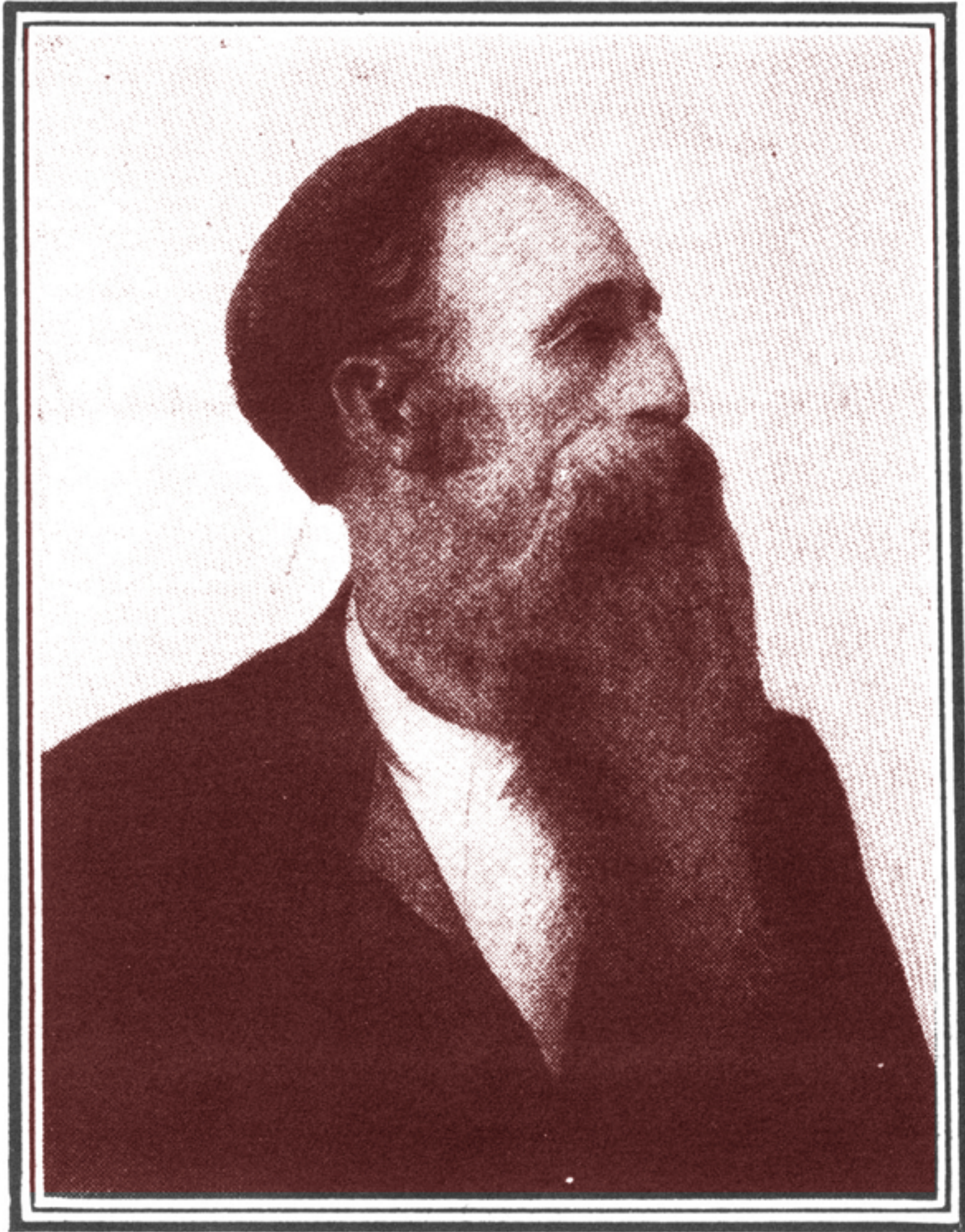


August, 1910

THE ORIGINALS OF SOME OF MARK TWAIN'S CHARACTERS



HUCKLEBERRY FINN



BECKY THATCHER

THE identification of the originals of the characters in the works of popular writers has always excited the liveliest interest of the reading public; and not seldom have the votaries of the great fiction-mongers been doomed to disappointment in their endeavors to lift the veil which their favorite authors have so skillfully thrown around the creatures of their fancy. According to Mr. Homer Croy, writing in the *Bellman* (Minneapolis), Mark Twain "sometimes used a real character, and sometimes he did not. If a person in breathing life measured up to romance as given to us by the late Samuel L. Clemens, he went in just as he was; if he did not, Mark put on high lights and profiles as the case demanded."

The best known two of all Mark Twain's characters are probably Becky Thatcher and Huckleberry Finn; and concerning these Mr.

Croy gives some interesting data. Of the former, he says:

When young Samuel wore a blue hickory shirt and Laura Fraser wore pigtails down her back he gathered nuts and berries for her as they wandered their way to Miss Lucy Davis' private school at Hannibal, Missouri. But before they reached the little house where the classes met they had to separate, for it would never do for a boy and a girl to come to school together. Never! Even if their books were mixed up and they had the same kind of berry stains on their mouths it would never do.

The world now knows her as Becky Thatcher, the lovable girl who was lost in the cave with Tom Sawyer when they found Injun Joe.

Mrs. Fraser is now living at Hannibal, Mo., where she is matron of a home for widows and orphans; and "she is loved and respected by all the people of her home town, for a truer, nobler woman never lived." Two years ago

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she visited the Clemens home at Redding, Conn.; and for two days she and the great humorist were "companions and friends as of old."

They were sad and merry in turns as they thought over the days that were no more. On the morning of her departure Mrs. Fraser found on the dressing table of her room a splendid steel engraving of Samuel L. Clemens, and written across it these words: "To Laura Fraser, with the love of her earliest sweetheart."

It is not, we think, generally known that the account of the losing of Tom Sawyer and Becky Thatcher in McDowell's Cave was founded on fact. Mr. Croy states that Samuel himself, when a boy, was really lost in the cave for thirty hours. The narration of the incident brought unexpected results: a large cement firm was attracted to the place, and investigation showed "that the entire cave was formed of cement rock."

A plant was started, and it soon became the largest of its kind in all the West. It brought thousands of laborers to Hannibal, and with it came other industries which lifted the river town to the dignity of a city. In a word, Hannibal largely owes its present prosperity to Tom Sawyer.

Huckleberry Finn, as the world knows him, is now living at Paris, Mo. He was "a member of the Hannibal boys who made the nights merry for the natives."

He is B. C. M., better known as "Barney," Farthing.

Young Samuel Clemens, it must be known, was never a leader in the pranks of "the gang." . . . Rather he was the one to sit back and think out things to do, and then, by the gentle art of suggestion, get the other boys to do them. To this bunch of merrymakers belonged Barney Farthing. . . .

He, however, maintains that he is Huckleberry Finn with alterations, for his father was neither a fisherman nor the town drunkard. But there is where the fiction touch comes in. . . .

Just as surely as one boy could not have done all the things that Huckleberry Finn is attributed with

is the fact that Barney Farthing did get mixed up in a whole lot of the things that did happen. Mark Twain took all his exploits, and then pieced them out with the adventures of other boys around the town until they made a wonderful and laughable whole.

Everybody whom young Clemens met at this period of his life became "material" for his books. Thus, Injun Joe was "a drunken half-breed Indian, who ran an express wagon, picking up odd jobs wherever he could." The aunt of Tom Sawyer, who helped the boys on their adventurous journey on the raft, was the wife of Judge Quarles, a relative of young Clemens who lived on a large plantation outside Hannibal. She died in California, in the direst poverty, a few years ago; but "so proud was she that she would not let her famous nephew know of her condition." Colonel Mulberry Sellers was James Lampton, a favorite cousin of Clemens' mother.

At first Mark Twain thought of calling him Eschol Sellers, and so drafted a part of "The Golden Age" with that name for the character.

But just at that time a man with the name of Eschol Sellers bobbed up and threatened to make trouble. So Mark hunted around for another first name, and hit upon Mulberry.

Horace Bixby is Captain Horace Bixby, still living at St. Louis, who taught Clemens to be a pilot for \$500, and who claims that Mark Twain was "the best graduate he ever had, and knew the personalities and eccentricities of more snags than any other pilot who ever handled the wheel in early days." The Poet Lariat on the steamer "Quaker City" in *The Innocents Abroad* was "really a poet, and was on the great sight-seeing trip with Mark Twain." His real name was Bloodgood H. Cutter; he lived at Little Neck, and was known as Long Island's farmer poet."

In contradistinction to other authors, Mark Twain never hunted for material. He met his characters, lived with them, thought their thoughts, and then, because he could not help it, put them on paper.