

Excerpt II from *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

In this excerpt, Huck and Jim have just met two men who are on the run from people they have cheated.

“Old man,” said the young one, “I reckon we might double-team it together; what do you think?”

“I ain’t undisposed. What’s your line—mainly?”

5 “Jour<sup>1</sup> printer by trade; do a little in patent medicines; theater-actor—tragedy, you know; take a turn to mesmerism<sup>2</sup> and phrenology<sup>3</sup> when there’s a chance; teach singing-geography school for a change; sling a lecture sometimes—oh, I do lots of things—most anything that comes handy, so it ain’t  
10 work. What’s your lay?”

“I’ve done considerable in the doctoring way in my time. Layin’ on o’ hands<sup>4</sup> is my best holt—for cancer and paralysis, and sich things; and I k’n tell a fortune pretty good when I’ve got somebody along to  
15 find out the facts for me. Preachin’s my line, too, and workin’ camp-meetin’s<sup>5</sup>, and missionaryin’ around.”

Nobody never said anything for a while; then the young man hove a sigh and says:

20 “Alas!”

“What’re you alassin’ about?” says the bald-head.

“To think I should have lived to be leading such a life, and be degraded down into such company.”  
25 And he begun to wipe the corner of his eye with a rag.

“Dern your skin, ain’t the company good enough for you?” says the baldhead, pretty pert and uppish.

30 “Yes, it *is* good enough for me; it’s as good as I deserve; for who fetched me so low when I was so high? I did myself. I don’t blame *you*, gentlemen—far from it; I don’t blame anybody. I deserve it all. Let the cold world do its worst; one thing I know—there’s a grave somewhere for me. The world may  
35 go on just as it’s always done, and take everything from me—loved ones, property, everything; but it can’t take that. Someday I’ll lie down in it and forget it all, and my poor broken heart will be at rest.” He went on a-wiping.

40 “Drot your pore broken heart,” says the bald-head; “what are you heaving your pore broken heart at *us f’r*? We hain’t done nothing.”

45 “No, I know you haven’t. I ain’t blaming you, gentlemen. I brought myself down—yes, I did it myself. It’s right I should suffer—perfectly right—I don’t make any moan.”

“Brought you down from whar? Whar was you brought down from?”

50 “Ah, you would not believe me; the world never believes—let it pass—’tis no matter. The secret of my birth—”

“The secret of your birth! Do you mean to say—”

55 “Gentlemen,” says the young man, very solemn, “I will reveal it to you, for I feel I may have confidence in you. By rights I am a duke!”

Jim’s eyes bugged out when he heard that; and I reckon mine did, too. Then the baldhead says: “No! you can’t mean it?”

60 “Yes. My great-grandfather, eldest son of the Duke of Bridgewater, fled to this country about the end of the last century, to breathe the pure air of freedom; married here, and died, leaving a son, his own father dying about the same time. The second  
65 son of the late duke seized the titles and estates—the infant real duke was ignored. I am the lineal descendant of that infant—I am the rightful Duke of Bridgewater; and here am I, **forlorn**, torn from my high estate, hunted of men, despised by the cold  
70 world, ragged, worn, heart-broken, and degraded to the companionship of felons on a raft!”

Jim pitied him ever so much, and so did I. We tried to comfort him, but he said it warn’t much use, he couldn’t be much comforted; said if we was a  
75 mind to acknowledge him, that would do him more good than most anything else; so we said we would, if he would tell us how. He said we ought to bow when we spoke to him, and say “Your Grace,” or “My Lord,” or “Your Lordship”—and he wouldn’t mind it  
80 if we called him plain “Bridgewater,” which, he said, was a title anyway, and not a name; and one of us ought to wait on him at dinner, and do any little thing for him he wanted done.

85 Well, that was all easy, so we done it. All through dinner Jim stood around and waited on him, and says, “Will yo’ Grace have some o’ dis or some o’ dat?” and so on, and a body could see it was mighty pleasing to him.

90 But the old man got pretty silent by and by—didn’t have much to say, and didn’t look pretty comfortable over all that petting that was going on around that duke. He seemed to have something on his mind. So, along in the afternoon, he says:

95 “Looky here, Bilgewater<sup>6</sup>,” he says, “I’m nation sorry for you, but you ain’t the only person that’s had troubles like that.”

“No?”

100 “No you ain’t. You ain’t the only person that’s ben snaked down wrongfully out’n a high place.”

“Alas!”

<sup>1</sup> **jour**, n. day [French]

<sup>2</sup> **mesmerism**, n. hypnotism (named after F.A. Mesmer)

<sup>3</sup> **phrenology**, n. the study of the relationship between the shape of one’s skull and one’s character and intelligence

<sup>4</sup> **laying on of hands**, n. a practice in which health is restored through a religious blessing

<sup>5</sup> **camp meeting**, n. a popular evangelistic meeting

<sup>6</sup> **bilge**, n. a part of a ship that often collects water during a voyage

“No, you ain’t the only person that’s had a secret of his birth.” And, by jings, *he* begins to cry.

“Hold! What do you mean?”

105 “Bilgewater, kin I trust you?” says the old man, still sort of sobbing.

“To the bitter death!” He took the old man by the hand and squeezed it, and says, “That secret of your being: speak!”

110 “Bilgewater, I am the late Dauphin!”

You bet you, Jim and me stared this time. Then the duke says:

“You are what?”

115 “Yes, my friend, it is too true—your eyes is lookin’ at this very moment on the pore disappeared Dauphin, Looy the Seventeen, son of Looy the Sixteen and Marry Antonette.”

“You! At your age! No! You mean you’re the late Charlemagne; you must be six or seven hundred years old, at the very least.”

120 “Trouble has done it, Bilgewater, trouble has done it; trouble has brung these gray hairs and this premature balditude. Yes, gentlemen, you see before you, in blue jeans and misery, the wanderin’, exiled, trampled-on, and sufferin’ rightful King of France.”

Well, he cried and took on so that me and Jim didn’t know hardly what to do, we was so sorry—and so glad and proud we’d got him with us, too. So we set in, like we done before with the duke, and tried  
130 to comfort *him*. But he said it warn’t no use, no-thing but to be dead and done with it all could do him any good; though he said it often made him feel easier and better for a while if people treated him according to his rights, and got down on one knee to speak to him, and always called him “Your Majesty,” and waited on him first at meals, and didn’t set down in his presence till he asked them. So Jim and me set to majestyin’ him, and doing this and that and t’other for him, and standing up till he told us  
140 we might set down. This done him heaps of good, and so he got cheerful and comfortable. But the duke kind of soured on him, and didn’t look a bit satisfied with the way things was going; still, the king acted real friendly towards him, and said the  
145 duke’s great-grandfather and all the other Dukes of Bilgewater was a good deal thought of by *his* father, and was allowed to come to the palace considerable; but the duke stayed huffy a good while, till by and by the king says:

150 “Like as not we got to be together a blamed long time on this h-yer raft, Bilgewater, and so what’s the use o’ your bein’ sour? It’ll only make things oncomfortable. It ain’t my fault I warn’t born a duke, it ain’t your fault you warn’t born a  
155 king—so what’s the use to worry? Make the best o’ things the way you find ’em, says I—that’s my motto. This ain’t no bad thing that we’ve struck here—plenty grub and an easy life—come, give us your hand, duke, and le’s all be friends.”

160 The duke done it, and Jim and me was pretty glad to see it. It took away all the uncomfatable-ness and we felt mighty good over it, because it

would a been a miserable business to have any un-friendliness on the raft; for what you want, above all  
165 things, on a raft, is for everybody to be satisfied, and feel right and kind towards the others.

It didn’t take me long to make up my mind that these liars warn’t no kings nor dukes at all, but just low-down humbugs and frauds. But I never said no-thing, never let on; kept it to myself; it’s the best  
170 way; then you don’t have no quarrels, and don’t get into no trouble. If they wanted us to call them kings and dukes, I hadn’t no objections, ’long as it would keep peace in the family; and it warn’t no use to tell  
175 Jim, so I didn’t tell him. If I never learnt nothing else out of pap<sup>7</sup>, I learnt that the best way to get along with his kind of people is to let them have their own way.

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<sup>7</sup> Huck’s father

## Comprehension Questions

Based on the context in which it appears, what does the following pronoun refer to?  
it (line 37)

Based on the context in which they appear, what do the following words mean?

line (line 3)

handy (line 9)

lay (line 10)

considerable (line 11)

holt (line 12)

hove (line 19)

uppish (line 28)

moan (line 46)

acknowledge (line 75)

body (line 87)

petting (line 91)

nation (line 94)

snaked (line 99)—think about the tone and connotations of this word

set in (line 129)

blamed (line 150)

sour (line 152)

grub (line 158)

What tone and connotation does the word “sling” have as used in line 8?

What dichotomy is there in the tone of the “king’s” comments about telling fortunes (lines 13-15) and the tone the author intends to convey by putting those words in his mouth? Consider what the passage reveals about the character of the king.

What rhetorical device is used repeatedly in lines 33-37?

What are the king’s comments in lines 52-53 and 58-59 intended to convey to the reader?

Why does the king use the term “Bilgewater” in lines 94, 104, 109, etc.? Similarly, why does the duke say that the king must actually be Charlemagne (lines 117-119)?

What irony is conveyed by the king’s speech in lines 113-116?

What is the effect of the juxtaposition of “blue jeans” and “misery” in line 123?

What is ironic about the way Huck narrates lines 141-143 (“But the duke...going”) and the way Twain intends the reader to view that information?

What is the tone of the king’s conciliatory comments to the duke in lines 144-147?

What is ironic about the king’s motto (lines 155-156)?

How do you think the reader is intended to view Huck’s comments in the last paragraph?

## Questions for Discussion and Writing

Discuss the differences between the Duke and the King. How do you think Twain intends the reader to perceive them?

Discuss the elements of the “art of the con” that the Duke employs so effectively to fool Huck, Jim, and perhaps even the reader. What elements of his story are contradictory, and how does he manage to be convincing despite these contradictions?

What questions does this passage, like much of the rest of the novel, raise about Huck as the narrator of the story?