



A G e n e r a l G o o d T i m e

WHEN WE AWOKE, JIM AND I EXAMINED THE SUPPLIES THAT WE FOUND in the small boat belonging to the three men. We found heavy shoes, blankets, clothes, books, tobacco—all kinds of things that the men had stolen. Neither Jim nor I had ever owned this much before. We sat all afternoon, talking. I told Jim what I had heard inside the sinking boat and how we had had a real adventure like those in books.

Jim said, “I would rather live without adventure. When I found the raft missing, I thought that it was the end for old Jim. If no one saved me, I would be drowned, and if someone did save me, I would be returned to Miss Watson for the reward money, and she would sell me down the river to New Orleans.”

Well, Jim was right, but then he was almost always right. Jim certainly understood a lot about people and what made them act the way that they do. He had a good mind.

I read to Jim from one of the books that we found in that boat. I read about kings and dukes and the fancy clothes that they wore and how they called each other “Your Majesty” instead of just plain mister. Jim was very interested. He said that he did not know about kings, he

knew only about King Solomon in the Bible.

“The Bible says that King Solomon was the wisest man who ever lived, but he had many, many wives and I don’t think that was so wise. Think of all the talking and the noise. And remember the time that two women came to him and each claimed to be the mother of the same baby. What does King Solomon say? He says that he’ll cut the baby into two pieces and give each woman a piece. Now what can a woman do with half a baby? Do you think that was wise?”

“But Jim, you don’t understand what King Solomon was doing.”

“Don’t tell me that I don’t understand. I have common sense, and common sense will tell you that you can’t settle an argument about a *whole* child with *half* a child.”

“But Jim, King Solomon knew that the baby’s *real* mother wouldn’t allow him to cut the baby in two.”

“You’re wrong, Huck. King Solomon had so many, many children that one more meant little to him. He didn’t value the baby the way a man would who has only one or two.”

I knew that I could never reason Jim about King Solomon, so I changed the subject to French kings. I told him about King Louis XVI who had his head cut off France many years ago and about his son, the Dolphin, who was supposed to become king but was put in prison. Some said that he died in prison, but others said that he escaped to America.

“What would the Dolphin do in America? There are no kings here.”

“Well, he could teach people to talk in French,” I answered.

“What do you mean, Huck? Don’t the French people talk the way Americans talk?”

“No, Jim. You wouldn’t understand a single word spoken by a Frenchman.”

“Why, Huck? It makes no sense for a Frenchman to speak in a different language. He should talk so that everyone could understand him.”

“Listen, Jim. Does a cat talk like we do?”

“No, a cat does not.”

“Does a cow talk like us?”

“No.”

“Does a cat talk like a cow or a cow talk like a cat?”

“No, they don’t.”

“Then it’s natural and correct for a cat or a cow to talk different from us and different from each other. Do you agree?”

“Certainly, Huck.”

“Then why should it not be natural for a Frenchman to talk in a language different from the one we speak?”

“Is a cat a man, Huck? Is a cow a man?”

“Well, no.”

“Then, of course, a cat or a cow won’t talk like a man. But is a Frenchman a man?”

“Well, yes.”

“Then why can’t he talk like a man? Answer that.”

I knew that I was wasting my words. I could never win in this kind of argument with Jim, so I quit.