

HARRY S. TRUMAN: MARK TWAIN ENTHUSIAST

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THERE is no keener Mark Twain enthusiast living to-day than Harry S. Truman, his fellow Missourian. He has read several times over everything that Mark Twain wrote, and often quotes from his writings. And Mr. Truman has made several pilgrimages to Hannibal, the boyhood home of Mark Twain.

In one of the few speeches made during the short period that he occupied the office of the Vice-Presidency, Truman said at Jefferson City on February 22, 1945:

I wonder if it may not be such simple characters as Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, who will, as symbols, show the world our undying contribution to the civilization on our continent. I do not refer entirely to the literary genius of Sam Clemens, but rather to the wholesome type of Americans he portrayed so understandingly. They are our people and our lives. I feel that his healthy American characters, with their tolerance, energy and ambitions, really represent the citizens of our State—frank, industrious, and sympathetic, but above all, Americans!

While intolerance is running rampant throughout the world, we need more friendly people, like those who grew so naturally out of the mind of Mark Twain, that kindly humorist from Hannibal, to guide us back to basic principles.

And a little later in the same speech he continued:

No matter how grave the post-war problems may be, I am sure that our American sense of proportion and—yes—our sense of humour, will see us through to victory. Like the living characters of Mark Twain, we shall continue to do our job with characteristic American energy and enthusiasm.

Truman might be said to have been raised on Mark Twain's writings. He once wrote me,

I learned to read when I was about four years old and from then on read everything I could get my hands on—histories and encyclopedias and everything else.

Before I was twelve years old, I had read everything Mark Twain had published up to that time. I have the purported complete set of his works and a lot of other publications of articles which have never been included in his books.

*Of Webster Groves, Missouri; a relative of the late Mark Twain.

Speaking in the Senate on April 20, 1944, Senator Truman said:

Mr. President, to-day marks the thirty-fourth anniversary of the death of Samuel L. Clemens, better known as Mark Twain, who was native of my state, having lived in Hannibal.

Mark Twain was the greatest humorist in the world, who made the world happier by living in it. His keen observations will live forever.

In the postscript of one of his recent letters to me, President Truman wrote: "I am still telling Mark Twain stories."

Although the Truman desk at the White House has not nearly so many things on it as that of the late Franklin D. Roosevelt, it does contain a framed facsimile of one of Mark Twain's most famous sayings: "*Always be good; this will gratify some people and astonish the rest.*"

In a speech not long since, President Truman quoted Mark Twain's saying on statesmen: "If we had less statesmanship, we could get along with fewer battleships."