

# Publishing of Twain Story Is a Story in Itself

It is not often that an unpublished work by Mark Twain turns up, starts a bidding war between magazines and lands a book contract.

The story, "A Murder, a Mystery and a Marriage" which runs 8,000 words or about 28 manuscript pages, chronicles the fortunes of a farmer in the mythical town of Deer Lick, Mo., who is determined to have his daughter marry the son of the wealthiest man in town.

Twain, who wrote the story in 1876, intended it as what was sometimes called a blind novelette, an outline that would serve to inspire other writers to mimic the story line. Twain wrote the outline, and a version of the story, for William Dean Howells, then his editor at *The Atlantic Monthly*, and asked him to request that eight other authors, including Henry James and Oliver Wendell Holmes, submit versions.

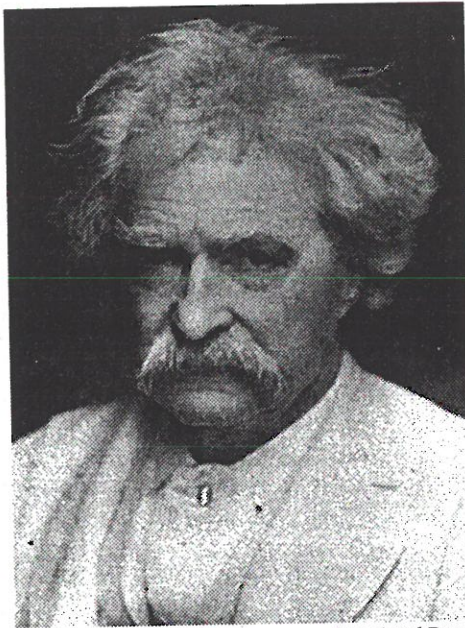
Perhaps miffed that anyone thought they did not have enough ideas on their own, none of the other authors did so, and the manuscript languished.

Patrick E. Martin of Buffalo — a lawyer who represents the Buffalo and Erie County Library and the Library Foundation of Buffalo and Erie County, which owns the manuscript for "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn"— came upon the unpublished manuscript while searching files in 1995.

When Michael Kelly became editor of *The Atlantic Monthly* last year, Mr. Martin brought the story to his attention.

Mr. Kelly said he felt it was important for the story to appear in the magazine for which it was originally intended, and he outbid *The New Yorker* to obtain the rights. It will appear in the July issue, along with some correspondence from Twain about the story.

Robert Weil, the executive editor of W. W. Norton & Company, which will publish the story as a book in September, said it was by no means



Associated Press

Mark Twain returns to the pages of *The Atlantic Monthly* in July.

a master work, but it was significant.

"It would be wrong to say that this is the missing masterpiece of Mark Twain," Mr. Weil said. "But it was written after 'Tom Sawyer,' and it anticipates 'Huck Finn,' and it is charming and interesting and very much in the Twain tradition."

The story almost came to the public's attention once before, Mr. Weil said. In 1946, the trustees of the Twain estate sued two New York publishers who had bought the manuscript and had intended to publish it as a book. In 1949, a state court ruled that the two publishers did not have publishing rights. So the story was never published.

Mr. Kelly said that it just felt right to have the story back.

"It's a very good read," he said. "Of course, I would be even happier if we found the original contract in a drawer somewhere that said we owned the story for the original price of 43 cents, but I am afraid that is never going to happen."

ALEX KUCZYNSKI

N.Y. Times  
1/22/01