



C H A P T E R 1 9

IT WAS DURING MY FIRST YEAR'S APPRENTICESHIP IN THE *COURIER* office that I did a thing which I have been trying to regret for fifty-five years. It was a summer afternoon and just the kind of weather that a boy prizes for river trips and other fun, but I was a prisoner. The others were all gone holidaying. I was alone and sad. I had committed a crime of some sort and this was the punishment. I must lose my holiday and spend the afternoon alone besides. I had one comfort and it was a generous one while it lasted. It was the half of a long and broad **watermelon**, fresh and red and ripe. I dug it out with a knife and I found room for it in my person—though it did crowd me until the juice ran out of my ears. There remained then the shell, the hollow shell. I didn't want to waste it and I couldn't think of anything to do with it that afforded entertainment. I was sitting at the open window which looked out upon the sidewalk of the main street three stories below, when it occurred to me to drop it on somebody's head. I doubted the wisdom of this, because so much of the resulting entertainment would fall to my share and so little to the other person's. But I thought I would chance it.

I watched out of the window for the right person to come along—the safe person—but he didn't come. But at last I saw the right one coming. It was my brother Henry. He was the best boy in the

whole region. He never did harm to anybody. He had an overflowing amount of goodness—but not enough to save him this time. I watched his approach with eager interest. He came walking slowly along, dreaming his pleasant summer dream. When he was almost under me all I could see from my high place was the end of his nose and his feet. Then I placed the watermelon, figured my distance and let it go, hollow side down.

My aim was beyond admiration. The shell landed right on the top of his head. I wanted to go down there and tell him I was sorry but it would not have been safe. He would have known I had done it. He said nothing about this adventure for two or three days—I was watching him in the meantime to keep out of danger—and I was deceived into believing he had no suspicion.

It was a mistake. He was only waiting for a sure opportunity. Then he landed a rock on the side of my head which raised a swelling so large I had to wear two hats for a time. I carried this crime to my mother, for I was always anxious to get Henry into trouble with her and could never succeed. I thought that I had a sure case this time. I showed the swelling to her but she said it was no matter. She didn't need to inquire into the circumstances. She knew I deserved it, and the best way would be for me to accept it as a valuable lesson and thereby get profit out of it.

About 1849 or 1850 Orion broke his connection with the printing-house in St. Louis and came up to Hannibal and bought a weekly paper called the *Hannibal Journal* for the sum of five hundred dollars cash. He took me out of the *Courier* office and hired me at three and a half a week, which was an extraordinary wage, but Orion was always generous with everybody but himself. It cost him nothing in my case, for he was never able to pay me a single penny as long as I was with him. By the end of the first year he found that he must cut down. The office rent was cheap but it was not cheap enough. He could not afford to pay rent of any kind, so he moved the whole plant into the house we lived in. He kept that paper alive during four years but I have at this time no idea how he did it. Finally he handed it over to Mr. Johnson, from whom he

had borrowed the money to buy it, and went to Muscatine, Iowa, and bought a small interest in a weekly newspaper there.

I had not joined the Muscatine venture. Just before that happened (which I think was in 1853) I disappeared one night and fled to St. Louis. There I worked at the *Evening News* for a time and then started on my travels to see the world. The world was New York City and there was a little World's Fair there. I arrived in New York with two or three dollars in pocket change and a ten-dollar bank bill concealed in the lining of my coat.

I got work at murderous wages, just enough to pay for board and room. By and by I went to Philadelphia and worked some months. Finally I made a trip to Washington to see the sights, and in 1854 I went back to the Mississippi Valley. I worked in a little printing office in Keokuk, Iowa, where Orion had now gone, for two years. Then I worked on board the swift and popular New Orleans and St. Louis boat, *Pennsylvania*. I was in New Orleans when Louisiana went out of the Union, January 26, 1861, and I started north the next day.

By this time Orion was very hard-pressed for money. But I was beginning to earn a wage of two hundred and fifty dollars a month as a pilot and so I supported him until his old friend, Edward Bates, then a member of Mr. Lincoln's first Cabinet, got him the place of Secretary of the new Territory of Nevada, and Orion and I headed for that country. At first I went about the country seeking silver, but at the end of '62 or the beginning of '63 I went to work on a newspaper in Virginia City, Nevada, the *Enterprise*.

I was sent down to Carson City to report the **legislative** meetings. I wrote a weekly letter to the paper; it appeared Sundays and as a result on Monday the legislative proceedings were stopped short by the complaints of the members. They answered the correspondent with anger, describing him with long fancy phrases, for lack of a briefer way. To save their time, I presently began to sign the letters "Mark **Twain**" (two **fathoms**—twelve feet), the Mississippi river boatman's call for announcing the depth of the water.

Then after two years on the *Enterprise* I went west to California.