Bold, lusty, wickedly funny, unexpurgated

MARK TWAIN'S 1601

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.
Mark Twain and "1601"

Samuel Langhorn Clemens, known to posterity as Mark Twain, was at one time or another, printer, riverboat pilot, miner, reporter, lecturer, publisher, financier of inventors and inveeterate world traveler. But he was also 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 archaisms--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: "Conversational, as it was by the Social Fireside in the Time of the Tudors"

Apologies to Mr. Dyer-Bennet for his gentlemanly delivery, bold honesty and uncompromising language withal! Caveat emptor! Not for work of a mature artist. .. The result is excruciatingly funny as well as aesthetically 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 was 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

"UNCOMPROMIN& HG HONESTY -- HIGH ARTISTRY!" -- O.B. Brummel, HIGH FIDELITY

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 Anglicic nicety and Saxon brevity with hilarious result. In his sketch, "1601," he wished to amuse, to provoke laughter, or to state the facts.

This he released anger, to provoke laughter, or to state the facts.

The tailor's boy A

2. His daughter, Elizabeth—a court lady seduced by Raleigh and did not hesitate to use the full spectrum of language acquired from wide acquaintance with men and books.

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 ground 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 old 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.

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