

“Well, ain’t you innocent!”

**Mark Twain’s Attack
on the American Adam**

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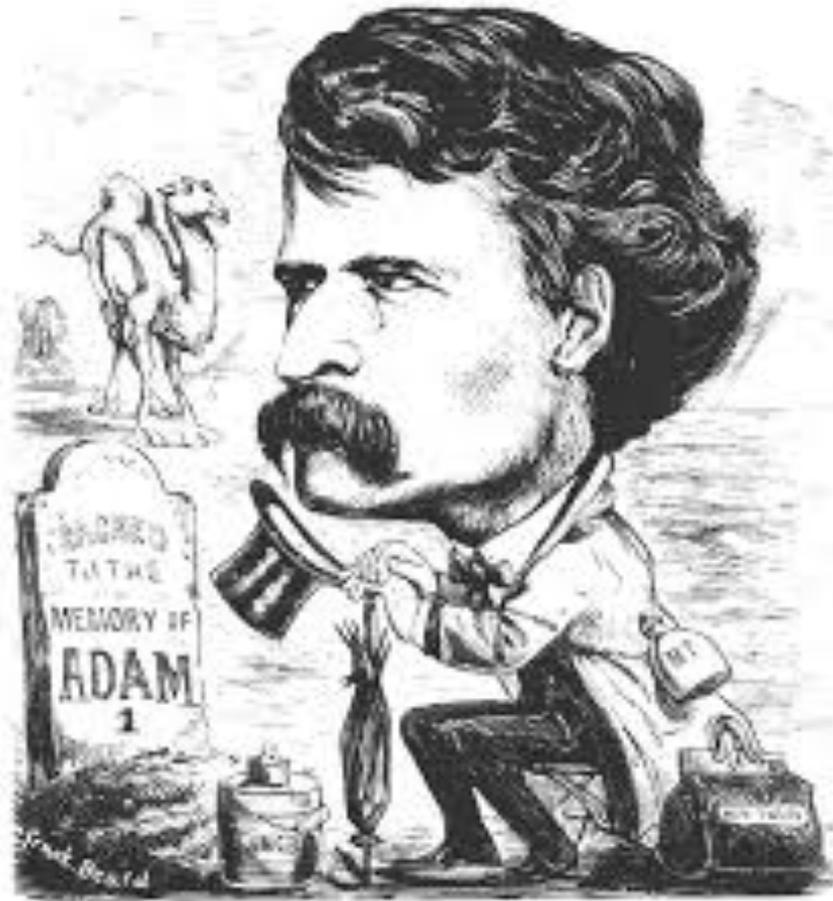
Twain's satire of American innocence



R.W.B. Lewis, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (1955)

“The American myth saw life and history as just beginning. It described the world as starting up again under fresh initiative, in a divinely granted second chance for the human race, after the first chance had been so disastrously fumbled in the darkening Old World. It introduced a new kind of hero, the heroic embodiment of a new set of ideal human attributes...an individual emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry, untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritances of family and race; an individual standing alone, self-reliant and self-propelling, ready to confront whatever awaited him with the aid of his own unique and inherent resources...most easily identified with Adam before the Fall...His moral position was prior to experience, and in his very newness he was fundamentally innocent.”

Twain, Satan, Adam & Eve



Adventures of Huckleberry Finn (1884)

NOTICE.

PERSONS attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot.

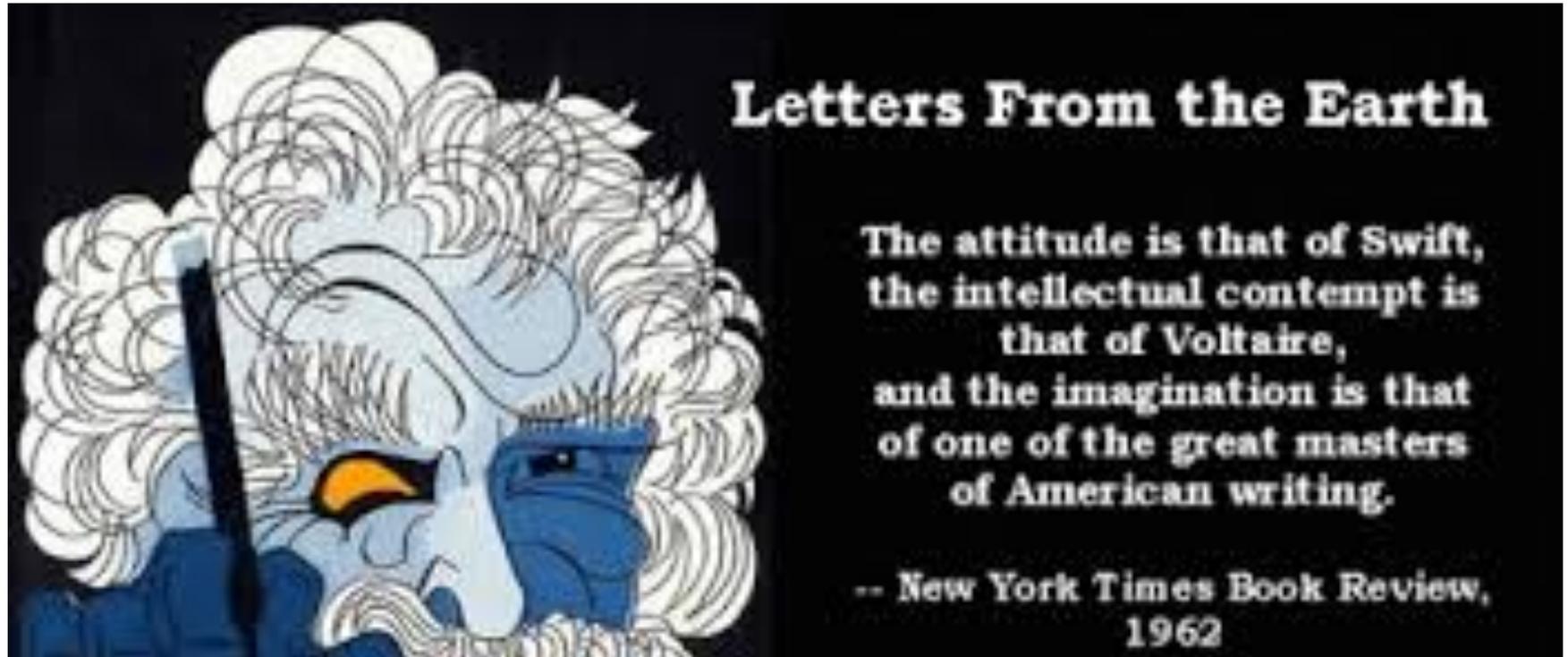
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The Diaries of Adam and Eve (1904)



“It would be a felony.”



Letters From the Earth

The attitude is that of Swift,
the intellectual contempt is
that of Voltaire,
and the imagination is that
of one of the great masters
of American writing.

-- New York Times Book Review,
1962

“Fraud, Malice, and Intent—The Theory of Torts”
The Common Law, Oliver Wendell Holmes (1881)

“The defendant must have had at least a fair chance of avoiding the infliction of harm before he becomes answerable for such a consequence of his conduct...it is certainly arguable that even a fair chance to avoid bringing harm to pass is not sufficient to throw upon a person the peril of his conduct, unless, judged by average standards, he is also to blame for what he does.”

“Letter to the Earth”

“Fifteen whole dollars! Ah heaven bless and keep you forever and ever, generous heart! There was not a dry eye in the realms of bliss...the decree was thundered forth from the shining mount that this deed should outhonor all the historic self-sacrifices of men and angels...for that the strain of it upon you had been heavier and bitterer than the strain it costs ten thousand martyrs to yield up their lives at the fiery stake...all said, ‘What is the giving up of a life, to a noble soul...compared with the giving up of fifteen dollars out of the greedy grip of the meanest white man that ever lived on the face of the earth?’”

“Human beings *can* be awful cruel to one another...I warn’t feeling so brash as I was before, but kind of ornery, and humble, and to blame somehow—though I hadn’t done nothing. But that’s always the way: it don’t make no difference whether you do right or wrong, a person’s conscience ain’t got no sense, and just goes for him *anyway*...It takes up more room than all the rest of a person’s insides, and yet ain’t no good, nohow.”



Satan on God's hypocrisy:

“God...had warned the man and the woman that they must not eat of the fruit of a certain tree. And he added a most strange remark: he said that if they ate of it they should surely die. Strange, for the reason that inasmuch as they had never seen a sample of death they could not possibly know what he meant...those ignorant children...the mere word could have no meaning for them, any more than it would have for an infant of days.”

“It will be best to start right and not let the record get confused, for some instinct tells me that these details are going to be important to the historian some day.” -Eve



Eve on God as a deadbeat dad:

“We were children, and ignorant; ignorant beyond the conception of the present day. We knew *nothing*—nothing whatever. We were starting at the bottom of things—at the very beginning; we had to learn the ABC of things. Today the child of four years knows things which we were ignorant of at thirty. For we were children without nurses and without instructors. There was no one to tell us anything.”

“She has taken up with a snake now. Nothing comes amiss to her, in the animal line. She trusts them all, they all trust her; and because she wouldn’t betray them, she thinks they wouldn’t betray her.” -Adam



