

Huckleberry Finn, The Reflection of Mark Twain

"Curse all the world's gifts, for mockeries and gilded lies! They are not gifts, but merely lendings. Pleasure, Love, Fame, Riches: they are but temporary disguises for lasting realities--Pain, Grief, Shame, Poverty. The fairy said true; in all her store there was but one gift which was precious, only one that was not valueless. How poor and cheap and mean I know those others now to be, compared with that inestimable one, that dear and sweet and kindly one, that steeps in dreamless and enduring sleep the pains that persecute the body, and the shames and griefs that eat the mind and heart. Bring it! I am weary, I would rest."

Mark Twain's *The Five Boons of Life*, is a short piece about life and what truly matters in life. In the end, the only valuable gift of life is death. The tale has the essence of a memoir, being that Mark Twain had experienced so many hardships including the guilt of out living the rest of his loved ones. In this piece we see a different side of Mark Twain; not only is he a comic and novelist, but also a tortured philosopher.

His philosophic nature is carried over to *Edward Mills and George Benton: A Tale*. This story brings to light the idea of right, wrong, and conscience. It is a tale of two brothers that chose very different paths in life: Edward was good and just to everyone and took care in his matters, whereas George was always a trouble maker, though he was always saved and sometimes well liked by others. George was always in the spotlight while Edward was not noticed. Mark Twain brings up the question of whether it is better to be without a strong conscience and well liked, though maybe oneself is unhappy, or follow strong morals without being noticed or praised, though maybe one,

personally, gets more out of this life. This is a question we see repeated in Twain's most famous books, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

Though *Tom Sawyer* is mostly about Tom, Huck plays a huge role. Tom is very much like George Benton in the sense that he is a trouble maker though is too charming not to get away with it. Huck, like Edward Mills, has an incredibly strong moral compass and tries to follow his beliefs about right and wrong as best as possible. Though both twelve year olds are somewhat of troublemakers, Huck always defends his reasons for doing things while Tom does it merely for adventure. At the end of *Tom Sawyer*, the narrator writes, "So endeth this chronicle. It being strictly a history of a BOY, it must stop here; the story could not go much further without becoming the history of a MAN."

Twain intentionally left this clue to foreshadow his following book *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. In *Huck Finn*, we see a side of Huck we didn't see in *Tom Sawyer*; much like we see the philosophical side of Mark Twain in *The Five Boons of Life*, we notice the maturity Huck that we hadn't seen before, a maturity unlike most twelve or thirteen year olds. The first appearance of this clever nature Huck applies, is when he stages his own death to get away from Pap. Huck could have gone for Pap as a way to escape; Huck had the capability to kill or at least subdue him to get away, but he knew that people would suspect him if he ran away from the crime, and he didn't hate Pap. Many people in this situation would hate Pap, and though Huck doesn't like him, he can't find himself hating Pap. Huck's conscience tells him that all people deserve a chance. This is also seen in Huck's relationship with Duke and King. Though he finds

himself disliking their company and disagreeing with what they do, he decides to warn them when he hears that people know about the Royal Nonesuch. Huck is kind to all people because he wants people to reciprocate that kindness. That is why Huck has a moral conflict about wanting to return Jim back to Miss Watson. He knows that Miss Watson has always been kind and that he has no reason to take her slave, but he has also gotten to know Jim and to know that he is a person too. In chapter 31, Huck initially decides to write to Miss Watson in an attempt to clear his conscience:

“I felt good and all washed clean of sin for the first time I had ever felt so in my life, and I knowed I could pray now. But I didn't do it straight off, but laid the paper down and set there thinking—thinking how good it was all this happened so, and how near I come to being lost and going to hell. And went on thinking. And got to thinking over our trip down the river; and I see Jim before me all the time: in the day and in the night-time, sometimes moonlight, sometimes storms, and we a-floating along, talking and singing and laughing. But somehow I couldn't seem to strike no places to harden me against him, but only the other kind. I'd see him standing my watch on top of his'n, 'stead of calling me, so I could go on sleeping; and see him how glad he was when I come back out of the fog; and when I come to him again in the swamp, up there where the feud was; and such-like times; and would always call me honey, and pet me and do everything he could think of for me, and how good he always was; and at last I struck the time I saved him by telling the men we had small-pox aboard, and he was so grateful, and said I was the best friend old Jim ever had in the world, and the *only* one he's got now; and then I happened to look around and see that paper.

It was a close place. I took it up, and held it in my hand. I was a-trembling, because I'd got to decide, forever, betwixt two things, and I knowed it. I studied a minute, sort of holding my breath, and then says to myself:

‘All right, then, I'll go to hell’—and tore it up.”

This moment in the book is a great turning point for Huck. In chapter 16 we see a similar conflict of wanting to help his friend, but also being brought up around slaves, knowing that they are a person's “property”, however it was not to the same effect as this situation. Huck really did think he was going to go to hell because of this, but he values Jim and their friendship over his after life.

