

All say, "How hard it is that we have to die" -- a strange complaint to come from the mouths of people who have had to live.

-- Pudd'nhead Wilson's Calendar. P. 76.



CHAPTER VIII PUDD'NHEAD WILSON  
AND "THE MAN WHO CORRUPTED HADLEYBURG"

In 1894, the attempt to write a detective story had been successful and this kind of writing had become popular with the reading public.<sup>157</sup> Twain, therefore, tried his hand at the genre and the result was Pudd'nhead Wilson. It is really successful neither as a detective story nor a novel. The book is a good example of how little control Twain usually had over what he is doing. His original intention was to write a six-page tale about a youthful Italian freak which consisted of two heads and four arms joined to a single body and a single pair of legs. He did not really know where the story would go, for it is a tale which he was making up as he went along. He simply had in mind some people, a locality and an incident or two. Then he let the story go along and spread itself into a book. At first, he began to write a farce. But later, serious elements appeared and three central characters, Pudd'nhead Wilson, Roxana and Tom Driscoll, appeared unexpectedly in the book. Twain began to see the difficulty:

But what was a great deal worse was, that it was not one story, but two stories tangled together; and they obstructed and interrupted each other

at every turn and created no end of confusion and annoyance.<sup>158</sup>

Twain then cut out the farce, "Those Extraordinary Twins," and published it as a separate story following Pudd'nhead Wilson, the tragic novel growing out of the comic beginning.

The most noticeable trait of the book is its total blackness. There is no redeeming light at all. The epigrammatic chapter headings from "Pudd'nhead Wilson's Calendar," clearly express the attitudes of Twain: his growing pessimism, cynicism, melancholy and disillusion:

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.<sup>159</sup>

Whoever has lived long enough to find out what life is, knows how deep a debt of gratitude we owe to Adam, the first great benefactor of our race. He brought death into the world.<sup>160</sup>

October 12, the Discovery. It was wonderful to find America, but it would have been more wonderful to miss it.<sup>161</sup>

This is the only humor in the book. The laughter is dark and the humor is black and bitter. The epigraphs reflect Twain's pessimistic view of man and of America. His ironic praise of death and cynical attitude to the discovery of America show the increasing disgust and despair of an aging man who had seen the tragedy of life.

Pudd'nhead Wilson returns to one of the main themes of Huck Finn, the inhumanity of man to man as found in the institution of slavery. However, in Huck Finn he is more detached, his anger is kept more in control, and he discusses the problem more creatively through the eyes of a boy who has been taught and believes that slavery is right, but whose heart tells him that it is cruel and wrong. In Pudd'nhead Wilson, Twain bogs down in a complicated plot. It is a detective story but it also includes a social study of the American village. In fact, the plot is almost nonsensical because of the presence of the comic story of the freakish twins, which could be a farcical element from Gilbert and Sullivan or The Importance of Being Earnest. It is possible that Twain even purposely makes his plot ridiculous as a way to dramatize that slavery itself is absurd. Twain creates a pair of children who are victims of a social system erected on slavery, and points out how the law of slavery is horrid and against reason, so terrible that it makes society a joke. Tom Driscoll and Valet de Chambre are raised together by Roxy, a female slave with one-sixteenth Negro blood. Valet de Chambre is Roxy's illegitimate son whose father is a member of the local Virginia aristocracy of Dawson's Landing, Colonel Cecil Burleigh Essex. The other baby is <sup>a</sup>son of Percy Northumberland Driscoll whose brother is Judge York Leicester Driscoll, an outstanding, and wealthy gentleman in Dawson's Landing. (Notice the satire in the names of the Virginia gentlemen.) Percy's wife had died in childbirth and left her son under the charge of her slave. As both boys grow up, they are almost identical in physical

appearance. Although Roxy's boy has blond hair, blue eyes and a Virginia aristocrat for a father, the boy is not saved from the slave's status, since one thirty-second of his blood is Negro. One day, Roxy switches the two babies in their cradles for fear that some day her son might be sold down the river like other Negro slaves. After the death of Percy, Roxy's son, now called Thomas, is adopted by his supposed uncle, Judge Driscoll. Thus, the black baby who is white in appearance becomes white in point of social fact, and the real white child becomes the Negro slave. This exchange completely reverses their lives. Tom Driscoll grows to be an unpleasant person and <sup>a</sup> thorough coward. "Chambers" becomes a humble, courageous servant and companion who fights in all battles to defend his white master. Later Tom is sent to study at Yale and returns with offensive mannerisms of dress. Knowing that he is the real heir to Judge Driscoll's fortune, he leads a wasteful life: having good times, gambling, spending money extravagantly and at last falling deeply into debt. Tom makes thieving raids on his neighbors in order to pay off his St. Louis debts. Like many other whites, Tom shows his contempt and cruelty to his Negro servant, Chambers, the rightful Thomas a Becket Driscoll. His brutal treatment and humiliation of the Negro slave reaches its highest point when Chambers enters Tom's room to ask an audience for Roxy:

Tom had risen. The other young man was trembling now, visibly. He saw what was coming, and bent his head sideways, and put up his left arm to shield it. Tom rained cuffs upon

the head and its shield, saying no word; the victim received each blow with a beseeching "Please, Marse Tom! -- oh, please, Marse Tom!" Seven blows -- then Tom said, "Face the door-march!" He followed behind with one, two, three solid kicks. The last one helped the pure-white slave over the door-sill, and he limped away mopping his eyes with his old ragged sleeve.<sup>162</sup>

After such a scene Tom declares, "How refreshing it was! I feel better."<sup>163</sup> To Tom, Chambers is a target on which he pours his rage and cruelty to ease his bitter thoughts and disturbed mind. The incident shows how personality is shaped by training and social environment.

After returning from her career as chambermaid on steamboats, Roxy is left penniless and worn out. She hopes to appeal to Tom's charity; but she is disappointed by his inhumanity and indignation. In her rage, she blackmails Tom with the knowledge that Chambers is the real, rightful heir to Judge Driscoll's fortune and Tom her son. This discovery affects Tom's feelings. He begins to foresee the approaching disaster of his future. He desperately attacks the social system that creates the curse of birth on Negroes:

Why were niggers and white made?  
 What crime did the uncreated first  
 nigger commit that the curse of  
 birth was decreed for him? And why  
 is this awful difference made bet-  
 ween white and black?...How hard the  
 nigger's fate seems, this morning! --  
 yet until last night such a thought  
 never entered my head.<sup>164</sup>

After learning the truth, Tom blushes every time he thinks of his real identity. It is the "nigger"<sup>165</sup> in him that asserts its humility and changes his conduct. But this change lasts only a short period of time and Tom becomes the same person. He learns to love his mother who cooperates with him in his thefts. Yet, the money they get from their robberies is not sufficient to pay Tom's debts. Roxy then suggests that Tom sell her into slavery to get the money he wants and after that buy her back within a year. But Tom sells her down the river to be treated more inhumanely than she would have been in Missouri.

Roxy escapes from her slave-holder and confronts Tom with a demand that he go to his uncle, confess the whole truth about his selling her and ask for the money to buy her back. Tom goes to the Judge, but decides to steal the money instead. He creeps into the Judge's room but the Judge awakens. Tom is frightened and stabs his uncle with a stolen Indian knife. Up to this time, no one knows the real identity of Tom. It takes about twenty years for the truth to be exposed by Pudd'nhead Wilson, the learned lawyer of Dawson's Landing. Though the racial identities of the two boys are determined by social convention, their true physical identities can be proved by Pudd'nhead fingerprints. It is the only scientific method of searching the boys true selves. When the truth is revealed, Chambers is restored to his rightful place as heir and free white man. But it is too late, for he cannot give up the slave's mannerisms. Twain points out how pitiful it is for Chambers to be lost in a

slave-holding environment which has made him its victim:

The real heir suddenly found himself in a most embarrassing situation. He could neither read nor write, and his speech was the basest dialect of the negro quarter. His gaits, his attitudes, his gestures, his bearing, his laugh -- all were vulgar and uncouth.... Money and fine clothes could not mend these defects or cover them up; they only made them... the more pathetic. The poor fellow could not endure the terrors of the white man's parlor, and felt at home and at peace nowhere but in the kitchen. 166

Similarly, Tom's personality and character are ruined beyond repair by his social identity. His cowardice, indolence, affectation of being a white aristocrat, and his cruelty towards slaves are represented as consequences of his status as a white boy which has molded his personality. Twain puts the blame for these shortcomings on the social crime, the institution of slavery. The institution has corrupted both of the boys: the slave by destroying his human dignity and creating in him an inferiority complex and self-consciousness and self-hatred, the master by encouraging his inhumanity to his human-fellows.

The title character of the book is Pudd'nhead Wilson, but he is not the central character. He is Dawson's Landing's new citizen who has intruded himself while Twain was trying to write a farce about the Italian twins. He is a young, intelligent lawyer. On the first day of his arrival at the village he gains his nickname "Pudd'nhead" from the townspeople. The reason is that

while he is conversing with a group of citizens whom he has just made acquaintance with, an unseen dog begins to annoy him with its barking. Wilson simply remarks that if he owned half of that barking dog, he would kill his half. This joke is misunderstood by the citizens who haven't the sense of humor to catch on to the remark. Some think Wilson is insane, some call him a fool. Thus, all agree to call him Pudd'nhead, which colloquially means a stupid person. Within only a week, Wilson loses his real name and Pudd'nhead takes its place.

Since Wilson is better educated and more intelligent than anyone in the community, he is an outsider who has to suffer twenty years of isolation while he wishes to be accepted as a member of the community. However, because of his detachment from the society, Wilson is free from the social crime of slavery existing in Dawson's Landing. With his mastery of fingerprinting, Wilson takes charge of discovering the mysterious physical identities of the two boys and the murderer of Judge Driscoll. In fact, Wilson lives in a town filled with fools who ironically think he is <sup>a</sup> fool. In solving the mystery, Wilson establishes himself as the only man of reason in the community. Throughout the book, Wilson remains only a minor character, and largely disappears from the novel except as the writer of the calendar. Only in the trial scene of the courtroom, where he clears up the mystery of the crimes, does he come into his own.

The Pudd'nhead Wilson figure is a recurring character in



Twain's works. His main interest to us is that he is a version of Mark Twain himself who sets himself up as a unique and intellectually superior figure to the community. This self-projection even includes Twain's contempt for mankind in general. We saw this Twain persona first as Colonel Sherburne in Huck Finn and later Hank Morgan became the same figure in the second half of A Connecticut Yankee. In Pudd'nhead Wilson, he has exactly the same opinion on about the frailty and weakness of man.

Nothing so needs reforming as other people's habits.<sup>167</sup>

It is easy to find fault, if one has that disposition. There was once a man who, not being able to find any other fault with his coal, complained that there were too many prehistoric toads in it.<sup>168</sup>

Gratitude and treachery are merely the two extremities of the same procession. You have seen all of it that is worth staying for when the band and the gaudy officials have gone by.<sup>169</sup>

Pudd'nhead attacks the weaknesses of man with the detached tone of an observer surveying the society from a distance. Since he is endowed with intellectual and moral authority, he must be isolated from the community.

The only other strong character in the book is Roxana. In fact, she is one of Twain's most fully conceived characters. Most of Twain's women are very unbelievable because in a century in

which women were often sentimentalized and idealized, Twain was one of the worst literary culprits. Roxana is the only woman in any of his books who is at all convincing. Her creation is the creation of a real person in a real environment. Since she is a Negro slave, Roxy is a vigorous enemy of the aristocracy of Dawson's Landing. Twain portrays her with great vitality and haughty grandeur though she uses the degraded speech and mannerisms of a slave. Her effort to save her son from the possibility of being sold down the river almost forces her to do a daring and terrible deed, to kill herself and the son. Because of her vitality, we are persuaded to believe that she can commit such an action. However, later she can find a better way: to exchange her son with her master's son in the cradle. In doing so, she is convinced that it is not a sin. According to the sermon of an old Negro preacher she had listened to, the same action had been done in England. The Negress had exchanged her son with the queen's. The preacher also gave an illustration of the free grace of the Lord bestowed upon man according to the will of God and pointed out that the action of God is similar to the Negress' in switching her son with the queen's:

He s'lect out anybody dat suit him,  
 en put another one in his place, en  
 make de fust one happy forever en <sup>170</sup>  
 leave t'other one to burn wid Satan.

Thus, Roxana imagines herself doing the same action as God's act of creation in helping her son escape from slavery. This double identity theme is Twain's most important use of the Doppelgänger

motif.

Roxana is a complicated character. She is torn between hatred and admiration of aristocracy. She is an adversary of the dominant class. Ironically at the same time she accepted and practised many values of the whites. Her pride of ancestry is revealed in her conversation with her son:

My great -great-great- gran' father en  
yo' great -great-great-great gran' father  
was Ole Cap'n John Smith, de highest blood  
dat Ole Virginia ever turned out, en his  
great-great- gran' mother or somers  
along back dah, was Pochontas de Injun  
queen, en her husbun' was a nigger king  
outen Africa --171

Again, she assures her son of the high, aristocratic blood in him that he should be proud of:

Dey ain't another nigger in dis  
town dat's as high-bawn as you is.  
Now den, go ' long! En jes you hold  
yo ' head up as high as you want to--  
you has de right, en dat I kin  
swah. 172

Besides, like the white aristocrats, Roxana has a passion of contempt for Negroes, at any rate for the passivity instilled in them by their mistreatment by white men. This is seen in her denunciation of Tom's cowardice, not to challenge the twins, who have kicked Tom:

En you refuse 'to fight a man  
dat kicked you, 'stid o' jumpin'  
at the chance! En you ain't got

no mo' feelin' den to come en tell me, dat fetched sich a po' lowdown ornery rabbit into de worl'! Pah! it makes me sick. It's de nigger in you, dat's what it is. Thirty-one parts o' you is white, en on'y one part nigger, en dat po' little one part is yo' soul. 'Tain't wuth savin'; 'tain't wuth totin 'out on a shovel en throwing in de gutter. You has disgraced yo' birth. What would yo' pa think o' you? It's enough to make him turn in his grave.<sup>173</sup>

Though she speaks in Negro dialect, the passage is powerful for it reflects her stature and strong personality. In fact, she is stronger than her son Tom who has been adopted as a white boy, and much stronger than the whites in the community. Roxana refuses to submit to the common lot of the status of Negro. She therefore, imagines an Indian queen and an African king among her ancestors. Besides these values, Roxana has the natural affection and self-sacrifice of a mother's heart. She even suggests to Tom that he sell her into slavery to pay his debts despite the misery she would necessarily encounter.

On the whole, Roxana is one of Twain's most fully developed characters. Twain creates her with understanding, sympathy and realism. That is why she is a convincing female character with her distinguishing traits -- self-pride, magnificent vigor and vitality.

Twain's career may be analyzed fruitfully in terms of the villages that can be seen dotting his prose. Dawson's Landing is but one stopping-off point in the sad pilgrimage from the bright sunlit world of St. Petersburg to the medieval village of Eseldorf,

buried in ignorance and despair. Twain's vision of childhood, the Happy Valley, is centered in Hannibal, the idyllic town of his childhood:

A town of sun, forest shade, drowsy peace, limpid emotions, simple humanity -- and eternity going by on the majestic river. 174

Hannibal is the most important fact that shapes Twain's mind and feelings.

St. Petersburg is visibly reminiscent of Hannibal. Twain conjures up a calm, reposeful town seen through the vivid eye of boyhood:

Saturday morning was come and all the summer world was bright and fresh and brimming with life. There was a song in every heart; and if the heart was young the music issued at the lips. There was cheer in every face....The locust trees were in bloom, and the fragrance of the blossoms filled the air.... Cardiff hill...was green with vegetation....dreary, reposeful, and inviting. 175

Many times Twain goes back to his boyhood period and write about it from his recollections of Hannibal life, though his attitude toward his memories changes with the years. It is a typical village where people of all sorts and classes live and Twain presents examples of all strata of society from Judge Thatcher to Muff Potter and Injun Joe. It is a happy town, a paradise of

childhood. Social evil, mystery, violence, terror and excitement are all present in this world. Yet, purity and goodness conquer evil and reign triumphant in an idyll of innocence and happiness.

Another home for childhood is found in the Grangerfords' home in Huck Finn. Huck finds himself comfortable there. Though the house reveals bad taste of the provincial aristocrats, it is still a good place to live. To Huck, it is a "mighty nice family, and a mighty nice house."<sup>176</sup> Huck is enchanted by its style and decorations.

However, Twain's nostalgic recreation of the Mississippi River town before the War changes, even in Huck Finn. It ceases to be a romantic image but tends to reveal more realistic aspects of life, and a bitterness enters the vision. An example is seen in Bricksville, Arkansas, which exposes the depressing situation of a small river town. Besides, filth, brutality, cowardice, ignorance and vulgarity, the town is filled with mud streets, junk heaps, run-down houses, pigs rolling about in the mire and loafers roaming in the town:

The houses had little gardens around them, but they didn't seem to raise hardly anything in them but jimson weeds... and ash-piles, and old curled up boots and shoes, and pieces of bottles, and rags, and played-out tin ware....There was generly hogs in the garden....There was empty dry-goods boxes under the awnings and loafers roosting on them all day long, whittling them with their Barlow knives; and chawing tobacco, and gaping and yawning and stretching --

a mighty ornery lot.... All the streets and lanes was just mud, they warn't nothing else but mud -- mud as black as tar, and nigh about a foot deep in some places; and two or three inches deep in all the places. The hogs loafed and grunted around, everywheres. You'd see a muddy sow and a litter of pigs come lazing along the street and whollop hereself right down in the way, where folks had to walk around her....177

Thus, the very real and concretely realized backwardness of Briceville intrudes upon Twain's idyllic image of his boyhood Hannibal. In Pudd'nhead Wilson, Twain projects another river town, Dawson's Landing. The town shares the same pleasant, reposeful aspects of St. Petersburg, with pretty homes, white-washed exteriors, sweet fragrant flowers in spring and steamboats passing up and down every hour:

The town was sleepy and comfortable and contented. It was fifty years old, and was growing slowly -- very slowly, in fact, but still it was growing.178

However, beneath these pleasing aspects, Twain lays open the hideous side of the town, the social crime as found in the institution of slavery. Twain points out the falsity of accepted values and the hatred, contempt, cruelty and brutality of the white aristocrats towards the Negroes.

Twain's vision of triumphant innocence is completely gone and Hannibal is no longer in the Happy Valley. The fact that

Twain is no longer romanticizing his childhood does not mean that now he can see his childhood home clearly. As we have emphasized before, the vision of his childhood home was precious to him; and when he could no longer believe in it, he was made bitter. So the villages of his later writing are worse than they would have been in reality.

Hadleyburg is the village in Twain's late writing that is the setting for one of his bitterest attacks on the fraud and hypocrisy of American society. It is a model of goodness. It has gained the reputation of being the most honest and upright town among all its neighbors. The reputation has been retained for three generations. But there is a contrast between appearance and reality, for in fact, Hadleyburg is filled with hypocrisy, dishonesty and fraud. The reality is exposed when there comes to the town a mysterious stranger named Stephenson who leaves a sack of gold with Richards, cashier of the bank in Hadleyburg and perpetrates a hoax. With the gold a note is left indicating that he was once helped by a native of the town and the native gave him \$ 20 with some advice. The words of advice were "You are far from being a bad man; Go, and reform."<sup>179</sup> That native was the deceased Mr. Goodson and therefore Stephenson wishes to give the gold to the man who had once done Goodson a great service without knowing the full value of it. The recipient must know the exact words had Goodson said to him on that day. At the same time, Stephenson sends anonymous letters to nineteen prominent citizens of the town



confirming that each of them is Goodson's benefactor and also revealing Goodson's words to Stephenson in the letter. Stephenson then encloses the words of advice in another sealed envelope to be opened in the church in one month by the Rev. Mr. Burgess. On that occasion, the benefactor can claim the gold by turning in an envelope with the words of advice written out.

Stephenson's plan to corrupt the town does work. In nineteen households the same conversations take place between husband and wife in finding methods to gain the money dishonestly. At last on the appointed day, the envelopes are opened and they reveal eighteen identical efforts to get the money by means of fabricated evidence. Thus, the reputation of the town is now lost for good. However, the minister Burgess protects Richards by suppressing the fraudulent note that Richards has submitted in support of his claim to the money. Therefore, the town assumes Richards is honest, and the reward is given to him, including the praise from the community. But, at last Richards dies from the pangs of guilt and shame.

The man who corrupted Hadleyburg is almost like the devil, an outsider who comes to the city, destroys its respectability and reputation, then leaves the town. Similar to Colonel Sherburne and Pudd'nhead Wilson, the man is an outsider who is detached from the community of Hadleyburg. He is in fact once again a version of Twain himself, taking revenge on his treasured memories of childhood. After his visit to Hannibal in 1882, the idyllic image of childhood was shattered. Twain became angry at the memories for having

fooled him. He therefore conjures up his boyhood home again in Hadleyburg, and puts a Mark Twain self-projection into it to destroy its self-esteem and belief in its goodness and then leaves town. Stephenson's revenge on Hadleyburg for some undisclosed offense against him by a resident of the town is a motive of an angry man, Twain, who is disgusted with his memories and wants to destroy them.

Hadleyburg is only one of Twain's re-creations of an American town. The demonstration of all kinds of evil existing in its community projects Twain's black vision of America and of man. People in Hadleyburg are displaying only human nature and because of their weaknesses they have a strong tendency to <sup>do</sup> evil rather than to do good. We have come a long way from Twain the comedian!