

Humorous.

WHAT IS THE USE?

What is the use of removing your hat, If you do not intend to tarry? What is the use of your wooing a maid, If you never intend to marry?

What's the use of your buying a coat, If you never intend to wear it? What is the use of a dwelling for two, If you never intend to share it?

What's the use of your buying a book, If you never intend to read it? And where's the use of a cradle to rock, If you never intend to need it?

A Burlesque Autobiography.

BY MARK TWAIN

Two or three persons, having at different times intimated that if I would write an autobiography they would read it when they got leisure, I yield at last to this frenzied public demand, and herewith tender my history.

Ours is a noble old house, and stretches a long way back into antiquity. The earliest ancestor the Twains have any record of was a friend of the family by the name of Higgins. This was in the eleventh century, when our people were living in Aberdeen, county of Cork, England. Why it is that our long line has ever since borne the maternal name (except when one of them now and then took a playful revenge in an alias to avert foolishness), instead of Higgins, is a mystery which none of us has ever felt much desire to stir. It is a kind of a vague, pretty romance, and we leave it alone. All the old families do that way.

Arthur Twain was a man of considerable note—a solicitor on the highway in William Rufus' time. At about the age of thirty he went to one of those fine old English places of resort called Newgate, to see about something, and never returned again. While there he died suddenly.

Augustus Twain seems to have made something of a stir about the year 1160. He was as full of fun as he could be, and used to take his old sabre and sharpen it up, and get in a convenient place on a dark night, and stick it through people as they went by to see them jump. He was born a humorist. But he got to going too far with it; and the first time he was found stripping one of these parties the authorities removed one end of him and put it up on a high place on Temple Bar, where it could contemplate the people and have a good time. He never liked any situation so much, or stuck to it so long.

Then for the next two hundred years the family tree shows a succession of soldiers—noble, big spirited fellows who always went into battle singing, right behind the army, and always went out a whooping, right ahead of it.

This is a scathing rebuke to old dead Froissart's poor witticism that our family tree never had but one limb to it, and that one stuck out at right angles and bore fruit winter and summer.

Early in the fifteenth century we had Beau Twain, called the "Scholar." He wrote a beautiful, beautiful hand. And he could imitate anybody's hand so closely that it was enough to make a person laugh his head off to see it. He had infinite sport with his talent. But by and by he took a contract to break stone for a road and the roughness of the work spoiled his hand. Still he enjoyed life all the time he was in the stone business, which, with inconsiderable intervals, was some forty-two years. During all those long years he gave such satisfaction that he never was through with a contract till the government gave him another. He was a perfect pet. And he was always a favorite with his fellow artists, and was a conspicuous member of their benevolent secret society called the Chain Gang. He always wore his hair short, had a preference for striped clothes and died lamented by the government. He was a sore loss to his country. For he was so regular.

Some years later we have the illustrious John Morgan Twain. He came over to this country with Columbus in 1492, as a passenger. He appears to have been of a crusty, uncomfortable disposition. He complained of the food all the way over, and was always threatening to go ashore unless there was a change. He wanted fresh shad. Hardly a day passed over his head that he did not go idling about the ship with his nose in the air, sneering about the commander and saying he did not believe Columbus knew where he was going to or had ever been before. The memorable cry of "Land, ho!" thrilled every heart in the ship but his. He gazed awhile through a piece of smoked glass at the pencilled line lying on the distant water and then said: "Land be-hanged, its a raft!"

When this questionable passenger came on board the ship, he brought nothing with him but an old newspaper containing a handkerchief marked "B. G.," one cotton sock marked "L. W. C.," one woolen one marked "D. F.," and a night shirt marked "O. M. R.," and yet during the voyage he worried more in regard to his trunk, and gave himself more airs about it, than all the rest of the passengers put together. If the ship was "down by the head," and would not steer, he would go and move his trunk farther aft, and then watch the effect. If the ship was "by the stern," he would suggest to Columbus to detail some men to "shift that baggage." In storms he had to be gagged because his wallings about his "trunk" made it impossible for the men to hear the orders. The man does not appear to have been openly charged with any gravely unbecoming thing but it is noted in a ship's log as a "curious circumstance," that albeit he brought on board the ship in a newspaper he took it ashore in four trunks, a queensware crate and a couple of champagne baskets. But when he came back insinuating in an insolent, swaggering way that some of his things were missing, and was going to search the other passengers it was too much and they threw him overboard.

They watched long and wonderingly for him to come up, but not even a bubble rose on the quietly ebbing tide. But while every one was most absorbed in gazing over the side and the interest was momentarily increasing, it was observed with consternation that the vessel was adrift, and the anchor cable hanging limp from the bow. Then in the ship's dimmed and ancient log we find this quaint note:—"In time it was discovered yt ye trouble-some passenger hadde gonne downe and got ye anchor, tooke ye same and solde it to ye dan savages from ye interior, saying yt he hadde founde it, ye sonne of a gun!"

Yet this ancestor had good and noble instincts, and it is with pride that we call to mind the fact that he was the first white person who ever interested himself in the work of elevating and civilizing our Indians. He built a commodious jail and put up a gallows, and to his dying day he claimed with satisfaction that he had had a more restraining and elevating influence on the Indians than any other reformer that ever labored among them. At this point the chronicle becomes less frank and chatty and closes abruptly by saying that the old voyager went to see his gallows perform on the first white man ever hanged in America, and while there received injuries which terminated in his death.

The great grandson of the "Reformer," flourished in sixteen hundred and something, and was known in our annals as "the Old Admirable," though in history he had other titles. He was long in command of fleets of swift vessels, well armed and manned and did great service in hurrying up merchantmen. Vessels which he followed and kept his eagle eye on always made good fair time across the ocean. But it a ship still loitered in spite of all he could do his indignation would grow till he could contain himself no longer—and then he would take that ship home where he lived and keep it there carefully, expecting the owners to come for it, but they never did. And he would try to get the jolliness and sloth out of the sailors of that ship by compelling them to take invigorating exercise and a bath. All the pupils liked it. At any rate they never found any fault with it after trying it. When the owners were late coming for their ship, the admiral always burned them, so that the insurance money should not be lost.

At last this fine old tar was cut down in the fullness of his years and honors. And to her dying day his poor heart broken widow believed that if he had been cut down fifteen minutes sooner he might have been resuscitated.

Charles Henry Twain lived in the latter part of the seventeenth century and was a zealous and distinguished missionary. He converted sixteen thousand South Islanders, and taught them that a dog tooth necklace and a pair of spectacles were not enough clothing to come to divine service in. His poor flock loved him very, very dearly; and when his funeral was over they got up in a body (and came out of the restaurant) with tears in their eyes, and saying one to another that he was a good tender missionary and they wished they had more of him.

I will remark here, in passing, that certain ancestors of mine are so thoroughly well-known in history by their aliases, that I have not felt it worth while to dwell upon them, or even mention them in the order of their birth. Among these may be mentioned Richard Brinsley Twain, alias Guy Fawkes; John Wentworth Twain, alias Sixteenstring Jack; William Hogarth Twain, alias Jack Sheppard; Ananias Twain, alias Baron Munchausen; John George Twain, alias Captain Kydd; and then there are George Francis Train, Tom Pepper, Nebuchadnezzar and Balaam's Ass—they all belong to our family, but to a branch of it somewhat distantly removed from the honorable direct line—in fact, a collateral branch whose members chiefly differ from the ancient stock in that, in order to acquire the notoriety we have always yearned and hungered for, they have got into a low way of going to jail instead of getting hanged.

It is not well when writing an autobiography to follow your ancestry down too close to your own time—it is safest to speak only vaguely of your great-grandfather, and then skip from there to yourself, which I now do.

I was born without teeth—and there Richard III. had the advantage of me; but I was born without a humpback, likewise, and there I had the advantage of him. My parents were neither poor nor conspicuously honest.

But now a thought occurs to me. My own history would really seem so tame contrasted with that of my ancestors, that it is simply wisdom to leave it un-written till I am hung—. If some other biographies I have read had stopped with the ancestry until a like event occurred, it would seem to have been a felicitous thing for the reading public. How does it strike you?

"What are you about?" inquired a lunatic of a cook, who was industriously picking the feathers from the fowl. "Dressing chickens," answered the cook. "I should call that undressing," replied the crazy fellow. The cook looked reflective.

Mrs. Podgers detected her husband burying an old sauceman in the back yard, the other morning, and asked him what he was about. "Nothing much," returned Podgers, "only it's high time we were getting ready to send some Revolutionary relics to the Centennial."

A most remarkable illustration has just been furnished of the overwhelming force of genuine patriotism. Twenty newly married couples stopped at a Philadelphia hotel one night last week, and nineteen of the brides sat up until after 12 o'clock reading Centennial tracts.

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