

Bold, lusty, wickedly funny, unexpurgated

MARK TWAIN'S 1601

STEREO
Can be played
on mono record
players with
excellent results.

Fireside conversation in the time of Queen Elizabeth I

And **songs** in the same free spirit
read and sung by

Richard Dyer-Bennet



This is not a record for children or the easily shocked adult. The language is strong and explicit.

DYER-BENNET RECORDS

RETURN TO ARCHIVE

Mark Twain's / CENTER FOR FOLK LIFE PROGRAMS
AND CULTURAL STUDIES
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

IF THERE IS ANY ENGLISH WORD THAT IS INTOLERABLE TO YOU,
THIS RECORD IS NOT FOR YOU.

"DYER-BENNET HAS PRODUCED A MASTERPIECE—a reading of Mark Twain's irreverent Elizabethan sketch and a group of ribald American and British songs and ballads. Only a seasoned performer should dare such a disc; only a master of nuance could do it justice. Dyer-Bennet far exceeds the qualifications for such a task. It is the work of a mature artist. . . The result is excruciatingly funny as well as aesthetically right. The songs admirably complement the reading. . . as hilarious and uninhibited a collection as ever were recorded. Praise to Mr. Dyer-Bennet for his gentlemanly delivery, bold honesty and uncompromising language withal! Caveat emptor! Not for the squeamish!" —Henrietta Yurchenko, THE AMERICAN RECORD GUIDE

"A COMIC MASTERPIECE!" — THE NEW RECORDS

"A DELIGHTFULLY BAWDY DISC!" — Everett Helm, MUSICAL AMERICA

"COULD NOT BE BETTER!" — Stephanie Gervis, THE VILLAGE VOICE

"UNCOMPROMISING HONESTY — HIGH ARTISTRY!"
— O.B. Brummel, HIGH FIDELITY



A NOTE ON THIS RECORDING

"FOR IT IS NOT THE WORD THAT IS THE SIN, IT IS THE SPIRIT BACK OF THE WORD." — MARK TWAIN

Mark Twain, master of a wide spectrum of language, could not possibly use all that he privately delighted in. Among close male friends (a male chauvinist by today's standards) he was appreciated for colorful invective and is said to have taken the hair off a dog with a verbal barrage.

The new freedom has opened the doors to much tasteless vulgarity, but it has also made possible the open dissemination of such comic masterpieces as Mark Twain's "1601" which Twain himself considered to be the funniest thing he ever wrote — elegant, colorful, coarse, it includes the full spectrum of the English language. A recording is just the place for it since the language sounds better to the ear than it looks to the eye.

We shall soon tire of words and public acts whose only value is rebellion against tradition. We shall not tire of such masterful language as Twain's, whatever words he cared to use.

—Richard Dyer-Bennet, February, 1971

A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

Unlike the Romance languages, which match it in subtlety of expression and beauty of sound, the English tongue can strike with the blunt force of a blackjack. I delight in this richness and variety, and believe appropriate use can be found for any word ever coined. By appropriate I mean simply that the word shall particularly serve its purpose, whether this be to release anger, to provoke laughter, or to state the facts.

No word is inherently choice or common, chaste or unchaste, sacred or profane, good or bad. A great writer gives words a minutely particular meaning and flavor, and justifies his language by the clarity of his intention and the skill of his usage. Thus D. H. Lawrence communicates warmth and tenderness by the use of words generally considered coarse and ugly. Thus the tortured honesty of James Joyce required unconventional language to express the thoughts of his characters.

Mark Twain also had occasion to use unfashionable language. In at least one piece from his pen he juxtaposes Anglican nicety and Saxon brevity with hilarious result. In his sketch, "1601," he wished to amuse, to instruct, and to puncture hypocrisy. Here his use of language is in turn elegant and coarse. Both qualities are true to life and, by contrast, wonderfully comic.

Many unknown folk poets have used language freely and well. The color and life of distant times still live in their songs, and the language of their greatest songs is invariably as subtle, or as direct, as the theme requires.

Each of us has his prejudices and inhibitions, but at least so far as language is concerned I will say with Terence: "I regard nothing human as alien to me."

MARK TWAIN AND "1601"

Samuel Langhorne Clemens, known to posterity as Mark Twain, was at one time or another printer, riverboat pilot, miner, reporter, lecturer, publisher, financier of inventors and inveterate world traveller. But he was also and at all times a story teller. His range of interest included all of man's activities, and his stated belief was that every man contains the universe within himself. In speech and print he told essential truth as he saw it, though he did not hesitate to color and elaborate in making his point; and he illumined his expression with a humor both wry and ludicrous. In print and public speech he suited his vocabulary to his audience. In personal letters and private speech he was often entirely unrestrained, and did not hesitate to use the full spectrum of language acquired from wide acquaintance with men and books.

The sketch "1601" was written in 1876. Twain was doing some preparatory reading for "The Prince and the Pauper" and became intrigued with the freedom of expression in a conversation reported in "Pepys' Diary." Wishing to practice his archaics—as he put it—he contrived a conversation such as might have been heard by the fireside in the time of the Tudors. He sent the sketch to his closest friend, the Rev. Joseph Twitchell of Hartford, Connecticut, who enjoyed it enormously. Private circulation was inevitable and the sketch was recognized as a masterpiece by those who saw it. Four copies were printed in 1880, one for John Hay, later Secretary of State. In 1882 fifty copies, in book form, were printed at the press of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. This was the first edition authorized by Twain. The printing was supervised by Lieutenant Charles Erskine Scott Wood, adjutant of the Academy at that time. Since then there have been countless more or less private editions both in America and abroad. A recent and publicly sold edition is a reproduction of a limited and privately sold edition of 1938. My partner Harvey Cort and I did much reading and thinking before embarking on this enterprise. Many editions were available to us, and we decided upon the text of the West Point edition. I have changed only such words as seemed probable printer's oversights and have added an occasional "saith," "asketh," "replieth," etc. to make the conversational shifts clear to the listener.

The West Point edition has this title and explanatory note: "Conversation, as it was by the Social Fireside in the Time of the Tudors"

(Mem.—The following is supposed to be an extract from the Pepys of that day, the same being cup-bearer to Queen Elizabeth. It is supposed that he is of ancient and noble lineage; that he despises these literary canaille; that his soul consumes with wrath to see the Queen stooping to talk with such; and that the old man feels his nobility defiled by contact with Shakespeare, etc., and yet he has got to stay there till Her Majesty chooses to dismiss him.)

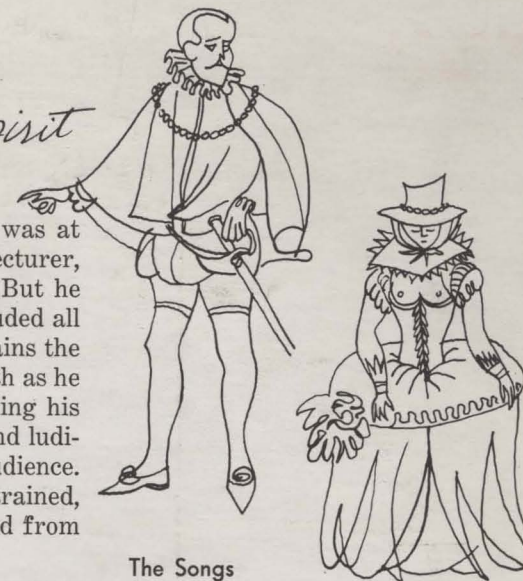
It is interesting to note how skillfully Twain puts the appropriate language into the mouths of Bacon, Raleigh, Jonson, Beaumonte, Shakespeare, the Ladies of the court and even the Queen who is known to have been capable of elegant or blunt speech as the occasion required.

Most of the characters in "1601" are well known. Perhaps three require identification:

1. Sir Nicholas Throgmorton—a gentleman who had recently extricated himself from political hot water.
2. His daughter, Elizabeth—a court lady seduced by Raleigh and therefore cause for Her Majesty's jealousy.
3. John Lyly and the Euphuists—a writer of books and of elegant, airy plays performed by a children's theatre at the court. His "Euphuës," published in two parts in 1579 and 1580, established a vogue for fanciful conceits and language. His followers were called Euphuists.

A CLOSING NOTE

In preparing this recording and the accompanying notes I became involved in some fascinating reading. As a boy I read many of Mark Twain's stories, but had never known much of the man himself. Now I feel I know the man. I have read the autobiography, the note books, the letters and Paine's biography. Like Montaigne, Voltaire and Shaw, Twain was concerned with everything. His words have helped me bury some ailing prejudices, confirm some of my most cherished beliefs, and look with a fresh eye on the world around me. I could hardly have been better paid for my time.—R.D.-B.



The Songs

Old Joe Clark A North Carolina folk song and fiddle tune from the manuscript collection of Fletcher, Collins, Staunton, Virginia.

The old she-crab A Connecticut fishermen's song. Some verses from an unknown singer in New York, some from Sam Eskin—roving American collector—the last verse an addition of my own. In my early New York days Frank Chapman and his charming wife, Gladys Swarthout, used to listen and encourage. During the second world war Major Chapman commanded me to sing to the U.S. Marines in Quantico, Virginia. Despite the presence of some wives, Frank, who is not a double standard man, encouraged me to sing The old she-crab. I did, and though some eyebrows were raised, Frank retained his commission and I my liberty.

The tailor's boy A 17th century London apprentices' song. Some years ago I had a small part in N. Richard Nash's "Second Best Bed," starring Ruth Chatterton. On the morning following our Detroit opening I was called to the theatre to discuss this song with a group of city dignitaries who questioned Detroit's capacity for such strong fare—the group had not attended our opening performance but had read the reviews. I sang them the song. They found it amusing, non-corruptive, and we kept it in the play.

The Eer-i-e Canal A canal boatmen's song. I heard it first in Portland, Maine, and later an almost identical version from Burl Ives.

There was a friar in our town On a memorable evening in 1946, Cyrus W. Durgin, distinguished critic of the Boston Globe, sang me this song. He also taught me how to produce the startling sound effect by the sudden removal of an empty hollow-bottomed bottle from a wet table top. In gratitude, I sang Cy the following:

The gatherin' o' the clan Oliver Gogarty told me this was probably written by Robert Burns. It has been in the oral tradition for a long time and I have heard many other verses, some of which are coarse without being funny. I have chosen to record only such verses as Burns might have written. These verses are certainly coarse, but they are also genuinely poetic; and only a frozen gravity can restrain laughter.—R.D.-B.

This is one of a series of recordings by Richard Dyer-Bennet, recorded under his own label. For a complete catalog listing contents of other albums, write: Dyer-Bennet Records, P. O. Box 235, Woodside 77, N. Y.

For best response on high fidelity phonographs, use R.I.A.A. characteristic.
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Recording Engineers: J. Gordon Holt
Produced by Harvey Cort

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