



MARK TWAIN

THE TRAGEDY OF
PUDD'NHEAD WILSON

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Contents:

The Tragedy Of Pudd'nhead Wilson

A Whisper To The Reader

Chapter 1 — Pudd'nhead Wins His Name

Chapter 2 — Driscoll Spares His Slaves

Chapter 3 — Roxy Plays a Shrewd Trick

Chapter 4 — The Ways of the Changelings

Chapter 5 — The Twins Thrill Dawson's Landing

Chapter 6 — Swimming in Glory

Chapter 7 — The Unknown Nymph

Chapter 8 — Marse Tom Tramples His Chance

Chapter 9 — Tom Practices Sycophancy

Chapter 10 — The Nymph Revealed

Chapter 11 — Pudd'nhead's Thrilling Discovery

Chapter 12 — The Shame of Judge Driscoll

Chapter 13 — Tom Stares at Ruin

Chapter 14 — Roxana Insists Upon Reform

Chapter 15 — The Robber Robbed

Chapter 16 — Sold Down the River

Chapter 17 — The Judge Utters Dire Prophecy

Chapter 18 — Roxana Commands

Chapter 19 — The Prophecy Realized

Chapter 20 — The Murderer Chuckles

Chapter 21 — Doom

Conclusion

Author's Note To "Those Extraordinary Twins"

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Mark Twain - A Biographical Primer

Mark Twain was the nom de plume of Samuel Langhorne Clemens (1835-1910), an American author who was born on the 30th of November 1835, at Florida, Missouri. His father was a country merchant from Tennessee, who moved soon after his son's birth to Hannibal, Missouri, a little town on the Mississippi. When the boy was only twelve his father died, and thereafter he had to get his education as best he could. Of actual schooling he had little. He learned how to set type, and as a journeyman printer he wandered widely, going even as far east as New York. At seventeen he went back to the Mississippi, determined to become a pilot on a river-steamboat. In his *Life on the Mississippi* he has recorded graphically his experiences while "learning the

river." But in 1861 the war broke out, and the pilot's occupation was gone. After a brief period of uncertainty the young man started West with his brother, who had been appointed lieutenant-governor of Nevada. He went to the mines for a season, and there he began to write in the local newspapers, adopting the pen name of "Mark Twain," from a call used in taking soundings on the Mississippi steamboats. He drifted in time to San Francisco, and it was a newspaper of that city which in 1867 supplied the money for him to join a party going on a chartered steamboat to the Mediterranean ports. The letters which he wrote during this voyage were gathered in 1869 into a volume, *The Innocents Abroad*, and the book immediately won a wide and enduring popularity. This popularity was of service to him when he appeared on the platform with a lecture or rather with an apparently informal talk, rich in admirably delivered anecdote. He edited a daily newspaper in Buffalo for a few months, and in 1870 he married Miss Olivia L. Langdon (d. 1904), removing a year later to Hartford, where he established his home. *Roughing It* was published in 1872, and in 1874 he collaborated with Charles Dudley Warner in *The Gilded Age*, from which he made a play, acted many hundred times with John T. Raymond as "Colonel Sellers." In 1875 he published *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, the sequel to which, *Huckleberry Finn*, did not appear until 1884. The result of a second visit to Europe was humorously recorded in *A Tramp Abroad* (1880), followed in 1882 by a more or less historical romance, *The Prince and the Pauper*; and a year later came *Life on the Mississippi*. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the next of his books, was published (in 1884) by a New York firm in which the author was chief partner. This firm prospered for a while, and issued in 1889 Mark Twain's own comic romance, *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court*, and in 1892 a less successful novel, *The American Claimant*. But after a severe struggle the publishing house failed,

leaving the author charged with its very heavy debts. After this disaster he issued a third Mississippi Valley novel, *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson*, in 1894, and in 1896 another historical romance, *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*, wherein the maid is treated with the utmost sympathy and reverence. He went on a tour round the world, partly to make money by lecturing and partly to get material for another book of travels, published in 1897, and called in America *Following the Equator*, and in England *More Tramps Abroad*. From time to time he had collected into volumes his scattered sketches; of these the first, *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*, appeared in 1867, and the latest, *The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg*, in 1900. To be recorded also is a volume of essays and literary criticisms, *How to Tell a Story* (1897). A complete edition of his works was published in twenty-two volumes in 1890-1900 by the American Publishing Company of Hartford. And in this last year, having paid off all the debts of his old firm, he returned to America. By the time he died his books had brought him a considerable fortune. In later years he published a few minor volumes of fiction, and a series of severe and also amusing criticisms of Christian Science (published as a book in 1907), and in 1906 he began an autobiography in the *North American Review*. He had a great reception in England in 1907, when he went over to receive from Oxford the degree of Doctor of Literature. He died at Redding, Connecticut, on the 21st of April 1910. Of his four daughters only one, who married the Russian pianist Gabrilowitch, survived him. Mark Twain was an outstanding figure for many years as a popular American personality in the world of letters. He is commonly considered as a humorist, and no doubt he is a humorist of a remarkable comic force and of a refreshing fertility. But the books in which his humour is broadly displayed, the travels and the sketches, are not really so significant of his power as the three novels of the

Mississippi, Tom Sawyer, Huckleberry Finn and Pudd'nhead Wilson, wherein we have preserved a vanished civilization, peopled with typical figures, and presented with inexorable veracity. There is no lack of humour in them, and there is never a hint of affectation in the writing; indeed, the author, doing spontaneously the work nearest to his hand, was very likely unconscious that he was making a contribution to history. But such Huckleberry Finn is, beyond all question; it is a story of very varied interest, now comic, now almost tragic, frequently poetic, unfailingly truthful, although not always sustained at its highest level. And in these three works of fiction there are not only humour and pathos, character and truth, there is also the largeness of outlook on life such as we find only in the works of the masters. Beneath his fun-making we can discern a man who is fundamentally serious, and whose ethical standards are ever lofty. Like Cervantes at times, Mark Twain reveals a depth of melancholy beneath his playful humour, and like Molière always, he has a deep scorn and a burning detestation of all sorts of sham and pretence, a scorching hatred of humbug and hypocrisy. Like Cervantes and like Molière, he is always sincere and direct.

The Tragedy Of Pudd'nhead Wilson

A Whisper To The Reader

There is no character, howsoever good and fine, but it can be destroyed by ridicule, howsoever poor and witless. Observe the ass, for instance: his character is about perfect, he is the choicest spirit among all the humbler

animals, yet see what ridicule has brought him to. Instead of feeling complimented when we are called an ass, we are left in doubt. —Pudd'nhead Wilson's Calendar

A person who is ignorant of legal matters is always liable to make mistakes when he tries to photograph a court scene with his pen; and so I was not willing to let the law chapters in this book go to press without first subjecting them to rigid and exhausting revision and correction by a trained barrister—if that is what they are called. These chapters are right, now, in every detail, for they were rewritten under the immediate eye of William Hicks, who studied law part of a while in southwest Missouri thirty-five years ago and then came over here to Florence for his health and is still helping for exercise and board in Macaroni Vermicelli's horse-feed shed, which is up the back alley as you turn around the corner out of the Piazza del Duomo just beyond the house where that stone that Dante used to sit on six hundred years ago is let into the wall when he let on to be watching them build Giotto's campanile and yet always got tired looking as Beatrice passed along on her way to get a chunk of chestnut cake to defend herself with in case of a Ghibelline outbreak before she got to school, at the same old stand where they sell the same old cake to this day and it is just as light and good as it was then, too, and this is not flattery, far from it. He was a little rusty on his law, but he rubbed up for this book, and those two or three legal chapters are right and straight, now. He told me so himself.

Given under my hand this second day of January, 1893, at the Villa Viviani, village of Settignano, three miles back of Florence, on the hills—the same certainly affording the most charming view to be found on this planet, and with it the most dreamlike and enchanting sunsets to be found in any planet or even in any solar system—and given, too, in

the swell room of the house, with the busts of Cerretani senators and other grandees of this line looking approvingly down upon me, as they used to look down upon Dante, and mutely asking me to adopt them into my family, which I do with pleasure, for my remotest ancestors are but spring chickens compared with these robed and stately antiques, and it will be a great and satisfying lift for me, that six hundred years will.

Mark Twain.

Chapter 1 — Pudd'nhead Wins His Name

Tell the truth or trump—but get the trick. —Pudd'nhead

Wilson's Calendar

The scene of this chronicle is the town of Dawson's Landing, on the Missouri side of the Mississippi, half a day's journey, per steamboat, below St. Louis.

In 1830 it was a snug collection of modest one- and two-story frame dwellings, whose whitewashed exteriors were almost concealed from sight by climbing tangles of rose vines, honeysuckles, and morning glories. Each of these pretty homes had a garden in front fenced with white palings and opulently stocked with hollyhocks, marigolds, touch-me-nots, prince's-feathers, and other old-fashioned flowers; while on the windowsills of the houses stood wooden boxes containing moss rose plants and terra-cotta pots in which grew a breed of geranium whose spread of intensely red blossoms accented the prevailing pink tint of the rose-clad house-front like an explosion of flame. When there was room on the ledge outside of the pots and boxes

for a cat, the cat was there—in sunny weather—stretched at full length, asleep and blissful, with her furry belly to the sun and a paw curved over her nose. Then that house was complete, and its contentment and peace were made manifest to the world by this symbol, whose testimony is infallible. A home without a cat—and a well-fed, well-petted, and properly revered cat—may be a perfect home, perhaps, but how can it prove title?

All along the streets, on both sides, at the outer edge of the brick sidewalks, stood locust trees with trunks protected by wooden boxing, and these furnished shade for summer and a sweet fragrancener in spring, when the clusters of buds came forth. The main street, one block back from the river, and running parallel with it, was the sole business street. It was six blocks long, and in each block two or three brick stores, three stories high, towered above interjected bunches of little frame shops. Swinging signs creaked in the wind the street's whole length. The candy-striped pole, which indicates nobility proud and ancient along the palace-bordered canals of Venice, indicated merely the humble barbershop along the main street of Dawson's Landing. On a chief corner stood a lofty unpainted pole wreathed from top to bottom with tin pots and pans and cups, the chief tinmonger's noisy notice to the world (when the wind blew) that his shop was on hand for business at that corner.

The hamlet's front was washed by the clear waters of the great river; its body stretched itself rearward up a gentle incline; its most rearward border fringed itself out and scattered its houses about its base line of the hills; the hills rose high, enclosing the town in a half-moon curve, clothed with forests from foot to summit.

Steamboats passed up and down every hour or so. Those belonging to the little Cairo line and the little Memphis line always stopped; the big Orleans liners stopped for hails only, or to land passengers or freight; and this was the case also with the great flotilla of "transients." These latter came out of a dozen rivers—the Illinois, the Missouri, the Upper Mississippi, the Ohio, the Monongahela, the Tennessee, the Red River, the White River, and so on—and were bound every whither and stocked with every imaginable comfort or necessity, which the Mississippi's communities could want, from the frosty Falls of St. Anthony down through nine climates to torrid New Orleans.

Dawson's Landing was a slaveholding town, with a rich, slave-worked grain and pork country back of it. The town was sleepy and comfortable and contented. It was fifty years old, and was growing slowly—very slowly, in fact, but still it was growing.

The chief citizen was York Leicester Driscoll, about forty years old, judge of the county court. He was very proud of his old Virginian ancestry, and in his hospitalities and his rather formal and stately manners, he kept up its traditions. He was fine and just and generous. To be a gentleman—a gentleman without stain or blemish—was his only religion, and to it he was always faithful. He was respected, esteemed, and beloved by all of the community. He was well off, and was gradually adding to his store. He and his wife were very nearly happy, but not quite, for they had no children. The longing for the treasure of a child had grown stronger and stronger as the years slipped away, but the blessing never came—and was never to come.

With this pair lived the judge's widowed sister, Mrs. Rachel Pratt, and she also was childless—childless, and sorrowful for that reason, and not to be comforted. The women were

good and commonplace people, and did their duty, and had their reward in clear consciences and the community's approbation. They were Presbyterians, the judge was a freethinker.

Pembroke Howard, lawyer and bachelor, aged almost forty, was another old Virginian grandee with proved descent from the First Families. He was a fine, majestic creature, a gentleman according to the nicest requirements of the Virginia rule, a devoted Presbyterian, an authority on the "code", and a man always courteously ready to stand up before you in the field if any act or word of his had seemed doubtful or suspicious to you, and explain it with any weapon you might prefer from bradawls to artillery. He was very popular with the people, and was the judge's dearest friend.

Then there was Colonel Cecil Burleigh Essex, another F.F.V. of formidable caliber—however, with him we have no concern.

Percy Northumberland Driscoll, brother to the judge, and younger than he by five years, was a married man, and had had children around his hearthstone; but they were attacked in detail by measles, croup, and scarlet fever, and this had given the doctor a chance with his effective antediluvian methods; so the cradles were empty. He was a prosperous man, with a good head for speculations, and his fortune was growing. On the first of February, 1830, two boy babes were born in his house; one to him, one to one of his slave girls, Roxana by name. Roxana was twenty years old. She was up and around the same day, with her hands full, for she was tending both babes.

Mrs. Percy Driscoll died within the week. Roxy remained in charge of the children. She had her own way, for Mr.

Driscoll soon absorbed himself in his speculations and left her to her own devices.

In that same month of February, Dawson's Landing gained a new citizen. This was Mr. David Wilson, a young fellow of Scotch parentage. He had wandered to this remote region from his birthplace in the interior of the State of New York, to seek his fortune. He was twenty-five years old, college bred, and had finished a post-college course in an Eastern law school a couple of years before.

He was a homely, freckled, sandy-haired young fellow, with an intelligent blue eye that had frankness and comradeship in it and a covert twinkle of a pleasant sort. But for an unfortunate remark of his, he would no doubt have entered at once upon a successful career at Dawson's Landing. But he made his fatal remark the first day he spent in the village, and it "gaged" him. He had just made the acquaintance of a group of citizens when an invisible dog began to yelp and snarl and howl and make himself very comprehensively disagreeable, whereupon young Wilson said, much as one who is thinking aloud:

"I wish I owned half of that dog."

"Why?" somebody asked.

"Because I would kill my half."

The group searched his face with curiosity, with anxiety even, but found no light there, no expression that they could read. They fell away from him as from something uncanny, and went into privacy to discuss him. One said:

"'Pears to be a fool."

"Pears?" said another. "*Is*, I reckon you better say."

"Said he wished he owned *half* of the dog, the idiot," said a third. "What did he reckon would become of the other half if he killed his half? Do you reckon he thought it would live?"

"Why, he must have thought it, unless he IS the downrightest fool in the world; because if he hadn't thought it, he would have wanted to own the whole dog, knowing that if he killed his half and the other half died, he would be responsible for that half just the same as if he had killed that half instead of his own. Don't it look that way to you, gents?"

"Yes, it does. If he owned one half of the general dog, it would be so; if he owned one end of the dog and another person owned the other end, it would be so, just the same; particularly in the first case, because if you kill one half of a general dog, there ain't any man that can tell whose half it was; but if he owned one end of the dog, maybe he could kill his end of it and—"

"No, he couldn't either; he couldn't and not be responsible if the other end died, which it would. In my opinion that man ain't in his right mind."

"In my opinion he hain't *got* any mind."

No. 3 said: "Well, he's a lummoX, anyway."

"That's what he is;" said No. 4. "He's a labrick—just a Simon-pure labrick, if there was one."

"Yes, sir, he's a dam fool. That's the way I put him up," said No. 5. "Anybody can think different that wants to, but those

are my sentiments."

"I'm with you, gentlemen," said No. 6. "Perfect jackass—yes, and it ain't going too far to say he is a pudd'nhead. If he ain't a pudd'nhead, I ain't no judge, that's all."

Mr. Wilson stood elected. The incident was told all over the town, and gravely discussed by everybody. Within a week he had lost his first name; Pudd'nhead took its place. In time he came to be liked, and well liked too; but by that time the nickname had got well stuck on, and it stayed. That first day's verdict made him a fool, and he was not able to get it set aside, or even modified. The nickname soon ceased to carry any harsh or unfriendly feeling with it, but it held its place, and was to continue to hold its place for twenty long years.

Chapter 2 — Driscoll Spares His Slaves

Adam was but human—this explains it all. He did not want the apple for the apple's sake, he wanted it only because it was forbidden. The mistake was in not forbidding the serpent; then he would have eaten the serpent. —Pudd'nhead Wilson's Calendar

Pudd'nhead Wilson had a trifle of money when he arrived, and he bought a small house on the extreme western verge of the town. Between it and Judge Driscoll's house there was only a grassy yard, with a paling fence dividing the properties in the middle. He hired a small office down in the town and hung out a tin sign with these words on it:

D A V I D W I L S O N ATTORNEY AND COUNSELOR-AT-LAW SURVEYING, CONVEYANCING, ETC.

But his deadly remark had ruined his chance—at least in the law. No clients came. He took down his sign, after a while, and put it up on his own house with the law features knocked out of it. It offered his services now in the humble capacities of land surveyor and expert accountant. Now and then he got a job of surveying to do, and now and then a merchant got him to straighten out his books. With Scotch patience and pluck he resolved to live down his reputation and work his way into the legal field yet. Poor fellow, he could foresee that it was going to take him such a weary long time to do it.

He had a rich abundance of idle time, but it never hung heavy on his hands, for he interested himself in every new thing that was born into the universe of ideas, and studied it, and experimented upon it at his house. One of his pet fads was palmistry. To another one he gave no name, neither would he explain to anybody what its purpose was, but merely said it was an amusement. In fact, he had found that his fads added to his reputation as a pudd'nhead; there, he was growing chary of being too communicative about them. The fad without a name was one which dealt with people's finger marks. He carried in his coat pocket a shallow box with grooves in it, and in the grooves strips of glass five inches long and three inches wide. Along the lower edge of each strip was pasted a slip of white paper. He asked people to pass their hands through their hair (thus collecting upon them a thin coating of the natural oil) and then making a thumb-mark on a glass strip, following it with the mark of the ball of each finger in succession. Under this row of faint grease prints he would write a record on the strip of white paper—thus:

JOHN SMITH, right hand—

and add the day of the month and the year, then take Smith's left hand on another glass strip, and add name and date and the words "left hand." The strips were now returned to the grooved box, and took their place among what Wilson called his "records."

He often studied his records, examining and poring over them with absorbing interest until far into the night; but what he found there—if he found anything—he revealed to no one. Sometimes he copied on paper the involved and delicate pattern left by the ball of the finger, and then vastly enlarged it with a pantograph so that he could examine its web of curving lines with ease and convenience.

One sweltering afternoon—it was the first day of July, 1830—he was at work over a set of tangled account books in his workroom, which looked westward over a stretch of vacant lots, when a conversation outside disturbed him. It was carried on in yells, which showed that the people engaged in it were not close together.

"Say, Roxy, how does yo' baby come on?" This from the distant voice.

"Fust-rate. How does *you* come on, Jasper?" This yell was from close by.

"Oh, I's middlin'; hain't got noth'n' to complain of, I's gwine to come a-court'n you bimeby, Roxy."

"*You* is, you black mud cat! Yah—yah—yah! I got somep'n' better to do den 'sociat'n' wid niggers as black as you is. Is ole Miss Cooper's Nancy done give you de mitten?" Roxy followed this sally with another discharge of carefree laughter.

"You's jealous, Roxy, dat's what's de matter wid you, you hussy—yah—yah—yah! Dat's de time I got you!"

"Oh, yes, *you* got me, hain't you. 'Clah to goodness if dat conceit o' yo'n strikes in, Jasper, it gwine to kill you sho'. If you b'longed to me, I'd sell you down de river 'fo' you git too fur gone. Fust time I runs acrost yo' marster, I's gwine to tell him so."

This idle and aimless jabber went on and on, both parties enjoying the friendly duel and each well satisfied with his own share of the wit exchanged—for wit they considered it.

Wilson stepped to the window to observe the combatants; he could not work while their chatter continued. Over in the vacant lots was Jasper, young, coal black, and of magnificent build, sitting on a wheelbarrow in the pelting sun—at work, supposably, whereas he was in fact only preparing for it by taking an hour's rest before beginning. In front of Wilson's porch stood Roxy, with a local handmade baby wagon, in which sat her two charges—one at each end and facing each other. From Roxy's manner of speech, a stranger would have expected her to be black, but she was not. Only one sixteenth of her was black, and that sixteenth did not show. She was of majestic form and stature, her attitudes were imposing and statuesque, and her gestures and movements distinguished by a noble and stately grace. Her complexion was very fair, with the rosy glow of vigorous health in her cheeks, her face was full of character and expression, her eyes were brown and liquid, and she had a heavy suit of fine soft hair which was also brown, but the fact was not apparent because her head was bound about with a checkered handkerchief and the hair was concealed under it. Her face was shapely, intelligent, and comely—even beautiful. She had an easy, independent

carriage—when she was among her own caste—and a high and "sassy" way, withal; but of course she was meek and humble enough where white people were.

To all intents and purposes Roxy was as white as anybody, but the one sixteenth of her which was black outvoted the other fifteen parts and made her a Negro. She was a slave, and salable as such. Her child was thirty-one parts white, and he, too, was a slave, and by a fiction of law and custom a Negro. He had blue eyes and flaxen curls like his white comrade, but even the father of the white child was able to tell the children apart—little as he had commerce with them—by their clothes; for the white babe wore ruffled soft muslin and a coral necklace, while the other wore merely a coarse tow-linen shirt which barely reached to its knees, and no jewelry.

The white child's name was Thomas a Becket Driscoll, the other's name was Valet de Chambre: no surname—slaves hadn't the privilege. Roxana had heard that phrase somewhere, the fine sound of it had pleased her ear, and as she had supposed it was a name, she loaded it on to her darling. It soon got shorted to "Chambers," of course.

Wilson knew Roxy by sight, and when the duel of wits begun to play out, he stepped outside to gather in a record or two. Jasper went to work energetically, at once, perceiving that his leisure was observed. Wilson inspected the children and asked:

"How old are they, Roxy?"

"Bofe de same age, sir—five months. Bawn de fust o' Feb'uary."

"They're handsome little chaps. One's just as handsome as the other, too."

A delighted smile exposed the girl's white teeth, and she said:

"Bless yo' soul, Misto Wilson, it's pow'ful nice o' you to say dat, 'ca'se one of 'em ain't on'y a nigger. Mighty prime little nigger, *I* al'ays says, but dat's 'ca'se it's mine, o' course."

"How do you tell them apart, Roxy, when they haven't any clothes on?"

Roxy laughed a laugh proportioned to her size, and said:

"Oh, *I* kin tell 'em 'part, Misto Wilson, but I bet Marse Percy couldn't, not to save his life."

Wilson chatted along for awhile, and presently got Roxy's fingerprints for his collection—right hand and left—on a couple of his glass strips; then labeled and dated them, and took the "records" of both children, and labeled and dated them also.

Two months later, on the third of September, he took this trio of finger marks again. He liked to have a "series," two or three "takings" at intervals during the period of childhood, these to be followed at intervals of several years.

The next day—that is to say, on the fourth of September—something occurred which profoundly impressed Roxana. Mr. Driscoll missed another small sum of money—which is a way of saying that this was not a new thing, but had happened before. In truth, it had happened three times before. Driscoll's patience was exhausted. He was a fairly