MARK TWAIN TODAY

ARTHUR L. SCOTT

This article is composed of sections of a talk delivered before the Central Mississippi Valley American Studies Association at the Mark Twain Anniversary Meeting, held at Hannibal-LaGrange College, Hannibal, Missouri, on October 15, 1960.

At the outset there is one thing to keep in mind: 1960 is not a normal Mark Twain year. Since it marks the fiftieth anniversary of Twain's death in 1910, we should be honest and should discount much of the recent fanfare on radio, television, and in the popular press. However, to ignore completely this current acclaim would be foolish, for it represents a world's tribute to a beloved man, whose career still makes excellent copy and whose best books "go right on selling like the Bible"--to use his own expression. But more about this popular ado at the end of my talk.

In discussing Mark Twain today, I shall include activities of the past three or four years. This will lend my subject substance; it will also temper the spasmodic enthusiasm of the anniversary year. The structure of my talk is pyramidal. I plan first to lay the broad base in my remarks on recent Twain scholarship. Then I'll build up with some comments on "the living Twain," i.e. the Twain books still in print. And finally I'll end up high in the air, far removed from academic concerns, in the realm of the popular Mark Twain--the legend and folk-hero.

Within the last four years about twenty new books on Mark Twain have appeared in English. In 1957 E. Hudson Long published his useful reference work entitled A Mark Twain Handbook. In the same year the official custodians of the Mark Twain papers brought together scattered fragments of material from the 1860's and gave us two books about Twain's early newspaper work in Nevada and California. These books were Mark Twain of the Enterprise and Mark Twain: San Francisco Correspondent. The author-editors were Henry Nash Smith and his assistant Frederick Anderson. (Professor Smith is the literary executor of the Mark Twain Estate, in direct line of succession from Albert Bigelow Paine, Bernard De Voto and Dixon Wecter.)

Also appearing in 1957 was a big, fat Book-of-the-Month Club bonus-type volume entitled The Complete Short Stories of Mark Twain. To fill up

over 600 pages, Charles Neider lifted stories from The Innocents Abroad, Roughing It, Life on the Mississippi and other volumes. But, even so, the word "complete" is just a publisher's dream. (Now that the book sells for 75 cents in a paperback, however, it is a real bargain, especially for students in my Mark Twain course.)

The following year, 1958, saw the publication of three books of a more purely academic interest. In the Netherlands Daniel McKeithan published Court Trials in Mark Twain and Other Essays, while in this country McKeithan also edited Twain's first letters from Europe and appropriately called the volume Traveling with the Innocents Abroad. And in 1958 Philip Foner presented a rather specialized portrait of Mark Twain, Social Critic.

Last year was a year of editing. Frederick Anderson got out a handsome limited edition, Concerning Cats: Two Tales by Mark Twain. Prefaced by a pleasant essay on Twain's love for cats, the book prints fresh material from the Mark Twain Papers. The other two Twain volumes of 1959 seem to have been aimed at the gift trade. The first of these was a carefully selected compilation designed to demonstrate The Art, Humor and Humanity of Mark Twain. This was the work of two respected students of Twain--Minnie Brashear and Robert Rodney. Most of the publicity of 1959, however, went to Charles Neider's boldly entitled The Autobiography of Mark Twain. Neider's book has had a brisk sale, as you know; but it is disappointing to us Twainians, who expected more than we were given. About one-fourth of Mark Twain's dictated autobiography had not yet been published, so we were hoping. Unfortunately, Neider's edition not only gives us very little new stuff, it also leaves out some of the most interesting sections which had already been printed by Paine and De Voto.

This brings us down to 1960, a banner year for Mark Twain scholarship. After more than twenty years of research, Walter Blair has finally presented his definitive study of a great novel in his Mark Twain and Huck Finn. This is a major work. Unless you are a New Critic or hipped on Freud, this book will tell you all you want to know about certain aspects of Huckleberry Finn--its real-life prototypes, its literary origins, its composition, its reception, its importance. In fact, unless you are a Mark Twain specialist, it may tell you even more than you care to know.

Of equal stature with Blair's book is the two-volume edition of The Twain-Howells Letters, meticulously edited by Henry Nash Smith and William Gibson, with the assistance of Frederick Anderson. There are almost 700 letters here--all that the editors have been able to track down. They represent forty years of correspondence between Mark Twain and his good friend and closest literary adviser, William Dean Howells. More than half these letters are printed here for the first time; all are fully annotated. These two works are labors of true love and scholarship. [For a more detailed discussion of these two works, see Edward F. Grier's review in this issue.]

A third new book for the student is Kenneth Lynn's Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor. Lynn's premise is that Twain was not just a brilliant improviser or "divine amateur," but was "a conscious and deliberate creator." Lynn proceeds, therefore, to suggest the influences upon Mark Twain of the whole stream of humor which flows down from William Byrd and Davy Crockett through The Spirit of the Times and into such colorful creations as Simon Suggs and Sut Lovingood.

This year, too, Caroline Harnsberger has followed up her "Fingertips" volume with a more intimate study, Mark Twain, Family Man. Much of her information, she told me this summer, came directly from Twain's daughter Clara. Arlin Turner has also just published his second Twain book. Growing from his earlier study of the Twain-Cable correspondence is his new Mark Twain and George W. Cable: The Record of a Literary Friendship. Actually, this is a portrait of Twain as viewed by Cable and reported in his miscellaneous writings and talk. Another brand new book is by Svend Petersen, who has selected and arranged numerous comments by Twain and edited them in a volume entitled Mark Twain and the Government.

Special study pamphlets on Mark Twain and on Huckleberry Finn have appeared during the past two years as teaching and research aids. Furthermore, as you might expect, there have also been a number of recent juveniles about Mark Twain, bearing such titles as Mark Twain on the Mississippi (E. S. Miers, 1957), Adventures of Mark Twain (Jerry Allen, 1957), America's Own Mark Twain (J. Eaton, 1958). And children's plays are still being made from Twain stories: Tom Sawyer and Injun Joe by Lewy Olfson in 1959, The Prince and the Pauper by Elizabeth Bremer in 1960.

Other books are announced for later this fall, too. Indiana will publish Mark Twain on the Lecture Circuit by Paul Fatout (Nov. 21). And I hear that Crowell means to bid for the holiday trade with a luxury item, just published: Milton Meltzer's Mark Twain Himself: A Pictorial Biography. This contains about 600 pictures, I've been told, which may not leave much room for text.

So much for the recent books. Their number and quality would astound those early critics who believed that Mark Twain's reputation would not outlive Mark Twain, the man. Those genteel and proudly cultivated critics would wonder even more at the volume of Mark Twain scholarship in the periodicals. The bibliographies all show that academic interest in Mark Twain has been steadily increasing. Take, for example, the Annual Bibliographies printed in the PMLA. Items listed under "Clemens": in 1953 there were 19; in 1955 there were 31; in 1957 there were 37; and in 1959 there were 45. (This year there will doubtless be many more, but the special anniversary tributes and appraisals will distort the pattern.) Obviously, I cannot take time to discuss these magazine articles. They display a range of interest which is boundless: from Mark Twain and the Boston Nihilists to

Mark Twain's influence on J. D. Salinger, from Mark Twain and the Byron Scandal to the height of Tom Sawyer's fence and which way the boards ran--up and down or sideways, and whether there was any space between the boards. There seems to be very little in Mark Twain which does not interest today's students.

Next, how about doctoral dissertations? Perhaps best of all these suggest the concerns of the scholars of the future. Between 1917 and 1957 there were 63 dissertations written on Mark Twain. About half of these were completed between 1950 and 1957. Since 1957 nine more dissertations on Twain have appeared--the same number, incidentally, which has appeared during that time on that subtle old master, Henry James. I confess that this James comparison surprised me. It proves, I believe, that Mark Twain has, at long last, come of age in academic circles. (Of his popular appeal there has never been a doubt.)

Since there are many more people writing books and articles and dissertations today than ever before, we must be careful with statistics. The point is that amid the current boom on the academic front Mark Twain is more than holding his own. He is enjoying a boom within the boom. He has been found eminently discutable--a prerequisite, it seems, for lasting fame. During his own lifetime his reputation as a mere "funny fellow" used to make Mark Twain furious, especially when he was writing with his pen "dipped in hell." How delighted he would be, therefore, to view the Twain scholarship of the past few years and to see us assembled here this weekend--and to realize that finally someone is taking him seriously.

Before I move out of the field of scholarship and on to other matters, I might say a word about the location of Mark Twain resource materials. The official Mark Twain Papers are behind a heavy door in Room 113 of the General Library of the University of California in Berkeley. Some of you have been there, I know. There you find over fifty file drawers chock full of letters, manuscripts, photostats, typescripts, clippings, reprints, notebooks, articles and scrapbooks. When I walked in, I felt like that mosquito at the nudist camp: I knew what I ought to do, but I didn't know where to begin. The manuscript of ~~Joan~~ of Arc is out there. There, too, is the original of that supposedly shocking autobiography which may never be printed in its entirety. There the scholar can pour over 46 of the private notebooks which Mark Twain carried in his pockets for forty years and more--one at a time, of course. These notebooks are fascinating and invaluable. (Fred Anderson is sweating over them right now. Incidentally, I understand that a single stray notebook brought $25,000 at auction this spring.) And among these papers are most of the unpublished stories, plays, sketches, articles, novels, memoranda and private correspondence which Mark Twain left when he died. All the books about Mark Twain are out there also, as well as a considerable amount of magazine and newspaper stuff on Twain. In short, the Mark Twain Estate is sparing no effort to make this the place to go for

anyone who undertakes a major Twain project. But let me warn you that this is no mere fun-room. At times it is a chamber of horrors. After a summer in Berkeley, Kenneth Lynn wrote, "The unpublished Papers of Mark Twain are the broken ruins and unfinished monuments of a great talent. To go poking about amongst them is an appalling experience. For they record, these shards, the steep descent of a richly humorous imagination into black despair." Mark Twain once said, "Everyone is a moon and has a dark side which he never shows to anybody." But out in Berkeley you can discover the dark side of Mark Twain.

No other collection can approach these official Mark Twain Papers, which are part of the Mark Twain Estate and are by law administered in such a way as to bring no disgrace to the name of Clemens and to assure Mark Twain's daughter Clara, now 86, of a good income. There are, however, other collections of Twainiana. By no means does Berkeley have everything, although the Estate tries constantly to supplement its holdings with copies and photostats. The Berg Collection in the New York Public Library, for example, has the manuscript of A Connecticut Yankee, as well as a valuable file of original manuscripts, letters and other material. Most of the Huckleberry Finn manuscript is in the Buffalo Public Library. Other materials of note are in the Houghton Library at Harvard, at the Huntington Library in San Marino, in the Lilly Collection at the University of Indiana, and in private collections like those of C. Walter Barrett and Samuel Charles Webster. Nor should scholars overlook the Hartford Memorial Library in Twain's old home or the growing files and library of the Mark Twain Research Foundation. This Research Foundation owns many volumes from Twain's own private library, has a fine bibliographical file, a complete set of first editions, and is building up a collection of foreign language editions of Twain's books. These items are now deposited in the Mark Twain Memorial Shrine. One of the Tom Sawyer manuscripts is out there, too. For Twain scholars the well is not running dry by any means. The prospect for the future is exciting.

I should also add that The Mark Twain Research Foundation publishes the small bi-monthly Twainian, which is devoted solely to Mark Twain. (The same cannot be said of The Mark Twain Journal, put out at irregular intervals down near St. Louis by Cyril Clemens, a distant cousin of Twain's.) The Research Foundation is largely responsible for the development of the beautiful Mark Twain State Park, for the construction of the Memorial Shrine, and for trying to make this Shrine into a midwest center for Mark Twain research.

Now that I've tried to lay the broad base of scholarship, let me proceed to the next level of my pyramid--the living Twain. Time is the great winnower. How much of Mark Twain is still alive fifty years after his death? One touchstone is the circulation of books in the public libraries; and I have read that Mark Twain leads our whole nineteenth century in this

regard. Looking in another direction, we find that Mark Twain's best books are all still in print in the United States. The genteel critics of the nineteenth century agreed, in the main, that The Prince and the Pauper was Twain's best novel and that Huckleberry Finn was amateurish, unpleasant and crude. You know as well as I do how tastes have changed. This is not to imply that The Prince and the Pauper is not still a delightful romance for children. It is. Mark Twain wrote it specifically for children; and last year fond parents could still find it freshly printed in no less than eight editions.

As for Huckleberry Finn-- the novel which Twain kept pigeonholing so that he could work on The Prince and other books--just about everyone now regards it as one of the great American novels, along with The Scarlet Letter and Moby Dick. And last year Huckleberry Finn was being published in twenty-five different editions from cheap paperbacks to lavishly illustrated gift volumes. If the signs can be trusted, old Huck--with the looks of a wharf-rat and the instincts of a gentleman--is going to die hard. If ever. The stamp of immortality seems to be on him.

In a different way, the same may be true of his best friend Tom Sawyer. The novel Huckleberry Finn was written for adults, but Tom Sawyer was meant for boys. Consequently, while the colleges have helped to keep Huck alive, Tom has had to go it more on his own. That he has had no trouble is evidenced by the twenty-five editions of Tom Sawyer also in print last year. As for the recent banning of Huckleberry Finn from many of the New York public schools because of racial reasons, I would like to say only that some people cannot see beyond Huck's word "Nigger" to the fact that Jim is the finest, most noble person in the book. Old Huck knows this. He is smarter than some of us.

Twenty-five reprintings each of Tom and Huck, eight of The Prince. What else was being offered last year? Not counting books reprinted only once or twice, seven editions of Life on the Mississippi were available, five of A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court, four of Pudd'nhead Wilson, three of The Innocents Abroad, three of Roughing It, and at least eight different collections of miscellaneous Mark Twain writings. Twain's beloved Joan of Arc is not doing so well; but, even without Joan, the list of Twain books in print is an impressive one.

As for royalties: in 1958 the royalties from Mark Twain's works amounted to $22,000, the total Twain Estate was valued at $700,000, and Twain's daughter Clara received more than $35,000 before taxes. (Last year's royalties came to $38,000, I just read in Life.) Also, since 1919 a sinking fund of $10,000 has been put away each year. In case you are puzzled about royalties from books now in the public domain, I refer you to the attorney for the Mark Twain Estate. It seems to have something to do not with copyrights, but with a patent on the name "Mark Twain." No one I've met appears to understand it very well; but apparently no one wants to tan-

gle with the Estate or to short-change Clara. [According to Henry Nash Smith, this patent is less important in law than it is as a myth among scholars. The strength of the Estate is due to the care with which Twain had his will drawn up. Ed.]

Right here would be the perfect place for me to give you the statistics on Mark Twain translations into foreign languages and on the sale of his books abroad. Unfortunately, I can't. All my information on the foreign market is many years old. The great Index Translationum is of no help here. We know, of course, that from the beginning Twain's books have been enormously popular in northern and central Europe, somewhat less so in those nations which are accustomed to more wit and politics, more subtlety and sex in their literature. I have read that right now in Russia the sales of Twain's books are close behind those of Jack London and Upton Sinclair. However, since I suspect that the Soviets read him for the wrong reasons (and maybe in garbled texts), perhaps I should not mention the matter.

Before moving on to unbookish things, I should like to add that the book collecting trade in early Mark Twain editions is brisker than it has ever been. Every time I order three books, two of them have already been sold. I sometimes reply airmail on the same day, but I seldom get what I want most. A fine copy of the first issue of The Jumping Frog or of Huckleberry Finn might not rival a Cézanne or a Monet in price, but in the book trade it is just as hot an item as an impressionist painting is at an art auction today. We Twainians do not collect for prestige or as a form of speculation; but it is comforting to us--as well as to our heirs--to see the market on a constant rise and to discern not the slightest dimming in the reputation of the old Belle of New York.

And now we have reached the top of the pyramid--that least substantial but most conspicuous aspect of Mark Twain Today. This is the popular ado on the non-literary level or, at least, on the non-bookish level. Newspapers, magazines and television have led the way in paying special tribute to Mark Twain in this fiftieth year since his death. In general, the newspapers and magazines have performed their services well. The cover-story in Newsweek shows more than a careless desire to compliment. The American Book Collector published a Special Mark Twain Number this summer, as did other periodicals. Holiday, Coronet, Travel, Look, American Heritage--these are among the many slicks which have honored Mark Twain with pages of excellent photographs and brief texts. Even The New Yorker showed its interest by running a long critical appraisal of Mark Twain and of Mark Twain scholarship. The anniversary tributes are too numerous to detail.

Television, it seems to me, has not done its job as well as the press. (I speak only of those programs I actually saw.) Mark Twain must have turned over in his grave to see his dramatic fantasy of boyhood, Tom Sawyer, turned into a wishy-washy musical. This was last spring. More recently, an NBC "Special" took liberties with Aunt Polly and Muff Potter (in love, in this version), but kept the spirit of the novel intact. As for the TV dram-

atization of Roughing It--one of Twain's liveliest and funniest books--it looked to me as if it were all shot on a broken down sound stage with a left-over cast. The actors tried to play some of the best scenes in the book, but they failed. For me it was a huge disappointment, a dismal evening.

Only slightly better was that hour-and-a-half Special devoted to Mark Twain's last years. A good actor, well made up and well dressed, dragged us through all the most painful experiences of the aging Mark Twain from the death of his daughter Susy in 1896 to the death of his daughter Jean on Christmas Eve 1909. Except for casting a tall, thin Howells, the facts were pretty straight; but somebody must have told the star that Mark Twain felt really beat, man--beat, beat, beat. Mark Twain's friends in real life did not see him as beat. Mad, yes; furious, passionate, vengeful, bitter--but not moping, slouching, dragging, beat. His head was bloody, true; but unbowed. This was another painful evening for those of us who admire Mark Twain as a man of courage and vitality.

Since I really enjoy television as a medium, I am happy to report that its Prince and the Pauper was delightful--sprightly and realistic, gay and satiric, nonsensical and melodramatic all in turn. It was fun; just as important, it was Mark Twain. To my mind, however, the most interesting of these TV productions was the one called The Age of Mark Twain. This was the program done entirely with hundreds of photographs and drawings, except for a few old movie clips at the end. The narration was perfect. It was all tasteful, entertaining, quickly paced--and sneakily educational. Mark Twain would have loved it.

About the movies I don't wish to say much. Gregory Peck's Man with a Million had to work hard to blow up Twain's short story to feature size. The result is Hollywood, not Twain. As for Huckleberry Finn, I'll leave it to you whether Mark Twain would recognize his bewhiskered old deadbeat King or his earthy waterfront boy or his scroungy prewar river towns. There is even a question whether Mark Twain would acknowledge authorship of this pretty, fumigated, stylized, emasculated little Hollywood romance for children. (One critic said that it bore as much resemblance to Huckleberry Finn as to Kant's Critique of Pure Reason.) And now Hollywood is planning a new life of Mark Twain. It must be twenty-five years since Frederick March won that Oscar for his portrayal of Twain. March is as fine an actor as there is around these days; then, too. But let's hope that this time the producer will use the technical advice of some of our California scholars.

While I am in the realm of show business, I must pay respects to a young actor who has done more than anyone to make the world Mark Twain conscious during the past two years. This is Hal Holbrook, whose off-Broadway An Evening with Mark Twain (or was it Mark Twain Tonight?) was the surprise hit of last season. Right now he is supposed to be doing his show in the British Isles. This winter, I believe, Hal is going to do it in New York again. (Professor George-William Smith of Chicago does a simi-

lar impersonation. He calls himself "the poor man's Hal Holbrook," but this is modesty, as you can attest if you were present at the Shrine dedication in June.) As for Hal Holbrook, he has had his one-man show on the road all over the United States. The State Department has even sent him to Asia. Since Holbrook not only knows his Twain, but also reads the Twain scholarship, he realizes that Mark Twain did not go around lecturing during his old-age, white suit period, puffing a big cigar. But, if you have caught the show, you must admit that the white suit, quavering voice and eloquent cigar are most effective stage devices. Hal Holbrook also put out a book, Mark Twain Tonight!; and his longplay record, made during an actual performance, is a surefire party hit.

Speaking of records, Harry Belafonte too got out a record last year called Mark Twain. He prefaces his song with his own explanation of how Mark Twain got his pen-name. According to Belafonte, it is merely a corruption of "Mark Twine" from the leadsman's call after pulling up the leadline or "twine." I would say that Harry is close, but misses. At any rate, Harry Belafonte's sensational popularity has brought Mark Twain's name before an immense audience. And not quite the same audience which has been listening with pleasure to Jerome Kern's Mark Twain and Ferde Grofé's Mississippi Suite.

One of the best biographies of Twain is entitled Mark Twain: Man and Legend. Mark Twain is indeed a legend. He needs no anniversary celebrations to keep his name alive. And some of his creations have just about entered into American folklore. How else can you explain the magnetic attraction in Disneyland of Tom Sawyer's Island, of Huck's raft, and of the great paddle-wheeler named "Mark Twain"? Why else is it that not only boys, but even college professors and business men always seem to be making summer excursions down the Mississippi on beat up old rafts? Why else is it that foreign tourists go out of their way to visit Hartford, that visitors by the thousands swarm through the Mark Twain Cave, home and museum in Hannibal, and that the new Mark Twain Shrine in Florida seems fated to become a Mecca of the midwest? And maybe you have read that this summer no fewer than 670 frogs from more than a dozen different countries were entered in the thirty-third annual Jumping Frog Contest in Calaveras County, California. There are carefully drawn contest rules, experienced judges and an arena which accommodates 20,000 spectators. Mark Twain today would not be the big business he is, were he not the best beloved man of letters yet produced by the United States.

The University of Illinois