

The Prince and the Pauper

By Mark Twain

Reviewed by D. Andrew McChesney

In 16th century London it comes to pass that a young boy from the slums is identical in appearance to Edward, the Prince of Wales. By chance they meet, notice the uncanny similarity, and with typical boyish enthusiasm decide to switch places for a brief time. Once they do, neither can convince others they are not who they are believed to be.

The royal youth, now King Edward VI, finds himself wandering the countryside with a band of robbers and other neer-do-wells. Tom, the poor boy from Offal court is treated with respect and honor as the King of England. It takes the intervention of an adventurer returning to England and a confrontation during what should be the King's coronation to restore the two to their rightful places.

While this reviewer read this classic tale only recently, it was familiar to him. He had watched it on The Wonderful World of Disney as a boy roughly the same age as the two primary characters. Revisiting the tale via the printed page rekindled half-buried memories of what had once been seen on the small screen.

The story itself is exciting and progresses smoothly. The only stumbling block noticed was the author's attempt to duplicate spoken 16th century English when characters were speaking. It was often necessary to re-read certain quotes to determine the meaning or to make an educated guess as to what was said. While it would have been unauthentic to have the characters speak in modern (19th century) vernacular, something less than full 16th century speech would have been appropriate and appreciated.

The Prince and the Pauper is an old fashioned fairy tale with a touch of history woven in. It's definitely worth the time needed to read it.