



# Mark Twain and Medicine: "Any Mummery Will Cure"

*K. Patrick Ober*

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Mark Twain has always been America's spokesman, and his comments on a wide range of topics continue to be accurate, valid, and frequently amusing. His opinions on the medical field are no exception. While Twain's works, including his popular novels about Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, are rich in medical imagery and medical themes derived from his personal experiences, his interactions with the medical profession and his comments about health, illness, and physicians have largely been overlooked.

In *Mark Twain and Medicine*, K. Patrick Ober remedies this omission. The nineteenth century was a critical time in the development of American medicine, with much competition among the different systems of health care, both traditional and alternative. Not surprisingly, Mark Twain was right in the middle of it all. He experimented with many of the alternative care systems that were available in his day—in part because of his frustration with traditional medicine and in part because he hoped to find the "perfect" system that would bring health to his family.

Twain's commentary provides a unique perspective on American medicine and the revolution in medical systems that he experienced firsthand. Ober explores Twain's personal perspective in this area, as he expressed it in fiction, speeches, and letters. As a medical educator, Ober explains in sufficient detail and with clarity all medical and scientific terms, making this volume accessible to the general reader.

Ober demonstrates that many of Twain's observations are still relevant to today's health care issues, including the use of alternative or complementary medicine in dealing with illness, the utility of placebo therapies, and the role of hope in the healing process.

Twain's evaluation of the medical practices of his era provides a fresh, humanistic, and personalized view of the dramatic changes that occurred in medicine through the nineteenth century and into the first decade of the twentieth. Twain scholars, general readers, and medical professionals will all find this unique look at his work appealing.

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