



Mark Twain's Letters, Volume 4

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As the demanding art of editing letters for publication has evolved over the past century, the correspondence of many figures has been edited and reedited more than once. Now, at last, the Mark Twain Project at the University of California is giving meaning to the term “definitive” by preparing letter editions so meticulously that little will ever need to be redone in the future.

Everything about the project's developing twenty-volume series is admirable: from the authority of its textual notes and editorial apparatus to the design of the books' pages. Of greater interest to readers, however, is the content of the volumes. Mark Twain's correspondence is often as fascinating as his fiction, revealing a life rich in incident, ideas, and hope. Moreover, he was often as witty and wise in letters as he was in his published writings.

The fourth volume in this series covers only two years in his life, but they were exceptional years. In early 1870, he ended his long bachelorhood by marrying a genteel Eastern woman and settling down as a newspaperman in Buffalo, New York. While enjoying new prosperity and fame from *THE INNOCENTS ABROAD* (1869), he became a magazine columnist and wrote his second great book, *ROUGHING IT* (1872). He also planned new writing and business ventures that would busy him for years. Meanwhile, however, a series of family catastrophes nearly drove him to distraction, forcing him to leave Buffalo for Hartford, Connecticut, and he hit the lecture circuit to recoup his financial losses.

The 338 letters from these tumultuous two years range from a poignant reminiscence to a boyhood friend that he composed shortly after his wedding, to extravagant plans for a book on South Africa that would never be written, scores of tender messages to his wife, and much more.

Until someone writes the definitive biography of Mark Twain, these volumes will stand as the richest, most authoritative, and—frequently—most engrossing account of his life.

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