

MORE FROM MARK TWAIN.*

WHAT author has caused the most laughter? We do not offer a guinea prize for the correct answer; we only ask the question. In the last hundred years we have had some notable humorists, Hood, Dickens, Mark Twain, and perhaps the last-named has been provocative of the heartiest merriment. He makes us put our heads back, drop the volume on the carpet, and fairly yield ourselves up to roars of laughter. Show him your cloud and he will provide it with a silver lining. Misery herself would surely smile over "The Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," and no monarch fortunate enough to have read "A Tramp Abroad" could possibly give up laughing. King Henry was born too early into the world. Happy the readers who have revelled in "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" and the immortal (we use this big word advisedly) "Huckleberry Finn." Now here we have Mark Twain describing the perils and pursuits of Tom, Huck, and Jim the Nigger abroad. Here is another chance for the gaiety of nations. Eclipsed for a while by indiscreet naval operations, frontier incidents, bursting bombs in theatre and *café*, Jewish persecutions and ravening promoters of bubble companies, it can now show itself without stint. Mark Twain is backing it up, not so brilliantly as heretofore, certainly, but sufficiently to amuse hugely tens of thousands of those who do not find the salvation of mirth in the writings of the younger English humorists, Mr. Jerome K. Jerome, Mr. Zangwill, and Mr. Barry Pain.

Tom Sawyer was not content after the adventures described in "Huckleberry Finn." A Western Alexander he pined for more worlds to conquer. Belauded as he was in his own village, there was a rival whom it was necessary to outdo by hook or by crook. Long did he muse upon this scheme and that. At last he hit upon a splendid idea. Jim, Huck, and he went out into the woods, where the new notion might be safely discussed. Tom's plan was simple. He wanted to start a crusade. He would arm a couple of thousand knights to wrest the holy city from the hands of the paynims. But Buck and Jim were not captivated. They resisted the plan. Tom was angry.

It made Tom hot, and he says: "'Well, it's enough to make a body sick, such mullet-headed ignorance. If either of you knowed anything about history, you'd know that Richard Cur de Lyon and the Pope and Godfry de Bulloyn, and lots more of the most noble-hearted and pious people in the world, hacked and hammered at the paynims for more than two hundred years, trying to take their land away from thep, and swum neck-deep in blood the whole time—and yet here's a couple of sap-headed country yahoos out in the backwoods of Missouri setting themselves up to know more about the rights and the wrongs of it than they did! Talk about cheek!'"

Just after this the people of St. Louis were much exercised about a certain professor who had invented a kind of balloon that was, he asserted, to fly to Europe. Of course, the three friends were all agog to see it, and see it they did, for when they, the last of the visitors, were about to withdraw the professor gently but firmly set sail for Europe, taking with him a trio of passengers by no means prepared for a cruise so extended. It need hardly be said that Mark Twain uses this opportunity to the full. Some of the conversations between the two boys and the nigger are delicious. There is a delightful passage in which Huck knows by the colour that they are over Illinois, and that Indiana is not in sight, for on the map Indiana is marked pink, and the professor was gone—the method of his end shall not here be disclosed—and Tom was captain of the air-ship, he

wrote a missive home to astonish his aunt and pulverise his rival.

"After breakfast Tom learned me and Jim how to steer, and divided all of us up into four-hour watches, turn and turn about; and when his watch was out I took his place, and he got out the professor's papers and pens, and wrote a letter home to his aunt Polly, telling her everything that had happened to us, and dated it "*In the Welkin approaching England*," and folded it together and stuck it fast with a red wafer, and directed it, and wrote above the direction in big writing, *From Tom Sawyer the Erronort*, and said it would sweat old Nat Parsons the postmaster when it come along in the mail. I says:

"'Tom Sawyer, this ain't no welkin: it's a baloon.'

"'Well, now, who said it was a welkin, smarty?'

"'You've wrote it on the letter, anyway.'

"'What of it? That don't mean that the baloon's the welkin.'

"'Oh, I thought it did. Well, then, what is a welkin?'

"I see in a minute he was stuck. He raked and scraped around in his mind, but he couldn't find nothing, so he had to say:

"'I don't know, and nobody don't know. It's just a word. And it's a mighty good word, too. There ain't many that lays over it. I don't believe there's *any* that does.'

"'Shucks,' I says, 'but what does it mean?—that's the p'int.'

"'I don't know what it means, I tell you. It's a word that people uses for—for—well, it's ornamental. They don't put ruffles on a shirt to help keep a person warm, do they?'

"'Course they don't.'

"'But they put them *on*, don't they?'

"'Yes.'

"'All right, then; that letter I wrote is a shirt, and the welkin's the ruffle on it.'

"I judged that that would gravel Jim, and it did. He says:

"'Now, Mars Tom, it ain't no use to talk like dat, en moreover it's sinful. *You* knows a letter ain't no shirt, en dey ain't no ruffles on it, nuther. Dey ain't no place to put 'em on, you can't put 'em on, en dey wouldn't stay on ef you did.'

"'Oh, *do* shut up, and wait till something's started that you know something about.'

"'Why, Mars Tom, sholy you don't mean to say I don't know about shirts, when goodness knows I's toted home de washin' ever sence —.'

"'I tell you this hasn't got anything to *do* with shirts. I only —.'

"'Why, Mars Tom! You said yo' own self dat a letter —.'

"'Do you want to drive me crazy? Keep still! I only used it as a metaphor.'

"That word kind of bricked us up for a minute. Then Jim says, rather timid, because he see Tom was getting pretty tetchy:

"'Mars Tom, what is a metaphor?'

When the "erronorts," having missed England, get over Africa, we have too many lions and caravans. Some stories from the "Arabian Nights" are put into Western lingo; there is a digression of some length upon fleas that is in no single particular worthy to stand beside the famous passage concerning ants in "A Tramp Abroad." It is easy enough to see that all these are devices to spin out the book to a respectable length. It would be hard to forgive most authors, but the padding of Mark Twain is not like the padding of other writers. Turn where one

* Tom Sawyer Abroad. By Mark Twain. (Chatto and Windus. 3s. 6d.)