

A MONUMENT TO ADAM
(To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives
of the United States In Congress Assembled)

WHEREAS,

A number of citizens of the city of Elmira
in the state of New York,
determined to erect
a monument to Adam,
and moved by a sentiment
of love and duty,
beg to lay before you
the following facts.

1. As far as we know,
no stone has ever been raised
to commemorate the services
rendered to our race
by this great man.
2. The father of mankind
has lain in entire neglect
(though the Father of our Country
has had for many years
a monument in progress.)
3. No right-feeling human being
should see this neglect continued;
rather, we should rejoice that he
will have reverent recognition
at the hands of the people of Elmira.
4. If this monument be here set up,
it will be to the eternal credit
of the United States, one of the youngest
of nations to spring from his loins
after eons of unappreciation.

5. This idea having originated
in the city of Elmira,
she will be always grateful
if the government shall secure to her
a certain advantage.

THEREFORE,

We humbly petition
that your honorable body
restrict to Elmira the right
to build a monument to Adam,
and inflict a heavy penalty
on any other community
that shall propose or erect
a monument to the said Adam.

Mark Twain

How it happened – Mark Twain’s account:

“The matter started as a joke... Mr. Darwin’s *Descent of Man* had been in print five or six years, and the storm of indignation raised by it was still raging in pulpits and periodicals. In tracing the genesis of the human race back to its source, Mr. Darwin had left Adam out altogether... Jestings with Mr. Beecher [Rev. Thomas K. Beecher, of Elmira, New York] and other friends in Elmira, I said there seemed to be a likelihood that the world would discard Adam and that in the course of time Adam’s very name would be forgotten... [T]his calamity ought to be averted; a monument would accomplish this, and Elmira ought not to waste this honorable opportunity to do Adam a favor and herself a credit.

“Then the unexpected happened. Two bankers came forward...not for fun, not for sentiment, but because they saw in the monument certain commercial advantages for the town... One of the bankers subscribed five thousand dollars...the other one subscribed half as much... We got designs made – some of them were from Paris.

“In the beginning – when it was as yet a joke – I had framed a humble and beseeching and perfervid petition to Congress begging the government to build the monument... I sent it to General Joseph R. Hawley, who was then in the House, and he said he would present it. But he did not do it. He explained that when he came to read it he was afraid of it; it was too serious, too gushy, too sentimental – the House might take it for earnest.”

The text for *A Monument to Adam* is adapted from Mark Twain’s petition.