

Mark Twain and the “Wild Man”

Mark Twain (actual name Samuel Langhorne Clemens – 1835-1910), one of America’s most famous writers, wrote a mock interview with a “wild man” that appeared in The Buffalo Express, New York, September 18, 1869.

I find the article highly amusing and indeed a bit of a testimony. What Twain describes is definitely what we now call “sasquatch” or “bigfoot,” so one can see that a lot of stories about the entity as we know it were quite prevalent over 147 years ago. Furthermore, he references the “Cain” connection and the “Wandering Jew” (Edomites) connection (Re Carter-Coy material), which tells us that these unusual associations were around at that time, and probably much earlier.

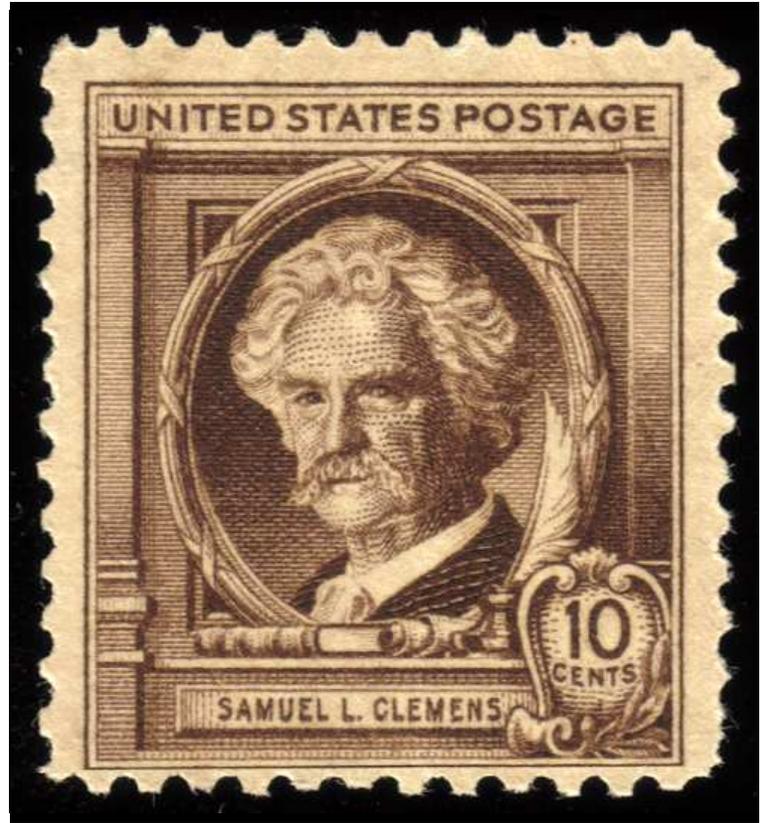
As to the antiquity of the being (whatever it is) that Clemens infers, we can see he did his homework. The oddity has been around a long, long time. Indeed, if old Samuel was still around, he would have over 4,000 more stories to draw upon to update his “interview.”

The Wild Man Interviewed

by Mark Twain

There has been so much talk about the mysterious “wild man” out there in the West for some time, that I finally felt it was my duty to go out and interview him. There was something peculiarly and touchingly romantic about the creature and his strange actions, according to the newspaper reports. He was represented as being hairy, long-armed, and of great strength and stature; ugly and cumbrous; avoiding men, but appearing suddenly and unexpectedly to women and children; going armed with a club, but never molesting any creature, except sheep, or other prey; fond of eating and drinking, and not particular about the quality, quantity, or character of the beverages and edibles; living in the woods like a wild beast, but never angry; moaning, and sometimes howling, but never uttering articulate sounds. Such was “Old Shep” as the papers painted him. I felt that the story of his life must be a sad one— a story of suffering, disappointment, and exile—a story of man’s inhumanity to man in some shape or other—and I longed to persuade the secret from him.

“Since you say you are a member of the press,” said the wild man, “I am willing to tell you all you wish to know. Bye and bye you will comprehend why it is that I wish to unbosom myself to a newspaperman when I have so studiously avoided conversation with other people. I will



US postage stamp depicting Clemens, issued February 13, 1940.

now unfold my strange story. I was born with the world we live upon, almost. I am the son of Cain.”

What?

“I was present when the flood was announced.”

Which?

“I am the father of the Wandering Jew.”

Sir?

I moved out of range of his club, and went on taking notes, but keeping a wary eye on him all the while. He smiled a melancholy smile and resumed:

“When I glance back over the dreary waste of ages, I see many a glimmering and mark that is familiar to my memory. And oh, the leagues I have traveled! The things I have seen! The events I have helped to emphasize! I was

at the assassination of Caesar. I marched upon Mecca with Mahomet. I was in the Crusades, and stood with Godfrey when he planted the banner of the cross on the battlements of Jerusalem. I —”

One moment, please. Have you given these items to any other journal? Can I —

“Silence. I was in the Pinta’s shrouds with Columbus when America burst upon his vision. I saw Charles I beheaded. I was in London when the Gunpowder Plot was discovered. I was present at the trial of Warren Hastings. I was on American soil when the battle of Lexington was fought—when the declaration was promulgated—when Cornwallis surrendered—when Washington died. I entered Paris with Napoleon after Elba. I was present when you mounted your guns and manned your fleets for the war of 1812—when the South fired upon Sumter—when Richmond fell—when the President’s life was taken. In all the ages I have helped to celebrate the triumphs of genius, the achievements of arms, the havoc of storm, fire, pestilence, famine.”

Your career has been a stirring one. Might I ask how you came to locate in these dull Kansas woods, when you have been so accustomed to excitement during what I might term so protracted a period, not to put too fine a point on it?

“Listen. Once I was the honoured servitor of the noble and illustrious” (here he heaved a sigh, and passed his hairy hand across his eyes) “but in these degenerate days I am become the slave of quack doctors and newspapers. I am driven from pillar to post and hurried up and down, sometimes with stencil-plate and paste-brush to defile the fences with cabalistic legends, and sometimes in grotesque and extravagant character at the behest of some driving journal. I attended to that Ocean Bank robbery some weeks ago, when I was hardly rested from finishing up the pow-wow about the completion of the Pacific Railroad; immediately I was spirited off to do an atrocious murder for the benefit of the New York papers; next to attend the wedding of a patriarchal millionaire; next to raise a hurrah about the great boat race; and then, just when I had begun to hope that my old bones would have a rest, I am bundled off to this howling wilderness to strip, and jibber, and be ugly and hairy, and pull down fences and waylay sheep, and waltz around with a club, and play ‘Wild Man’ generally—and all to gratify the whim of a bedlam of crazy newspaper scribblers. From one end of the continent to the other, I am described as a gorilla, with a sort of human seeming about me—and all to gratify this

quill-driving scum of the earth!”

Poor old carpetbagger!

“I have been served infamously, often, in modern and semi-modern times. I have been compelled by base men to create fraudulent history, and to perpetrate all sorts of humbugs. I wrote those crazy Junius letters, I moped in a French dungeon for fifteen years, and wore a ridiculous iron mask; I poked around your Northern forests, among your vagabond Indians, a solemn French idiot, personating the ghost of a dead Dauphin, that the gaping world might wonder if we had ‘a Bourbon among us’; I have played sea-serpent off Nahant, and Woolly-Horse and what-is-it for the museums; I have interviewed politicians for the Sun, worked up all manner of miracles for the Herald, ciphered up election returns for the world, and thundered Political Economy through the Tribune. I have done all the extravagant things that the wildest invention could contrive, and done them well, and this is my reward—playing Wild Man in Kansas without a shirt”

Mysterious being, a light dawns vaguely upon me—it grows apace—what—what is your name?

“SENSATION!”

“Hence, horrible shape!”

It spoke again:

“Oh pitiless fate, my destiny hounds me once more. I am called. I go. Alas, is there no rest for me?”

In a moment the Wild Man’s features seemed to soften and refine, and his form to assume a more human grace and symmetry. His club changed to a spade, and he shouldered it and started away sighing profoundly and shedding tears.

Whither, poor shade?

“TO DIG UP THE BYRON FAMILY!”

Such was the response that floated back upon the wind as the sad spirit shook its ringlets to the breeze, flourished its shovel aloft, and disappeared beyond the brow of the hill.

All of which is in strict accordance with the facts.

M.T.