ForeWord Reviews

Proper Mark Twain
Leland Krauth
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When he first donned the white suit, Samuel Clemens became the "proper" Mark Twain, speaking with irreverence to conservative society, but really believing that honoring faith, country and family was the highest calling.

A University of Colorado at Boulder professor, Krauth stresses that Clemens "portrayed Mark Twain to the world as nothing less than an eminent Victorian…" The premise, though scholarly and overdeveloped, is long-awaited and reassuring, especially in today's dangerously seductive American political climate of George W. Bush and William Bennett.

Proper Mark Twain is a beam from above, illuminating the real message of the author and liberating him from the atheists who've claimed Twain as their own. Unbelievers have heralded the father of humorist literature as a modern Voltaire, poking fun at the ways of Christians. Drawing his conclusions from speeches, letters, novels and other sources, Krauth asserts just the opposite—that Twain was open to more than one religion, but stopped short at belittling the dogmatic masses. His humor, however pointed and critical, was meant to stir thought and invert upon itself, making fun, therefore, of the detractors.

Fortunately, this late in the Twain literature game, the author extensively notes his sources, including nearly 200 books about Twain, and is sure to mention even radical voices in Clemens literature, from Leslie Fiedler to Toni Morrison.

Twain wanted us to recognize the frauds attempting to monger their wares. He was inspired by purity and humbled by the devotion of everyman. As we hear today in popular culture, he was somebody who wanted to believe. Twain was open and politically correct enough to allow each good citizen his, or her, own search for the truth.

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