

THE WRITING OF *Tom Sawyer*

When Mark Twain began to write *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* in the early 1870s, he had already experimented with using some of the same materials in a story told in the first person by a character named Billy Rogers, a story later given the title "Boy's Manuscript." A manuscript page is reproduced here, as is a surviving page of Mark Twain's earliest attempt to write a play about Tom Sawyer. A portrait of Laura Hawkins, who served as the model for Becky Thatcher in the completed book, and an advertisement for a patent medicine, Perry Davis's Pain-Killer, follow. An 1876 advertisement for *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* used by the canvassers who sold the book door-to-door, and three letters written by Mark Twain after completion of his manuscript but before publication of the book end the gathering. The photograph shows Mark Twain at work during this period.



A stereopticon photograph of Mark Twain in 1874 in his study at Quarry Farm in Elmira, New York, where he wrote *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Mark Twain Papers, The Bancroft Library.

(*Opposite*) A page from “Boy’s Manuscript,” written by Mark Twain in October 1868, and found with the first two pages, including the author’s own title, missing. Mark Twain Papers, The Bancroft Library. The surviving text is published in full in *Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer among the Indians and Other Unfinished Stories*, ed. Dahlia Armon and Walter Blair (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989). This page reads:

I don’t take any interest in funerals any more. I don’t wish to do anything but just go off by myself & think of *her*. I wish I was dead—that is what I wish I was. Then maybe she would be sorry.

~~Thursday~~ ^ Friday. — ^

My mother ~~does not~~ ^ don’t ^ understand it. And I can’t tell her. She worries about me, & asks me if I’m sick, & where it hurts me— & I have to say that I ain’t sick & nothing don’t hurt me, but she says she knows better, because it’s the measles. So she gave me ipecac, & calomel, & all that sort of stuff & made me ~~aff~~ awful sick. And I had to go to bed, & she gave me a mug of hot sage tea & a mug of hot ~~sheep~~-saffron tea, & covered

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2 feet
p. 508

(2) 37/16 mdc

Act. 1.

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Scene 1.

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A village cottage, with back
door looking into garden.

A closet & the ordinary
furniture. Old lady of
50, cheaply & neatly dressed.

Wears spectacles—knitting.

=


(The old lady)
Aunt Winny. — Tom!

[to answer.] Tom! [to
answer.] What's gone with
that boy, I wonder? You

Page 1 of Mark Twain's earliest attempt to write a Tom Sawyer play, in the early 1870s. Aunt Polly was called Aunt Winny. By 1887, more than ten years after *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* was published, he decided that it was a book "which cannot be dramatized. One might as well try to dramatize any other hymn. Tom Sawyer is simply a hymn, put into prose form to give it a worldly air." Unsent draft letter to W.R. Ward, 8 September 1887, Mark Twain Papers, The Bancroft Library.



A photograph of Laura Hawkins at the age of nineteen. In 1908, Mark Twain remembered that she was "the very first sweetheart I ever had. It was 68 years ago. She was 5 years old, & I the same. I had an apple, & fell in love with her & gave her the core. I remember it perfectly well, & exactly the place where it happened, & what kind of a day it was. She figures in 'Tom Sawyer' as 'Becky Thatcher.'" Letter to Margaret Blackmer, 6-9 October 1908, Beinecke Library, Yale University.



Perry Davis'
PAIN-KILLER

IS JUST WHAT ITS NAME IMPLIES
A
KILLER OF PAIN.

It is NOT a CURE-ALL, but is JUST
THE THING NEEDED in case of the slight
ailments and accidents which occasionally
afflict us all.

For CHOLERA MORBUS, CRAMPS, and all
bowel troubles, IT HAS NO EQUAL.

It removes all pain and soreness from CUTS,
BRUISES, BURNS, &c. (It smarts upon
application, but only for a moment.)

An advertisement for Perry Davis's Pain-Killer, one of the patent medicines Sam Clemens's mother gave him as a child and the inspiration for the incident in chapter 12 of *Tom Sawyer* (see pp. 94–96). According to Dr. J.W. Epler, the medicine contained $\frac{3}{4}$ ounce myrrh, $\frac{1}{3}$ ounce guaiacum resin, $\frac{1}{4}$ ounce gum camphor, $\frac{1}{2}$ dram each of red pepper oil and anise oil, diluted 50 percent with alcohol (*Medical World*, 7 November 1889, 465). Illustration courtesy of K. Patrick Ober.

MARK TWAIN'S NEW BOOK, THE ADVENTURES OF TOM SAWYER.

PRONOUNCED BY ALL WHO HAVE SEEN IT TO BE THE MOST HUMOROUS AND
WONDERFUL PRODUCTION OF THE AUTHOR'S PEN.

In announcing this volume, the publishers have no hesitation in declaring it to be one of the most original, unique, piquant and entertaining of all MARK TWAIN'S works.

The genius requisite to render the written adventures of a boy overwhelmingly fascinating to grown up readers, is possessed but by few, and challenges the deepest admiration. That Mr. Clemens has this, is evident from the burst of enthusiastic praise with which the publication of "TOM SAWYER" in England, has been received. No words have seemed too strong to express the pleasure felt at this fresh exhibition of the author's powers, exerted in a direction least expected. In entering the new field here introduced, Mr. Clemens by no means abandons his old style of writing, as will be realized at once in the perusal of the book. From beginning to end, the pages of "TOM SAWYER" are replete with lively sallies, humorous ideas, and scathing hits. Tom, Aunt Polly, Huckleberry Finn, Becky Thatcher, Joe Harper, Injun Joe and others, are active, original characters, who manage to keep their little world lively and stirring, and inevitably draw the reader within the vortex. The Illustrations are superb, and taken all in all the book is an incomparable one.

The volume will contain nearly 300 pages, with about 150 Illustrations, and will be

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Leather, (Library Style),.....	\$3.25.	Half Turkey, Elegantly Bound,.....	\$4.25.

Published by AMERICAN PUBLISHING CO.,
Hartford, Conn., Chicago, Ill., Cincinnati, Ohio.

Persons entering their names upon the blank pages in this prospectus will be considered as subscribers for the work, but no obligation will rest upon any one to receive the book unless it equals in every respect, the description given and sample shown.

The American Publishing Company's 1876 advertisement for *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* from a sales prospectus with which subscription agents sold the book door-to-door. The buyer had a choice of four bindings, ranging in price from \$2.75 to \$4.25. Courtesy of Clifton Waller Barrett Library, University of Virginia.

THREE LETTERS BY MARK TWAIN

Mark Twain (Samuel L. Clemens) wrote the three letters that follow, signing them "Mark" and "Clemens," to his friend William Dean Howells, the editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*. Howells had written Clemens on 3 July 1875 that he hoped to publish *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* in installments in the magazine, and that he felt "very much interested in your making that your chief work; you wont have such another chance; don't waste it on a boy" (Mark Twain Papers, The Bancroft Library). In the first of these letters, Clemens refers to Le Sage's eighteenth-century picaresque romance *Gil Blas*; to Howells's novel *A Foregone*

Conclusion, which had been serialized in the *Atlantic* in 1874; to Bret Harte, whose novel *Gabriel Conroy* was serialized in *Scribner's Monthly* beginning in November 1875; to Oliver Wendell Holmes, the author of *The Autocrat of the Breakfast-Table* and of a recent pamphlet and poem published by James R. Osgood; to the publisher William F. Gill, who had annoyed Clemens and Osgood by appropriating published work in unauthorized ways; to Whitelaw Reid, the editor of the *New York Tribune*, who had similarly annoyed Osgood; and to his wife, Olivia Clemens, and their daughter Olivia Susan (Susie or Susy). In the second letter, Clemens refers to proofsheets of his "A Literary Nightmare," published in the February 1876 *Atlantic Monthly*; to the writer and historian Charles Francis Adams, whose article "Of Some Railroad Accidents" appeared in the November and December 1875 *Atlantic Monthly*; to Mark Twain's friend and fellow author Charles Dudley Warner; to an unidentified work Clemens was having difficulty writing; to the secretarial copy of *Tom Sawyer*, which Howells was to begin reading and marking; and to the first installment of Howells's story "Private Theatricals," which appeared in the November 1875 *Atlantic Monthly*. In the third letter, Clemens refers to Truman W. (True) Williams, the illustrator of *Tom Sawyer*, who had also illustrated two of Clemens's previous books; again to the secretarial copy of *Tom Sawyer* that Howells had read; to his wife, Olivia Clemens, her mother, Olivia Lewis Langdon, and her aunt Louisa Lewis Marsh; to the Hartford Monday Evening Club, which was to meet on 24 January at Clemens's house, where he planned to read "The Facts Concerning the Recent Carnival of Crime in Connecticut"; and to the sculptor John Quincy Adams Ward, a prospective houseguest of the Howells family. All three letters are in the Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection, New York Public Library, and published in *Mark Twain's Letters, Volume 6: 1874-1875* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 503-6, 594-97, and at *Mark Twain Project Online* (www.marktwainproject.org). Howells convinced Clemens to change "they comb me all to hell": see p. 256.

To William Dean Howells
5 July 1875 • Hartford, Conn.

July 5.

My Dear Howells:

I have finished the story & didn't take the chap beyond boyhood. I believe it would be fatal to do it in any shape but autobiographically—like *Gil Blas*. I perhaps made a mistake in not writing it in the first person. If I went on, now, & took him into manhood, he would just be like all the one-horse men in literature

& the reader would conceive a hearty contempt for him. It is *not* a boy's book, at all. It will only be read by adults. It is only written for adults.

Moreover, the book is plenty long enough, as it stands. It is about 900 pages of MS., & may be 1000 when I shall have finished "working up" vague places; so it would make from 130 to 150 pages of the Atlantic—about what the Foregone Conclusion made, isn't it?

I would dearly like to see it in the Atlantic, but I doubt if it would pay the publishers to buy the privilege, or me to sell it. Bret Harte has sold his novel (same size as mine, I should say) to Scribner's Monthly for \$6,500 (publication to begin in September, I think,) & he gets a royalty of 7½ per cent from Bliss in book form afterward. He gets a royalty of ten per cent on it in England (issued in serial numbers) & the same royalty on it in book form afterward, & is to receive an advance payment of five hundred pounds the day the first No. of the serial appears. If I could do as well, here & there, with mine, it might possibly pay me, but I seriously doubt it—though it is likely I could do better in England than Bret, who is not widely known there.

You see I take a vile, mercenary view of things—but then my household expenses are something almost ghastly.

By & by I shall take a boy of twelve & run him on through life (in the first person) but not Tom Sawyer—he would not be a good character for it.

I wish you would promise to read the MS of Tom Sawyer some time, & see if you don't really decide that I am right in closing with him as a boy—& point out the most glaring defects for me. It is a tremendous favor to ask, & I expect you to refuse, & would be ashamed to expect you to do otherwise. But the thing has been so many months in my mind that it seems a relief to snake it out. I don't know any other person whose judgment I could venture to take fully & entirely. Don't hesitate about saying no, for I know how your time is taxed, & I would have honest need to blush if you said yes.

Osgood & I are "going for" the puppy Gill on infringement of trademark. To win one or two suits of this kind will set literary folks on a firmer bottom. The N.Y. Tribune doesn't own the world—I wish Osgood would sue it for stealing Holmes's poem. Wouldn't it be gorgeous to sue Whitelaw Read for *petty larceny*? I will promise to go into court & swear I think him capable of stealing pea-nuts from a blind pedlar.

Mrs. C. grows stronger. Susie is down with a fever. Kindest regards to you all.

Yrs Ever
Clemens

To William Dean Howells
23 November 1875 • Hartford, Conn.

Hartford, Nov. 23/75.

My Dear Howells:

Herewith is the proof. In spite of myself, how awkwardly I do jumble words together; & how often I do use three words where one would answer—a thing I am always trying to guard against. I shall become as slovenly a writer as Charles Francis Adams if I don't look out. [That is said in jest; because of course I do not seriously fear getting so bad as that. I never *shall* drop so far toward his & Bret Harte's level as to catch myself saying "It must have been wiser to have believed that he might have accomplished it if he could have felt that he would have been supported by those who should have &c., &c., &c.,"] The reference to Bret Harte reminds me that I often accuse him of being a deliberate imitator of Dickens; & this in turn reminds me that I have charged unconscious plagiarism upon Charley Warner; & *this* in turn reminds me that I have been delighting my soul for two weeks over a bran new & ingenious way of beginning a novel—& behold, all at once it flashes upon me that *Charley Warner* originated the idea 3 years ago & told me about it! Aha! So much for self-righteousness! I am well repaid. Here are 108 pages of MS, new & clean, lying disgraced in the waste paper basket, & I am beginning the novel over again in an unstolen way. I would not wonder if I am the worst literary thief in the world, without knowing it.

It is glorious news that you like Tom Sawyer so well. I mean to see to it that your review of it shall have plenty of time to appear before the other notices. Mrs. Clemens decides with you that the book should issue as a book for boys, pure & simple—& so do I. It is surely the correct idea. As to that last chapter, I think of just leaving it off & adding nothing in its place. Something told me that the book was done when I got to that point—& so the strong temptation to put Huck's life at the widow's into detail instead of generalizing it in a paragraph, was resisted. Just send Sawyer to me by Express—I enclose money for it. If it should get lost it will be no great matter.

Company interfered last night, & so "Private Theatricals" goes over till this evening, to be read aloud. Mrs. Clemens is mad, but the story will take *that* all out. This is going to be a splendid winter night for fireside reading, anyway.

I am almost at a dead stand-still with my new story, on account of the misery of having to do it all over again.

We-all send love to you-all.

Yrs Ever
Mark.

To William Dean Howells
18 January 1876 • Hartford, Conn.

Hartford, Jan 18/76

My Dear Howells:

Thanks, & ever so many, for the good opinion of Tom Sawyer. Williams has made about 200 rattling pictures for it—some of them very dainty. Poor devil, what a genius he has, & how he does murder it with rum. He takes a book of mine, & without suggestion from anybody builds no end of pictures just from his reading of it.

There never was a man in the world so grateful to another as I was to you day before yesterday, when I sat down (in still rather wretched health) to set myself to the dreary & hateful task of making final revision of Tom Sawyer, & discovered, upon opening the package of MS that your pencil marks were scattered all along. This was splendid, & swept away all labor. Instead of *reading* the MS, I simply hunted out the pencil marks & made the emendations which they suggested. I reduced the boy-battle to a curt paragraph; I finally concluded to cut the Sunday-school speech down to the first two sentences, (leaving no suggestion of satire, since the book is to be for boys & girls; I tamed the various obscenities until I judged that they no longer carried offense. So, at a single sitting I began & finished a revision which I had supposed would occupy 3 or 4 days & leave me mentally & physically fagged out at the end. I was careful not to inflict the MS upon you until I had thoroughly & painstakingly revised it. Therefore, the only faults left were those that would discover themselves to others, not me—and these you had pointed out.

There was one expression which perhaps you overlooked. When Huck is complaining to Tom of the rigorous system in vogue at the widow's, he says the servants harass him with all manner of compulsory decencies, & he winds up by saying, "and they comb me all to hell." (No exclamation point.) Long ago, when I read that to Mrs. Clemens, she made no comment; another time I created occasion to read that chapter to her aunt & her mother (both sensitive & loyal subjects of the kingdom of heaven, so to speak,) & they let it pass. I was glad, for it was the most natural remark in the world for that boy to make (& he had been allowed few privileges of speech in the book); when I saw that you, too, had let it go without protest, I was glad, & afraid, too—afraid you hadn't observed it. Did you? And did you question the propriety of it? Since the book is now professedly & confessedly a boy's & girl's book, that dern word bothers me some, nights, but it never did until I had ceased to regard the volume as being for adults.

Don't bother to answer *now*, (for you've writing enough to do without allowing me to add to the burden,) but tell me when you see me again.

Which we do hope will be next Saturday or Sunday or Monday. Couldn't you come now & mull over the alterations which you are going to make in your MS, & make them after you get back? Wouldn't it assist the work, if you dropped out of harness & routine for a day or two & have that sort of revivification which comes of a holiday-forgetfulness of the workshop? I can always work after I've been to your house; & if you will come to mine, now, & hear the club toot their various horns over the exasperating metaphysical question which I mean to lay before them in the disguise of a literary extravaganza, it would just brace you up like a cordial. As for Ward, you can fix it easily with him for the next week.

(I feel sort of mean, trying to persuade a man to put down a critical piece of work at a critical time, but yet I am honest in thinking it would not hurt the work nor impair your interest in it to come, under the circumstances.) Mrs. Clemens says, "Maybe the Howellses could come *Monday* if they cannot come Saturday; ask them; it is worth trying." Well, how's that? *Could* you? It would be splendid if you could. Drop me a postal card—I should have a twinge of conscience if I forced you to write a letter, (I am honest about that,)—& if you find you can't make out to come, tell me that you bodies will come the *next* Saturday if the thing be possible, & stay over Sunday.

Yrs Ever

Mark.

MARK TWAIN

THE
ADVENTURES
OF
TOM SAWYER



To

My Wife

This book

is

Affectionately Dedicated.