

INTRODUCTION

ANIMALS WERE INTEGRAL to Mark Twain's work as a writer from the first story that earned him national renown to pieces he wrote during his final years that remained unpublished at his death. Twain is famous for having crafted amusing and mordant quips about animals, as well as for having brought to life a cavalcade of animals who are distinctive, quirky, vividly drawn, and memorable. He is less known for being the most prominent American of his day to throw his weight firmly behind the movement for animal welfare.

Mark Twain's Book of Animals brings together in one volume writings that span more than fifty years, nearly the full range of Twain's career. It includes familiar stories as well as pieces that have never appeared in print before. We encounter Twain at his silliest and at his most philosophical, at his most sentimental and most sardonic, Twain having fun and Twain seething in anger. We read texts that are playful and texts that are dark, texts that are appealing and texts that are repulsive. We get glimpses of Twain as a child and as a parent, artist, thinker, and activist. Twain's writings on animals, in short, are as complex and variegated as the author himself.

Mark Twain came of age as a writer at a time when Western culture was struggling to assimilate and grasp the significance of the links that Charles Darwin posited between humans and other animals. Twain himself often weighed in on this reexamination of humankind's place in creation, even limning a delightful post-Darwinian Eden in which Adam hypothesizes that the newest small animal in the neighborhood (we recognize it as his baby son) must be a new kind of fish.¹ Adam decides that it must be some other kind of animal only after he throws it in the water and it sinks. But the question that stumps Twain's Adam seriously troubled Twain and his peers, as well: what kind of animal *was* man after all? And what obligations—if any—did he owe the other creatures with whom he shared the earth?

These questions percolated throughout the last third of the nineteenth century, and they surface again and again in the work of Mark Twain, where a broad range of animals take center stage with the human animals who populate the planet alongside them. A long-jumping frog, a churchgoing poodle,

ravenous coyotes, and loquacious blue-jays are just a few of the memorable animals we meet in his work. But while Twain often found animals to be a reliable source of humor at the start of his career, they soon became much more: an Archimedean point from which to view—and evaluate—humans. Twain’s astute observations of nonhuman animals, and of the ways they were treated, enabled him to train a cynical eye on human animals, and find them wanting. It turns out that the Lowest Animal—as he came to call man—did not stack up so well against the rest of the animal kingdom.

This introduction opens with an overview of Mark Twain’s personal experience with actual animals and then looks at the roles animals played in his work, moving chronologically through the three periods into which the selections in this book are divided, the 1850s–1860s, the 1870s–1880s, and the 1890s–1910. The afterword discusses the cultural conversation about animals that Twain’s writings entered and, in turn, helped shape.

Animals in Mark Twain’s Life

*A home without a cat—and a well-fed, well-petted and properly revered cat—
may be a perfect home, perhaps, but how can it prove title?*

—*The Tragedy of Pudd’nhead Wilson*, chap. 1

TWAIN WAS SURROUNDED by animals from childhood through the last years of his life. His mother’s compassion for all animals made a big impression on young Sam. He tells us in his autobiography that

One day in St. Louis she walked out into the street and greatly surprised a burly cartman who was beating his horse over the head with the butt of his heavy whip; for she took the whip away from him and then made such a persuasive appeal in behalf of the ignorantly offending horse that he was tripped into saying he was to blame; and also into volunteering a promise which of course he couldn’t keep, for he was not built in that way—a promise that he wouldn’t ever abuse a horse again. That sort of interference in behalf of abused animals was a common thing with her all her life. . . . All the race of dumb animals had a friend in her.²

The sympathy Jane Clemens held for stray cats was striking. “By some subtle sign,” Twain wrote, “the homeless, hunted, bedraggled, and disreputable cat recognized her at a glance as the born refuge and champion of his sort—and followed her home. His instinct was right, he was as welcome as the prodigal son.”³ At one point in 1845 the family had nineteen cats; according to Twain,

“there wasn’t one in the lot that had any character, not one that had any merit, except the cheap and tawdry merit of being unfortunate. They were a vast burden to us all—including my mother—but they were out of luck, and that was enough; they had to stay.” Cats were the only pets Jane Clemens permitted her children to have. They were “not allowed to have caged ones.” “An imprisoned creature was out of the question,” Twain recalled. “My mother would not have allowed a rat to be restrained of its liberty.”⁴ Albert Bigelow Paine, Mark Twain’s official biographer, called Jane Clemens’s “sense of pity” “abnormal,” writing that “She refused to kill even flies, and punished the cat for catching mice.”⁵

To a large extent, Jane Clemens’s son Sam shared his mother’s revulsion at the thought of inflicting pain on animals—but not as a result of her supplications. In the unpublished “A Family Sketch” (1901), he recalled that “for more than fifty-five years I have not wantonly injured a dumb creature” but credited that fact not “to home, school or pulpit, but to a momentary outside influence.”

When I was a boy my mother pleaded for the fishes and birds and tried to persuade me to spare them, but I went on taking their lives unmoved, until at last I shot a bird that sat in a high tree, with its head tilted back, and pouring out a grateful song from an innocent heart. It toppled from its perch and came floating down limp and forlorn and fell at my feet, its song quenched and its unoffending life extinguished. I had not needed that harmless creature, I had destroyed it wantonly, and I felt all that an assassin feels, of grief and remorse when his deed comes home to him and he wishes he could undo it and have his hands and his soul clean again from accusing blood.⁶

(If we take Twain at his word that this childhood experience made him loath to “wantonly [injure] a dumb creature ever after,” then we must assume that if—as he claims in *Roughing It*—he took a shot at a jackrabbit in the Nevada desert to scare him and watch the velocity at which he’d speed off, then he really did intend to miss.⁷ Although Twain condemned cruelty to animals when he saw others inflicting it, on this occasion, at least, he seems to have been blind to the cruelty of his own behavior. Then again, since Twain never exempted himself from the flaws of which he accused mankind, he may have had behavior like his own in mind when he wrote, “Of all the animals, man is the only one that is cruel.”)⁸ His close friend William Dean Howells recalled that Twain “abhorred the dull and savage joy of the sportsman in a lucky shot,” adding that “once when I met him in the country he had just been

4 INTRODUCTION

sickened by the success of a gunner in bringing down a blackbird, and he described the poor, stricken, glossy thing, how it lay throbbing its life out on the grass, with such pity as he might have given a wounded child."⁹

Some eight years before Twain wrote about his own regret at killing a bird when he was a child, he had Huck Finn reflect on a similar experience (in *Tom Sawyer Abroad*). Here is Huck, in his own voice, describing how it felt to shoot a bird:

. . . I see a bird setting on a limb of a high tree, singing, with its head tilted back and his mouth open, and before I thought I fired, and his song stopped and he fell straight down from the limb, all limp like a rag, and I run and picked him up, and he was dead, and his body was warm in my hand, and his head rolled about, this way and that, like his neck was broke, and there was a little white skin over his eyes, and one little drop of blood on the side of his head, and laws! I couldn't see nothing more for the tears; and I hain't never murdered no creature since, that warn't doing me no harm, and I ain't going to.¹⁰

(Despite his disapproval of the wanton cruelty that hunting as a sport condoned, Twain did not object to killing animals for food, a view underlying his humorous piece "Hunting the Deceitful Turkey," in which the turkey clearly gets the better of the narrator trying to catch him.)¹¹ Given that adults in the nineteenth century often viewed boys' killing small wild animals with approval—as "a rehearsal for the activities of manhood," as Katherine Grier has observed—Twain's revulsion from hunting as sport or pastime is notable.¹²

When Twain himself became a parent, he retained the prohibition on caged pets that had prevailed throughout his childhood, and also made sure there were always plenty of cats. He wrote in an 1884 letter to Charlie Webster, "There is nothing so valuable in a home as a baby—& no young home is complete *without* a baby—a baby & a cat. Some people scorn a cat & think it not an essential; but the Clemens tribe are not of these."¹³ His daughter Clara recalled that if for any reason she had to disturb her father while he was at work, it was "expedient to be accompanied by a kitten."¹⁴ Twain couldn't bear to be without pet cats during a summer stay in Dublin, New Hampshire, so he rented four cats from the wife of a neighboring farmer. "They have been good company," Twain wrote in an autobiographical dictation, claiming that they liked hearing him speak French "with a Missouri accent," and particularly enjoyed hearing him make "impassioned speeches in that language."¹⁵ His daughter Susy once commented that "The difference between papa and mama is, that mama loves morals and papa loves cats."¹⁶ His Hartford pastor

and close friend Joseph Twichell recalled that Twain “could scarcely meet a cat on the street without stopping to make its acquaintance.”¹⁷

The family had cats named “Stray Kit, Abner, Motley, Freulein [sic], Lazy, Bufalo Bill [sic], Soapy Sall, Cleveland, Sour Mash, and Pestilence and Famine.”¹⁸ Also Billiards, Babylon, Ananda, Annanci, Sindbad, Bones, Appollinaris, Zoroaster, Blatherskite, Socrates, and Belchazar.¹⁹ And “at one time when the children were small,” they “had a very black mother-cat named Satan, and Satan had a small black offspring named Sin.”²⁰ The family had eleven or twelve cats at Quarry Farm in Elmira, New York, where they spent summers, and several more at their home in Hartford.²¹ Susy noted that her father was fond of carrying around on his shoulder a grey cat named Lazy whose color matched his “grey coat and hair.”²² In his home in Redding, Twain tolerated with good humor a cat named Tammany who was fond of squeezing himself into a corner-pocket of Twain’s billiard table and spoiling shots with his paw.²³ Other family pets at various times included a pet dog named Flash, a pet calf named Jumbo, horses named Max Clemens, Scott, and Fix, and a pet donkey named Cadichon.²⁴ For a while Clara kept two pet squirrels she had tamed in a cubicle off the third-floor billiard room where Twain wrote in Hartford.²⁵ The Clemens family’s affection for their pets reflected attitudes held by much of mainstream America. As Katherine Grier notes in *Pets in America: A History*, there was wide consensus in America during this era on the importance of pets in shaping a child’s character—a consensus reflected in child-rearing advice books, parenting guides, and children’s magazines.²⁶

The stable of the Hartford home, presided over by Patrick McAleer, the family coachman, was a favorite retreat of the children’s.²⁷ “The children had a deep admiration for Patrick,” Twain recalled in “A Family Sketch.” “To them he seemed to know everything and how to do everything.”²⁸ The family kept a flock of garden ducks which the children would help Patrick drive down to the stream that “lazily flowed through the grounds” and then bring them back to the stable at sunset. Twain tells us that Patrick allowed the children

to look on and shrink and shiver and compassionately exclaim, when he had a case of surgery on hand—which was rather frequent when the ducks were youthful. They would go to sleep on the water, and the mud-turtles would get them by the feet and chew until Patrick happened along and released them. Then he brought them up the slope and sat in the shade of the long quarter-deck called “the ombra” and bandaged the stumps of the feet with rags while the children helped the ducks do the suffering.²⁹

But Patrick also “slaughtered a mess of birds for the table pretty frequently, and this conduct got him protests and rebukes.” Twain writes,

Once Jean said—

“I wonder God lets us have so much ducks, Patrick kills them so.”

A proper attitude for one who was by and by, in her sixteenth year, to be the founder of a branch of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.⁵⁰

Neither Twain nor Jean avoided eating meat. But the issue Jean raised in this conversation of the cosmic justice underlying what—and who—becomes “super” would trouble Twain well into his later years, as a piece like “The Victims” clearly demonstrates.⁵¹

Twain’s letters throughout his life show him regaling family and friends with anecdotes about various pets. For example, to his friend Franklin Whitmore, a Hartford real estate and insurance agent, he wrote, during a summer in Elmira in 1881, “That cat of ours went down to town—3 miles, through the woods, in the night,—& attended a colored people’s church festival where she didn’t even know the deacons—was gone 48 hours, & marched home again this morning. Now think of that! That cat is not for sale. Talented cat. Religious cat. And no color prejudices, either.”⁵² To his friend Charles S. Fairchild, an attorney, who had presented the Clemens family with a pet dog named Rab, Twain wrote in 1881,

Alas! Rab has acquired an evil reputation already. He takes position on the lawn, & thence darts forth & greets every horse & wagon & street car that goes along—three hundred of ‘em a day—always in the friendliest spirit, of course, but he has caused a couple of runaways & come near causing many more; & he can’t be persuaded to leave off his diversion. People threaten his life daily; so we’ve got to part, for his sake as well as our own. You wanted him back in case this state of things occurred. . . .⁵³

After explaining how he would get the dog back to Fairchild, Twain added, “I am mighty sorry it has turned out so, for he is a noble dog.”

Twain wrote his mother from Elmira in 1887 that he and his family had “put in this whole Sunday forenoon teaching the new dog to let the cats alone, & it has been uncommonly lively for those 5 cats. They have spent the most of the time in the trees, swearing.”⁵⁴ His letters to the Angelfish, the little girls whose visits brightened his final years, were filled with news of pets, as well.⁵⁵

Twain’s daughters developed an empathy for animals as intuitive and

strong as their grandmother's. As a child, when Jean was shown a book about the Lisbon earthquake, she showed little interest in a picture of people "being swallowed up." But when a picture on the next page "showed a number of animals being overwhelmed," her nurse recalled, she had exclaimed "Poor things!" Questioned as to why she didn't say that about the people, Jean answered, "Oh, they could speak." The "dumb" animals had a special claim on her sympathies. "She was a loyal friend to all animals," Twain recalled after her death, "and she loved them all, birds, beasts, and everything—even snakes—an inheritance from me. She became a member of various humane societies when she was still a little girl—both here and abroad—and she remained an active member to the last. She founded two or three societies for the protection of animals, here and in Europe."⁵⁶

Twain recalled that his eldest daughter, Susy,

was born with humane feelings for the animals, and compassion for their troubles. This enabled her to see a new point in an old story once, when she was only six years old—a point which had been overlooked by older and perhaps duller people for many ages. Her mother told her the moving story of the sale of Joseph by his brethren, the staining of his coat with the blood of the slaughtered kid, and the rest of it. She dwelt upon the inhumanity of the brothers, their cruelty toward their helpless young brother, and the unbrotherly treachery which they practiced upon him; for she hoped to teach the child a lesson in gentle pity and mercifulness which she would remember. Apparently her desire was accomplished, for the tears came into Susy's eyes and she was deeply moved. Then she said, "Poor little kid!"⁵⁷

Twain recalled, in "A Family Sketch," that "I admonished the children not to hurt animals; also to protect weak animals from stronger ones." "When Clara was small," he recalled, "small enough to wear a shoe the size of a cow-slip—she suddenly brought this shoe down with determined energy, one day, dragged it rearward with an emphatic rake, then stooped down to examine the results. We inquired, and she explained—'The naughty big ant was trying to kill the little one! Neither of them survived the generous interference.'⁵⁸

Mark Twain sometimes identified with animals in a personal, visceral way. In 1868 he had learned that his friend Mary Mason Fairbanks and her family had named a dog after him. "How is the dog?" he inquired in a letter. "If he neglects to wipe his feet on the mat before he comes in, & is in all places & at all times blundering & heedless, he will do no discredit to his name. But don't *chain* him. It makes me restive to think of it."⁵⁹ In their correspondence,

his daughters Susy and Jean commonly addressed Clemens as “Dearest Grenouille.”⁴⁰ Whether the sobriquet was paying homage to the celebrated author of the “Celebrated Jumping Frog” or not (more likely not, since that was not one of his daughters’ favorite pieces), the Clemens daughters must have had their own reasons for addressing their father as a frog, albeit a French one, in letters otherwise written in English. And in an 1899 letter to his friend William Dean Howells, in which he berated himself for having bragged about selling a particular stock at a “fine profit” only to watch it advance to “\$60,000 more than I sold it for,” Twain wrote, “My tail hangs low.”⁴¹

In the Missouri farm country where Sam Clemens spent his childhood, mosquitoes, flies, ants, fish, frogs, snakes, bats, and bees were even more plentiful than the ubiquitous cats, horses, and pigs. Twain’s travels around the world exposed him to camels, exotic birds, porpoises, monkeys, and a wide variety of other creatures—animals that sometimes irritated him and sometimes intrigued him—but that always captured his attention, and often found their way into his books.⁴²

Animals in Mark Twain’s Work

If you pick up a starving dog and make him prosperous, he will not bite you.

This is the principal difference between a dog and a man.

—*The Tragedy of Pudd’nhead Wilson*, chap. 16

FROM HIS EARLIEST WRITINGS to his latest, nonhuman animals provided a vehicle through which Twain could comment on his fellow human beings. Describing animal behavior in terms usually reserved for humans was, from early on, a source of broad humor for Twain. But when he described the human flaws and foibles that the animals appeared to replicate, the joke was on the humans, not the animals: Twain found that making fun of animals for qualities that showed them as all too human could be a useful ploy for mounting genial critiques of human behavior. By the same token, Twain found that shining a spotlight on the cruelty with which humans treated animals could be a useful strategy for illuminating human hypocrisy, misplaced moral pride, and unwarranted senses of entitlement and superiority—qualities that became increasingly salient for Twain as the years wore on. No matter how much they may resemble humans, however, Twain’s animals in the selections in this book are usually recognizable as animals—animals with familiar human personality traits and qualities, perhaps—but animal nonetheless.

Twain’s animals communicate, but unlike the animals one finds in Aesop’s

fables or animal trickster tales common to African American and Native American folklore, they rarely “talk.” Twain occasionally hypothesizes what animals might be saying if they *could* talk (as when he imagines what the ravens in *A Tramp Abroad* or the crows in *Following the Equator* might be saying about *him*); but they usually don’t talk to each other. Indeed, the relatively rare occasions when Twain does write fables that feature talking animals—as in “A Fable,” “Some Learned Fables,” or “The Fable of the Yellow Terror”—the result is a rather pedestrian conversation among generally interchangeable disembodied “animal” voices shorn of any real distinctiveness. Since these pieces tend to be rather clumsy, long-winded, and not especially well-crafted, and since they are readily available elsewhere, they are omitted here.⁴⁵ (I have, however, made three exceptions: I have included “The Jungle Discusses Man,” a tale from the 1890s that was published for the first time in 2009; “The Victims,” a little-known but important piece from the early 1900s that was first published in 1972; and portions of the 1906 novella, *A Horse’s Tale*—all three feature animals that talk to each other.)

If Twain’s animals do not generally talk to each other, in one text in this book they *write* to each other: “Letters from a Dog to Another Dog Explaining and Accounting for Man. Author, Newfoundland Smith. Translated from the Original Doggerel by M.T.” And in two others—*A Horse’s Tale* and “A Dog’s Tale”—they speak directly to *us*. While *A Horse’s Tale* contains a fair amount of interpolated text that is *not* from the horse’s point of view, “A Dog’s Tale” is narrated almost in its entirety (until the last few lines) by an engaging and sympathetic dog who, like Huck, begins by introducing herself to the reader: “My father was a St. Bernard, my mother was a collie, but I am a Presbyterian.”

Mark Twain enjoyed both fiction and nonfiction about animals.⁴⁴ His dog was called Rab in homage to the eponymous hero of a novella by his friend the Scottish doctor John Brown, *Rab and His Friends* (1858), a book he greatly admired.⁴⁵ He was fascinated by Darwin’s descriptions of animal behavior in *The Descent of Man* (1871), as his copious marginal notes in that book make clear.⁴⁶ He was a great fan of the animal fables that Ambrose Bierce published in *Fun* in the 1870s (the famous blue-jay yarn Twain published in 1880 may well have reprised a scenario he had first encountered in Bierce’s 1873 story, “The Robin and the Woodpecker”).⁴⁷ Twain purchased a copy of John James Audubon’s *Birds of America* in 1880; when his friend George Washington Cable visited him in Hartford in 1884 the two men consulted it “to identify a strange & beautiful bird” that they had seen through the library window.⁴⁸ Twain called Kipling’s *Jungle Book* (1894) “incomparable” and entertained his family one evening in 1906 with a reading from Kipling’s story “Red Dog.”⁴⁹

He praised Robert Williams Wood's 1908 *Animal Analogues. Verse and Illustrations* as "a cunning book."⁵⁰ He presented his daughter Jean with *The Kindred of the Wild; A Book of Animal Life* by Charles Roberts in 1905, and gave her a copy of Audubon's *Birds of North America* in 1906.⁵¹ His own writing on animals, however, while reminiscent, now and then, of work by others, is more variegated in form, function, and content than that of any of his peers.

The selections in this book are arranged roughly in the chronological order in which they were written (although not necessarily the order in which they were published: some pieces are printed here for the first time). The fact that the second section (devoted to writing from the 1870s and 1880s) is longer than the first (focused on writing from the previous two decades), and that the final section (work from the 1890s until Twain's death) is the longest by far reflects the increasingly important role that writing on animals came to play in Twain's work as he grew older.

1850s and 1860s

*You never see a frog so modest and
straightfor'ard as he was, for all he was so gifted.*

—"Jim Smiley and His Jumping Frog"

IN 1856, in a letter home, nine years before a story about a man who'd bet on frogs, bull-pups, and one-eyed cows won him his first national fame, twenty-one-year-old Sam Clemens spun this inventive description of the bugs that tormented him as he worked at a printing press at 2 A.M. in Keokuk, Iowa:

They at first came in little social crowds of a dozen or so, but soon increased in numbers, until a religious mass meeting of several millions was assembled on the board before me, presided over by a venerable beetle, who occupied the most prominent lock of my hair as his chair of state, while innumerable lesser dignitaries of the same tribe were clustered around him, keeping order, and at the same time endeavoring to attract the attention of the vast assemblage to their own importance by industriously grating their teeth.⁵²

Here Twain is punning on the similar sound of the name of a church official and the name of a familiar insect—beadles and beetles. Of course it's whimsical anthropomorphism to interpret this gathering of insects as a grand "religious mass meeting." But while perhaps the first description we have from Twain of a religious gathering happened to be a fantasy about insects,

it clearly prefigures the famous church scene in *Tom Sawyer*, where Twain would reprise this image of a religious service in which the teachers, the students, and the preacher—everyone, in fact—was trying to attract attention to their own importance by showing off. This fact suggests that writing about animals may have sometimes been a rehearsal for things Twain would later write about humans.

Mark Twain first achieved national fame for a sketch based on a story he heard from a man named Ben Coon in Angels Camp in Calaveras County, California, about an inveterate gambler named Jim Smiley. “Jim Smiley and His Jumping Frog” appeared in the New York *Saturday Press* on 18 November 1865, and was reprinted by Bret Harte in the *Californian* on 16 December 1865. Prior to the publication of “Jumping Frog,” Twain had a growing but largely regional reputation in the West, principally in California and Nevada, where he had lived and worked as a journalist since 1862. In the story, Simon Wheeler, a master of western deadpan humor, infuriates and befuddles a genteel visitor from the East with stories about an inveterate gambler named Jim Smiley, who

said all a frog wanted was education, and he could do most anything—and I believe him. Why, I’ve seen him set Dan’l Webster down here on this floor—Dan’l Webster was the name of the frog—and sing out, “Flies! Dan’l, flies,” and quicker’n you could wink, he’d spring straight up, and snake a fly off’n the counter there, and flop down on the floor again as solid as a gob of mud, and fall to scratching the side of his head with his hind foot as indifferent as if he hadn’t no idea he’d done any more’n any frog might do. You never see a frog so modest and straightfor’ard as he was, for all he was so gifted.⁵³

The humor in the story comes not from the eponymous frog himself (or from the other animals in the piece) but from the story Simon Wheeler tells and the eastern visitor’s failure to realize that he is being “had.” “Jumping Frog” reverses the dynamics of the usual “frame story,” in which educated narrator and readers are amused by the ignorant speech and antics of rustics who are their social and intellectual inferiors. Here it is the effete, impatient, and humorless eastern visitor, not the loquacious and colloquial Simon Wheeler, who is out of his depth. The story (which appeared under a number of different titles) provided the title to Twain’s first book in 1867—*The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County and Other Sketches*—which sported a “gorgeous gold frog” on its cover.⁵⁴

The “Jumping Frog” story signaled one important way in which animals

would figure in Twain's work: as comic foils to a deft vernacular storyteller. (A jumping frog would also become an emblem for the author himself: posters advertising his readings and lectures after the story appeared sometimes featured the image of Twain riding a jumping frog, the same image that appears on the first page of this book.) But Twain would also write a great deal about animals that was not comic. His travel books, for example, are filled with many straight descriptive passages about animals. And his writing on the topic of cruelty to animals—a body of work that includes journalism, essays, short stories, and a novella—would eventually make him the most well-known American advocate of animal welfare of his era.

Twain published his earliest short squib on the topic in the San Francisco *Daily Morning Call* in September 1864 under the heading "Cruelty to Animals." It skewers the driver of a truck wagon for trying (unsuccessfully) to make a horse pull a load "nearly as heavy as an ordinary church."⁵⁵ Another form of abuse was featured in an 1866 piece Twain published in the Virginia City *Territorial Enterprise* about a horse whose owner fed him only "old newspapers and sometimes a basket of shavings," leading the starving animal to eat anything—including neighborhood cats.⁵⁶ Twain again used the title "Cruelty to Animals" for his first extended article devoted solely to the issue of animal welfare, which appeared in the San Francisco *Daily Alta California* in 1867, the year he published his first book. His 1867 article, which Twain filed from New York, heaps praise on the recently founded American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals:

One of the most praiseworthy institutions in New York, and one which must plead eloquently for it when its wickedness shall call down the anger of the gods, is the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Its office is located on the corner of Twelfth street and Broadway, and its affairs are conducted by humane men who take a genuine interest in their work, and who have got worldly wealth enough to make it unnecessary for them to busy themselves about anything else. They have already put a potent check upon the brutality of draymen and others to their horses, and in future will draw a still tighter rein upon such abuses, a late law of the Legislature having quadrupled their powers, and distinctly marked and specified them. You seldom see a horse beaten or otherwise cruelly used in New York now, so much has the society made itself feared and respected. Its members promptly secure the arrest of guilty parties and relentlessly prosecute them.⁵⁷

The article describes how the society works, and what other projects it is undertaking on behalf of animals. Twain even evidently followed its founder,

Henry Bergh, on a mission to get a theatre manager to discontinue what Bergh viewed as the abuse of an animal on stage during a show. It would be hard to find a more laudatory portrait than the one Twain limns here of Bergh.

Shortly after filing this story, Mark Twain left on the cruise of the *Quaker City*, which he chronicled in newspaper articles during the trip. That material would form the core of his first travel book, *The Innocents Abroad*, published in 1869; the remaining selections in part 1 are from that volume. Twain's travels and the books that resulted are key to his writing on animals, and much of the basic pattern is established in *Innocents Abroad*. Travel provided Twain with the opportunity to be exposed to animals he hadn't seen before—like the camels he encounters in Syria or the oddly pious-looking bird he sees in a zoo in Marseilles; his readers were unlikely to have seen such creatures either, and Twain undertook the challenge of describing them with sufficient detail and wit to allow his readers to see them in their mind's eyes. Travel also gave Twain the chance to observe familiar animals in unfamiliar contexts (like the dogs of Constantinople), and to pay attention to how humans and animals interacted in fresh circumstances—such as watching how the horses were treated both by the Arabs who rented them out and by his fellow American tourists who were their customers. Twain directs harsh criticism at both groups. Of his compatriots, he writes,

Properly, with the sorry relics we bestrode, it was a three days' journey to Damascus. It was necessary that we should do it in less than two. It was necessary because our three pilgrims would not travel on the Sabbath day. . . . We pleaded for the tired, ill-treated horses, and tried to show that their faithful service deserved kindness in return, and their hard lot compassion. . . . Nothing could move the pilgrims. They *must* press on. . . . they must enter upon holy soil next week, with no Sabbath-breaking stain upon them. . . . Apply the Testament's gentleness, and charity, and tender mercy to a toiling, worn and weary horse?—Nonsense—these are for God's human creatures, not His dumb ones. . . .

We satisfied our pilgrims by making those hard rides from Baalbec to Damascus, but Dan's horse and Jack's were so crippled we had to leave them behind and get fresh animals for them. The dragoman says Jack's horse died.⁵⁸

When Twain needs to swap horses because his own horse is worn out, he tells us that he chooses the one he chooses because he has “not seen his back”:

I do not wish to see it. I have seen the backs of all the other horses, and found most of them covered with dreadful saddle-boils which I know have not been washed

or doctored for years. The idea of riding all day long over such ghastly inquisitions of torture is sickening. My horse must be like the others, but I have at least the consolation of not knowing it to be so.⁵⁹

These early comments by Twain on cruelty to animals prefigure a theme that will become increasingly salient for him in later decades.

1870s and 1880s

Of all God's creatures there is only one that cannot be made the slave of the lash. That one is the cat. If man could be crossed with the cat it would improve man, but it would deteriorate the cat.

—Notebook 33, typescript pp. 56–57

MUCH OF TWAIN'S most interesting writing on animals during this period appears in the travel books *Roughing It* (1872) and *A Tramp Abroad* (1880), and the novel *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876). But there are also memorable passages in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), and sketches written for his children.

In *Roughing It*, the saga of Twain's trip out west by stagecoach, we meet two of Twain's most memorable animals, the coyote and the jackrabbit, animals who have left an indelible mark on American popular culture. Chuck Jones, the legendary Warner Brothers animation director who created the Road Runner cartoons and was one of the creators of Bugs Bunny, acknowledges in his autobiography, *Chuck Amuck*, the seminal role that Twain's coyote and jackrabbit played in the creation of both Wile E. Coyote and Bugs Bunny. On page 34 of *Chuck Amuck* is an image of Wile E. Coyote chasing after his famous prey, Road Runner, with a knife and fork in his hand and a determined glint in his eye. The artist's caption reads "The Coyote—Mark Twain discovered him first." Jones writes that "One fateful day our family moved into a rented house, furnished with a complete set of Mark Twain, and my life changed forever."⁶⁰ What particularly impressed Jones was Twain's ability to portray quirky, funny, and yet totally plausible *character* in animals—particularly one memorable coyote he encountered while devouring *Roughing It* at age seven. Twain had written that

The cayote is a long, slim, sick and sorry-looking skeleton, with a gray wolf-skin stretched over it, a tolerably bushy tail that forever sags down with a despairing expression of forsakenness and misery, a furtive and evil eye, and a long, sharp

face, with slightly lifted lip and exposed teeth. He has a general slinking expression all over. The coyote is a living, breathing allegory of Want. He is *always* hungry.⁶¹

In Mark Twain's coyote, we can glimpse a prototype of Wile E. Coyote. Whenever Road Runner races past, Wile E. Coyote imagines him on a platter, steaming hot, evenly browned, garnished with vegetables and potatoes. The madcap chase is always fueled by a hunger as vast as the craggy chasms of the desert landscape in which the action takes place—a chase Coyote is always doomed to lose, his abject humiliation immediately giving way to new plots to trap his opponent. Although Road Runner is clearly a bird, he takes his character and abilities from several of Mark Twain's portraits of nonfeathered creatures in *Roughing It*, among them the jackrabbit, as Jones notes. He tells us that Twain's chapter on jackrabbits in *Roughing It* "gave [him] the clue to the speed of the Road Runner."⁶² When he perceives himself being shot at, Twain's jackrabbit "dropped his ears, set up his tail, and left for San Francisco at a speed which can only be described as a flash and a vanish! Long after he was out of sight we could hear him whiz."⁶³ Jones came to understand that "Mark Twain used words the way the graphic artist uses line control."⁶⁴ Through his influence on Jones and others, Twain would shape the Saturday mornings of American children for generations to come.

In *Roughing It*, Twain occasionally interpolates memories of animals from other times and places as they come to mind—an artistic strategy that he will employ with more and more frequency in later years. Here this openness to digression allows him to have another pass at the Syrian camel he first described in *Innocents Abroad*. The train of thought that takes him there matters little: what matters is that *this* time Twain does not constrain himself to description or even description that descends into hyperbole as he did in *Innocents Abroad*; instead, he superimposes on the distinctive image in his head—of a camel chewing—a comic edifice so elaborate that it would collapse under its own weight if it weren't so funny.⁶⁵ His mind also wanders back to a "former crisis" of his life set in a different time and a different place in which a horse that was understandably a creature of habit caused Twain excruciating embarrassment. Here, as in so many of Twain's animal stories, the horse is presented respectfully (we are told that he "had just retired from a long and honorable career as the moving impulse of a milk wagon") while Twain makes fun of his own desire to impress the "aristocratic young lady" who is his date. When the habits of a sensible horse who is set in his ways clash comically with Twain's attempts at social climbing, it is Twain's vanity rather than the horse that is made to appear ridiculous.⁶⁶

Tom Sawyer includes several memorable passages about animals, but surely the most iconic is the encounter between the poodle and the pinch-bug in church on a languid summer morning during an interminable sermon. During the dull service, Tom remembers a treasure he has in his pocket and gets it out.

It was a large black beetle with formidable jaws—a “pinch-bug,” he called it. It was in a percussion-cap box. The first thing the beetle did was to take him by the finger. A natural fillip followed, the beetle went floundering into the aisle and lit on its back, and the hurt finger went into the boy’s mouth. The beetle lay there working its helpless legs, unable to turn over. . . . Presently a vagrant poodle dog came idling along, sad at heart, lazy with the summer softness and the quiet, weary of captivity, sighing for change. He spied the beetle; the drooping tail lifted and wagged. He surveyed the prize; walked around it; smelt at it from a safe distance; walked around it again; grew bolder, and took a closer smell; then lifted his lip and made a gingerly snatch at it, just missing it; made another, and another; began to enjoy the diversion; subsided to his stomach with the beetle between his paws, and continued his experiments; grew weary at last, and then indifferent and absent-minded. His head nodded, and little by little his chin descended and touched the enemy, who seized it. There was a sharp yelp, a flirt of the poodle’s head, and the beetle fell a couple of yards away, and lit on its back once more. The neighboring spectators shook with a gentle inward joy . . . and Tom was entirely happy. The dog looked foolish, and probably felt so; but there was resentment in his heart, too, and a craving for revenge. So he went to the beetle and began a wary attack on it again; jumping at it from every point of a circle, lighting with his forepaws within an inch of the creature, making even closer snatches at it with his teeth, and jerking his head till his ears flapped again. But he grew tired once more, after a while; tried to amuse himself with a fly but found no relief; followed an ant around, with his nose close to the floor, and quickly wearied of that; yawned, sighed, forgot the beetle entirely, and sat down on it! Then there was a wild yelp of agony and the poodle went sailing up the aisle; the yelps continued, and so did the dog. . . . till presently he was but a woolly comet moving in its orbit with the gleam and the speed of light. . . . By this time the whole church was red-faced and suffocating with suppressed laughter, and the sermon had come to a dead stand-still.⁶⁷

Part of what makes this passage so brilliant is that the dog acts like a dog and the bug acts like a bug and the people act like people. One can imagine that it may well have been scenes like this that helped make *Tom Sawyer* the favorite book of Walt Disney, the man who went on to create the modern animated