

## Mark Twain's – The Gilded Age and other works

As good fortune would have it, I was left from someone in the generation past a series of beautifully bound old books of Twain's printed in the 1930's or 1940's. They are not dated and don't have a copyright page like modern books. The original publisher, when he had written them, was Nelson Doubleday in Garden City, New York. But in the 40's my copies were published by arrangement with Harper & Row under permission of S. L. Clemens trademark.

Of the set, I read *A Connecticut Yankee in King's Arthurs's Court* first. It was fanciful and I suppose in its own way a very early science fiction work. Twain's sardonic humor was skillfully deployed in this imaginative work. He, the Yankee, Sir Boss is the narrator and educates us about the absurdity of humanity using medieval "values" contrasted with his 19th century modernity. It was thought-provoking and hilarious at once. His 19<sup>th</sup> century thoughts about society, culture and humanity are not that much different than ours were up to the late 20<sup>th</sup>. The 21<sup>st</sup> century is a strange new thing and who knows where its supposed values will lead the culture and the society.

Certainly I enjoy living in the past through literature and my own writing. It is there I find some evidence of grace and graciousness I cannot find in the present. Yes, our American history is a million stories of the good, the bad, and the ugly. That is no surprise to any adult with a developed pre-frontal cortex and the ability to reason. But I learn from the past more than the present, so I find myself there often, exploring and reasoning.

Currently I am reading *The Gilded Age*. I had previously written about many of its themes in my own third novel – *The American: A Man's Life*.

I guess I have become an exegesis writer in addition to my own work. That is because I admire so many of the writers in our American lexicon. I study them and examine the way they use language and put words together. It has helped me a little bit but I am comfortable with my limited abilities. The bar is too high for my talent. But I work hard and I have read writers who are worse than I am.

So here once again are some words from a great writer I admire:

"She sat long, with the letters in her lap, thinking – and unconsciously freezing. She felt like a lost person who had traveled down a long lane in good hope of escape, and, just as the night descends finds his progress barred by a bridgeless river whose further shore, if it has one, is lost in the darkness. If she could only have found these letters a month sooner! That was her thought. But now the dead had carried their secrets with them. A dreary melancholy settled down upon her. An undefined sense of injury crept into her heart. She grew very miserable.

She had just reached the romantic age – the age when there is a sad sweetness, a dismal comfort to a girl to find out that there is a mystery connected with her birth, which no other piece of good luck can afford. She had more than her rightful share of practical good sense, but still she was human; and to be human is to have one's little modicum of romance secreted away in

one's composition. One never ceases to make a hero of one's self, (in private,) during life, but only alters the style of his heroism from time to time as the drifting years belittle certain gods of his admiration and raise up others in their stead that seem greater.

The recent wearing days and nights of watching, and the wasting grief that had possessed her, combined with the profound depression that naturally came with the reaction of idleness, made Laura peculiarly susceptible at this time to romantic impressions. She was a heroine, now, with a mysterious father somewhere. She could not really tell whether she wanted to find him and spoil it all or not; but still all the traditions of romance pointed to the making of the attempt as the usual and necessary course to follow; therefore she would someday begin the search when opportunity should offer."