

ROYALTY ON THE MISSISSIPPI: AS CHRONICLED BY HUCKLEBERRY FINN.

BY MARK TWAIN.

Soon as it was night, out we chived; when we got her out to about the middle, we let her alone, and let her float wherever the current wanted her to. Then we lit the pipes, and dangled our legs in the water and talked about all kinds of things.

Sometimes we'd have that whole river all to ourselves for the longest time. Yonder was the banks and the islands, across the water; and may be a spark,—which was a candle in a cabin window,—and sometimes on the water you could see a spark or two, on a raft or a scow, you know; and may be you could hear a fiddle or a song coming over from one of them crafts. It's lovely to live on a raft. We had the sky up there all speckled with stars, and we used to lay on our backs and look up at them, and discuss about whether they was made, or only just happened. Jim he allowed they was made, but I allowed they happened. I judged it would have took too long to make so many. Jim said the moon could 'a' laid them; well, that looked kind of reasonable, so I didn't say nothing against it, because I've seen a frog lay most as many, so of course it could be done.

Once or twice of a night we would see a steamboat slipping along in the dark, and now and then she would belch a whole world of sparks up out of her chimneys, and they would rain down in the river and look awful pretty; then she would turn a corner, and her lights would wink out and her pow-wow shut off and leave the river still again; and by and by her waves would get to us, a long time after she was gone, and joggle the raft a bit, and after that you wouldn't hear nothing for you couldn't tell how long, except may be frogs or something.

After midnight the people on shore went to bed, and then for two or three hours the shores were black—no more sparks in the cabin windows. These sparks was our clock—the first one that showed again meant morning, so we hunted a place to hide and tie up right away.

One morning, about daybreak, I found a canoe and crossed over a chute to the main shore,—it was only two hundred yards,—and paddled about a mile up a creek amongst the cypress woods to see if I couldn't get some berries. Just as I was passing a place where a kind of cow-path crossed the creek, here comes a couple of men tearing up the path as tight as they could foot it. I thought I was a goner, for whenever anybody was after anybody I judged it was me—or may be Jim. I was about to dig out from there in a hurry, but they were pretty close to me then, and sung out and begged me to save their lives; said they hadn't been doing nothing, and was being chased for it; said there was men and dogs a-coming. They wanted to jump right in, but I says:

"Don't you do it. I don't hear the dogs and horses yet. You've got time to crowd through the brush and get up the creek a little ways; then you take to the water and wade down to me and get in—that'll throw the dogs off the scent."

They done it, and soon as they were aboard I lit out for our tow-head, and in about five or ten minutes we heard the dogs and the men away off, shouting. We heard them come along towards the creek, but couldn't see them; they seemed to stop and fool around awhile. Then, as we got further and further away all the time, we couldn't hardly hear them at all. By the time we had left a mile of woods behind us and struck the river, everything was quiet, and we paddled over to the tow-head and hid in the cottonwoods and was safe.

One of these fellows was about twenty, or upward, and had a bald head and very gray whiskers. He had an old battered up slouch on, and a greasy blue woolen shirt, and ragged old jean britches stuffed into his boot-tops, and home-knit gaiters—no, he only had one. He had an old long-tailed blue jeans coat with slick brass buttons slung over his arm, and both of them had big fat ratty-looking carpet-bags.

The other fellow was about thirty and dressed about as onery. After breakfast we all laid off and talked, and the first thing that come out was that these chaps didn't know one another.

"What got you into trouble?" says the baldhead to the other chap.

"Well, I'd been selling an article to take the tartar off the teeth—and it does take it off, too, and generally the enamel along with it; but I staid about one night longer than I ought to, and was just in the act of aliding out when I ran across you on the trail this side of town, and you told me they were coming, and begged me to help you to get off. So I told you I was expecting trouble myself and would scatter out with you. That's the whole yarn—what's yourn?"

"Well, I'd been a-runnin' a little temperance revival thar, 'bout a week, and was the pet of the women-folks, big and little, for I was makin' it mighty warm for the rummies. I tell you, and takin' as much as five or six dollars a night—ten cents a head, children and niggers free—and business a-growin' all the time; when somehow or other a little report got around, last night, that I had a way of puttin' in my time with a private jug, on the sly. A nigger rousted me out this mornin', and told me the people was getherin' on the quiet, with their dogs and horses, and they'd be along pretty soon and give me 'bout half an hour's s—, and then run me down if they cou— and if they got me they'd tar and feather me and ride me on a rail, sure. I didn't wait for no breakfast—I wasn't hungry."

"Old man," says the young one, "I reckon we might double-team it together; what do you think?"

"I ain't undisposed. What's your line—mainly?"

"Your printer by trade; do a little in patent medicines; theatre-actor—tragedy, you know; take a turn at meamerism and phrenology when there's a chance; teach singing-geography school for a change; sling a lecture sometimes. Oh, I do lots of things—most anything that comes handy, so it ain't work. What's your line?"

"I've done considerable in the doctoring way in my time. Layin' on o' hands is my best hold—for cancer, and paralysis, and sich things; and I k'n tell a fortune pretty good, when I've got somebody along to find out the facts for me. Preashin' my line, too; and workin' camp-meetin's; and missionarin' around."

Nobody never said anything for a while; then the young man hove a sigh and says:

"Alas!"

"What're you a-lassin' about?" says the baldhead.

"To think I should have lived to be leading such a life, and be degraded down into such company." And he begun to wipe the corner of his eye with a rag.

"Ain't the company good enough for you?" says the baldhead, pretty pert and upish.

"Yes, it is good enough for me; it's as good as I deserve; for who fetched me so low, when I was so high? I did myself. I don't blame you, gentlemen—far from it; I don't blame anybody. I deserve it all. Let the cold world do its worst; one thing I know—there's a grave somewhere for me. The world may go on just as it's always done, and take everything from me—loved ones, property, everything—but it can't take that. Some day I'll lie down in it and forget it all, and my poor broken heart will be at rest." He went on a-wiping.

"Drot your pore broken heart," says the baldhead; "what are you heaving your pore broken heart at us for? He hain't done nothing."

"No, I know you haven't. I ain't blaming you, gentlemen. I brought myself down—yes, I did it myself. It's right I should suffer—perfectly right—I don't make any mean."

"Brought you down from whar? Whar was you brought down from?"

"Ah, you would not believe me; the world never believes—let it pass—'tis no matter. The secret of my birth—"

"The secret of your birth? Do you mean to say—"

"Gentlemen," says the young man, very solemn, "I will reveal it to you, for I feel I may have confidence in you. By rights I am a duke."

Jim's eyes bugged out when he heard that, and I reckon mine did, too. Then the baldhead says:

"No! you can't mean it!"

"Yes. My great-grandfather, eldest son of the Duke of Bridgewater, fled to this

country about the end of the last century, to breathe the pure air of freedom; married here, and died, leaving a son, his own father dying about the same time. The second son of the late duke seized the title and estates—the infant real duke was ignored. I am the lineal descendant of that infant—I am the rightful Duke of Bridgewater; and here am I, forlorn, torn from my high estate, hunted of men, despised by the cold world, ragged, worn, heart-broken, and degraded to the companionship of felons on a raft!"

Jim pitied him over so much, and so did I. We tried to comfort him, but he said it wasn't much use, he couldn't be much comforted; said if we was a mind to acknowledge him, that would do him more good than most anything else; so we said we would, if he would tell us how. He said we ought to bow when we spoke to him, and say, "Your Grace," or "My Lord," or "Your Lordship,"—and he wouldn't mind it if we called him plain "Bridgewater," which he said was a title, anyway, and not a name; and one of us ought to wait on him at dinner, and do any little thing for him he wanted done.

Well, that was all easy, so we done it. All through dinner Jim stood around and waited on him, and says, "Will you Grace have some o' dis, or some o' dat?" and so on, and a body could see it was mighty pleasant to him.

But the old man got pretty silent by and by—didn't have much to say, and didn't look pretty comfortable over all that petting that was going on around that duke. He seemed to have something on his mind. So, along in the afternoon, he says:

"Looky here, Bilgewater," he says, "I'm 'nation sorry for you, but you ain't the only person that's had troubles like that."

"No?"

"No, you ain't. You ain't the only person that's been anaked down wrongfully out'n a high place."

"Alas!"

"No, you ain't the only person that's had a secret of his birth."

And he begun to cry.

"Hold! What do you mean?"

"Bilgewater, kin I trust you?" says the old man, still sort of sobbing.

"To the bitter death!" He took the old man by the hand and squeezed it, and says:

"The secret of your being; speak!"

"Bilgewater, I am the late Dauphin!"

"You bet you Jim and me stared this time. Then the duke says:

"You are what?"

"Yes, my friend, it is too true—your eyes is lookin' at this very moment on the pore disappeared Dauphin, Looy the Seventeen, son of Looy the Sixteen and Marry Antoinette."

"You! At your age! No! You mean you're the late Charlemagne; you must be six or seven hundred years old, at the very least."

Trouble has done it, Bilgewater, trouble has done it; trouble has brung these gray hairs and this premature balditude. Yes, gentlemen, you see before you, in blue jeans and misery, the wanderin', exiled, trampled-on, and sufferin' rightful King of France."

Well, he cried and took on so that me and Jim didn't know hardly what to do, we was so sorry—and so glad and proud we'd got him with us, too. So we set in, like we done before with the duke, and tried to comfort him. But he said it warn't no use, nothing but to be dead and done with it all could do him any good; though he said it often made him feel easier and better for a while if people treated him according to his rights, and got down on one knee to speak to him, and always called him "Your Majesty," and waited on him first at meals, and didn't set down in his presence till he asked them. So Jim and me set to majestyin' him, and doing this and that and 'tother for him, and standing up till he told us we might set down. This done him heaps of good, and so he got cheerful and comfortable. But the duke got of sored on him, and didn't look a bit satisfied with the way things were going; still, the king acted real friendly toward him, and said the duke's great-grandfather and all the other Dukes of Bilgewater was a good deal thought of by his father, and was allowed to come to the palace considerable; but the duke staid huffy a good while, till by and by the king says:

"Like as 'not we got to be together a blamed long time, on this h-yer raft, Bilgewater, and so what's the use of your being

sour? It'll only make things uncomfortable. It ain't my fault I warn't a duke, it ain't your fault you warn't a king—so what's the use to worry? I—the best o' things the way you find 'em—that's my motto. This ain't no bad that we've struck here—plenty grub, easy life. Come, give us your hand, and less all be friends."

The duke done it, and Jim and me pretty glad to see it.

It didn't take me long to make my mind that these liars warn't no king dukes at all, but just low-down hums and frauds. But I never said no never let on; kept it to myself; it's best way; then you don't have no quarrel and don't get into no trouble. I wanted us to call them kings and dukes hadn't no objections, 'long as it would peace in the family; and it warn't to tell Jim, so I didn't tell him.

"They asked us considerable many things; wanted to know what we covered the raft that way for, and laid by daytime instead of running—was Jim a away nigger?"

Says I:

"Goodness sakes, would a runaway run south?"

No, they allowed he wouldn't. I to account for things some way, so I says "My folks was living in Pike county Missouri, where I was born, and he died off but me and Pa and my brother Pa, he 'lowed he'd break up and go and live with Uncle Ben, who's got a one-horse place on the river, forty-four below Orleans. Pa was pretty poor, had some debts; so when he'd square there warn't nothing left but sixteen and our nigger, Jim. That warn't to take us fourteen hundred mile, ded sage nor no other way. Well, the river rose, Pa had a streak of luck, he ketched this piece of a raft; so we ones we'd go down to Orleans on it. Luck didn't hold out; a steamboat run the forward corner of the raft ones and we all went overboard and doted the wheel; Jim and me come up all but Pa was drunk, and I was only years old, so the never come up. Well, the next day or two we had some trouble, because people was a coming out in skiffs and trying to take away from me, saying they believed I was a runaway nigger. We don't run day no more now; nights they don't better."

The duke says:

"Leave me alone to cipher out a way we can run in the dayt—"

I'll think the thing over—I'll invent that'll fix it. We'll let it alone for to because of course we don't want to that town yonder by daylight—it might be healthy."

Towards night it begun to darken; look like rain; the heat lightning squirts around, low down in the sky, the leaves was beginning to shiver; going to be pretty ugly, it was easy to see that. So the duke and the king was overhauling our wigwag, to see what beds were like. My bed was a straw—better than Jim's, which was a cord of tick; there's always cobs around about shuck tick, and they poke into you hurt; and when you roll over, the shucks sound like you was rolling on a pile of dead leaves; it makes such a ling that you wake up. Well, the duke loved he would take my bed; but the allowed he wouldn't. He says:

"I should 'a' reckoned the difference rank would 'a' sejoiced to you that a shuck bed warn't just fitten for me on. Your Grace'll take the shuck yourself."

Jim and me was afraid there was to be some more trouble amongst them; we was pretty glad when the duke says:

"Tis my fate to be always ground the mire under the iron heel of oppression. Misfortune has broken my once happy spirit; I yield, I submit; 'tis my fate am alone in the world—let me suffer; I bear it."

We got away as soon as it was good dark. The king told us to stand up towards the middle of the river, and show a light till we got a long ways to the town. We come in sight of the bunch of lights by and by—that was town, you know—and slid by, about a mile out, all right. When we was quarters of a mile below, we hoisted a signal lantern; and about ten o'clock come on to rain and blow and light