

**MARK TWAIN**

## **THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN (1884)**

*-summary of the novel* : Huck escapes from the lonely cabin in which his drunken, brutal father had imprisoned him. On Jackson's island he meets Jim, a runaway slave. Together they float down the Mississippi River on a raft, occasionally stopping at the banks. In these brief episodes, Huck participates in the lives of others, witnessing corruption, moral decay, and intellectual impoverishment. He learns from Jim of the dignity and worth of a human being. Life on the river comes to an end when Jim is captured. Huck, reunited with Tom Sawyer, helps him to escape, subordinating society's morality to his own sense of justice and honour.

The youth experience of the novelist is presented in the work THE ADVENTURES OF HUCKLEBERRY FINN, novel about life on the Mississippi. The Southern traditions, the situation of the Negro slaves, the life during the XIXth century in the South of the United States, all is presented in a humorous but full of understanding manner. The following excerpt from "Chapter 16" dwells on Huck's rather pragmatic behaviour in a very dramatic situation. As the raft taking him and Jim downstream approaches the mouth of the Ohio River, Jim grows more and more excited because he believes that when he can head up the Ohio he will be out of slave, and therefore be free. Huck, in his turn, begins to realize for the first time that he is actually helping a slave to escape. His conscience, formed by the mid-19th century American Southern society, goads him until he decides he will turn Jim in as a runaway slave. But when he is faced with the actual situation of having to inform on Jim to two Negro hunters, Huck finds himself unable to carry out his abominable plan and improvises an elaborate story that makes them believe there is smallpox on the raft. By enlisting himself in Jim's cause, Huck becomes a self-proclaimed social outlaw. He goes through two moral crises in which he is denounced by his conscience, but he finally

decides to "go to Hell" – that is to defy the laws of God and of man and to stay loyal to Jim who has by now become his alter ego.

The novel is written in the first person narrative, thus the feelings of the main character (Huck himself) are expressed more directly, offering the whole story authenticity and freshness. The scene presenting Huck's inner struggle is very impressive and of a peculiar dramatism. Huck leaves his raft "feeling sick", disgusted with himself and with the idea of cheating his friend so cruelly. Still, he thinks it is his duty to inform the authorities. Very soon, he meets two men in a skiff. The men are white, they carry guns and they are looking for "runaway niggers". When he is asked if there are any men on his raft, Huck answers that there is only one. At this point he still doesn't know what to do. But when he is asked if his man is white or black, he hesitates for a while, trying to "brace up and out with it". The clash between his feelings of friendship towards Jim on one hand, and his prejudices as a Southern boy, on the other, now reaches its climax. Huck regards his incapacity of telling the truth as a matter of courage after all, thinking he isn't man enough, but in fact his loyal heart can't accept to betray a true friend. Finally, he takes a decision, in spite of his prejudices, and he tells the two men that his man is white.

The attitude didn't seem very convincing, as the two men expressed their wish to see for themselves the man on the raft. Huck immediately wish to see for themselves the man on the raft. Huck immediately invents a story: the man on the raft is his father, he says, and his father is ill. He lets the two men guess that the so-called father has got the smallpox, a very unpleasant and, at the same time, very dangerous disease. The two men leave in a hurry, feeling pity for Huck and giving him some money. As they don't want to catch the disease, they don't even have a look on the raft. Jim is saved but Huck's soul is tormented by various questions: had he done right or wrong? Would he have felt better if he had given Jim up?

He decides he had done wrong according to the Southern rules concerning runaway slaves, but he realizes he would have felt miserable if he had betrayed his friend in need. Huck is in fact the victim of the social prejudices, but he is aware of the contradiction between his feelings of brotherhood towards and these prejudices. He can't help regarding Jim as a human being, a faithful friend, and thus finally he acts like a man helping another man. Huck is guilty

from the point of view of the Southern prejudices and laws, but from a human point of view he is innocent, because he saved Jim's life.

Huck is an objective narrator. He is objective about himself, even when that objectivity is apt to reflect discreditably upon himself. He is objective about the society he encounters, even when, as he often fears, that society possesses virtues and sanctions to which he must ever remain a stranger. He is an outcast, he knows that he is an outcast.

Possessing neither a wide background of economic fact and theory, nor a comprehensive knowledge of scientific or philosophical methods, he had a genuine contempt for all pretense and hypocrisy, and exposed to humorous view the tyrannies of chivalry, of slavery, and of religion. Mark Twain is the greatest American voice of his day.