



Life on the Mississippi

Mark Twain (1835 - 1910)

Read by:	John Greenman	Format:	MP3 CD in DVD case
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Life on the Mississippi is a memoir by Mark Twain, published in 1883 and, notably, the first submission to a publisher of a typewritten manuscript. The memoir is in two parts. The first recounts Twain's memories of a halcyon time before the Civil War when Twain was in training to become a steamboat pilot. Here, Twain fondly recounts life on the river from St. Louis to New Orleans. The second part of the memoir recounts the trip Twain made down the river many years later after the Civil War. The two parts reflect that as the Mississippi River separates America, east from west, the Civil War separated America, north and south, and continues to separate America, its past and its future. Twain loved his time as a cub pilot, mentored by a senior steamboat pilot, and, analogous to William Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, the first part of the memoir is brilliant with the light of youth, potential, and

promise. The second part, coming as it does after the almost unfathomable, albeit necessary tragedy that was the Civil War, is the work of a man who's lived, and has suffered both the good and the bad offered up in a life fully lived. He complains about the competition from the railroads, the rise of urban America with its new and large cities, and makes trenchant observations on greed, gullibility, and what he perceived to be bad architecture. Take the trip down the river with Mark Twain, the writer who knew America so well, its east and west, its north and south, its past and future. (*Summary by Michael Hogan*)

Mark Twain is the pen name of **Samuel Langhorne Clemens** (November 30, 1835 – April 21, 1910), an American novelist, essayist, and lecturer noted for his humor and biting satire. Born in Florida, Missouri to a poor family, his father failed in business repeatedly and died of pneumonia when Sam was eleven. He went to work as an apprentice typesetter and then for brother Orion's *Hannibal Journal*. He worked as a journeyman printer in the east and started writing humorous articles and sketches to fill space. He returned to Missouri and worked as riverboat pilot until the Civil War broke out in 1861. He avoided service in the Confederate Army by journeying to Nevada with his brother Orion, then secretary to the territorial governor. After a failed attempt to strike it rich as a miner he wrote for the paper in Virginia City, where he adopted the pen name Mark Twain. He began developed a specialty as a traveling correspondent, posting pieces from Hawaii for the *Sacramento Union* and then a journal from a six month excursion to Europe and the Holy Land that formed his first book in 1869, *The Innocents Abroad*, considered the most popular travel book ever written. He followed with *Roughing It* in 1872, a portrait of life on the American frontier, and *The Gilded Age* in that same year, a satirical treatise on the follies and foibles of the emerging elite in American culture.

Twain was happily married Olivia Langdon in 1870 and settled first in Buffalo and then Hartford. In spite of his success with *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), he experienced substantial financial losses as an entrepreneur with the Paige typesetting machine and then a venture established to publish the memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant. He closed shop in Connecticut and embarked on a long tour of lecturing and writing abroad, which enabled him to retire his debts and return a conquering hero in 1900. Twain was born after a visit by Halley's Comet in 1835 and predicted he would "go out with it, too". True to his word, he died the day after its return in 1910.