



Mark Twain and Human Nature (MARK TWAIN & HIS CIRCLE)

Tom Quirk

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Mark Twain once claimed that he could read human character as well as he could read the Mississippi River, and he studied his fellow humans with the same devoted attention. In both his fiction and his nonfiction, he was disposed to dramatize how the human creature acts in a given environment--and to understand why. Now one of America's preeminent Twain scholars takes a closer look at this icon's abiding interest in his fellow creatures. In seeking to account for how Twain might have reasonably believed the things he said he believed, Tom Quirk has interwoven the author's inner life with his writings to produce a meditation on how Twain's understanding of human nature evolved and deepened, and to show that this was one of the central preoccupations of his life. Quirk charts the ways in which this humorist and occasional philosopher contemplated the subject of human nature from early adulthood until the end of his life, revealing how his outlook changed over the years. His travels, his readings in history and science, his political and social commitments, and his own pragmatic testing of human nature in his writing contributed to Twain's mature view of his kind. Quirk establishes the social and scientific contexts that clarify Twain's thinking, and he considers not only Twain's stated intentions about his purposes in his published works but also his ad hoc remarks about the human condition. Viewing both major and minor works through the lens of Twain's shifting attitude, Quirk provides refreshing new perspectives on the master's oeuvre. He offers a detailed look at the travel writings, including *The Innocents Abroad* and *Following the Equator*, and the novels, including *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, as well as an important review of works from Twain's last decade, including fantasies centering on man's insignificance in *Creation*, works preoccupied with isolation--notably *No. 44*, *The Mysterious Stranger* and *Eve's Diary*--and polemical writings such as *What Is Man?* Comprising the well-seasoned reflections of a mature scholar, this persuasive and eminently readable study comes to terms with the life-shaping ideas and attitudes of one of America's best-loved writers. *Mark Twain and Human Nature* offers readers a better understanding of Twain's intellect as it enriches our understanding of his craft and his ineluctable humor.

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