



Dangerous Water: A Biography Of The Boy Who Became Mark Twain

Ron Powers

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While Mark Twain remains one of our most quintessentially American writers, the actual boyhood experiences that fueled his most enduring literature remained largely unexplored—until now. Twain's early years were a decidedly un-innocent time, marked by deaths of friends and family and his father's bankruptcy. Twain dealt with those personal tragedies through humor and the tall tale. From the time that a ten-year-old Samuel Clemens lit out on his own and boarded his first Mississippi steamer to his first encounter with a traveling "mesmerizer" (which ignited his lifelong penchant for acting and spectacle), from the brooding sense of guilt and fear of eternal damnation inculcated into him at church to the superstitions and stories of witchcraft he learned from the blacks on his farm, Powers unforgettably shows how Mark Twain was shaped by the distinctly American landscape, culture, and people of Hannibal, Missouri. Jay Parini, the celebrated biographer of Robert Frost, called *Dangerous Water* "a long-needed evocation of the boyhood of the man who invented boyhood for all time. . . . An immensely shrewd and deeply engaging book, a great gift to all of us who love Twain."

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