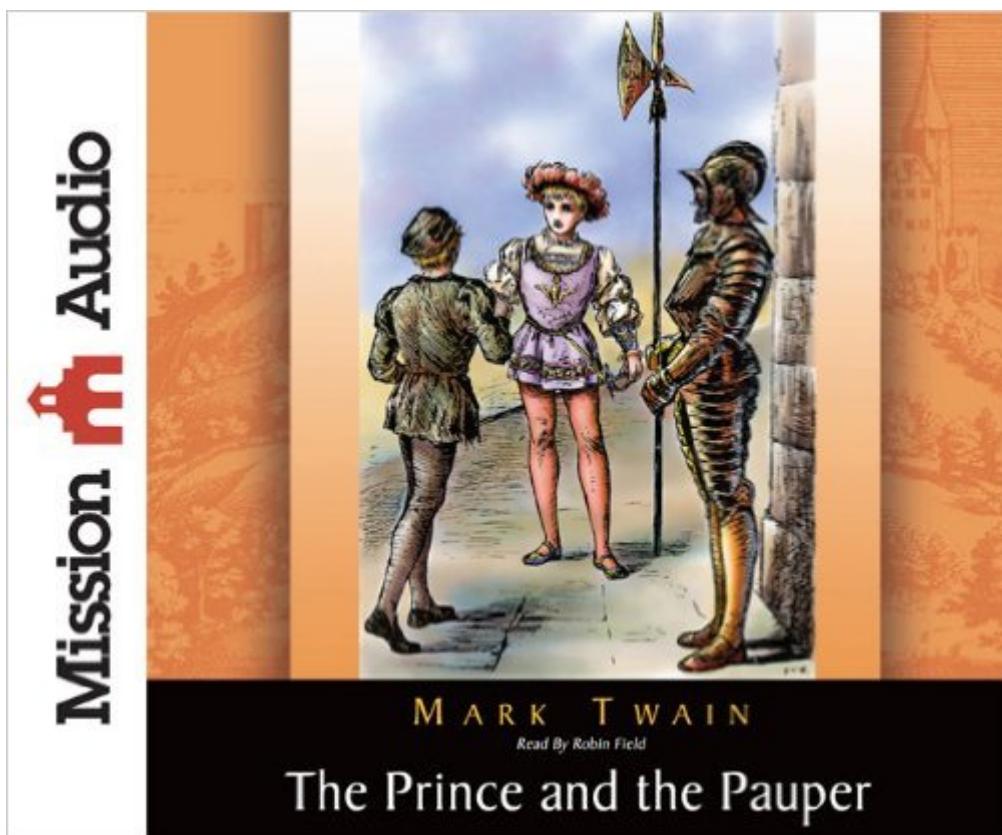


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The Prince And The Pauper



Synopsis

After the young Prince Edward VI of England and a peasant boy switch places, the little king tries to escape from a world in which he must beg for food, sleep with rodents, face ridicule, and avoid assassination. Meanwhile, the peasant, who is now the prince, dreads exposure and possible execution; members of the Court believe he has gone mad. As a result of the swap, both boys learn that social class, like so much of life, is determined by chance and random circumstance. Originally published in 1881, *The Prince and the Pauper* is one of Mark Twain's earliest social satires. With his caustic wit and biting irony, Twain satirizes the power of the monarchy, unjust laws and barbaric punishments, superstitions, and religious intolerance. Although usually viewed as a child's story, *The Prince and the Pauper* offers adults critical insight into a people and time period not really all that different from our own.

Book Information

Audio CD: 7 pages

Publisher: Mission Audio; Unabridged edition (April 1, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1610451406

ISBN-13: 978-1610451406

Product Dimensions: 6.4 x 0.7 x 5.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 7.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars Â See all reviews Â (10 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #5,822,461 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #60 in Books > Books on CD > Authors, A-Z > (T) > Twain, Mark #2052 in Books > Books on CD > Literature & Fiction > Classics #18760 in Books > Books on CD > Literature & Fiction > Unabridged

Customer Reviews

One day while the Prince was out exercising in the yard, he saw a boy being hit by one of the palace guards. Infuriated that they should treat even the poorest of his father's subjects so, he invited the boy in. Noticing the way the boy was eyeing his fine clothing, he offered to let the boy try them on; this was not solely an unselfish act, for the Prince had often wondered what it would be like to wear such rags and be free to play in the mud, and rather than be left naked, he put on the poor boy's rags. Looking in the mirror, he noticed that they looked so physically similar that the only way one could tell them apart was by their clothing. Looking further, he noticed a bruise that had been delivered by the guard, and, forgetting himself and his attire, strode out of the room in fury to

let the guard have a piece of his mind. The guard, seeing the poor boy who had caused him so much trouble threw the prince out without a second thought! The Pauper was left in princely raiment, and eventually someone came to him to inquire about something or other. He told them he was not the Prince, and thus they thought him mad (for anyone who would claim to be a Prince would obviously be rational, and likewise, anyone who claimed himself to not be must be insane). Thus begins a story where a poor man finds that a king lives in a gilded cage, and a king discovers that a poor man barely manages to live at all. This was a great story full of laughs and interesting insights. I literally laughed aloud when I heard the reasoning behind the thinking that the "Prince" must have gone mad. And it was quite funny when the actual Prince made a friend who thought him mad, but humored him anyway, and became an Earl because of it!

The Prince and the Pauper, by Mark Twain, narrated by Norman Dietz: This is a fun, easy adventure story, well-written (of course), and enjoyable. As I was listening to it, I realized that it's enjoyable partly because it's got such a wonderfully compelling theme. The premise of two people from disparate walks of life exchanging places for awhile is a powerful setup, because the author immediately has not one, but two storylines in which the joys and absurdities of any given lifestyle can be explored from the perspective of an outsider. (It's no accident that modern reality shows like "Trading Spaces," and "Wife Swap" have similar premises). I doubt Twain was the first person to exploit this device, but it makes me curious to know who used it before him. Anyway, Twain does it justice. One thing I found myself questioning as I listened to this book, is its classification as 'children's literature'. While it's true that the themes of the book are far less weighty than 'The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn', (for example), it would not in my mind, be easy reading for kids. For one thing, the language isn't always straightforward. For another, there are some rather adult depictions of cruelty and violence. My mom read me this book when I was about eight years old, and either she read me the abridged version, or she edited out the more grizzly scenes, because I certainly don't remember the nastier bits. On the subject of classification: in the introduction to this audiobook, the narrator explains 'The Prince & the Pauper' was Mark Twain's first attempt at historical fiction. However, it seems to me that the lines of this genre are a little gray.

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