



April 2001

A deception

Mark TWAIN

This book has been created to be read in a full screen

[CTRL] + L

The webmaster of Pitbook.com

You may remember that I lectured lately for the young gentlemen of the Clayonian Society?

During the afternoon of that day I was talking with one of the young gentlemen referred to, and he said he had an uncle who, from some cause or other, seemed to have grown permanently bereft of all emotion. And with tears in his eyes this young man said:

“Oh, if I could only see him laugh once more! Oh, if I could only see him weep!”

I was touched. I could never withstand distress. I said:

“Bring him to my lecture. I’ll start him for you.”

“Oh, if you could but do it! If you could but do it, all our family would bless you for evermore; for he is very dear to us. Oh, my benefactor, can you make him laugh? Can you bring soothing tears to those parched orbs?”

I was profoundly moved. I said:

“My son, bring the old party round. I have got some jokes in my lecture that will make him laugh, if there is any laugh in him; and, if they miss fire, I have got some others that’ll make him cry or kill him, one or the other.”

Then the young man wept on my neck, and presently spread both hands on my head and looked up towards heaven, mumbling something reverently; and then he went after his uncle. He placed him in full view, in the second row of benches, that night, and I began on him. I

tried him with mild jokes, then with severe ones; I dosed him with bad jokes, and riddled him with good ones; I fired old, stale jokes on him, and peppered him fore and aft with red-hot new ones. I warmed up to my work, and assaulted him on the right and left, in front and behind; I fumed, and charged, and ranted, till I was hoarse and sick, and frantic and furious; but I never moved him once, I never started a smile or a tear! Never a ghost of a smile, and never a suspicion of moisture! I was astounded. I closed the lecture at last with one despairing shriek, with one wild burst of humor, and hurled a joke of supernatural atrocity full at him. It never phased him! Then I sat down bewildered and exhausted.

The president of the society came up and bathed my head with cold water, and said:

“What made you carry on so towards the last?”

I said, “I was trying to make that confunded old idiot laugh in the second row.”

And he said, “Well, you were wasting your time; because he is deaf and dumb, and as blind as a badger.”

Now was that any way for that old man’s nephew to impose on a stranger and an orphan like me?