

# 15 of Mark Twain's Sassiest Witticisms

Mark Twain (1835-1910) is arguably the most celebrated humorist and writer in American history.

Born Samuel Langhorne Clemens in Hannibal, Missouri, Twain built a literary reputation unrivaled in his day. On one hand, he wrote [Huck Finn](#), a literary masterpiece widely considered the greatest novel ever written by an American. On the other hand, Twain was a bit like a nineteenth century standup comedian, employing his biting satire on stages as well as in his literary works. He used his (often irreverent) humor to poke at things he was not supposed to because, well, that's what great satirists do. (See quote #9).

Selecting Twain's wittiest lines is hard because he said so *much*. (Christopher Hitchens [once observed](#) that the difficulty in confronting any Twain topic was "the sheer volume of ink the man expended on his own doings.")

Still, what that in mind, it's an effort worth undertaking. So without further ado, here are 15 of Twain's cleverest lines:

1. "To create man was a fine and original idea; but to add the sheep was a tautology." – *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* (30 May 1902)
2. "I haven't a particle of confidence in a man who has no redeeming petty vices whatsoever." – "Answers to Correspondents," *The Californian*, 17 June 1865
3. "It is curious that physical courage should be so common in the world, and moral courage so rare." – *Mark Twain in Eruption: Hitherto Unpublished Pages About Men and Events*

(1940) edited by Bernard DeVoto

4. "A man is never more truthful than when he acknowledges himself a liar." – *Mark Twain and I* by Opie Read

5. "He was ignorant of the commonest accomplishments of youth. He could not even lie." – "Brief Biographical Sketch of George Washington," (1867)

6. "The only reason why God created man is because he was disappointed with the monkey." – *Autobiographical Dictation* (1906)

7. "I have been complimented many times and they always embarrass me; I always feel that they have not said enough." – Speech (23 September 1907).

8. "Reader, suppose you were an idiot. And suppose you were a member of Congress. But I repeat myself." – Draft manuscript (c.1881), quoted by Albert Bigelow Paine in *Mark Twain: A Biography* (1912)

9. "The funniest things are the forbidden." – Notebook 18 (February–September 1879)

10. "Always acknowledge a fault frankly. This will throw those in authority off their guard and give you opportunity to commit more." – *More Maxims of Mark* (1927)

11. "I am opposed to millionaires, but it would be dangerous to offer me the position." – *American Claimant* (1892)

12. "All men have heard of the Mormon Bible, but few except the "elect" have seen it, or, at least, taken the trouble to read it. I brought away a copy from Salt Lake. The book is a curiosity to me, it is such a pretentious affair, and yet so "slow," so sleepy; such an insipid mess of inspiration. It is

chloroform in print.” – *On the Book of Mormon*, [Roughing It](#) (published 1872)

13. “A crowded police docket is the surest of all signs that trade is brisk and money plenty.” – [Roughing It](#)

14. “The only way to keep your health is to eat what you don’t want, drink what you don’t like, and do what you’d druther not.” – *Following The Equator* p. 459 (1897)

15. “Get your facts first, and then you can distort them as much as you please.” – Interview with Rudyard Kipling, 1899