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Mark Twain: A Literary Life

Everett Emerson
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With biographical narration and liberal quoting from Twain's complete writings, Emerson, in essence, co-authors with Samuel Clemens to create this all at once engaging and purified life story. This strategic partnership between biographer (Emerson) and subject (Clemens) enables contemporary audiences to enjoy the pleasures of a straightforward biography complemented with parallels in Twain literature rather than burdened by endless and boorish "scholarly" interpretation.

Mark Twain is an achievement broad in vision and impact, explaining the love of fiction in the author, even when applied to real events. "The writer himself is largely responsible for the myths about himself," Emerson explains. From the nautical pseudonym to the split personality of writer and living character, the man who inspired a hundred rural "hometown of's" in the United States lives again in Emerson's original treatment.

Appealing to scholastic seekers of Twain lifeblood as well as general readers, Emerson immaculately chronicles Twain's love of theater, his business interests and failures, his changing views of Christianity, the unfinished books, censorship, extensive and life-defining world travel, politics and Twain's struggles to create himself, including the many attempts (and finally victory) at autobiography.

Clemens, Emerson asserts, was a solid reproduction of his father's common sense and his mother's (the stronger literary influence) push toward organized religion and humanitarianism. In his adult years, Clemens went from hiding in a room of a farmhouse in Elmira, New York to bang out manuscripts, to the lecture circuit to make money when his foolish business dealings forced him into bankruptcy. Clemens struggled so much against his own feelings of literary inadequacy and drought that he even considered, on more than one occasion, to write sequels to Huckleberry Finn and other cherished novels.

Leave it to Twain to give us the final thought in this life and our place in it. Despite all the trials and tragedies, man "has unquestionably one weapon—laughter. Against laughter, nothing can stand."
BRANDON M. STICKNEY (October 16, 1999)

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