

NONFICTION

Mark Twain

Samuel Langhorne Clemens (1835–1910) was brought up in Hannibal, Missouri. After serving as a printer's apprentice, he became a steamboat pilot on the Mississippi (1857–1861) and adopted his pen name or *pseudonym* from the leadsman's call ("mark twain" means "by the mark two fathoms") when sounding the river in shallow places. After an unsuccessful attempt to mine gold in Nevada, Twain edited the Virginia City Enterprise. In 1865 in the New York Saturday Press, Twain published "Jim Smiley and His Jumping Frog," which then became the title story of *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County and Other Sketches* (1867). His reputation as a humorist was enhanced by *Innocents Abroad* (1869), a comic account of his travels through France, Italy, and Palestine; and by *Roughing It* (1872), a delightful spoof of his mining adventures. His acknowledged masterpieces are *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876) and its sequel *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), works of great comic power and social insight. Twain's later works, including *The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg* (1900), a fable about greed, and *The Mysterious Stranger* (1916), published six years after Twain's death, assail hypocrisy as endemic to the human condition. "The Lowest Animal" (1906) shows Twain at his most iconoclastic, formulating a scathing comparison between humans and the so-called lower animals.

THE LOWEST ANIMAL

I have been studying the traits and dispositions of the "lower animals" (so-called), and contrasting them with the traits and dispositions of man. I find the result humiliating to me. For it obliges me to renounce my allegiance to the Darwinian theory of the Ascent of Man from the Lower Animals; since it now seems plain to me that that theory ought to be vacated in favor of a new and truer one, this new and truer one to be named the Descent of Man from the Higher Animals.

In proceeding toward this unpleasant conclusion I have not guessed or speculated or conjectured, but have used what is commonly called the scientific method. That is to say, I have subjected every postulate that presented itself to the crucial test of actual experiment, and have adopted it or rejected it according to the result. Thus I verified and established each step of my course in its turn before advancing to the next. These experiments were made in the London Zoological Gardens, and covered many months of painstaking and fatiguing work.

Before particularizing any of the experiments, I wish to state one or two things which seem to more properly belong in this place than further along. This in the interest of clearness. The massed experiments established to my satisfaction certain generalizations, to wit:

1. That the human race is of one distinct species. It exhibits slight variations—in color, stature, mental caliber, and so on—due to climate, environment, and so forth; but it is a species by itself, and not to be confounded with any other.