

**АНГЛИЙСКИЙ В АДАПТАЦИИ:  
ЧТЕНИЕ И АУДИРОВАНИЕ**

МАРК ТВЕН • MARK TWAIN



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Признанный классик американского юмора умеет заинтриговать, рассмешить, заставить задуматься и узнать в его героях себя или соседа. Теперь прочитать его рассказы смогут даже те, кто не очень уверенно читает по-английски.

Серия «Английский в адаптации: чтение и аудирование» — это тексты для начинающих, продолжающих и продвинутых. Теперь каждый изучающий английский может выбрать свой уровень и своих авторов и совершенствовать свой английский с лучшими произведениями англоязычной литературы! Читая и слушая текст на диске, а также выполняя упражнения на чтение, аудирование и новую лексику, читатели качественно улучшат свой английский. Они станут лучше воспринимать английскую речь на слух, и работа с текстами станет эффективнее. Аудиозапись начитана носителями языка.

Книга предназначена для изучающих английский язык на продолжающем уровне.

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# Mark Twain



## 17 Best Humorous Stories

# A COMPLAINT ABOUT CORRESPONDENTS, DATED IN SAN FRANCISCO

**W**hat do you take us for on this side of the continent? I am addressing myself personally, and directly, to every man, woman and child east of the Rocky Mountains. How do you think our minds work, that you always write us such poor, senseless, uninteresting letters? You complain that by the time that a man has been on the Pacific coast for six months, he seems to lose all interest in things and matters and people in the distant East, and stops answering the letters of his friends and even his relatives. It is your own fault. You need a lecture on the subject.

There is only one simple law for letter-writing, and yet you either do not know that law, or you are so stupid that you never think of it. It is very easy and simple: — Write only about things and people your correspondent has a living interest in.

Can you remember this simple rule and follow it? If you are an old friend of the person you are writing to, you know a number of his acquaintances, and you can be quite sure



that even the most trivial things you can write about them will be read with eagerness out here on the edge of sunset.

Yet how do you write? — how do the most of you write? You write and write and write this nonsense about people one never heard of before, and things which one knows nothing at all about and cares less. There is no sense in that. Let me show up your style. Here is a paragraph from my Aunt Nancy's last letter. I got it four years ago, and didn't answer immediately — not at all, I may say: —

St. Louis, 1862

'Dear Mark! — We spent the evening very pleasantly at home yesterday. The Rev.<sup>1</sup> Dr. Mucklin and his wife, from Peoria, were here. He is a hard-working priest, and takes his coffee strong. He is also subject to neuralgia — neuralgia in the head — and is modest and prayerful. There are few such men. We had soup for dinner as usual, although I am not fond of it. O Mark! why don't you try to lead a better life? Read II. Kings<sup>2</sup>, from chap. 2 to chap. 24 inclusive. It would be so pleasant to me if you reform. Poor Mrs. Gabrick is dead. You did not know her. She had fits, poor soul. On the 14<sup>th</sup> the entire army headed off from —'


I always stopped here, because I knew what was coming — the war news, in dull and dry detail — because I could never explain these fools that the overland telegraph enabled me to know here in San Francisco every day all that

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<sup>1</sup> Rev. = Reverend — преподобный (титул священника). (Прим. ред.)

<sup>2</sup> II. Kings — Вторая Книга Царей. (Прим. ред.)

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happened in the United States the day before, and that the pony express brought me the full details of all the war matters at least two weeks before their letters could possibly reach me. So I naturally passed their outdated war reports, even at the cost of slipping the usual suggestions to read several chapters from the Scriptures, which are always hidden in the text here and there, so that a careless sinner could get trapped.

Now, what was the Rev. Mucklin to me? Did I care at all that he was 'a hard-working priest', and 'took his coffee strong'? — and was 'modest', and 'neuralgic', and 'prayerful'? Such a combination of qualities could only excite my admiration — nothing more. It could awake no living interest. That there are few such men, and that we had soup for dinner, is simply nice to hear — that is all. 'Read twenty-two chapters of II. Kings' is quite a shocking offer for a man who is not training as a priest. The news that 'poor Mrs. Gabrick' was dead aroused no enthusiasm — mostly because of the circumstance that I had never heard of her before, I think. But I was glad she had fits — although a stranger.

Don't you begin to understand, now? Don't you see that there is not a sentence in that letter of any interest in the world to me? I had the war news in advance of it; I could get a much better sermon at church when I needed it; I didn't care anything about poor Gabrick, not knowing the deceased; nor yet the Rev. Mucklin, not knowing him either. I said to myself, 'Here is not a word about Mary Ann Smith — I wish there was; nor about Georgiana Brown, or Zeb Leavenworth, or Sam Bowen, or Strother Wiley — or about anybody else I care for.' And so, as this letter was just like all



that went before it, it was not answered, and one useless correspondence was stopped.

My dear mother is rather a good correspondent — she is above the average, at any rate. She puts on her spectacles and takes her scissors and a pile of newspapers, and cuts out column after column — editorials, hotel arrivals, poetry, telegraph news, advertisements, old jokes, recipes of making pies, cures for liver — anything that goes handy; it doesn't matter for her; she's entirely impartial; she cuts out a column, and runs her eye down it over her spectacles — (she looks *over* them because she can't see *through* them, but she prefers them to her more serviceable ones because they have got gold rims to them) — runs her eye down the column, and says, 'Well, it's from a St. Louis paper, anyway,' and puts it into the envelope along with her letter. She writes about everybody I ever knew or ever heard of; but unhappily, she forgets that when she tells me that 'J.B. is dead,' or that 'W.L. is going to marry T.D.,' and 'B.K. and R.M. and L.P.J. have all gone to New Orleans to live,' it is more than likely that after years of absence I don't remember once familiar names so well, and their unexplained initials are absolutely unclear to me. She never writes a name in full, and so I never know whom she is talking about. So I have to guess; and that's why I mourned the death of Bill Kribben instead of rejoicing over the death of Ben Kenfuron. I failed to identify the person by initials.

The most useful and interesting letters we get here from home are from children seven or eight years old. This is absolute truth. Happily they have nothing to talk about but



home, and neighbours, and family — things their parents think unworthy of transmission thousand of miles. They write simply and naturally, and without any unnecessary effect. They tell all they know, and then stop. Consequently their letters are brief; but, treating as they do of familiar persons and scenes, always entertaining. Now, therefore, if you would learn the art of letter-writing, let a little child teach you. Here is a letter from a small girl eight years of age; I keep it as a curiosity, because it is the only letter I ever got from the States that has any information in it. It runs thus:

St. Louis, 1865

‘Uncle Mark, it’s a pity you’re not here, so I can’t tell you about Moses in the rushes again, I know it better now. Mr. Sowerby has got his leg broken falling off a horse. He was riding it on Sunday. Margaret, that’s the maid, Margaret has taken all the ashtrays, and old jugs out of your room, because she says she doesn’t think you’re likely to come back; you’ve been gone so long. Sissy McElroy’s mother has got another little baby. She has them all the time. It has got little blue eyes, like Mr. Swimley, their lodger, and looks just like him. I have got a new doll, but Johnny Anderson pulled one of its legs out. Miss Doosenberry was here today; I gave her your picture, but she said she didn’t want it. My cat has got more kittens — oh! You can’t think! — twice as many as Lottie Belden’s. And there’s one, such a sweet little one with a short tail, and I named it for you. All of them have got names now — General Grant, and Halleck, and Moses, and Margaret, and Deuteronomy, and



Captain Semmes, and Exodus, and Leviticus, and Horace Greely<sup>1</sup> — all named but one, and I am saving it because the one that I named for you's been sick all the time since, and I'm afraid it'll die. [It appears to have been quite cruel to the short-tailed kitten, naming it for me — I wonder how the unnamed one will stand it.] Uncle Mark, I do believe Hattie Coldwell likes you, and I know she thinks you are pretty, because I heard her say nothing could hurt your good looks — nothing at all — she said, even if you were to have the small-pox, you would be just as good-looking as you were before. And my ma says she's ever so smart. [Very.] So no more this time, because General Grant and Moses are fighting.

'Annie'

This child hurts my feelings in every other sentence, but in the simplicity of her time of life she doesn't know it.

I consider that a model letter — a readable and entertaining letter, and, as I said before, it contains more matter of interest and more real information than any letter I ever received from the East. I had rather hear about the cats at home and their truly remarkable names, than listen to a lot of stuff about people I am not acquainted with, or read 'The Evil Effects of Alcohol,' illustrated in the back with a picture of a ragged scoundrel with an empty beer bottle in the midst of his family circle.

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<sup>1</sup> Девочка назвала котят именами военных и политических деятелей эпохи Гражданской войны в США, а также названиями священных книг (Второзаконие, книга Левит, Исход). (Прим. ред.)



## PUNCH, BROTHERS, PUNCH

**W**ill the reader take a look at the following lines, and see if he can find anything harmful in them?

Conductor, when you receive a fare,  
 Punch in the presence of the passenjare!  
 A blue trip slip for an eight-cent fare,  
 A buff trip slip for a six-cent fare,  
 A pink trip slip for a three-cent fare,  
 Punch in the presence of the passenjare!

CHORUS

Punch, brothers! punch with care!  
 Punch in the presence of the passenjare!

I came across these rhymes in a newspaper not long ago, and read them a couple of times. They took possession of me at once. I recalled them so many times during breakfast that I almost forgot to eat at all. And when I returned to my office to continue the novel I was writing all I could think of was, 'Punch in the presence of the passenjare.' I tried hard for an hour, but it was useless. My head kept repeating, 'A blue trip slip for an eight-cent fare, a buff trip slip for a six-cent fare,' and so on and so on. I failed to do any work that day. I gave up and walked down-town, and soon I found out that my feet were keeping time to that jingle. When I could stand it no longer I altered my step. But it did no good; those rhymes adapted to the new step and went on annoying me just as before. I returned home, and suffered all the afternoon; suffered all through my dinner; suffered, and cried all through the evening; went to



bed and couldn't sleep, and tried to read. But all I could see in the page was, 'Punch! punch in the presence of the passenjare.' By sunrise I was out of my mind, and everybody was annoyed with my 'Punch! oh, punch! punch in the presence of the passenjare!'

Two days later, on Saturday morning, I woke up wrecked, and went forth to meet with a good friend, the Rev. Mr. —, to walk to the Talcott Tower, ten miles away. He stared at me, but asked no questions. We started. Mr. — talked, talked, talked as is his habit. I said nothing; I heard nothing. At the end of a mile, Mr. — said 'Mark, are you sick? I never saw a man look so tired and absent-minded. Say something, do!'

Sadly, without enthusiasm, I said: 'Punch, brothers, punch with care! Punch in the presence of the passenjare!'

My friend looked blankly at me, confused, and said:

'I do not think I quite understand what you mean, Mark. There's nothing sad in these words; and yet — maybe it was the way you said the words — I never heard anything that sounded so pathetic. What is—'

But I heard no more. I was already far away with my 'blue trip slip for an eight-cent fare, buff trip slip for a six-cent fare, pink trip slip for a three-cent fare; punch in the presence of the passenjare.' I do not know what happened during the other nine miles. However, all of a sudden Mr. — put his hand on my shoulder and shouted:

'Oh, wake up! wake up! wake up! Don't sleep all day! Here we are at the Tower, man! I am tired of talking to you, and yet I never got a response. Just look at this beautiful



autumn landscape! Look at it! look at it! Enjoy it! You have traveled; you have seen famous landscapes elsewhere. Come, now, give me an honest opinion. What do you say to this?’

I sighed, and murmured:

‘A buff trip slip for a six-cent fare, a pink trip slip for a three-cent fare, punch in the presence of the passenjare.’

Rev. Mr. — stood there, very serious, full of anxiety, and looked long at me; then he said:

‘Mark, there is something about this that I cannot understand. Those are about the same words you said before; there does not seem to be anything in them, and yet they nearly break my heart when you say them. Punch in the — how is it they go?’


I began at the beginning and repeated all the lines.

My friend’s face lighted with interest. He said:

‘Why, what a catchy jingle it is! It is almost music. It flows along so nicely. I have nearly caught the rhymes myself. Say them over just once more, and then I’ll remember them, sure.’

I said them over. Then Mr. — said them. He made one little mistake, which I corrected. The next time and the next he got them right. Now a great burden seemed to fall down from my shoulders. That torturing jingle got out of my brain, and a pleasing sense of rest and peace came instead. I was light-hearted enough to sing; and I did sing for half an hour, all the way home. Then my freed tongue could speak again, and the pent talk of many weary hours began to flow. It flowed on and on, joyously, cheerily, until the fountain was empty and dry. As I shook my friend’s hand at parting, I said:

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'Wasn't it a great time! But now I remember, you haven't said a word for two hours. Come, come, tell me something!'

The Rev. Mr. — turned a gloomy eye upon me, sighed deeply, and said, without animation, without noticeable consciousness:

'Punch, brothers, punch with care! Punch in the presence of the passengjare!'

A pang shot through me as I said to myself, 'Poor fellow, poor fellow! he has got it, now.'

I did not see Mr. — for two or three days after that. Then, on Tuesday evening, he came to me, staggering, and sat gloomily into a seat. He was pale, worn; he was a wreck. He lifted his faded eyes to my face and said:

'Ah, Mark, these rhymes are really ruinous. They were following me like a nightmare, day and night, hour after hour, to this very moment. Since I saw you I have suffered great torments. Saturday evening I had a sudden call, by telegraph, and took the night train for Boston. The occasion was the death of a good old friend who had requested that I should preach his funeral sermon. I took my seat in the train and started preparing my speech. But I never got over the opening paragraph; for then the train started and the car-wheels began their "clack, clack-clack-clack-clack! clack-clack! — clack-clack-clack!" and right away those awful rhymes adapted themselves to these sounds. For an hour I sat there and fitted them to every separate clack the car-wheels made. I was as tired, then, as if I had been cutting wood all day. My head was splitting with headache. It seemed to me that I would go mad if I sat there any longer;



so I undressed and went to bed. I stretched myself out, and — well, you know what the result was. The torment went on, just the same. “Clack-clack-clack, a blue trip slip, clack-clack-clack, for an eight cent fare; clack-clack-clack, a buff trip slip, clack clack-clack, for a six-cent fare, and so on, and so on, and so on punch in the presence of the passenjare!” Sleep? Not a single wink! I was almost a lunatic when I got to Boston. Don’t ask me about the funeral. I did my best, but every sentence was woven in and out with “Punch, brothers, punch with care, punch in the presence of the passenjare.” And the saddest thing was that my sermon dropped into the rhythm of those pulsing rhymes, and I could actually see absent-minded people nodding time to its rhythm with their stupid heads. And, Mark, you may believe it or not, but before I got through all the people were nodding their heads in solemn unison, mourners, undertaker, and all. The moment I had finished, I ran to the anteroom in a state close to madness. Of course it would be my luck to find a sorrowing and aged aunt of the deceased there, who had arrived from Springfield too late to get into the church. She began to cry, and said:

“Oh, oh, he is gone, he is gone, and I didn’t see him before he died!”

“Yes! I said, “he is gone, he is gone, he is gone — oh, will this suffering never stop!”

“ You loved him, then! Oh, you too loved him!”

“ Loved him! Loved who?”

“ Why, my poor George! my poor nephew!”

“ Oh — him! Yes — oh, yes, yes. Certainly — certainly. Punch — punch — oh, this torture will kill me!”