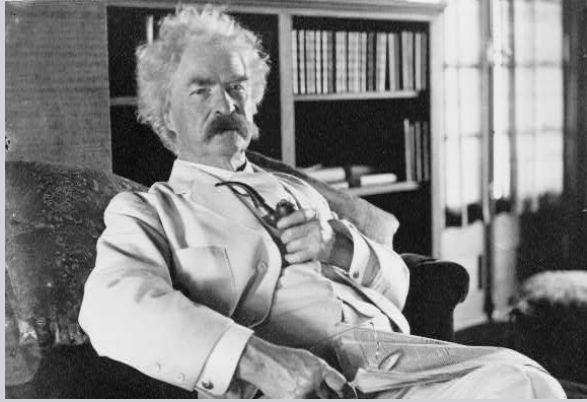


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Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain), ca. 1905

MARK TWAIN
(Samuel Clemens)

The Dervish
and the
Offensive Stranger
1902

The Dervish: I will say again, and yet again, and still again, that a good deed —

The Offensive Stranger: Peace, oh man of narrow vision! There is no such thing as a good *deed* —

The Dervish: O shameless blaspheme —

The Offensive Stranger: And no such thing as an evil deed. There are good *impulses*, there are evil impulses, and that is all. Half of the results of a good intention are evil; half the results of an evil intention are good. No man can command the results, nor allot them.

The Dervish: And so —

The Offensive Stranger: And so you shall praise men for their good intentions, and not blame them for the evils resulting; you shall blame men for their evil intentions, and not praise them for the good resulting.

The Dervish: O, maniac! will you say —

The Offensive Stranger: Listen to the law: From *every* impulse, whether good or evil, flows two streams; the one carries health, the other carries poison. From the beginning of time this law has not changed, to the end of time it will not change.

The Dervish: If I should strike thee dead in anger —

The Offensive Stranger: Or kill me with a drug which you hoped would give me new life and strength —

The Dervish: Very well. Go on.

The Offensive Stranger: In either case the results would be the same. Age-long misery of mind for you — an evil result; peace, repose, the end of sorrow for me — a good result. Three hearts that hold me dear would break; three pauper cousins of the third remove would get my riches and rejoice; you would go to prison and your friends would grieve, but your humble apprentice-priest would step into your shoes and your fat sleek life and be happy. And are these all the goods and all the evils that would flow from the well-intended or ill-intended act that cut short my life? Oh thoughtless one, Oh purblind creature! the good and evil results that flow from *any* act, even the smallest, breed on and on, century after century, forever and ever and ever, creeping by inches around the globe, affecting all its coming and going populations until the end of time, until the final cataclysm!

The Dervish: Then, there being no such thing as a good deed —

The Offensive Stranger: Don't I tell you there are good *intentions*, and evil ones, and there an end? The *results* are not foreseeable. They are of both kinds, in all cases. It is the law. Listen: this is far-western history:

VOICES OUT OF UTAH

I.

The White Chief (to his people): This wide plain was a desert. By our heaven-blest industry we have dammed the river and utilized its waters and turned the desert into smiling fields whose fruitage makes prosperous and happy a thousand homes where poverty and hunger dwelt before. How noble, how beneficent, is Civilization!

II.

Indian Chief (to his people): This wide plain, which the Spanish priests taught our fathers to irrigate, was a smiling field, whose fruitage made our homes prosperous and happy. The white American has dammed our river, taken away our water for his own valley, and turned our field into a desert; wherefore we starve.

The Dervish: I perceive that the good intention did really bring both good and evil results in equal measure. But a single case cannot prove the rule. Try again.

The Offensive Stranger: Pardon me, *all* cases prove it. Columbus discovered a new world and gave to the plodding poor and the landless of Europe farms and breathing-space and plenty and happiness —

The Dervish: A good result —

The Offensive Stranger: And they hunted and harried the original owners of the soil, and robbed them, beggared them, drove them from their homes, and exterminated them, root and branch.

The Dervish: An evil result, yes.

The Offensive Stranger: The French Revolution brought desolation to the hearts and homes of five million families and drenched the country with blood and turned its wealth to poverty.

The Dervish: An evil result.

The Offensive Stranger: But every great and precious liberty enjoyed by the nations of Continental Europe to-day are the gift of that Revolution.

The Dervish: A good result, I concede it.

The Offensive Stranger: In our well-meant effort to lift up the Filipino to our own moral altitude with a musket, we have slipped on the ice and fallen down to his.

The Dervish: A large evil result.

The Offensive Stranger: But as an offset we are a World Power.

The Dervish: Give me time. I must think this one over. Pass on.

The Offensive Stranger: By help of three hundred thousand soldiers and eight hundred million dollars England has succeeded in her good purpose of lifting up the unwilling Boers and making them better and purer and happier than they could ever have become by their own devices.

The Dervish: Certainly that is a good result.

The Offensive Stranger: But there are only eleven Boers left, now.

The Dervish: It has the appearance of an evil result. But I will think it over before I decide.

The Offensive Stranger: Take yet one more instance. With the best intentions the missionary has been laboring in China for eighty years.

The Dervish: The evil result is —

The Offensive Stranger: That nearly a hundred thousand Chinamen have acquired our Civilization.

The Dervish: And the good result is —

The Offensive Stranger: That by the compassion of God four hundred millions have escaped it.

The Dervish: Adieu, good sir; I am convinced, and accept your Law.