

Mark Twain

What Mark Twain Did Not Say but Might Have Said If He Had Written This Book

I'll open this little parley with a claim: Life swarms with sundry things that open and close. If you don't close the picket gate, the dog runs out, and the next thing you know it barks at Miss Mary, and you have two quarts of trouble trying to get him back in. The pantry door is usually closed, but it only takes a second to open it and swipe some of Aunt's strawberry jam and jump out the back door before you get caught. A screen door had better be closed, but I don't need to explain why. It gets almighty tiresome explaining everything.

At school they used to teach us about what they called *clauses*. They said that word was from some Roman place from long ago and that clauses open and close. I pondered it a bit, but it never made much sense to me then. You can probably understand it better than I did. I never knew any Romans. The idea of a clause was that the subject opens a thought, and the predicate closes it. So if I say, "The Widow Douglass...", that's just a subject. It opens the idea. If you don't like that one, then I might say, "That cheating Ben Rogers...", and I know you will like that subject. Ben would be affronted.

But subjects by themselves are pitiful things. They're just like saying "A cloud" or "A sore toe." Subjects are like half a chew; there's no point opening your mouth if you aren't going to close it again.

If the subject opens the idea of a clause, then the predicate closes it. A predicate by itself is a miserable, useless species. What if I said, "hid behind the bean pole"? That wouldn't make much sense because you don't know who hid behind the bean pole or why they had to hide. Or if I said, "snatched a piece of Aunt Polly's apple pie," you wouldn't know that I snatched it, even though I did. She told me three times to stay out of that pie until after dinner, but she has never been a boy. Boys can't help it. I try to do good, but it is hard, with life full of pies and strawberry jam and such.