning to end, atonement and
all. The problem of life and death and eternity
and the true conception of God is a bigger thing
than is contained in that book."4

He becomes quite ironical about the interior evidences
of "Divine Origin".

"What a pity God didn't levy the tax (tithes)
upon the rich alone. I would. However, He knew
the rich couldn't be forced to pay it and the poor
could. With all his brutalities and stupidities
and grotesqueries that old Hebrew God always had
a good business head. He always stopped talking
shop (piousness, sentiment, sweetness in life) and
came right down to business when there was a matter
concerning shekels on hand. His commercial satis-
fection in the clink of shekels runs all through his
Book—that Book whose 'every word' He inspired and
whose ideas were all his own; among them the idea
of levying a one-tenth income tax upon paupers.
We hear a great deal about the interior evidences
of the 'Divine Origin' of that Book. Yes; and yet
the tithe could have originated in hell if interior
evidences go for anything."5

Nor did he believe in the inerrancy of the Bible.

Speaking of Herod's slaughter of the infants, he makes
the following criticism:

"Tacitus makes no mention of it, and he would

5. Clemens, S. L. Mark Twain's Notebook, p. 191.
hardly have overlooked a sweeping order like that, issued by a petty ruler like Herod. Just consider a little king of a corner of the Roman Empire ordering slaughter of the first-born of a lot of Roman subjects. Why, the Emperor would have reached out that long arm of his and dismissed Herod."6

He ridiculed a number of the stories of the Bible. For example:

"She (Eve) engages herself in many foolish things, among others, to study why the animals called lions and tigers live on grass and flowers, when as she says, the sort of teeth they wear would indicate that they were intended to eat each other."7

"She (Eve) is in much trouble about the buzzard; says grass does not agree with it; is afraid she can't raise it; thinks it was intended to live on decayed flesh."8

"The more I see of modern marine architecture and engineering the more I am dissatisfied with Noah's Ark. It was admirably unfitted for the service required of it. Nobody but a farmer could have designed such a thing, for such a purpose."9

He shows the injustice of the "Fall":

"The Bible reveals the character of God with minute exactness. It is a portrait of a man, if one can imagine a man with evil impulses far beyond the human limit. In the Old Testament he is pictured as unjust, ungenerous, pitiless, and revengeful, punishing innocent children for the misdeeds of their parents; punishing unoffending people for the sins of their rulers, even descending to bloody vengeance upon harmless calves and sheep as punishment for puny trespasses committed by their proprie tors. It is the most damnatory biography that ever found its way into print. Its beginning is merely childish. Adam is forbidden to eat the fruit of a certain tree, and gravely informed that if he

7. Clemens, S. L. Adam's Diary, p. 23.
8. Ibid., p. 31.
9. Clemens, S. L. Mark Twain's Notebook, p. 266.
disobeys, he shall die. How could that impress
Adam? He could have no idea of what death meant.
He had never seen a dead thing. He had never heard
of one. If he had been told that he would be
turned into a meridian of longitude that threat
would have meant just as much as the other one.
The watery intellect that invented that notion
could be depended on to go on and decree that all
of Adam's descendants down to the latest day should
be punished for that nursery trespass in the begin-
ning."10

Satan speaks,

"Again as in that former time they puzzled over
those words, Good, Evil, Death, and tried to reason
out their meaning; but of course they were unable
to do it.... The meaning of those words—would I
tell her? Certainly none could be more willing,
but how was I to do it?... It was a hopeless case.
Words referring to things outside her experience
were a foreign language to her and meaningless.
She was like a little baby whose mother says to
it, 'Don't put your finger in the candle flame;
it will burn you.' Burn— it is a foreign word to
the baby, and will have no terrors for it until
experience shall have revealed its meaning.....
Poor ignorant things, the command of refrain had
meant nothing to them, they were but children, and
could not understand untried things and verbal
abstractions which stood for matters outside of
their little world and their narrow experience.
Eve reached for an apple...."11

Eve speaks,

"We could not know it was wrong to disobey a
command, for the words were strange to us and we did
not understand them. We did not know right from
wrong—how should we know? We could not, without
Moral Sense; it was not possible. If we had been
given the Moral Sense first—oh! that would have
been fairer, that would have been kinder; then we
should be to blame if we disobeyed.... We knew no
more then than this littlest child of mine knows

Short Stories and Famous Essays of Mark Twain,
p. 833-54.
now, with its four years.... Would I say to it, 'If thou touchest this bread, I will overwhelm thee with unimaginable disaster, even to the dissolution of thy corporeal elements,' and when it took the bread and smiled up in my face, thinking no harm, as not understanding those strange words, would I take advantage of its innocence and strike it down with the mother hand it trusted."

He calls attention to the lack of originality in Bibles.

"There is a curious poverty of inventions in Bibles. Most of the great races each have one, and they all show this striking defect. Each pretends to originality, without possessing any. Each of them borrows from the other, confiscates old stage properties, puts them forth as fresh and new inspiration from on high. We borrowed the Golden Rule from Confucius, after it had seen service for centuries, and copyrighted it without a blush. We went back to Babylon for the Deluge, and are as proud of it and as satisfied with it as if it had been worth the trouble; whereas we know now that Noah's flood never happened, and couldn't have happened—not in that way. The flood is a favorite with Bible-makers."

In an ironical letter to the librarian of the Brooklyn Public Library, answering the complaint made by a young woman of the children's department that Huck and Tom were bad examples for children, Mark Twain uses the Bible as an illustration of the harm unexpurgated literature can do to a young mind.

"I am greatly troubled by what you say. I wrote "Tom Sawyer" and "Huckleberry Finn" for adults exclusively, and it always distresses me when I find that boys and girls have been allowed

access to them. The mind that becomes soiled in youth can never again be washed clean. I know this by my own experience and to this day I cherish an unappeasable bitterness against the unfaithful guardians of my young life, who not only permitted but compelled me to read an unexpurgated Bible through before I was fifteen years old. None can do that and ever draw a clean sweet breath again this side of the grave. Ask that young lady—she will tell you so.

"Most honestly I do wish that I could say a softening word or two in defense of Huck's character, since you wish it, but really in my opinion it is no better than God's (in the Ahab chapter and 97 others) and those of Solomon, David, Satan and the rest of the sacred brotherhood.

"If there's an unexpurgated in the Children's Department, won't you please help that young woman remove Huck and Tom from that questionable companionship?"14

3. God

The conception of God as given in the Old Testament was repugnant to Mark Twain, and he bitterly reviled him, as the following epigrammatic sentences show.

"None of us can be as great as God, but any of us can be as good."15

"God, so atrocious in the Old Testament, so attractive in the New—the Jekyll and Hyde of sacred romance."16

"God is Might, and He is shifty, malicious, and uncertain."17

"When one reads Bibles, one is less surprised at what the Deity knows than at what he doesn't

15. Clemens, S. L. Mark Twain's Notebook, p. 379.
16. Ibid., p. 392.
17. Ibid., p. 394.
Gods offer no reward for intellect. There was never one yet that showed any interest in it. Which is singular, for they themselves have possessed it; some of them in a considerable degree; not transcending the human limit in any instance, but quite often reaching it.  

"God's inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn."  

"God pours out love upon all with a lavish hand—but he reserves vengeance for his very own."  

"Jehovah—He is all good. He made man for hell, or hell for man—take your choice. He made it hard to get into heaven and easy to get into hell."  

"He commanded man to multiply and replenish—what? Hell."  

From his note-book we get the following passage—a bitter denunciation of the Bible God.  

"If I were going to construct a God I would furnish Him with some ways and qualities and characteristics which the Present (Bible) One lacks.  

"He would not stoop to ask for any man's compliments, praises, flatteries; and He would be far above exacting them. I would have Him as self-respecting as the better sort of man in these regards.  

"He would not be a merchant, a trader. He would not buy these things. He would not sell, or offer to sell, temporary benefits or the joys of eternity for the product called worship. I would have Him as dignified as the better sort of men in this regard."

19. Ibid., p. 379.  
20. Ibid., p. 344.  
"He would value no love but the love born of kindnesses conferred; not that born of benevolences contracted for. Repentance in a man's heart for a wrong done would cancel and annul that sin, and no verbal prayers for forgiveness be required or desired or expected of that man.

"In his Bible there would be no Unforgivable Sin. He would recognize in Himself the Author and Inventor of Sin and Author and Inventor of the Vehicle and Appliances for its commission; and would place the whole responsibility where it would of right belong: upon Himself, the only Sinner.

"He would not be a jealous God—a trait so small that even men despise it in each other.

"He would not boast.

"He would keep private His admiration of Himself; He would regard self-praise as unbecoming the dignity of his position.

"He would not have the spirit of vengeance in His heart; then it would not issue from his Lips.

"There would not be any Hell—except the one we live in from the cradle to the grave.

"There would not be any heaven—of the kind described in the world's Bibles.

"He would spend some of His eternities in trying to forgive Himself for making man unhappy when He could have made him happy with the same effort and He would spend the rest of them in studying astronomy."23

From "The Mysterious Stranger" come these lines:

"A God who could make good children as easily as bad, yet preferred to make bad ones; who could have made every one of them happy, yet never made a single happy one; who made them prize their bitter life, yet stingily cut it short; who gave

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his angels eternal happiness unearned, yet required his other children to earn it; who gave his angels painless lives, yet cursed his other children with biting miseries and maladies of mind and body; who mouths justice and invented hell—mouths Golden Rules, and forgiveness multiplied by seventy times seven and invented hell, who mouths morals to other people and has none himself; who frowns upon crimes, yet commits them all; who created man without invitation, and then tries to shuffle the responsibility for man's acts upon man, instead of honorably placing it where it belongs, upon himself; and finally, with altogether divine obtuseness, invites this poor, abused slave to worship him!"24

Another denunciation of the Bible God comes from his biography.

"We haven't been satisfied with God's character as it is given in the Old Testament; we have amended it. We have called him a God of mercy and love and morals. He didn't have a single one of those qualities in the beginning. He didn't hesitate to send the plagues on Egypt, the most fiendish punishments that could be devised—not for the king, but for his innocent subjects, the women and the little children, and then only to exhibit His power—just to show off—and He kept hardening Pharaoh's heart so that He could send some further ingenuity of torture, new rivers of blood, and swarms of vermin and pestilences, merely to exhibit samples of His workmanship. Now and then, during the forty years' wandering, Moses persuaded Him to be a little more lenient with the Israelites, which would show that Moses was the better character of the two. That Old Testament God never had an inspiration of His own."25

Mark Twain did believe in God, the Creator, however, but his conception is far removed from the Creator of his early teachings—deistic in extreme.

"No one who thinks can imagine the universe made by chance. It is too nicely assembled and

24. Clemens, S. L. The Mysterious Stranger and Other Stories, p. 139.
regulated. There is, of course, a great Master Mind, but it cares nothing for our happiness or our unhappiness."26

"For that Supreme One is not a God of pity or mercy—not as we recognize those qualities. Think of a God of mercy who would create the typhus germ, or the house-fly, or the centipede, or the rattlesnake, yet these are all His handiwork. They are a part of the Infinite plan....

"Two things are quite certain: one is that God, the limitless God, manufactured those things, for no man could have done it---

"The other conclusion is that God has no special consideration for man's welfare or comfort, or He wouldn't have created those things to disturb and destroy him. The human conception of pity and morality must be entirely unknown to that Infinite God, as much unknown as the conceptions of a microbe to man, or at least as little regarded."27

In the following article, which his wife prevailed upon him not to print, he sets forth the difference between the Bible God and his own deistic conception.

"The difference in importance between the God of the Bible and the God of the present day, cannot be described, it can only be vaguely and inadequately figured to the mind.... If you make figures to represent the earth and moon, and allow a space of one inch between them, to represent the four hundred thousand miles of distance which lies between the two bodies, the map will have to be eleven miles long in order to bring in the nearest fixed star. So one cannot put the modern heavens on a map, nor the modern God; but the Bible God and the Bible heavens can be set down on a slate and yet not be discommoded.

"The difference between that universe and the modern one revealed by science is as the difference between a dust-flecked ray in a barn and the sublime arch of the Milky Way in the skies. Its God was

27. Ibid., p. 1356.
strictly proportioned to its dimensions. His sole solicitude was about a handful of truculent nomads. He worried and fretted over them in a peculiarly and distractingly human way. One day he coaxed and petted them beyond their due, the next he harried and lashed them beyond their deserts. He sulked, he cursed, he raged, he grieved, according to his mood and the circumstances, but all to no purpose; his efforts were all vain; he could not govern them. When the fury was on him he was blind to all reason—he not only slaughtered the offender, but even his harmless little children and dumb cattle.

"To trust the God of the Bible is to trust an irascible, vindictive, fierce and even fickle and changeful master; to trust the true God is to trust a Being who has uttered no promises, but whose beneficent, exact, and changeless ordering of the machinery of his colossal universe is proof that he is at least stedfast to his purposes; whose unwritten laws, so far as they affect man, being equal and impartial, show that he is just and fair; these things taken together, suggest that if he shall ordain us to live hereafter, he will still be stedfast, just, and fair toward us. We shall not need to require anything more."28

His daughter says of him:

"I wondered how his adoration of nature could coincide with his doubt of the existence of a creative God. Later I knew that he was merely objecting to a smaller conception of the Supreme Being."29

This larger conception of God is given in the following passages:

"Let us now consider God, the genuine God, the great God, the sublime and supreme God, the authentic Creator of the real universe, whose remotenesses are visited by comets only—comets unto which incredible distant Neptune is merely an outpost, a Sandy Hook to homeward—bound specters of the deeps of space

29. Clemens, Clara, op. cit., p. 44.
that have not glimpsed it before for generations—a universe not made with hands and suited to an astronomical nursery, but spread abroad through the illimitable reaches of space by the feat of the real God just mentioned, by comparison with whom the gods whose myriads infest the feeble imagination of men are as a swarm of gnats scattered and lost in the infinitude of the empty sky."

Finally, we have the following long passage, explaining his conception of God.

"The Being who to me is the real God is the One who created this majestic universe and rules it. He is the only Originator, the only originator of thoughts; thoughts suggested from within, not from without; the originator of colors and of all their possible combinations; of forces and the laws that govern them; of forms and shapes of all forms. Man has never invented a new one; He is the only Originator—He made the materials of all things; He made the laws by which, and by which only, man may combine them into machines and other things which outside influence may suggest to him. He made character—man can portray it but not 'create' it, for He is the only Creator.

"He is the perfect artisan, the perfect artist. Everything which he has made is fine, everything which he has made is beautiful; nothing coarse, nothing ugly has ever come from His hand. Even His materials are all delicate, none of them is coarse. The materials of the leaf, the flower, the fruit, of the insect, the elephant, the man; of the earth, the crags and the ocean; of the snow, the hoar-frost and the ice—may be reduced to infinitesimal particles and they are still delicate, still faultless; whether He makes a gnat, a bird, a horse, a plain, a forest, a mountain range, a planet, a constellation, or a diatom whose form the keenest eye in the world cannot perceive, it is all one—He makes it utterly and minutely perfect in form, and construction. The diatom which is invisible to the eye on the point of a needle is graceful and beautiful in form and in the minute exquisite elaboration of its parts it is a wonder.

The contemplation of it moves one to something of the same awe and reverence which the march of the comets through their billion mile orbits compels.

"This is indeed a God! He is not jealous, trivial, ignorant, revengeful—it is impossible. He has a personal dignity—dignity answerable to his grandeur, his greatness, his might, his sublimity; He cares nothing for men's flatteries, compliments, praises, prayers; it is impossible that he should value them, impossible that he should listen to them, these mouthing's of microbes. He is not ignorant, He does not mistake His myriad great suns, swimming in the measureless ocean of space for tallow candles hung in the roof to light this forgotten potato which we call the Earth, and name His footstool. He can not see it except under His microscope. The shadow does not go back on His dial—it is against His law; His sun does not stand still on Bibeon to accommodate a worm out on a raid against other worms—it is against His law. His real character is written in plain words in his real Bible, which is nature and her history; we read it every day; and we could understand it and trust in it if we would burn the spurious one and dig the remains of our insignificant reasoning faculties out of the grave where that and other man-made Bibles have buried them for 2000 years and more.

"The Bible of Nature tells us no word about any future life, but only about this present one. It does not promise a future life; it does not even vaguely indicate one. It is not intended as a message to us, any more than the scientist intends a message to surviving microbes when he boils the life out of a billion of them in a thimble. The microbes discover a message in it; this is certain—if they have a pulpit.

"The Book of Nature tells us distinctly that God cares not a rap for us—nor for any living creature. It tells us that His laws inflict pain and suffering and sorrow, but it does not say that this is done in order that He may get pleasure out of this misery. We do not know what the object is, for the Book is not able to tell us. It may be mere indifference. Without a doubt He had an object, but we have no way of discovering what it was. The scientist has an object, but it is not the joy of inflicting pain upon the microbes.
"The Law of the Distribution of Comfort and Pain shows an entire absence of sentimental justice. The proportion of punishments to the size of infractions has been ignored; this again shows the absence of anything representing sentimental justice. I knew an unspeakable villain who was born rich, remained rich, was never ill a day, never had a bone broken, led a joyous life till eighty, then died a painless death by apoplexy. I knew a man who when in his second year in college jumped into an ice-cold stream when he was overheated and rescued a priest of God from drowning; suffered partial paralysis, lay in his bed thirty-eight years, unable to speak, unable to feed himself, unable to write, not even the small charity of quenching his mind was doled to him—he lay and thought and brooded and mourned and begged for death thirty-eight years. There are no laws founded upon sentimental justice; the laws are all hard and fast. If it so happen that you are just in the right condition to bring on thirty-eight years of paralysis by a sudden cold bath, that is what the bath will produce—no allowance will be made even if you take the bath to save the Virgin Mary."31

4. Creation

Mark Twain ridiculed the six-day theory of creation.

"On this trip I saw a little towhead (infant island) half a mile long, which had been formed during the past nineteen years. Since there was so much time to spare that nineteen years of it could be devoted to the construction of a mere towhead, where was the use, originally, in rushing this whole globe through in six days? It is likely that if more time had been taken, in the first place, the world would have been made right, and this ceaseless improving and repairing would not be necessary now. But if you hurry a world or a house, you are nearly sure to find out by and by that you have left out a towhead, or a broom-closet, or some other little convenience, here and there, which has got to be supplied, no matter how much expense or vexation it may cost."32

He tried to illustrate his larger conception of creation in the following way.

"One of his memoranda says, 'I think we are only the microscopic trichina concealed in the blood of some vast creature's veins, and that it is that vast creature whom God concerns himself about and not us.'"33

And again:

"The suns and planets that form constellations of a billion billion solar systems and go pouring, a tossing flood of shining globes, through the viewless arteries of space are the blood-corpuscles in the veins of God; and the nations are the microbes that swarm and wiggle and brag in each, and think God can tell them apart at that distance and has nothing better to do than try. This—the entertainment of an eternity. Who so poor in his ambitions as to consent to be God on those terms? Blasphemy? No, it is no blasphemy. If God is as vast as that He is above blasphemy; if He is as little as that, He is beneath it."34

And yet, although he admired the work of the Creator, he considered man a failure.

"Man was made at the end of the week when God was tired."35

"If man had created man he would be ashamed of his performance."36

"Human beings seem to be a poor invention. If they are the noblest work of God, where is the ignoblest?"37

He would have improved the life of man.

"If I had been helping the Almighty, when He created man, I would have had Him begin at the other

34. Ibid., Vol. III, p. 1354.
35. Ibid., p. 1195.
37. Ibid., p. 276.
end, and start human beings with old age and have all the bitterness and blindness of age in the beginning. One would not mind then if he were looking forward to a joyful youth. Think of the joyous prospect of growing young instead of old! Think of looking forward to eighteen instead of eighty! Yes, the Almighty made a poor job of it. I wish he had invited my assistance."

In the work of the Creator he saw and admired beauty. Impressed by the majesty of the Alps, he wrote, "They could not think base thoughts or do mean and sordid things here, before the visible throne of God."39

The valley below the Matterhorn he also described in picturesque language. "That short valley is a picture gallery of a notable kind, for it contains no mediocrities; from end to end the Creator has hung it with His masterpieces."

And when he beheld another view of awe-inspiring grandeur, he declared that if a child had asked him what it was, he would have said, "Humble yourself in this presence, it is the glory flowing from the hidden head of the Creator."

5. Christ

While Mark Twain reviled the Bible God, he had great admiration for Christ. At one time he even contemplated writing a life of Christ but was dissuaded from doing so

40. Ibid., p. 100.
41. Ibid., p. 189.
by his friends. Christ, he believed, was the only true Christian, but "they caught Him and crucified Him early." He deplored the present state of Christianity. "If Christ were here now, there is one thing he would not be—a Christian," he said.

And yet, he told Mr. Paine that he regarded Christ as a myth.

"He reviewed the statements of the Gospels concerning Christ, though he declared them to be mainly traditional and of no value....He did not admit there had been a Christ with the character and mission related by the Gospels. 'It is all a myth,' he said. 'There have been Saviours in every age of the world. It is all just a fairy tale, like the idea of Santa Claus.' The doctrine of the Virgin Birth he showed was of pagan origin, ridiculing the idea that we had received it by divine inspiration.

"Another favorite with the founders of religions is the Immaculate Conception. It had been worn threadbare, but we adopted it as a new idea. It was old in Egypt several thousand years before Christ was born. The Hindus prized it years ago. The Egyptians adopted it even for some of their kings. The Romans borrowed the idea from Greece. We got it straight from Heaven by way of Rome. We are still charmed with it." The doctrine of the Virgin Birth he showed was of pagan origin, ridiculing the idea that we had received it by divine inspiration.

6. Atonement and Redemption

Mark Twain considered the doctrine of atonement mun-

43. Clemens, S. L. Mark Twain's Notebook, p. 344.
44. Ibid., p. 328.
46. Ibid., p. 1355.
"Christ gave His life for our race: Could a man be found who could do such a thing? Millions of men and millions of women have done more; they have freely given their lives to save even individuals who were in danger—and risked eternal damnation when they did it; for they rushed to the rescue without first squaring up their sin account with God. Every volunteer in the army offers his life to save his country or his country's honor, and does it on the chance that his death may land him in hell, not on the great white throne, which was Christ's sure destination. For men to throw away their lives for other people's sake is one of the commonest events in our everyday history. It is ludicrous to see the church make something fine out of the only instance of it where nothing was risked that was of consequence, for nothing was involved but a few hours of pain; and every girl takes a risk superior to that when she marries and subjects herself to the probable pains of childbirth, indefinitely repeated.

"There seems to be nothing connected with the atonement scheme that is rational. If Christ was God, He is in the attitude of One whose anger against Adam has grown so uncontrollable in the course of ages that nothing but a sacrifice of life can appease it, and so without noticing how illogical the act is going to be, God condemns Himself to death—commits suicide on the cross, and in this ingenious way wipes off that old score. It is said that the ways of God are not like ours. Let us not contest this point.

"If Christ was God, then the crucifixion is without dignity. It is merely ridiculous, for to endure several hours' pain is nothing heroic in God, in any case."47

"For a man to risk his life (and lose it) for the sake of a friend, a child, a battalion, a king, a country, is no large matter, it has been done a billion times, it is done every day by firemen and by soldiers at $8 a month (1898). For a God to take three days on a cross out of a life of eternal happiness and mastership of the universe is a
service which the least among us would be glad to do upon the like terms. The world's population is 1,500,000,000; if the offer was made there would be 1500,000,000 takers. Charlotte Corday--she risked and got hell--as she believed. 48

He considered the doctrine of redemption as unfair. Speaking of a murderer and his victims, he says,

"His redemption was a very real thing to him, and he was as jubilantly happy on the gallows as ever was Christian martyr at the stake. We dwellers in this world are strangely made, and mysteriously circumstanced. We have to suppose that the murdered men are lost, and that Burgess is saved; but we cannot suppress our natural regrets." 49

7. Morals

Mark Twain accepted the morals as taught in the Christian religion, not because he believed they came from God, but because he believed they were the products of human experience. In "What Is Man?" he teaches that man's desire to obtain happiness and avoid pain is his only possible motive to action, that there is no unselfish act. 50

Howells wrote,

"One of the questions that we used to debate a good deal was whether every human motive was not selfish. We inquired as to every impulse, the noblest, the holiest in effect, and he found them in the last analysis of selfish origin." 51

And yet he gives the following advice:

"Diligently train your ideals upward and still

51. Howells, W. D. My Mark Twain, p. 77.
upward toward a summit where you will find your chiefest pleasure in conduct which, while contenting you, will be sure to confer benefits upon your neighbor and the community."

He believed that the spirit of moral law should be adhered to, not the letter. He illustrates this idea in "Was It Heaven—or Hell?" One character rebukes another:

"You are like all the rest of the moral moles; you lie from morning till night, but because you don't do it with your mouths, but only with your lying eyes, your lying inflections, your deceptively misplaced emphasis, and your misleading gestures, you turn up your complacent noses and parade before God and the world as saintly and un-smirched Truth-speakers, in whose cold-storage souls a lie would freeze to death if it got there. Why will you humbug yourselves with that foolish notion that no lie is a lie except a spoken one? What is the difference between lying with your eyes and lying with your mouth? There is none."

The unspoken lie is the vicious lie:

"The universal conspiracy of the silent-assertion lie is hard at work always and everywhere, and always in the interest of a stupidity, or a sham, never in the interest of a thing fine and respectable. Is it the most timid and shabby of all lies? It seems to have the look of it. For ages and ages it has mutely labored in the interest of despotisms and aristocracies and chattel slaveries, and military slaveries, and religious slaveries, and has kept them alive; keeps them alive yet, here and there and yonder, all about the globe, and will go on keeping them alive until the silent-assertion lie retires from business—the silent-assertion that nothing is going on which fair and intelligent men are aware of and are engaged by their duty to try to stop."

52. Clemens, S. L. What Is Man? and Other Essays, p. 54-55
53. Clemens, S. L. "Was It Heaven—or Hell?" The $30,000 Bequest, p. 82-83.
Another of his ideas about morals was that an untried virtue is worthless. In "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg" he teaches that "the weakest of all weak things is a virtue which has not been tested in the fire." The motto gracing the town's official seal had been "Lead us not into temptation." It was changed, leaving out "not".

8. Satan

Mark Twain ridicules the story of the temptation of Christ.

"Satan must have been pretty simple, even according to the New Testament, or he wouldn't have led Christ up on a high mountain and offered him the world if he would fall down and worship him. That was a manifestly absurd proposition, because Christ, as the Son of God, already owned the world; and besides, what Satan showed him was only a few rocky acres of Palestine. It is just as if some one should try to buy Rockefeller, the owner of all the Standard Oil Company, with a gallon of kerosene."

In the following satirical quotation we are given a wholly unorthodox view of Satan.

"I have no special regard for Satan, but I can at least claim that I have no prejudice against him. It may even be that I have been a little in his favor, on account of his not having a fair show. All religions issue Bibles against him, but we never hear his side. We have none but the evidence for the prosecution, and yet we have rendered the verdict. To my mind, this is irregular. It is un-English, it is un-American.

"Of course Satan has some kind of case, it

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55. Clemens, S. L. The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg and Other Stories and Essays, p. 65.
goes without saying. It may be a poor one, but that is nothing; that can be said about any of us. As soon as I get at the facts I will undertake his rehabilitation myself, if I can find an impolite publisher. It is a thing which we ought to do for anybody who is under a cloud.

"We may not pay him reverence, for that would be indiscreet, but we can at least respect his talents. A person who has for untold centuries maintained the imposing position of spiritual head of four-fifths of the human race, and political head of the whole of it, must be granted the possession of executive abilities of the loftiest order. In his large presence the other popes and politicians shrink to midgets for the microscope. I would like to see him. I would rather see him and shake him by the tail than any other member of the European Concert."57

9. Hell

Concerning hell, Mark Twain wrote little, but did not believe in its existence. Howells tells us,

"He greatly admired Robert Ingersoll, whom he called an angelic orator, and regarded as an evangel of a new gospel-the gospel of free thought. He took warmest interest in a newspaper controversy raging at the time as to the existence of a hell; when the 'noes' carried the day, I suppose that no enemy of perdition was more pleased."58

Mark Twain himself said;

"We don't care to live under the blow that is likely to fall at any moment; and yet every time we bring a child into this world we are bringing it to a country, to a community gathered under the crater of a volcano, knowing that sooner or later death will come, and that before death there will be catastrophies infinitely worse. Formerly it was much worse than now, for before the ministers

58. Howells, W. D., My Mark Twain, p. 31.
abolished hell a man knew, when he was begetting a child, that he was begetting a soul that had only one chance in a hundred of escaping the eternal fires of damnation. He knew that in all probabilities that child would be brought to damnation—one of the ninety-nine black sheep."59

In "Sold to Satan" he ridiculed the fire and brimstone conception of hell. Satan, a lovely being composed of radium, describes the modern hell.

"Soft coal and brimstone is the tradition, yes, but it is an error. We could use it, at least we could make out with it after a fashion, but it has several defects: it is not cleanly, it ordinarily makes but a temperate fire, and it would be exceedingly difficult, if even possible, to heat it up to standards, Sundays; and as for the supply, all the worlds and systems could not furnish enough to keep us going halfway through eternity. Without radium there could be no hell; certainly not a satisfactory one."60

In his note-book is the following note:

"Idea for *Stormfield’s Visit to Heaven*—In modern times the halls of heaven are warmed by registers connected with hell; and this is greatly applauded by Jonathan Edwards, Calvin, Baxter and Company, because it adds a new pang to the sinner’s sufferings to know that the very fire which torments him is the means of making the righteous comfortable."61

10. Heaven

He also scoffed at the traditional idea of heaven.

"What a childish notion it was, and how curious that only a little while ago human beings were so willing to accept such fragile evidences about a
place of so much importance. If you should find somewhere today an ancient book containing an account of a beautiful and blooming tropical Paradise secreted in the center of eternal icebergs—an account written by men who did not even claim to have seen it themselves—no geographical society on earth would take any stock in that book, yet that account would be quite as authentic as any we have of heaven. If God has such a place prepared for us, and really wanted us to know it, He could have found some better way than a book so liable to alterations and misinterpretation. God has had no trouble to prove to man the laws of the constellations and the construction of the world, and such things as that, none of which agree with his so-called book. As to a hereafter, we have not the slightest evidence that there is any—no evidence that appeals to logic and reason." 62

Petty, narrow conceptions of heaven—continual singing, harp playing, eternal rest, angel wings, halos, etc.—are comically satirized in "Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven". In comparison with the immensity of the heavens, our world, only one of many billions, is made extremely insignificant.

In "Notes for Letters From the Earth," an unfinished manuscript supposedly written by an angel visiting the earth, to one in heaven, Mark Twain makes the traditional idea of heaven seem absurd.

"His (man's) heaven is a curious place. It has not a single feature in it that he values on earth. It consists wholly of diversions which on earth he cares for not at all. For example:

"Most men do not sing—cannot sing—will not stay where others are singing; many men do not pray, or like to; fewer still go to church. To

most men Sunday is a bore—all sane men detest noise—also, monotony.

"Very well, in Man's heaven it is always Sunday, and everybody either prays or sings. Continually. Especially sings. The man who could not sing a note on earth sings there. Hymns! One hymn: 'Hosannah, hosannah unto the highest!' and everybody banging a harp—a hurricane of sound—a praise service—a service of flattery, adulation. You would wonder who would endure this insane compliment—not only endure it, but like it, require it. Hold your breath—it is God; Man's God, his own pet invention.

"Man's heaven is a place of reward—of previous delights—made it himself, mind you—all out of his own head. Very well; of the delights of this world man cares most for sexual intercourse. He will go any length for it—risk fortune, character, reputation, life itself. And what do you think he has done? In a thousand years you would never guess—he has left it out of his heaven! Prayer takes its place."63

In "Life on the Mississippi" he compares the river to the Christian's heaven.

"Majestic unchanging sameness of serenity, repose, tranquility, lethargy, vacancy,—symbols of eternity, realization of the heaven pictured by priest and prophet, and longed for by the good and thoughtless."64

11. Immortality

As the following quotations show, Mark Twain never ceased hoping for an after-life, but his reason would not let him believe in it.

"No one ever debated the undiscovered country more than he. In his whimsical, semi-serious fashion he had considered all the possibilities of the future

63. Clemens, S. L. Mark Twain's Notebook, pp. 397-98.
64. Clemens, S. L. Life on The Mississippi, p. 198.
state—orthodox and otherwise—and drawn picture­esquely original conclusions. He had sent Captain Stormfield in a dream to report the as­pects of the early Christian heaven. He had examined the scientific aspects of the more subtle philos­ophies. He had considered spiritualism, trans­migration, the various esoteric doctrines, and in the end he had logically made up his mind that death concludes all, while with that less logical hunger which survives in every human heart he had never ceased to expect an existence beyond the grave. His disbelief and his pessimism were identical in their structure. They were of his mind; never of his heart."65

Howells, too, saw this struggle in Mark Twain between the hope in his heart and reasoning of his mind.

"He was at times furiously intolerant of other's belief in a divine Fatherhood and a life after death; he believed that he saw and heard all nature and human nature denying it; but when once he had wreaked himself in his bigotry of unbelief, he was ready to listen to such poor reasons as believers could give for the faith that was in them."66

"All his expressions to me were of a courageous renunciation of any hope of living again, or else­where seeing those he had lost."67

"Sometimes he believed death ended everything, but most of the time he felt sure of a life beyond."68

About the proofs of immortality he makes this state­ment:

"One of the proofs of immortality of the soul is that myriads have believed it. They also be­lieved that the world was flat."69

To Mrs. Stowe he wrote the following poem.

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67. Howells, W. D. My Mark Twain, p. 32.
68. Clemens, Clara. op. cit., p. 280.
69. Clemens, S. L. Mark Twain's Notebook, p. 379.
"If you prove right and I prove wrong,
A million years from now,
In language plain and frank and strong
My error I'll avow
To your dear waking face.

"If I prove right, by God His grace
Full sorry I shall be
For in the solitude no trace
There'll be of you and me."70

12. Resurrection

It follows, of course, that if he doubted the immor-
tality of the soul, he would also doubt a physical
resurrection. The arguments presented by the Fijians
against a resurrection were interesting to him.

"They drew the line; they thought that the
missionary's doctrine was too sweeping, too
comprehensive. They called his attention to
certain facts. For instance, many of their
friends had been devoured by sharks, the sharks,
in their turn, were caught and eaten by other
men; later these men were captured in war, and
eaten by the enemy. The original person had
entered into the composition of the sharks,
next, they and the sharks had become part of
the flesh and blood and bone of the cannibals.
How, then, could the particles of the original
men be searched out from the conglomerate and
put together again? The inquirers were full of
doubts, and considered that the missionaries had
not examined the matter with the gravity and
attention which so serious a thing deserved."71

71. Clemens, S. L. Following The Equator, p. 98.
CHAPTER III

THE HUMANITARIAN--HIS ATTITUDE TOWARD HUMAN RELATIONSHIP

Generally, religion is considered as the relationship between man and his god or gods. In recent years the concept of religion has been enlarged, emphasizing the importance of the relationship of man to man—the brotherhood of man. To this phase of religion Mark Twain has made important contributions.

"Mark Twain's religion was a faith too wide for doctrines—a benevolence too limitless for words. From the beginning he strove against oppression, sham, and evil in every form. He despised meanness; he resented with every drop of blood in him anything that savored of persecution or a curtailment of human liberties. It was a religion identified with his daily life and his work."

"Mark Twain's creed, then and always, may be put into three words, 'liberty, justice, humanity.' It may be put into one word, 'humanity'."

1. Hypocrisy and Intolerance

Mark Twain hated hypocrisy and deplored the state of Christianity as he saw it in this country. Referring to a letter he had written to Tchaykoffsky, he said,

"I told him what I believed to be true: that our Christianity which we have always been
so proud of—not to say so vain of—is now nothing but a shell, a sham, a hypocrisy; that we have lost our ancient sympathy with oppressed peoples struggling for life and liberty."3

His contempt for hypocrites is revealed in the short story, "The Great Revolution in Pitcairn," in which an American gains control of the island through his hypocritical methods, and in "The Gilded Age" in which Senator Delworthy is almost the personification of hypocrisy. To gain his ends,

"The Senator now turned his attention to matters touching the souls of his people. He appeared in church; he took a leading part in prayer meetings; he met and encouraged temperance societies... He wrought in Bible classes and nothing could keep him away from the Sunday-School."4

When the Rev. T. DeWitt Talmage delivered from the pulpit an argument against workingmen occupying pews in fashionable churches, Mark Twain compared him with the early disciples of Christ.

"They healed the very beggars, and held intercourse with people of a villainous odor every day. If the subject of these remarks had been chosen among the original twelve apostles he would not have associated with the rest, because he could not have stood the fishy smell of some of his comrades who came from around the Sea of Galilee. He would have resigned his commission with some such remarks as he makes in the extract quoted above: 'Master, if thou art going to kill the church thus with bad smells, I will have nothing to do with this work of evangelization.' He is a disciple, and makes that remark to the Master: the only difference is that he makes it in the nineteenth instead of the first century."5

His hatred of intolerance is shown in "Innocents Abroad".

"Some seventeen or eighteen centuries ago, the ignorant men of Rome were wont to put Christians in the arena of the Coliseum yonder, and turn the wild beasts in upon them for a show. It was for a lesson as well. It was to teach the people to abhor and fear the new doctrine the followers of Christ were teaching. The beasts tore the victims limb from limb and made poor mangled corpses of them in the twinkling of an eye. But when the Christians came into power, when the holy Mother Church became mistress of the barbarians, she taught them the error of their ways by no such means. No, she put them in this pleasant Inquisition and pointed to the Blessed Redeemer, who was so gentle and so merciful toward all men, and they urged the barbarians to love him, and they did all they could to persuade them to love and honor him—first by twisting their thumbs out of joint with a screw, then by nipping their flesh with pincers—red-hot ones, because they are the most comfortable ones in cold weather; then by skinning them alive a little, and finally by roasting them in public. They always convinced those barbarians. The true religion, properly administered, as the good Mother Church used to administer it, is very, very soothing. It is wonderfully persuasive, also. There is a great difference between feeding parties to wild beasts and stirring up their finer feelings in an Inquisition. One is the system of degraded barbarians, the other of enlightened, civilized people. It is a great pity the playful Inquisition is no more."

2. Tolerance

Among Mark Twain's "Notes" are found these words,

"I would not interfere with anyone's religion, either to strengthen it or to weaken it. I am not able to believe one's religion can affect his hereafter one way or the other, no matter what that religion may be. But it may easily be a great comfort to him in this life—hence it is a valuable

possession to him."\(^7\)

He preaches a tolerance which is more than tolerance.

"So much blood has been shed by the Church because of an omission from the Gospel: 'Ye shall be indifferent as to what your neighbor's religion is.' Not merely tolerant of it, but indifferent to it. Divinity is claimed for many religions; but no religion is great enough or divine enough to add that new law to its code."\(^8\)

Whenever the act of an individual or a group was praiseworthy, Mark Twain did not stint his praise, no matter what the creed in question was. A few examples follow. He commends the Parsees.

"The Parsees build and endow hospitals for both men and animals; and they and their womankind keep an open purse for all great and good objects. They are a political force, and a valued support to the government. They have a pure and lofty religion, and they preserve it in its integrity and order their lives by it."\(^9\)

An old Hindu widow who insisted on suttee without showing any signs of pain gained both his respect and his reverence.

"It is fine and beautiful. It compels one's reverence and respect—no, has it freely, and without compulsion. We see how the custom, once started, could continue, for the soul of it is that stupendous power, faith; faith brought to the pitch of effectiveness by the cumulative force of example and long use and custom."\(^10\)

He honors the missionaries in Hawaii.

"Missionaries have made honest men out of the

\(^8\) Ibid., p. 1537.
\(^9\) Clemens, S. L. *Following The Equator*, p. 378.
\(^10\) Ibid., p. 456.
nation of thieves; instituted marriage; created homes; lifted woman to the same rights and privileges enjoyed elsewhere; abolished infanticide; abolished intemperance; diminished licentiousness; given equal laws whereby the chief's power of life and death over his subjects is taken away; in a great measure abolished idolatry; have well-educated the people."

He gives credit to the Salvation Army:

"The doctor tells me of several old drunkards, one spiritless loafer, and several far-gone moral wrecks who have been reclaimed by the Salvation Army, and have remained staunch and hard workers these two years. Wherever one goes, these testimonials to the Army's efficiency are forthcoming."12

Preachers were among his most intimate friends. He praises the calling:

"It is the loftiest of all human vocations—medicine and surgery. Relief from physical pain, physical distress. Next comes the pulpit, which solaces mental distress; soothes the sorrows of the soul. These two are the great professions, the noble professions."13

In spite of his hatred of priestcraft, when credit is due he gives it.

"I have heard of many things that redound to the credit of the priesthood, but the most notable matter that occurs to me now is the devotion one of the mendicant orders showed during the prevalence of the cholera last year. I speak of the Dominican Friars. When the cholera was raging in Naples, when the people were dying by hundreds and hundreds every day....these men banded themselves together and went about nursing the sick and burying the dead. Their noble efforts cost many of them their lives."14

Another:

11. Clemens, S. L. Mark Twain's Notebook, p. 28.
"And this young establishment (Trappist Monastery in Africa) has set up eleven branches in South Africa, and in them they are christianizing and educating and teaching wage-yielding mechanical trades to 1200 boys and girls."  

3. Philanthropy

With speeches, with money, and with his pen, Mark Twain was ready to aid both individuals and causes. Examples are given.

Speeches: He acted as a chairman at the first meeting of the association which was formed in the interest of the adult blind, and in a letter from Helen Keller, she called him, "our newest ambassador to the blind."  

Dorothy Quick, one of the many little girls whose friendship he cultivated, remembers a speech he made on a boat returning from Bermuda.

"He said that he would devote much of his life to the subject of aiding the blind, and the passengers promised their aid in anything he undertook. It was like Mr. Clemens to take every opportunity of helping a cause in which he was interested."  

Money:

"He did not care much for money in itself, but he luxuriated in the lavish use of it, and he was as generous with it as ever a man was. He liked giving it, but he commonly wearied of giving it himself, and wherever he lived he established an almoner, whom he fully trusted to keep his left hand ignorant of what his right hand was doing."

With his pen:

15. Clemens, S. L. Following The Equator, p. 652.
"The first number of the 'Memoranda' (a department in the Galaxy Magazine) was fairly representative of those that followed it. 'Facts in the Case of the Great Beef Contract'... was its initial contribution. Besides the Beef Contract, there was a tribute to George Wakeman, a well-known journalist of those days; a stricture on the Rev. T. DeWitt Talmage,... a presentation of the Chinese situation in San Francisco, depicting the cruel treatment of the Celestial immigrant; a burlesque of the Sunday-school, 'good little boy' story, and several shorter skits and anecdotes, ten pages in all."19

"He wrote 'King Leopold's Soliloquy,' the reflections of the fiendish sovereign who had maimed and slaughtered fifteen millions of African subjects in his greed—gentle, harmless blacks—men, women, and little children whom he had butchered and mutilated in his Congo rubber-fields. Seldom in the history of the world have there been such atrocious practices as those of King Leopold in the Congo and Clemens spared nothing in his picture of them.... The article was regarded as not quite suitable for magazine publication, and it was given to the Congo Reform Association, and issued as a booklet for distribution, with no return to the author, who would gladly have written a hundred times as much if he could have saved that unhappy race and have sent Leopold to the electric chair.... The book was marked $0.25, but the returns from such as were sold went to the cause. Thousands of them were distributed free."20

4. Oppression and War

Mark Twain hated governmental and religious oppression intensely:

"There was never a throne which did not represent a crime."21

"The kingly office is entitled to no respect. It was originally procured by the highwayman's method; it remains a perpetuated crime. It is no more

entitled to respect than the flag of a pirate.... In its escutcheon should always be the skull and crossbones." 22

Another note:

"Instead of giving the people decent wages, church and gentry and nobility made them work for nothing, pauperized them, then fed them with alms and persuaded themselves that alms-giving was the holiest work of God, and the giver was sure to go to heaven, whereas one good wage-earner was worth a million of them to the state." 23

From the "Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court":

"It being my conviction that an Established Church is an established crime, an established slave-pen, I had no scruple, but was willing to assail it in any way or with any weapon that promised to hurt it." 24

"It was pitiful... to listen to their humble outpourings of loyalty toward their king and church and nobility: as if they had any more occasion to love and honor king and church and noble than a slave has to love and honor the lash or a dog has to love and honor the stranger that kicks him!... The truth was, the nation as a body was in the world for one object, and one only; to grovel before king and Church and noble; to slave for them, sweat blood for them, starve that they might be fed, work that they might play, drink misery to the dregs that they might be happy, go naked that they might wear silks and jewels, pay taxes that they might be spared from paying them, be familiar all their lives with the degrading language and postures of adulation that they might walk in pride and think themselves gods of this world.... There you see the band of that awful power, the Roman Catholic Church. In two or three little centuries it had converted a nation of men to a nation of worms.... But then the Church came to the front, with an axe to grind; and she was wise, subtle,

23. Ibid., p. 200.
and knew more than one way to skin a cat—or a nation; she invented 'divine right of kings', and propped it all around, brick by brick, with the Beatitudes—wrenching them from their good purpose to make them fortify an evil one; she preached (to the commoner) humility, obedience to superiors, the beauty of self-sacrifice; she preached (to the commoner) meekness under insult; preached (still to the commoner, always to the commoner) patience, meanness of spirit, non-resistance under oppression; and she introduced heritable ranks and aristocracies, and taught all the Christian populations of the earth to bow down to them and worship them."

In this book Mark Twain was doing more than championing a worn-out cause. He was trying to teach the real meaning of "loyalty".

"Loyalty is a word which has worked vast harm; for it has been made to trick men into being "loyal" to a thousand iniquities, whereas the true loyalty should have been to themselves—in which case there would have ensued a rebellion, and the throwing off of that deceptive yoke."26

The following note appears in his Notebook.

"Note for Yankee.

"The first thing I want to teach is disloyalty, till they get used to disusing that word loyalty as representing a virtue. This will beget independence—which is loyalty to one's best self and principles, and this is often disloyalty to the general idols and fetishes."27

He approved of rebellion.

"The first gospel of all monarchies should be Rebellion; the second should be Rebellion; and the third and all gospels and the only gospel in any monarchy should be Rebellion against Church and State."28

27. Ibid.
28. Ibid., p. 217.
His sympathies were with the impending Russian Revolution; to Tchaykoffsky he wrote:

"My sympathies are with the Russian revolution, of course. It goes without saying. I hope it will succeed, and now that I have talked with you I take heart to believe it will. Government by falsified promises, by lies, by treachery, and by the butcher knife, for the aggrandizement of a single family and its idle and vicious kin has been borne quite long enough in Russia, I should think."

In the Boxer rebellion his sympathies were with the Chinese.

"Why should not China be free from the foreigners, who are only making trouble on her soil? If they would only all go home, what a pleasant place China would be for the Chinese! We do not allow Chinamen to come here, and I say in all seriousness that it would be a graceful thing to let China decide who shall go there."

He denounced Cecil Rhodes.

"All of us, for instance, have read somewhat of the conditions in South Africa...but I doubt if we have found the case anywhere so well stated as in the closing chapter of Mark Twain's 'Following The Equator'.

He felt that we had no right to take the Philippines and classed General Funston with criminals.

"But we are sending three regiments in a hurry from the Philippines to China, under the generalship of Funston, the man who captured Aguinaldo by methods which would disgrace the lowest blatherskite that is doing time in any penitentiary."

Wars for any other purpose than rebellion were decried

30. Clemens, S. L. Mark Twain's Speeches, p. 145.
in scathing words. He tells of his own brief experience with a group of raw recruits in the Civil War—how they killed a man, and how he reacted to the man's death.

"He muttered and mumbled like a dreamer in his sleep about his wife and his child; and I thought with a new despair, 'This thing that I have done does not end with him; it falls upon them too, and they never did me any harm, any more than he.'

"In a little while the man was dead; killed in fair and legitimate war; killed in a battle as you may say; and yet he was as sincerely mourned by the opposing force as if he had been their brother...

"He was a stranger in the country; that was all we ever found out about him. The thought of him got to preying upon me every night; I could not get rid of it. I could not drive it away, the taking of that unoffending life seemed such a wanton thing. And it seemed an epitome of war; that all war must be just that—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."

Patriotism and Christianity he believed incompatible.

"A man can be a Christian or a patriot, but he can't legally be a Christian and a patriot—except in the usual way; one of the two with the mouth, the other with the heart. The spirit of Christianity proclaims the brotherhood of the race and the meaning of that strong word has not been left to guess-work, but made tremendously definite—the Christian must forgive his brother all crimes he can imagine and commit, and all insults he can conceive and utter—forgive these injuries how many times?—seventy times seven—another way of saying there shall be no limit to the forgiveness. That is the spirit and the law of Christianity. Well—patriotism has its law. And it is also a perfectly definite one, there are no vaguenesses about it. It commands that the brother

over the border shall be sharply watched and brought to book every time he does us a hurt or offends us with an insult. Word it as softly as you please, the spirit of patriotism is the spirit of the dog and the wolf. The moment there is a misunderstanding about a boundary line or a hamper of fish or some other squalid matter, see patriotism arise, and hear him split the universe with his war-whoop. The spirit of patriotism being in its nature jealous and selfish, is just in man's line, it comes natural to him—he can line up to all its requirements to the letter; but the spirit of Christianity is not in its entirety possible to him."

From "The Mysterious Stranger" come these lines.

"There has never been a just one, never an honorable one—on the part of the instigator of the war. I can see a million years ahead, and this rule will never change in so many as half a dozen instances.

"The loud little handful—as usual—will shout for war. The pulpit will, warily and cautiously, object—at first; the great, big dull bulk of the nation will rub its sleepy eyes and try to make out why there should be a war, and will say, earnestly and indignantly, 'It is unjust and dishonorable, and there is no necessity for it.'

"Then the handful will shout louder, a few fair men on the other side will argue and reason against the war with speech and pen, and at first will have a hearing and be applauded; but it will not last long; those others will outshout them, and presently the anti-war audiences will thin out and lose popularity.

"Before long you will see this curious thing: the speakers stoned from the platform and free speech strangled by hordes of furious men who in their secret hearts are still at one with those stoned speakers—as earlier—but do not dare to say so.

"And now the whole nation—pulpit and all—will take up the war cry, and shout itself hoarse,

34. Clemens, S. L. Mark Twain's Notebook, pp. 332-33.
and mob any honest man who ventures to open his mouth; and presently, such mouths will cease to open.

"Next the statesmen will invent cheap lies, putting the blame upon the nation that is attacked, and every man will be glad of those conscience-soothing falsities, and will diligently study them, and refuse to examine any refutation of them; and thus he will by and by convince himself that the war is just; and will thank God for the better sleep he enjoys after this process of grotesque self-deception."35

More ironical yet is the "War Prayer"

"O Lord Our God, help us to tear their soldiers to bloody shreds with our shells; help us to cover their smiling field with the pale forms of their patriot dead; help us to drown the thunder of their guns with the wounded, writhing in pain; help us to lay waste their humble homes with a hurricane of fire; help us to wring the hearts of their unoffending widows with unavailing grief; help us to turn them out roofless with their little children to wander unfriended through wastes of their desolated land in rags and hunger and thirst, sport of the sun flames of summer and the icy winds of winter, broken in spirit, worn with travail, imploring Thee for the refuge of the grave and denied it—for our sakes, who adore thee, Lord, blast their hopes, blight their lives, protract their bitter pilgrimage, make heavy their steps, water their way with their tears, stain the white snow with the blood of their wounded feet. We ask of One who is the spirit of love and who is the ever faithful refuge and friend of all that are sore beset, and seek His aid with humble and contrite hearts. Grant our prayer, O Lord, and Thine shall be the praise and honor and glory, now and ever. Amen."36

35. Clemens, S. L. The Mysterious Stranger and Other Stories, pp. 119, 120.
CHAPTER IV

METHOD

In his earlier writings, satire and irony permeated with humor, with ludicrous incongruities, were the chief weapons used by Mark Twain in bringing the ideas of conventional theology into question. A good illustration of this type of writing is "Captain Stormfield's Visit To Heaven" in which the narrow traditional idea of heaven is satirized with comic effect.

But as Mark Twain grew older, when he turned to the religious question, he used "poison gas"; his satire became bitter and his irony tragic. "The Mysterious Stranger" written in the last years of his life is the best example of this type of writing. It is an allegory, showing the futility of life, ironical and satirical but absolutely unrelieved by any humor.

In denouncing injustice or wrongs, Mark Twain never minced words. His condemnations are sarcastically biting—strong philippics pouring out his wrath.

1. Satire

Satirical passages of the humorous type ridiculing religion are very numerous in Mark Twain's writings. In "Innocents Abroad", for example, he ridicules the relic idea.
"We find a piece of the true cross in every old church we go into, and some of the nails that held it together. I would not like to be positive, but I think we have seen as much as a keg of these nails."1

He saw too many of the handkerchiefs with which St. Veronica had wiped the Saviour's face.

"The strangest thing about the incident that has made her name so famous is, that when she wiped the perspiration away, the print of the Saviour's face remained upon the handkerchief, a perfect portrait, and so remains unto this day. We knew this was true because we saw the handkerchief in a cathedral in Paris, in another in Spain, and in two others in Italy."2

He lets Huck express his opinion of praying:

"She told me to pray every day, and whatever I asked for I would get it. But it warn't so. I tried it. Once I got a fish-line, but no hooks. It warn't any good to me without hooks.... I says to myself, if a body can get anything they pray for, why don't Deacon Winn get back the money he lost on pork? Why can't the widow get back her silver snuff-box that was stole? Why can't Miss Watson fat up?. No, says I to myself, there ain't nothing in it."3

He also lets Huck describe a camp-meeting:

"The first shed we come to the preacher was lining out a hymn. He lined out two lines, everybody sung it, and it was kind of grand to hear it, there was so many of them and they done it in such a rousing way; then he lined out two more for them to sing—and so on. The people woke up more and more, and sung louder and louder; and towards the end some begun to groan, and some begun to shout. Then the preacher begun to preach, and begun in earnest, too; and went weaving first to one side of the platform and then to the other, and then a-leaning down over the front of it, with his arms

2. Ibid., p. 412.
3. Clemens, S. L. Huckleberry Finn, p. 15.
and body going all the time, and shouting his words with all his might; and every now and then he would hold up his Bible, and spread it open, and kind of pass it around this way and that, shouting, 'It's the brazen serpent in the wilderness! Look upon it and live!' And the people would shout out, 'Glory-A-a-men!' And so he went on, and the people groaning and crying and saying amen:

"'Oh, come to the mourner's bench! come, black with sin! (amen) come, sick and sore! (amen) come, lame, and halt, and blind! (Amen!) come, pore and needy, sunk in shame! (a-a-men!) come, all that's worn and soiled and suffering!—come with a broken spirit! come with a contrite heart! come in your rags and sin and dirt! the waters that cleanse is free, and the door of heaven stands open—oh, enter in and be at rest! (a-a-men! glory, glory, hallelujah!)

"And so on. You couldn't make out what the preacher said any more, on account of the shouting and crying. Folks got up everywheres in the crowd, and worked their way by main strength to the mourners' bench, with the tears running down their faces; and when all the mourners had got up there to the front benches in a crowd, they sung and shouted and flung themselves down on a straw, just crazy and wild."4

From "Adam's Soliloquy:"

"They collected and stowed a good share of the, really useful animals; and also, when Noah was not watching, a multitude of useless ones, such as flies, mosquitoes, snakes, and so on, but they did certainly leave ashore a good many creatures which might possibly have had value some time or other.... (Noah says to Adam) 'As it was we lost many choice animals... for they wouldn't drink the water after the salt sea water got mixed with the fresh. But we never lost a locust, nor a grasshopper, nor a weevil, nor a rat, nor a cholera germ, nor any of that sort of beings. On the whole, I think we did very well. We were shepherds and farmers; we had never been to sea before; and we were ignorant of naval matters.'5

5. Clemens, S. L. "Adam's Soliloquy," The Complete Short Stories and Famous Essays of Mark Twain, p. 858.
Satire of a more serious nature is the following:

"Concerning man... that he was not made for any useful purpose, for the reason that he hasn't served any; that he was most likely not even made intentionally; and that his working himself up out of the oyster bed to his present position was probably matter of surprise and regret to the Creator... His history, in all climes, all ages, and all circumstances, furnishes oceans and continents of proof that of all the creatures that were made he is the most detestable. Of the entire brood he is the only one—the solitary one that possesses malice.... That one thing puts him below the rats, the grubs, the trichinae. He is the only creature that inflicts pain for sport, knowing it to be pain.... Also—in all the lot he is the only creature that has a dirty mind."6

Another passage, seriously satirical, follows:

"Thanksgiving Day—a function that originated in New England two or three centuries ago when those people recognized that they really had something to be thankful for—annually, not oftener—if they had succeeded in exterminating their neighbors, the Indians, during the previous twelve months instead of getting exterminated by their neighbors, the Indians. Thanksgiving Day became a habit, for the reason that in the course of time, as the years drifted on, it was perceived that the exterminating had ceased to be mutual and was all on the white man's side, consequently on the Lord's side; hence it was proper to thank the Lord for it and extend the usual annual compliments. The original reason for a Thanksgiving Day has long ceased to exist—the Indians have long ago been comprehensively and satisfactorily exterminated and the account closed with the Lord, with the thanks due. But, from old habit, Thanksgiving Day has re­mained with us, and every year the President of the U. S. and the Governor of all the several states and territories set themselves the task, every November, to hunt up something to be thankful for, and then they put those thanks into a few crisp and reverent phrases, in the form of a proclamation, and this is read from all the pulpits in the land.

the national conscience is wiped clean with one
swipe, and sin is resumed at the old stand."

2. Irony

In Tom Sawyer’s reaction to a "revival" we get some
humorous irony.

"He was very ill, he was interested in nothing.
When he got upon his feet at last and moved feebly
down town, a melancholy change had come over every­
thing and every creature. There had been a 'revival',
and everybody had 'got religion', not only the
adults but even the boys and girls. Tom went about,
hoping against hope for the sight of one blessed
sinful face, but disappointment crossed him every­
where. He found Joe Harper studying a Testament,
and turned sadly away from the depressing spectacle.
He sought Ben Rogers, and found him visiting the
poor with a basket of tracts. He hunted up Jim
Holtis, who called his attention to the precious
blessing of his late measles as a warning. Every
boy he encountered added another ton to his depres­
sion, and when, in desperation, he flew at last to
the bosom of Huckleberry Finn and was received with
a Scriptural quotation, his heart broke and he
crept home and to bed realizing that he alone of all
that town was lost, forever and forever."

The aphorisms of "Pudd'inhead Wilson's Calendar" are
mainly ironical.

"Adam was human—this explains it all. He did
not want the apple for the apple’s sake, he wanted
it only because it was forbidden. The mistake was
in not forbidding the serpent; then he would have
eaten the serpent."

"When in doubt, tell the truth."

"When I reflect upon the number of disagreeable
people who I know have gone to a better world, I

10. Clemens, S. L. Following The Equator, p. 35.
am moved to lead a different life."\(^1^1\)

The following passages are also good examples of the way Mark Twain used irony humorously.

"And it had swimming pools, too, which were forbidden to us and therefore much frequented by us. For we were little Christian children and had early been taught the value of forbidden fruit."\(^1^2\)

He ridiculed the evidences of authority given for the Mormon Bible.

"Some people have to have a world of evidence before they can come anywhere in the neighborhood of believing anything; but for me, when a man tells me that he has 'seen the engravings which are upon the plates, and not only that, but an angel was there at the time, and saw him see them, and probably took his receipt for it, I am very far on the road to conviction no matter whether I ever heard of that man before or not, and even if I do not know the name of the angel, or his nationality either,... and when I am on the road to conviction, and eight men, be they grammatical or otherwise, come forward and tell me that they have not only seen those plates but 'hefted' them, I am convinced."\(^1^3\)

Besides numerous passages of humorous irony in his works, there are a great many where the irony is completely unrelieved by humor. The stories, "The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg," and "Was It Heaven--or Hell?", are entirely ironical, but there is no laughter in them. In the following passage from "The Mysterious Stranger" the irony is not only serious, but bitter.

11. Clemens, S. L. Pudd'nhead Wilson, p. 123.
"You perceive... you have made continual progress. Cain did his murder with a club; the Hebrews did their murders with javelins and swords; the Greeks and Romans added protective armor and the fine arts of military organization and generalship; the Christian has added guns and gunpowder; a few centuries from now he will have so greatly improved the deadly effectiveness of his weapons of slaughter that all men will confess that without Christian civilization war must have remained a poor and trifling thing to the end of time.... They all did their best—to kill being the chiefest ambition of the human race and the earliest incident in history—but only the Christian civilization has scored a triumph to be proud of."14

3. Philippics

When his anger was aroused he used strong language.

Most of these outbursts appeared in magazine articles, but we find them also scattered throughout his works. The treatment of the Chinese in California called forth writing of this indignant type, a sample of which appeared in "Roughing It".

"No Californian gentleman or lady ever abuses or oppresses a Chinaman, under any circumstances, an explanation that seems to be much needed in the East. Only the scum of the population do it—they and their children; they, and naturally and consistently, the policemen and politicians, likewise, for these are the dust-licking pimps and slaves of the scum, there as well as elsewhere in America."15

Most of these philippics appeared in magazine articles. In one of them, "A Defense of General Funston," Mark Twain indignantly and sarcastically lampooned General Funston,

the man who had captured the Filipino, Aguinaldo, by extremely treacherous methods. I quote a passage.

"Is Funston to blame? I think not. He did not make his own disposition. It was born with him. It chose his ideals for him, he did not choose them. It chose the kind of society it liked, the kind of comrades it preferred, and imposed them upon him, rejecting the other kinds; he could not help this;... but it, and it only, was to blame, not Funston; its it took as naturally to moral slag as Washington's took to moral gold, but only its it was to blame, not Funston. Its moral sense, if it had any, was color-blind, but this was no fault of Funston's, and he is not chargeable with the results; it had a native predilection for unsavory conduct, but it would be in the last degree unfair to hold Funston to blame for the outcome of his infirmity; as clearly unfair as it would be to blame him because his conscience leaked out through one of his pores when he was little—a thing which he could not help, and he couldn't have raised it, anyway."16

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In this study of the religion of Mark Twain I have tried to show that he made actual contributions to modern religious thought by shifting the emphasis from the relation of man to God, to the relation of man to man. In doing this he made two important contributions:—first, he showed the absurdity of the dogmas of Christianity, and reviled hypocrisy;—second, he taught by his life and through his works that love for one’s neighbor is the highest form of religion. He fought for tolerance and justice; he practiced honesty, kindness and generosity.

I have tried to show that in spite of his iconoclastic attitude toward outworn beliefs, he was very tolerant toward the religion of others and, far from being irreverent, he was reverent to the extent that he had a deep respect for the holy things of people of other nations.

I have tried to show that he was not only a religious, reverent man, but that his religion was of that type which transcends creeds and doctrines, expressing itself in a humanitarian desire to help the oppressed, for he was "moved with compassion for the multitude".
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43. Washington, Booker T.  
    "Tributes to Mark Twain." 
44. Woolf, S. J.
"Painting The Portrait of Mark Twain."
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