

ROYALTY ON THE MISSISSIPPI: AS CHRONICLED BY HUCKLEBERRY FINN.

BY MARK TWAIN.

(CONTINUED.)

"Because Mary Jane'll be in mourning from this out; and first you know the nigger that does up the rooms will get an order to box those duds up and put 'em away; and do you reckon a nigger can run across money and not borrow some of it?"

"Your head's level agin, Duke," says the king; and he come a fumbling under the curtain two or three foot from where I was. I stunk tight to the wall, and kept mighty still, though quivery; and I wondered what them fellows would say to me if they catched me; and I tried to think what I'd better do if they did catch me. But the king he got the bag before I could think more than about a half a thought, and he never suspicioned I was around. They took and shoved the bag through a rip in the straw tick that was under the feather bed, and crammed it in a foot or two amongst the straw, and said it was all right now, because a nigger only makes up a rip in the feather bed, and don't turn over the straw tick only about twice a year. I had it out of there before they was half-way down stairs. I groped along up to my cubby, and hid it there till I could get a chance to do better. I judged I better hide it outside of the house somewhere, because if they missed it they would give the house a good ransacking. I knowed that very well. Then I turned in, with my clothes all on; but I couldn't 'a' gone to sleep, if I'd 'a' wanted to, I was in such a hurry to get through with the business. By and by I heard the king and the duke come up; so I rolled off of my pallet and laid with my chin at the top of my ladder and waited to see if anything was going to happen. But nothing did.

So I held on till all the late sounds had quit and the early ones hadn't begun yet; and then I slipped down the ladder.

I crept to their doors and listened; they was snoring, so I tiptoed along, and got down stairs all right. There warn't a sound anywhere. I peeped through a crack of the dining-room door, and see the men that was watching the corpse all sound asleep on their chairs. The door was open into the parlor, where the corpse was laying, and there was a candle in both rooms. I passed along, and the parlor door was open, but I see there warn't nobody in there but the remainders of Peter; so I shoved on by; but the front door was locked, and the key wasn't there. Just then I heard somebody coming down the stairs back behind me. I run in the parlor, and took a swift look around, and the only place I see to hide the bag was in the coffin. I tucked the money-bag in under the lid, and then I run back across the room and in behind the door.

The person coming was Mary Jane. She went to the coffin, very soft, and knelt down and looked in; then she put up her handkerchief, and I see she begun to cry, though I couldn't hear her, and her back was to me. I slid out, and as I passed the dining-room I thought I'd make sure them watchers hadn't seen me; so I looked through the crack, and everything was all right; they hadn't stirred.

I slipped up to bed, feeling rather blue, on accounts of the thing playing out that way after I had took so much trouble and run so much risk about it. Says I, if it could stay where it is, all right; because when we got down the river a hundred mile or two I could write back to Mary Jane, and she could dig him up again and get it; but that ain't the thing that's going to happen. The thing that's going to happen is, the money'll be found when they come to screw on the lid. Then the king'll get it again, and it'll be a long day before he gives anybody another chance to smouch it from him. Of course I wanted to slide down and get it out of there, but I didn't try it.

When I got down stairs in the morning the parlor was shut up and the watchers was gone. There warn't nobody around but the family and the widow Bartley and our tribe. I watched their faces to see if anything had been happening but I couldn't tell.

Towards the middle of the day the undertaker came with his man, and they set the coffin in the middle of the room on a couple of chairs, and then set all our chairs in rows, and borrowed more from the neighbors, till the hall, and the parlor, and the

dining-room was full. I see the coffin-lid was the way it was before, but I didn't go to look in under it with folks around.

Then the people begun to flock in, and the beats and the girls took seats in the front row at the head of the coffin, and for half an hour the people filed around slow in single rank; and it was very still and solemn, only the girls and the beats holding handkerchiefs to their eyes and keeping their heads bent and sobbing a little.

They had borrowed a melodeum—a sick one; and when everything was ready, a young woman set down and worked it; and it was pretty akreky and collicky, and everybody joined in and sung. Then the Reverend Hobson opened up, slow and solemn, and begun to talk; and straight off the most outrageous row busted out in the cellar a body ever heard; it was only one dog, but he made a most powerful racket, and he kept it up right along. The parson he had to stand there and wait; you couldn't hear yourself think. It was right down awkward, and nobody 'int seem to know what to do. But pre: soon they see the long legged undertaker, like a cat, to the preacher as much as to say, "Don't you worry—just depend on me." Then he stooped down and begun to glide along the wall, just his shoulder's showing over the people's heads. So he glided along, and the powwow and racket getting more and more outrageous all the time; and at last, when he had gone around two sides of the room, he disappeared down cellar. Then, in about two seconds we heard a whack, and the dog he finished up with a most amazing howl or two, and then everything was dead still, and the parson begun his solemn talk where he left off. In a minute or two here comes the undertaker's back and shoulders gliding along the wall again; and so he glided, and glided, around three sides of the room, and then rose up, and shaded his mouth with his hands, and stretched his neck out toward the preacher, over the people's heads, and says, in a kind of a coarse whisper, "He had a rat!" Then he drooped down and glided along the wall again to his place. You could see it was a great satisfaction to the people, because naturally they wanted to know. A little thing like that don't cost nothing, and it's just the little things that makes a man to be looked up to and liked. There warn't no more popular man in town than what that undertaker was.

Well, the funeral sermon was very good, but pison long and tiresome; and then the king he shoved in and got off some of his usual rubbish; and at last the "go through" and the undertaker begun a weak up on the coffin with his screw-driver. I was in a sweat then, and watched him pretty keen. But he never meddled at all; just slid the lid along, and screwed it down tight and fast. So there I was! I didn't know whether the money was in there or not. So, says I, s'pose somebody has hogged that bag on the sly?—now how do I know whether to write to Mary Jane or not? S'pose she dug him up and didn't find nothing—what would she think of me? Blame it, I says, I might get hunted up and jailed; I'd better lay low and keep dark, and not write at all; the thing's awful mixed, now; trying to better it, I've worsened it a hundred times.

They buried him, and we come back home, and I went to watching faces again—I couldn't help it, and I couldn't rest o'ry. But nothing come of it; the faces didn't tell me nothing.

The king he visited around in the evening, and sweetened everybody up, and made himself ever so friendly; and he give out the idea that his congregation over in England would be worrying about him, so he must hurry and settle up the estate right away, and leave for home. He was very sorry he was so pushed, and so was everybody; they wished he could stay longer, but they said they could see it couldn't be done. And he said of course him and Will iam would take the girls home with them; and that pleased everybody, too, because then the girls would be well fixed, and amongst their own relations; and it pleased the girls, too—tickled them so they clean forgot they ever had a trouble in the world, and told him to sell out as quick as he

wanted to, they would be ready. Them poor things was that glad and happy it made my heart ache to see them getting fooled and lied to so, but I didn't see no safe way for me to chip in and change the general tune.

Well, blamed if the king didn't bill the house and the niggers and all the property for auction straight off—sale two days after the funeral; but anyone could buy private before hand if they wanted to.

So the next day after the funeral, along about noon-time, the girls' joy got the first jolt; a couple of nigger-traders come along, and the king sold them the niggers reasonable, for three-day drafts as they called it, and away they went, the two sons up the river to Memphis, and their mother down the river to Orleans. I thought them poor girls and them poor niggers would break their hearts for grief; they cried around each other and took on so it most made me down sick to see it. The girls said they hadn't ever dreamed of seeing the family separated or sold away from the town. I can't ever get it out of my memory, the sight of them poor miserable girls and niggers hanging around each other's necks and crying; and I reckon I couldn't 'a' stood it all, but would 'a' had to bust out and tell on our gang, if I hadn't knowed the sale warn't no account and the niggers would be back home in a week or two.

The thing made a big stir in the town, too, and a good many come out flat-footed and said it was scandalous to separate the mother and children that way. It injured the frauds some; but the old fool he bulled right along, spite of all the duke could say or do, and I tell you the duke was powerful uneasy.

Next day was auction day. About broad day in the morning, the king and the duke come up in the garret and woke me up, and I see by their look that there was trouble. The king says:

"Was you in my room night before last?"

"No, Your Majesty"—which was the way I always called him when nobody but our gang warn't around.

"Was you in there yisterday er last night?"

"No, Your Majesty."

"Honor bright, now—no lies."

"Honor bright, Your Majesty; I'm telling you the truth. I hain't been near your room since Miss Mary Jane took you and the duke and showed it to you."

The duke says:

"Have you seen anybody else go in there?"

"No, Your Grace, not as I remember, I believe."

"Stop and think."

I studied awhile, and see my chance; then I says:

"Well, I see the niggers go in there several times."

Both of them give a little jump, and looked like they hadn't ever expected it, and then like they had. Then the duke says:

"What, all of them?"

"No—leastways not all at once. That is, I don't think I ever see them all come out at once but just one time."

"When was that?"

"It was the day we had the funeral. In the morning. It warn't early, because I overslept. I was just starting down the ladder, and I see them."

"Well, go on, go on. What did they do? How'd they act?"

"They didn't do nothing. And they didn't act anyway, much, as far as I see. They tiptoed away; so I seen, easy enough, that they'd shoved in there to do up Your Majesty's room, or something, s'posing you was up, and found you warn't up, and so they was hoping to slide out of the way of trouble without waking you up."

"Great guns, this is a go!" says the king; and both of them looked pretty sick, and tolerable silly. They stood there a thinking and scratching their heads a minute, and then the duke he bust into a kind of a little raspy chuckle, and says:

"It does beat all, how neat the niggers played their hand. They let on to be sorry they was going out of this region! and I believed they was sorry. And so did you, and so did everybody. Don't ever tell me any more that a nigger ain't got any histrionic talent. Why, the way they played that thing, it would fool anybody. In my opinion there's a fortune in 'em. If I had capital and a theatre, I wouldn't want a better lay-out than that. And here we're gone and sold 'em for a song—yes, and ain't

privileged to sing the song yet. Say, when is that song—that draft?"

"In the bank for to be collected. When would it be?"

"Well, that's all right, then, thank goodness."

Says I, kind of timid-like:

"Is something gone wrong?"

The king whirled on me and rips out:

"None o' your business! You keep your head shot, and mind y'r own affairs—if you got any. Long as your in this town, don't you forgit that—you hear?" Then he says to the duke, "We got to jest swaller it, and say nothin': mum's the word for us."

As they was starting down the ladder, the duke he chuckles again, and says:

"Quick sales and small profits! It's a good business—yes."

The king snarls around on him, and says:

"I was trying to do for the best in selling 'em out so quick. If the profits has turned out to be none, lackin' considerable, and none to carry, is it my fault any more'n it's yourn?"

"Well, they'd be in this house yet, and we wouldn't, if I could 'a' got my advice listened to."

The king sassed back, as much as was able for him, and then swapped around and in into me again. He give me down the back for not coming and telling him I see the niggers come out of his room acting that way—said any fool would 'a' knowed something was up. And then he waltzed in and cursed himself awhile; and said it all come of him not laying late and taking his natural rest that morning, and he'd be blamed if he'd ever do it again. So they went off a-jawing.

By and by it was getting-up time; so I come down the ladder and started for downstairs, but as I come to the girls' room the door was open, and I see Mary Jane setting by her old hair trunk, which was open and she'd been packing things in it—getting ready to go to England. But she had stepped now, with a folded gown in her lap, and had her face in her hands, crying. I went in there, and says:

"Miss Mary Jane, you can't a-beat to see people in trouble, and I can't—most always. Tell me about it."

So she done it. And it was the nigger—I just expected it. She said the beautiful trip to England was most about spoiled for her.

"Oh, dear, dear! to think they ain't no going to see each other any more!"

"But they will—and inside of two weeks—and I know it!" says I.

Laws, it was out before I could think it—and before I could budge, she throws her arms around my neck, and told me to say it again, say it again, say it again!

I see I had spoke too sudden, and said too much, and was in a close place. I asked her to let me think a minute; and she set there, very impatient and excited and handsome, but looking kind of happy and eased-up, like a person that's had a tooth pulled out. So I went to studying it out. I says to myself, I reckon a body that up and tells the truth when he is in a tight place, is taking considerable many risks, though I ain't had no experience, and can't say for certain; but it looks so to me, say way; and yet here's a case where I'm blest if it don't look to me like the truth is better, and actually easier, than a lie. I must lay it by in my mind, and think it over some time or other, it's so kind of strange and irregular. I never see nothing like it. Well, I says to myself at last, I'm a-going to chance it; I'll up and tell the truth this time, though it does seem most like setting off just to see where you'll go to. Then I says:

"Miss Mary Jane, is there any place out o' town a little ways, where you could go and stay three or four days?"

"Yes—Mr. Lotherp's. Why?"

"Never mind why, yet. If I'll tell you how I know the niggers will see each other again—inside of two weeks—here in this house—and prove how I know it—will you go to Mr. Lotherp's and stay four days?"

"Four days!" she says; "I'll stay a year!"

"All right," I says; "I don't want nothing more out of you than just your word—I druther have it than another man's kiss-the-Bible." She smiled, and reddened up very sweet, and I says, "If you don't mind it, I'll shut the door—and bolt it."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Could an aged reprobate be considered an example of that which is sin-cere in life?

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