Mark Twain's Religious Writings:
Blush, Despair and Rejoice

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Honors Thesis

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The name of Mark Twain, in the popular mind, usually conjures up images of whitewashed fences, Injun Joe and jumping frog contests. Yet, Twain went far beyond these humorous and entertaining visions into the controversial realm of religion. His essays, short stories and speeches on this issue sparked anger, amusement and confusion in his audiences and readers of the mid and late 1800's. Those reactions transcend time and continue to evoke the same kinds of feelings in the 1970's and 1980's. The atheist would read Twain's religious works with amusement, the agnostic with confusion and the orthodox Christian with anger.

Twain did not just speak out on religion—he wrote cynically, satirically—but all with underlying seriousness. His sarcasm was bitter, humorous and always thought-provoking. "... he ... had serious doubts about it (his religion) underneath the burning faith, which is why he couldn't speak suavely, coolly, gracefully ... on the subject." He challenged the beliefs of organized religion and laughed at the world's man-made versions of heaven and God. He looked at the Bible and the events in it with unbiased logic and thus showed many of them as ridiculous. Through several characters, such as Little Bessie or Phillip Traum, he scoffed at the theory of man's 'God-given' moral sense and chuckled at man's concepts of how God behaves and the rules of heaven.

Twain made mankind look religiously foolish and gullible—and for
this, few can read his works open-mindedly. He showed: his inward
bitterness toward life at various points and how he felt that God did
exist, but differently from how organized religion had molded Him.
Twain was a fascinating man and his religious writings only helped to
show his versatility and greatness.
Samuel Clemens was born on November 30, 1835 in Florida, Missouri. His parents had an immense affect on his religious beliefs. He turned against Christianity as such in rejecting the stern form of it he had known as a child. His father was an agnostic and very skeptical of religion in general. Counteracting him, Clemens' mother was a devout Presbyterian. She cared for all mankind and defended every last soul, no matter what the misdeed. At an early age, Clemens was even able to trick her into defending Satan himself. He later defined her, after this incident, by saying, "This friend of Satan was a most gentle spirit..."

Clemens' mother used church as a method of punishment for her children. They were sent there on Sunday nights if found guilty of a crime.' Clemens usually went elsewhere and then lied to his mother. He memorized Bible verses and would recite them as proof of his attendance. As is obvious then, Clemens began to stray from the Presbyterian religion at a young age. "... young Sam's saying of prayers at bedtime seemed to give way increasingly to the fabrication of tales built around the adventures of the day."

Death became a prevalent aspect of young Clemens' life and continued to be until his own death. When he was four his sister died, at seven a brother died and at eleven, his father died. These untimely
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deaths were compounded by the death of his close brother Henry when 
Clemens was 23. The death of Henry profoundly influenced Clemens's 
religious attitudes. When Henry was injured, Clemens ordered a doctor 
to administer morphine. It was an overdose and Henry died. Clemens 
felt responsible, albeit indirectly. "... this tragic experience 
and its aftermath, mark the parting of the ways for Samuel Clemens and 
the God of the Bible."7 From this point onward, "... rebellion be-
came a frame of mind, an attitude toward life."8

As Clemens approached his mid-20's, he read a copy of Paine's 
The Age of Reason. This contained a brand of Deism new to Clemens— 
that God is a "Master-Machinist" who was remote and indifferent to the 
world and mankind. 9 This theory remained with Clemens for the rest of 
his life.

Finally, in 1870, a positive and joyful thing occurred— Clemens, 
by now under the pen name of Mark Twain, married Olivia Langdon—'Livy.' 
Livy was a religious woman and during their courtship, Twain tried to 
adopt a more pious attitude in the attempt to win her. He made numerous 
promises to her to again accept Christianity, but "... they never 
seem(ed) to culminate in definite action."10 Twain did manage to for-
sake drinking and swearing for her.

After Livy and Twain were married and became parents, the children 
were raised with Livy's beliefs, including evening prayer and Bible 
study. Yet, by 1878, Livy too had begun to drift from religion. She 
became critical of the church and of the local clergymen.

During this phase, Twain continued to experience a leftover sense 
of guilt from Henry's death. This emotion was strongly intensified
when two things occurred. First, Twain did not go visit an ill family friend and the friend died soon after. Then, once when Twain took his infant son for a ride, the boy got overchilled and died quickly from diptheria. For a large part, because of all these events, by 1879, both Twain and his wife abandoned church-going and any hope of a belief in Christianity. In the early 1880's, Twain began to rebel against the Biblical concept of God.

The 1890's were a continuance of ill fortune for Twain. In October, 1890, his mother died; in November, 1890, Livy's mother died and in April, 1891, a close cousin died. Twain began to develop rheumatism, Livy had heart trouble and their daughter Susy was ill at college.

In 1895, Twain went bankrupt and was forced to go on a world lecture tour. During the tour, Susy died. Twain was extremely grief-stricken and generally angry with the entire world. He and Livy secluded themselves in London.

1898 brought financial security back to the household, but death still forced itself in. Twain's other brother died and Jean, Twain's daughter, became ill.

In 1904, after 34 years of marriage, Livy died. Twain was overcome with sorrow. In The Diary of Adam and Eve, which he wrote during this period, he said, in tribute to Livy and womanhood, "Wheresoever she was, there was Eden."11

1909 brought Jean's death at a young age of 29 and 1910 brought Twain's death due to a chronic heart condition. Death—which had tracked his every move through life, had formed his religious beliefs and been brightly reflected in his writings—had finally gained control and taken him away.
Twain watched people closely and turned these observations into amusing religious stories. For instance, in "The Motley Population of the Christian Heaven," he wrote of people's racial prejudices as if they existed in heaven. The scene in heaven showed a Captain surveying the area. There were very few white angels around, just primarily copper-colored ones that did not speak English. An ironic monologue took place when a passing angel explained the racial phenomenon to the Captain: "You see what the Jersey district of heaven is, for whites; well, the California district is a thousand times worse. It swarms with a mean kind of leather-headed mud-colored angels--and your nearest white neighbors are likely to be a million miles away. What a man mostly misses in heaven, is company--company, of his own sort and and color and language."¹²

Perhaps the funniest and most realistic description of what man envisions heaven to be is in Letters from the Earth. Although Letters was written in the early 1900's, it was not published for several decades after that. Clara Clemens would not permit it. This point alone shows the impact it contained. Twain himself said, "I propose publishing these letters here in the world before I return to you. Two editions. One, unedited, for Bible readers and their children; the other, expurgated, for persons of refinement."¹³
The premise of *Letters from the Earth* was that Satan, while still an angel, was sent to Earth as a punishment. (His crime was saying that he thought God should not have given all the animals the knowledge of how to kill.) His mission was to observe the people and send private reports back to heaven. He sent these letters to his cousins, Saint Michael and Saint Gabriel.

Satan's discoveries of how man thought of God and heaven astounded him. First, he ridiculed mankind's idea that they are God's favorite creation. At best, Satan wrote, they were equivalent to low-grade angels and at worst they were "... unspeakable, unimaginable; and first and last and all the time, he (man) is a sarcasm."\(^{14}\) Then Satan latched onto the people's general view of heaven: "... he has imagined a heaven, and has left entirely out of it the supremest of all his delights, the one ecstasy that stands first and foremost in the heart of every individual of his race--and of ours--sexual intercourse ... it (heaven) has not a single feature in it that he actually values. It consists--utterly and entirely--of diversions which he cares next to nothing about, here in the earth, yet is quite sure he will like heaven."\(^{15}\)

Not only does heaven not include sex, but people must sing constantly, one hymn, over and over. Satan furthered the folly of this by supplying the lyrics of "Hosannah, hosannah, hosannah, Lord God of Sabbath, 'rah! 'rah! 'rah! Siss!--Boom! ... a-a-ah!"\(^{16}\)

About two of every hundred people play instruments on Earth, but in Heaven, chuckled Satan, **everyone** played harps! What an incredibly deafening sound. How would God be able to stand it, Satan wondered.

According to his discoveries, man's heaven also meant perpetual
sermons, total equality and no intellectuality. To all of these notions, Satan shook his head in bewilderment.

Concerning the content of the Bible, Satan said that it consisted of "... noble poetry, clever fables, blood-drenched history, good morals, a wealth of obscenity and upwards of a thousand lies."17

A third vision of heaven was represented in Twain's bitter "Private Secretary's Diary." This short story was written in June of 1897, when Twain was still terribly angry about his daughter Susy's death. The scene was of a secretary at a meeting held in heaven. The angels and God had met to dole out the punishments to the sinners that day. One four-year-old girl had laughed on the Sabbath day, so they gave her scarlet fever for sinning. This was not adequate punishment in their eyes though. At eight, she was made semi-deaf; and at 37, she was given a health problem that required four operations. This surgery left her speech affected and her face distorted. Yet, the punishment did not stop there either. Her son was given softening of the brain and her grandson was born retarded. All this because she laughed on the Sabbath day.

Whether Twain painted heaven as funny, ironical or cruel, his visions could touch everyone in some way. He cursed God and heaven, yet he never denied them. "Mark Twain, far from denying God, insists upon Him, hunts Him down, and reviles Him."18
CHAPTER THREE:
Foolish Notions

'God moves in mysterious ways' and 'God's will be done' are two clichés that get prevalent mention when disaster occurs. In Twain's "The Lost Ear-ring," written in 1878, these clichés are expanded into a short story. In the story, a woman lost an earring of great sentimental value. When she lost it, she said, "Ah, we are born to suffer--God's will be done." Thus the misfortune—a very trivial one—was attributed to God. Yet, when it was later found, the woman exclaimed, "The ways of God are wonderful!"

In "Colloquy Between a Slum Child and a Moral Mentor," Twain satirized people's religious ideals against realistic life. The story was of a conversation between a ghetto child and a holy man. as the man tried to give the boy religious instruction:

Man: What does our Heavenly Father do with the grass when He makes it?
Boy: (James) Puts it in the Hall park and puts up a sign, 'Keep off'n the grass--dogs ain't allowed.'
Man: James, who made you?
James: Chief Police, I guess.
Man: Mercy! I wish I could get that all-powerful potentate out of your head. No James, God made you.
James: Did he, though?
Man: Yes--God made you, as well as the grass.
James: Honest Injun? That's bully. But I wish he'd fence me in and take care of me, sames as he does the grass.

Twain challenged the reader's religious beliefs in the story "Was it Heaven? or Hell?" The story revolved on the sin of lying.
The Lester family, which consisted of a widow, her daughter and two maiden aunts, was terribly strict religiously and morally. When both the mother and daughter fell fatally ill, the prudish aunts battled with their consciences as to whether to tell each of the invalids the actual condition of the other—knowing it would cause considerable anguish for both. In the end, they both decided to lie, thus soothing the brows of the invalids. Because of this, both of them died peacefully.

Now, asked Twain, where will these aunts go when they die— to heaven for their kindness or to hell for the lie?

Through stories such as these, Twain challenged traditional religious beliefs by forcing the people to look at things logically, instead of wearing blinders. This challenge caused some of his works to be ignored or to remain unpublished for years. It also caused personal turmoil and yet incredible interest as the public's minds opened with the marching on of time.
CHAPTER FOUR:

Little Bessie

Included in a volume entitled Mark Twain's Fables of Man were several stories with a highly amusing and slightly unbelievable character named Little Bessie. Primarily written in 1908 and 1909, these stories concerned God's malevolence and unfairness. "The God these works show is one who does nothing for the specific good of man."22 Similar to the stories in chapter three, the Little Bessie fables also satirized the over-readiness of people to accept the 'myths of providence.'

In these stories, Little Bessie, a child of four or five years, questioned her mother about why God did things—like send disasters. As is still typically true of many religion defenses, the mother's answers were vague, which demonstrated a hollow and shallow faith. An example of this was evident in the following conversation:

(Little Bessie) "Did He make the roof fall in on the stranger that was trying to save the crippled old woman from the fire, mamma?"

(Mamma) "Yes, my child. Wait! Don't ask me why, because I don't know. I only know it was to discipline some one, or be a judgement upon somebody, or to show his power."23

Little Bessie converted this information into her own terms and later said to her mamma, "Mamma, brother Eddie needs disciplining right away; and I know where you can get the smallpox for him, and the
itch, and the diptheria, and bone-rot, and heart disease, and consumption, and—Dear Mamma, have you fainted?”

Another character in the Little Bessie stories was a Mr. Hollister. He was a reflection of Twain. He was cynical about religion and told Little Bessie many ironical things about God’s ‘goodness.’ At one time, Hollister made an analogy between Frankenstein=God and his monster=man. He said in exasperation, “God made man, without man’s consent, and made his nature too; made it vicious instead of angelic, and then said, Be angelic, or I will punish you and destroy you. But no matter, God is responsible for everything man does, all the same; He can’t get around that fact. There is only one Criminal, and it is not man.”

This theme of God’s creating man’s temperament one way and then setting up rules to obey that go directly against that nature was a favorite of Twain’s. He included it in many of his works, but most blatantly in “The Ten Commandments.” (1905) In this, Twain theorized that man should not be blamed or labeled a sinner for breaking a commandment. If God created man with that kind of nature, disobedience should be both accepted and expected. Once more God was shown as unjust and overly dominating.
Twain had many approaches to the satirization and analyzation of religion, one of which was the recreation of Biblical events. Twain felt that "... the Christian's Bible is a drugstore. Its contents remain the same, but the medical practice changes." Several Biblical events that Twain updated or rewrote with a new outlook, were the Advent, Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and Noah and the Flood.

For "The Second Advent," written in 1881, Twain went to the Holy Land. This story satirized the Virgin birth. Twain felt that the concept was absurd and put God, in his version, in the role of the seducer. Twain's story was set in Black Jack, a small and dirty town in Arkansas.

A girl named Nancy Hopkins represented the Virgin Mary. Nancy was engaged to be married to a man named Jackson Barnes. (i.e. Joseph) But, before the wedding could take place, Nancy found herself pregnant. She claimed to be a virgin and that this was an Immaculate Conception. Nancy assured her fiance that she had been visited by an angel. After a lengthy discussion, Jackson believed Nancy and went to face the unbelieving townspeople:

People: What did the angel look like?
Jackson: Like a man.
People: Naked?
Jackson: No--clothed.
People: How?
Jackson: In ancient times the angels came clothed in a robe, the dress of the people of the day. Naturally this one was clothed according to the fashion of our day. He wore a straw hat, a blue jeans roundabout and pants, and cowhide boots.

People: You suspect none but God?
Jackson: How should I?
People: You do not suspect the angel in the straw hat? 28

Later, the citizens found out the rest of this unbelievable claim:

People: What shall you call it, if it be a girl?
Jackson: It will not be a girl.
People: Then if it be a boy?
Jackson: It shall be called Jesus Christ.
People: What--is there to be another Jesus Christ?
Jackson: No, it is the same that was born of Mary, ages ago, not another. This is merely the Second Advent. I was so informed by the most High in a dream. 29

Nancy and Jackson decided to have the baby quietly with no glory--since that method worked the 'time before.' Word of the imminent birth of the new Savior spread and it became world known. Three wise men: an editor from New York, the president of Yale and the president of Princeton, began to follow the star of Venus to Black Jack. They brought gifts of the history of various religions, toy models of the torture devices from the Inquisition and a copy of the Bible, with the "decent passages" marked with red ink. 30 The whole world had begun to believe Nancy and Jackson. Yet, after the boy child was born, everyone forgot about the family and they faded out of the limelight.

Thirty years later, Jesus was a man and began his religious mission. He started to teach in a church, then he got twelve disciples, performed a few miracles and soon after had a large following. Then--there was a drought. The people beseeched Jesus to provide rain, so he prayed to a saint for it. The people got their rain, so much so that it quickly turned into a flood. Jesus made it stop, but not before
many homes were destroyed.

When Jesus supplied some cold weather to save the life of an old woman upon a request, the 'miracle'--at the same time--killed and injured many with frostbite and exposure. Jesus was so swamped with requests for miracles that he had to radically change the weather every day. This caused confusion, illness and ruined the crops. The weathermen lost their jobs and they threatened revenge. Jesus, in an attempt to please the people, banished all sickness and disease. This angered all the doctors, nurses and pharmacists.

Finally Jesus received his biggest request--to part an ocean so people could pass through safely.

To accomodate a procession, they prayed that the river might be divided; this prayer was answered, and the procession passed over dry-shod. The march consumed twenty minutes, only, but twenty minutes was ample time to enable the backed-up waters to overflow all the country for more than one hundred and fifty miles up the river, on both sides; in consequence of which a vast number of farms and villages were ruined, many lives were lost, immense aggregations of live stock destroyed, and thousands of people reduced to beggary. The people were irate and formed the new prayer: "Lord, Thy will, not mine, be done."

Soon after this last incident, the disciples and the Savior were crucified by a posee from Black Jack. "Thus ended the Second Advent, A.D. 1881."

Another Biblical event that Twain decided to investigate with logic was the episode of Adam and Eve in Eden. Each of them kept their own diary. "Eve's Diary" (1904) was begun when she and the creation were one day old. She began by writing of her close observation of Adam, who intrigued her. Eve enjoyed talking and one day chased Adam up a tree (cut off due to textual corrections).
with her incessant chatter.

After the banishment from Eden, Eve was very bitter. She wrote, "They drove us from the Garden with their swords of flame, the fierce cherubim. And what had we done? We meant no harm. We were ignorant, and did as any other children might do. We could not know it was wrong to disobey the command, for the words were strange to us and we did not understand them. We did not know right from wrong—how should we know?"34

Here once more was the theme of man's nature in opposition of God's rules.

"Adam's Diary" contained some humorous extracts. It began with a quarrel between Adam and Eve because he wanted to name the place the Garden of Eden and she wanted to call it the Niagra Falls Park. Adam was a very logical man. He wrote in his diary, "Tuesday: She told me she was made out of a rib taken from my body. This is at least doubtful, if not more than that. I have not missed any rib."35

Later Adam became aware of a new item in the Garden, but did not yet fear it. "She has taken up with a snake now. The other animals are glad, for she was always experimenting with them and bothering them; and I am glad because the snake talks, and this enables me to get a rest."36

As time went on though, Adam began to suspect trouble. "Friday: I advised her to keep away from the tree. She said she wouldn't. I foresee trouble. Will emigrate."37

Neither Adam nor Eve could understand what Cain was. For a while, they thought he was a new kind of animal—possibly a type of fish. Later, they decided he was a form of kangaroo. When Cain was eleven
months old, they knew he was a bear. At the conclusion of the diary, they considered that he might be a human being like them. Their initiation to death came with the murder of Abel by Cain.

Nineteen years after the initial writing of "Adam and Eve's Diary," Twain wrote "Adam's Soliloquy." (1923) Adam's spirit was in the New York City Museum of Natural History in this essay. He was there to inspect a dinosaur. He also inspected the people as they walked by and observed how little change there had been in them since his time. Adam entered into a conversation with a lady sitting near him. She believed him to be a foreigner. "I ... believed I knew that you were a foreigner, by another sign."

"What was that?"

"Your accent."

"She was an accurate observer; I do speak English with a heavenly accent ... ." 38

One of the most humorous re-makes that Twain wrote was the "Noah and the Flood" excerpt from Letters from the Earth. He looked at the episode with unemotional logic. First of all, to get two of every animal on earth was impossible, so Noah got as many as he could. And, the animals all came, not just single pairs of them. A fleet of arks was required, not just one. On the third day of the journey, according to Twain, a fly was forgotten. Noah and his family returned to get it and it was full of typhoid. Twain accused God of acute jealousy and condemned Him for giving His people such sickness and disease. " ... having thus made the Creator responsible for all those pains and diseases and miseries (cut off for textual corrections)
above enumerated, and which he could have prevented, the gifted Christian blandly calls him 'Our Father.'\(^\text{39}\)

Because of this fly, all of Noah's family became ill. There was "typhoid, cholera, lockjaw, plague and a hymn to constipation."\(^\text{40}\)

Twain asked why God should get credit for medical cures, when He was the one that created the disease in the first place.

Twain even thought about the issue of dinosaurs having been on the Ark. He finally decided there were not any. "Noah's conscience was easy; it (the dinosaur) was not named in his cargo list and he and the boys were not aware that there was such a creature. He said he could not blame himself for not knowing about the dinosaur, because it was an American animal, and America had not then been discovered."\(^\text{41}\)

By rewriting these Biblical events, Twain was able to disguise his anger and religious frustration with amusement and satire. This method was not only unique, but also very effective. The alert reader instantly catches on to the tension underlying the humor.
A type of religion called Christian Science began to flourish during Twain's time. Needless to say, Twain delved into its basic premises. This resulted in a book entitled Christian Science. (1907)

The book began with a humorous anecdote about a man who had fallen off a cliff. He was in dire need of a surgeon, but there were none to be had in the remote region he was in. A Christian Science doctor (female) was sent for, but being unable to come, she sent a message. She recommended to the patient to keep quiet, comfy and to remember there was nothing at all wrong with him. Obviously, this severely upset the invalid and he emotionally objected to the person who delivered the message:

Did you tell her I walked off a cliff 75 feet high?
Yes.
And struck a boulder at the bottom and bounced?
Yes ... I told her what you told me to tell her; that you were now but an incoherent series of compound fractures extending from your scalp-lock to your heels, and that the comminuted projections caused you to look like a hat-rack. And it was after this that she wished me to remember that there was nothing the matter with me?
Those were her words.42

In other words, the doctor had suggested that he was to deny hunger, thirst and pain as completely non-existent. To this, the injured man replied, "Do they let her run at large, or do they tie her up?"43

Emerging from this anecdote, Twain went on to describe "the
fundamental propositions of Christian Science.\textsuperscript{44} They \ldots are summarized in the four following self-evident propositions: 1) God is All in all, 2) God is good. Good is Mind, 3) God, Spirit, being all, nothing is matter, and 4) Life, God, omnipotent Good, deny death, evil, sin, disease.\textsuperscript{45} In an attempt to understand these four principles, the narrator wondered if saying them backwards would help any. He came to the conclusion that, "Read backward, or forward, or perpendicularly, or at any given angle, these four propositions will always be found to agree in statement and proof."\textsuperscript{46}

Christian Science was founded in 1866 by an American woman named Mary Baker G. Eddy. According to Mrs. Eddy, her religion and leadership were predicted in the Bible. Twain considered the religion incoherent and its leaders equivalent to fortune-tellers, charlatans and hypnotists. The doctors of this faith give no medicine. They stress that the mind has more influence over the body and thus prey on the patient's imagination.

Twain had a deep fear that Mrs. Eddy would one day be worshipped as the new Christ. He predicted that Christian Science would become the most powerful religion in the world by 1940. It contained a universal appeal since "its clientage is the Human Race."\textsuperscript{47} Twain felt that four-fifths of people's illnesses were psychosomatic and thus they would make excellent victims.

The education of Christian Scientists only further exemplified its unreliability in Twain's opinion. For $300 (in 1903), anyone could take a three week course at the Trust Metaphysical College in Boston. The school, like the religion, dealt on a cash level only.
The motto of the Christian Scientists, in reference to the financial aspect of it was, "The laborer is worthy of his hire." Twain interpreted the motto as "Do anything and everything your hand may find to do; and charge cash for it, and collect the money in advance." Fortunately, Twain's prophecy did not come true. Although the religion remains today, it does not have much control. Twain must be smiling about it now. Here's to you, Mary Baker Eddy!
Just as Twain's thoughts about God were important to his religious writings, so were his views of the devil. Twain, true to his style, showed Satan in many different lights. In "That Day in Eden" (an excerpt from "Satan's Diary"), Satan, in the form of the serpent, seemed almost sorry for Adam and Eve. They were desperate to know the meanings of pain, fear, evil and death. Yet, Satan cannot explain to them; it would be incomprehensible. It was not until the apple was tasted that they achieved their moral sense.

In one essay entitled "Sold to Satan," the devil was shown as a member of a business partnership. Twain described Satan quite eloquently: "... the modern Satan (was) tall, slender, graceful, in tights and trunks, a short cape mantling his shoulders, a rapier at his side, a single drooping feather in his jaunty cap, and on his intellectual face the well-known and high-bred Mephistophelian smile." Twain continued by saying he (Satan) was about 6'1" and approximately 215 pounds. The narrator thought to himself that, "He must have seen the admiration in my illuminated face, but he took no notice of it, being long ago used to it in faces of other Christians with whom he had had trade relations."

The Satan of this essay was also made completely of expensive radium. (Radium is capable of destruction and can release its energy.
in different amounts.) When the narrator inquired about Satan's unusual consistency, the devil replied, "Without radium there could be no hell; certainly not a satisfactory one . . . if we hadn't radium we should have to dress the souls in some other material, then, of course, they would burn up and get out of trouble. They would not last an hour."  

Of all the works Twain wrote, *The Mysterious Stranger* contained the broadest description of Satan. This book " . . . contains all of Twain's final wisdom about life."  

In this book, Satan was the nephew of the devil and he came to the town of Eseldorf in Austria in the year 1590. "The point is that Satan, the book's hero, the true creator of human existence, according to Twain, and the glamorous 'teacher' of the group of innocent young boys in the narrative (who's not even the true Satan but a distant nephew), is a remarkably entertaining literary creation."  

In *The Mysterious Stranger*, Satan befriended a group of young boys and amazed them with his tales and tricks. When he made his appearance he was found to be young (only 16,000 years old), friendly, handsome, charming and well-clothed. He possessed many unnatural powers that he flaunted about with pride to the awe-struck boys. He read their minds, created fire out of air, turned water into ice, produced fruit on request and made people and animals from clay, then gave them life. Despite the fact that he was the devil's nephew, Satan claimed to be an angel. Of his relatives, he said,"'It is a good family--ours,' said Satan; 'there is not a better. He (the devil) is the only member of it that has ever sinned.'"  

Although Satan claimed to be completely incapable of sinning or committing a wrong, he turned around and crushed some of the tiny clay people to death.
did it indifferently and casually and shocked his audience of young boys in doing so. Satan lulled them back to him though when he told them more adventure stories. "The stranger had seen everything, he had been everywhere, he knew everything, and he forgot nothing. He saw the world made; he saw Adam created; he saw Samson surge against the pillars and bring the temple down in ruins about him; he saw Caesar's death..."

Not only did Satan have tales of life on Earth, but fascinated the boys with fiery and violent images of hell. He scoffingly called mankind, "dull and ignorant and trivial and conceited, and so diseased and rickety, and such a shabby, poor, worthless lot all around."

In this book, Satan went by the alias of Philip Traum. (Traum meant dream in German.) Through-out the story, Traum/Satan did good things for people. He gave them food and money and defended an innocent who had been falsely accused. Yet, at one point, he directly caused several people to die. He explained this by saying that God had people die in order to save them from worse lives. One boy named Nicky drowned in order to avoid a future life as a medical vegetable due to disease. Despite being an angel, Satan had a dim view of Christians:

In five or six thousand years, five or six high civilizations have risen, flourished, commanded the wonder of the world, then faded out and disappeared; and not one of them except the latest ever invented any sweeping and adequate way to kill people. They all did their best--to kill being the chiefest ambition of the human race and the earliest incident in its history--but only the Christian civilization has scored a triumph to be proud of. Two or three centuries from now it will be recognized that all the competent killers are Christians..."

While the entire book was unusual and at times shocking, the ending was especially revealing of Twain's thoughts. Satan's final
speech before he ventured onward, demonstrated these feelings: "It is true, that which I have revealed to you: there is no God, no universe, no human race, no earthly life, no heaven, no hell. It is all a dream—a grotesque and foolish dream. Nothing exists but you. And you are but a thought—a vagrant thought, a useless thought, a homeless thought, wandering forlorn among the empty eternities." He vanished and left me appalled, for I knew, and realized, that all he had said was true."\(^59\)

Twain wrote The Mysterious Stranger for several reasons. In it he was able to satirize religious hypocrisy, put forth a sermon on morality and used it as an allegory of human life.

A couple of influences were at work upon this book and its author. Twain's life and his religious training as a boy naturally affected the story. Several pieces of literature also influenced the way Twain wrote the book, Paradise Lost, Gulliver's Travels, Zadig, Faust and Micromegas.

Whether Twain portrayed Satan as suave or devilish, he did it entertainingly. His Satans should stand along with Goethe's Mephistopheles and Voltaire's Jesrad. He looked at Satan as an integral part of a religious creed. "The Clemens theology was trinitarian. It involved contempt for the Old Testament God, championship of the insulted and injured Satan, and immense respect for the Universal Creator."\(^60\)
While most of Twain's writings were amusing, some contained elements of great bitterness and rancor. Usually these were written during Twain's bereavement over Livy and Susy's deaths.

In the essay "Thoughts of God," Twain dwelt on the sadistic indifference God seemed to have towards the human race. He cited a trivial example of God's cruelty in the beginning--the creation of the fly. The fly was an intolerable creature that no man could have ever created. So why did God? Twain said, "Not one of us could have planned the fly, not one of us could have constructed him; and no one would have considered it wise to try, except under an assumed name."61 From this small example Twain surmised that "it is plain that there is one moral law for heaven and another for the earth."62

God appeared to ignore all our pleas and usually made no attempt to save us from trouble. To Twain this seemed inconsistent with the church sermons he had heard. "The pulpit assures us that wherever we see suffering and sorrow which we can relieve and do not do it, we sin heavily. There was never yet a case of suffering or sorrow which God could not relieve."63 The question Twain asked was, why was not God a sinner then?

Twain's "The Victims," written in the early 1900's, took almost a satanic point of view. The story was a parody on how each organism,
from a microbe to a man, fed on the organism one stage below them. The story began with molecules, moved to germs; then to insects; then to animals; and finally to humans. Animating each creature with a name and personality served to intensify the concept of the world's cannibalistic tendencies.

"Patriotism and Christianity" connected violence and war to religion. In Twain's opinion, "A man can be a Christian or a patriot, but he can't legally be a Christian and a patriot--except in the usual way: one of the two with the mouth, the other with the heart."64

Twain suggested in this essay that mankind should pity God, "... for he sees unceasingly myriads of his creatures suffering unspeakable miseries--and besides this foresees how they are going to suffer during the remainder of their lives."65

"The War Prayer" reiterated the linkage Twain saw between religion and war. It had better elements within it, but it remained logical. It experienced a surge of renewed popularity during the Viet Nam war.

In this story, which took place in a church, a prayer was being recited in regard to the war: "Bless our arms, grant us the victory, O Lord our God, Father and Protector of our land and flag."66

Following this prayer, a stranger approached the pulpit and indicted the congregation with sanctioning war and death and portraying them as noble and desirable. He then translated their prayer into what he felt was the true message of it:

O Lord our God, help us to tear their soldiers to bloody shreds with our shells; help us to cover their smiling fields with the pale forms of their patriot dead; help us to drown the thunder of the guns with the shrieks of their wounded, writhing in pain ... help us to turn them out roofless
with their children to wander unfriended the wastes of their desolated land in rags and hunger and thirst... for our sakes, who adore Thee, Lord, blast their hopes, blight their lives... We ask it, in the spirit of Love, of Him Who is the source of Love, and Who is the ever-faithful refuge and friend of all that are sore beset and seek His aid with humble and contrite hearts. Amen.

It was believed afterwards, that the man was a lunatic, because there was no sense in what he said.67

On the one-year anniversary of Susy’s death (1897), Twain wrote his angriest essay called "In My Bitterness." His words were a cry of grief and an accusation of injustice to God: "He (God) never does a kindness. When He seems to do one, it is a trap which He is setting. . . He gives you a wife and children whom you adore only that through the spectacle of the wanton shame and miseries which He will inflict upon them, He may tear the palpitating heart out of your breast and slap you in the face with it."68 Sorrowfully, he ended this outpouring of anger with the wrenching words: "Be at peace now. You are out of his reach forever; and I too; He can never hurt me any more."69

Even in the extremes of his emotions, Twain managed to convey his opinions skillfully and with great impact. His bitterness only strengthened his messages.
Despite his cynicism, satirization, biting humor and deep bitterness concerning religion, Twain was not an atheist. He was not truly an agnostic either. Mark Twain believed in a God, just not in the type that organized religions tried to propagandize. Twain had his own personal, internal beliefs that he occasionally put into words.

Between the years of 1880 and 1885, Twain wrote an essay entitled "Three Statements of the '80's." In this essay, he put forth his three major theories on his religious faith.

His first statement was that he did believe in God, but that it was a God no man had ever seen or heard from. He felt that the Bible was written entirely by imaginative men, with no 'Divine inspiration.' He did not believe in 'special providences' and felt the universe was guided by strict laws. Although Twain was unsure and indifferent about the possibility of any type of afterlife, he was firm on the belief that there was no such thing as eternal punishment (i.e. hell): "...to roast him (man) forever for the mere satisfaction of seeing him roast would not be reasonable."70

In addition to this, he felt that moral laws came from the "outcome of world's experience,"71 not God. To Twain, 'sinning' was not hurting God; it was hurting others and so should not be 'divinely'...
rewarded or punished.

Twain's second statement was simple and brief; each and every person was entitled to their own individual religion. He felt that the Bible could be taught in many ways.

Twain's third statement reiterated a portion of statement one. He strongly felt that the Bible was written entirely by some bright men, not by God. "God would have said 'Thou shalt not commit adultery;' but He would not have followed it up in the same book by plainly violating His own law with Mary, the betrothed bride of Joseph. The lamest of modern book-makers would hardly be guilty of so egregious a blunder as that."  

The other essay that defined Twain's religious beliefs was entitled "Mark Twain's God." The theme of this piece was how he would design God, if it were in his realm of ability.

First, Twain's God would have been self-respecting. This would have meant that He would not need to ask for constant praise from His followers. Secondly, Twain would not have made God a merchant—trading the joys of eternity for perpetual worship. Twain felt that would have been more dignified. He would have banished the requirement of verbal prayer to obtain forgiveness. Repentance in a man's heart would be enough. Twain would also have banished the concept of 'unforgiveable sin.' Since He had created it, He would have to carry all the blame. As for hell, Twain said, "There would not be any hell—except the one we live in from the cradle to the grave." 

In this 'blue print' of God, Twain theorized on God's emotional self also. "He (God) would spend some of His eternities in trying to
forgive Himself for making man unhappy when He could have made him happy with the same effort and He would spend the rest of them in studying astronomy."\(^{74}\)

Twain ended this essay with a few deep remarks about his faith:

"The Being who to me is the real God is the one who created this majestic universe and rules it."\(^{75}\) To Twain, there was a Bible, but a completely different one from the one people read: "His (God's) real character is written in plain words in His real Bible, which is Nature and her history . . . The Book of Nature tells us distinctly that God cares not a rap for us--nor for any living creature."\(^{76}\)

Through such essays as these, Twain showed that he did have firm beliefs and took God and religion seriously. His writings were due to the fact that he was " . . . dismayed . . . at the creeds and disciplines of Christianity."\(^{77}\)

Twain did not write his religious works to simply amuse or entertain or even anger. " . . . he tinkered with ideas, hoping to put together a combination which would make life bearable."\(^{78}\) Twain was also not a pessimistic person, contrary to how some of his works may have seemed. "It was certainly not a gloomy temperament that led Mark Twain to curse God and man so often and so earnestly. It was an apple--the bitter fruit of the knowledge of good and evil . . . But Mark Twain ate it, core and all. It deeply colored his art, but it did not affect his temperament."\(^{79}\)

Twain's religious writings still remain as powerful and as thought-provoking today as they did when they were written. The combination of humor, sarcasm and novel ideas succeeded in making them timeless.
"Mark Twain yearned for the good and compulsively gaped at the evil. Guilt, resentment, suffering imaginary and real built up in him an intolerable tension. For this tension there were safety values: (1) exploding in humor, satire, or crusading fervor; (2) reasoning his way out of the moral issue by determinism; (3) evading all issues by losing himself in time, space, or dreams."
Notes


4. Twain, Autobiography, p. 27.

5. Ibid., p. 28.


7. Ibid., p. 17.

8. Ibid., p. 1.

9. Ibid., p. 18.

10. Ibid., p. 38.

11. Ibid., p. 99.


15. Ibid., p. 15-6

16. Ibid., p. 17.
17 Ibid., p. 20.


20 Ibid., p. 148.

21 Ibid., p. 108.

22 Ibid., p. 4.

23 Ibid., p. 35.

24 Ibid., p. 37.

25 Ibid., p. 38.


27 Twain, *Fables*, p. 53.

28 Ibid., p. 55.

29 Ibid., p. 57.

30 Ibid., p. 62.

31 Ibid., p. 66.

32 Ibid., p. 68.

33 Ibid., p. 68.

34 Twain, *Complete Essays*, p. 622.

35 Smith, *Man and Beast*, p. 100.

36 Ibid., p. 100.

37 Ibid., p. 100.

38 Twain, *Complete Essays*, p. 561.
39 Twain, Letters, p. 33.
40 Ibid., p. 34.
41 Twain, Complete Essays, p. 559.
43 Ibid., p. 7.
44 Ibid., p. 12.
47 Ibid., p. 53.
48 Ibid., p. 79.
49 Ibid., p. 79.
50 Twain, Complete Essays, p. 650.
51 Ibid., p. 651.
52 Ibid., p. 656.
53 Geismar, p. xxii.
54 Ibid., p. xxi.
56 Ibid., p. 171.
57 Ibid., p. 172.
58 Ibid., p. 234.
59 Ibid., p. 253.
61 Twain, Fables, p. 112.
62 Ibid., p. 114.
63 Ibid., p. 114.
64 Geismar, p. 114.
65 Ibid., p. 149.
66 Ibid., p. 105.
67 Ibid., p. 106.
68 Twain, Fables, p. 131.
69 Ibid., p. 132.
70 Twain, What is Man?, p. 56.
71 Ibid., p. 56.
72 Ibid., p. 58.
73 Twain, Fables, p. 154.
74 Ibid., p. 154.
75 Ibid., p. 154.
76 Ibid., p. 155.
77 Twain, What is Man?, p. 3.
78 Tuckey, p. 121.
79 Smith, Man and Beast, p. 23-4.
80 Tuckey, p. 121.
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### Appendix I

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