

On the following day, nine seven-pound packages of sugar were left at his residence from as many different dealers, each supposing himself the one intended. (Alfred H. Miles {ed.}, *One Thousand & One Anecdotes*, New York: Thomas Whittaker, 1895, 260)

### ***Mark Twain: The Lightning Rod Sale***

After repeated visits by the lightning rod agent, Twain is sold four hundred feet of “the best quality lightning zinc-plated, spiral twist rod system available that would stop a streak of lightning any time, no matter where it was bound, and render its errand harmless and its further progress apocryphal.”

However, the agent is not yet satisfied that Twain will be completely protected and he urges Twain to acquire eight more rods of about five hundred feet “of the stuff.” Twain acquires this additional protection—but the agent is not yet done with him. After erecting the sixteen lightning rods on Twain’s home, the agent suggests that even more are needed.

“Let us have peace!” shrieks Twain. “Put up a hundred and fifty! Put some on the kitchen! Put a dozen on the barn! Put a couple on the cow! Put one on the cook! Scatter them all over the persecuted place till it looks like a zinc-plated, spiral-twisted, silver-mounted cane-brake! Move! Use up all the material you can get your hands on; and when you run out of lightning-rods, put up ram-rods, cam-rods, stair-rods, piston-rods—anything that will pander to your dismal appetite for artificial scenery, and bring respite to my raging brain and healing to my lacerated soul!

“Three Days Later. We are all about worn out. For four-and-twenty hours our bristling premises were the talk and wonder of the town. The theaters languished, for the

happiest scenic inventions were tame and commonplace compared with my lightning-rods. Our street was blocked night and day with spectators, and among them were many came from the country to see.

“It was a blessed relief, on the second day, when a thunder-storm came up and the lightning began to ‘go for’ my house, as the historian Josephus quaintly phrases it. It cleared the galleries, so to speak. In five minutes there was not a spectator within half a mile of my place; but all the high houses about that distance away were full—windows, roof, and all. And well they might be; for all the falling stars and Fourth-of-July fireworks of a generation put down together and rained down simultaneously out of heaven in one brilliant shower upon one helpless roof would not have any advantage of the pyrotechnic display that was making my house so magnificently conspicuous in the general gloom of the storm.

“By actual count, the lightning struck at my establishment seven hundred and sixty-four times in forty minutes, but tripped on one of those faithful rods every time and slid down the spiral twist and shot into the earth before it probably had time to be surprised at the way the thing was done.

“And through all that bombardment, only one patch of slats was ripped up; and that was because, for a single instant, the rods in the vicinity were transporting all the lightning they could possibly accommodate.

“Well, nothing was ever seen like it since the world began. For one whole day and night not a member of my family stuck his head out of the window but he got the hair snatched off it as smooth as billiard-ball; and if the reader will believe me, not one of us ever dreamt of stirring abroad.

But at last the awful siege came to an end, because there was absolutely no more electricity left in the clouds above us within grappling distance of my insatiable rods.”

Following the storm, Twain has workmen tear down all of “terrific armament except just for three rods on the house, one on the kitchen and one on the barn.”

Twain finishes his piece with an ad that he placed in the local magazine: “To Whom it May Concern—Parties having need of three thousand two hundred and eleven feet of the best quality zinc-plated spiral-twist lightning-rod stuff, and sixteen hundred and thirty-one silver-tipped points, all in tolerable repair (and, although much worn by use, still equal to any ordinary emergency), can hear of a bargain by addressing the publishers of this magazine.” (W. I. Pattison, *How 'Tis Done*, Syracuse, NY: 1890, 186–90)

### ***Beware These Swindles***

It is the purpose of this volume to treat of that fairly numberless class of canvassers with whom the farmer, and townspeople most especially, are almost daily thrown into contact, and who, roaming from town to town and house to house, have some article to dispose of which they will offer for sale at what may appear to be prices far below current rates.

These wares generally novel in design, attractive in appearance, or seemingly valuable in application to the advertised end . . . It is hardly necessary for us to say, in this connection, that the wares of these peripatetic salesmen are, for the major part, frauds, or at least possess of such trifling merit as to be of no practical use.

In nearly every portion of the Eastern, Middle, and Western States the people have been made to pay mighty tribute