



Mark Twain

*A Connecticut Yankee
in King Arthur's Court*



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THE STRANGER'S HISTORY

I am an American. I was born and reared in Hartford, in the State of Connecticut — anyway, just over the river, in the country. So I am a Yankee of the Yankees — and practical; yes, and nearly barren of sentiment, I suppose — or poetry, in other words. My father was a blacksmith, my uncle was a horse doctor, and I was both, along at first. Then I went over to the great arms factory and learned my real trade; learned all there was to it; learned to make everything: guns, revolvers, cannon, boilers, engines, all sorts of labor-saving machinery. Why, I could make anything a body wanted — anything in the world, it didn't make any difference what; and if there wasn't any quick new-fangled way to make a thing, I could invent one — and do it as easy as rolling off a log. I became head superintendent; had a couple of thousand men under me.

Well, a man like that is a man that is full of fight — that goes without saying. With a couple of thousand rough men under one, one has plenty of that sort of amusement. I had, anyway. At last I met my match, and I got my dose. It was during a misunderstanding conducted with crowbars with a fellow we used to call Hercules. He laid me out with a crusher alongside the head that made everything crack, and seemed to spring every joint in my skull and made it overlap its neighbor. Then the world went out in darkness, and I didn't feel anything more, and didn't know anything at all — at least for a while.

When I came to again, I was sitting under an oak tree, on the grass, with a whole beautiful and broad country landscape all to myself — nearly. Not entirely; for there was a fellow on a horse, looking down at me — a fellow fresh out of a picture-book. He was in old-time iron armor from head to heel, with a helmet on his head the shape of a nail-keg with slits in it; and he had a shield, and a sword, and a prodigious spear; and his horse had armor on, too, and a steel horn projecting from his forehead, and gorgeous red and green silk trappings that hung down all around him like a bedquilt, nearly to the ground.

“Fair sir, will ye just?” said this fellow.

“Will I which?”

“Will ye try a passage of arms for land or lady or for —”

“What are you giving me?” I said. “Get along back to your circus, or I’ll report you.”

Now what does this man do but fall back a couple of hundred yards and then come rushing at me as hard as he could tear, with his nail-keg bent down nearly to his horse’s neck and his long spear pointed straight ahead. I saw he meant business, so I was up the tree when he arrived.

He allowed that I was his property, the captive of his spear. There was argument on his side — and the bulk of the advantage — so I judged it best to humor him. We fixed up an agreement whereby I was to go with him and he was not to hurt me. I came down, and we started away, I walking by the side of his horse. We marched comfortably along, through glades and over brooks which I could not remember to have seen before — which puzzled me and made me wonder — and yet we did not come to any circus or sign of a circus. So I gave up the idea of a circus, and concluded he was from an asylum. But we never came to an asylum — so I was up a stump, as you may say. I asked him how far we were from Hartford. He said he had never heard of the place; which I took to be a lie, but allowed it to go at that. At the end of an hour we saw a far-away

town sleeping in a valley by a winding river; and beyond it on a hill, a vast gray fortress, with towers and turrets, the first I had ever seen out of a picture.

“Bridgeport?” said I, pointing.

“Camelot,” said he.

My stranger had been showing signs of sleepiness. He caught himself nodding, now, and smiled one of those pathetic, obsolete smiles of his, and said:

“I find I can’t go on; but come with me, I’ve got it all written out, and you can read it if you like.”

In his chamber, he said: “First, I kept a journal; then by and by, after years, I took the journal and turned it into a book. How long ago that was!”

He handed me his manuscript, and pointed out the place where I should begin:

“Begin here — I’ve already told you what goes before.” He was steeped in drowsiness by this time. As I went out at his door I heard him murmur sleepily: “Give you good den, fair sir.”

I sat down by my fire and examined my treasure. The first part of it — the great bulk of it — was parchment, and yellow with age. I scanned a leaf particularly and saw that it was a palimpsest. Under the old dim writing of the Yankee historian appeared traces of a penmanship which was older and dimmer still — Latin words and sentences: fragments from old monkish legends, evidently. I turned to the place indicated by my stranger and began to read — as follows:

THE TALE OF THE LOST LAND

Chapter I CAMELOT

“Camelot — Camelot,” said I to myself. “I don’t seem to remember hearing of it before. Name of the asylum, likely.”

It was a soft, reposeful summer landscape, as lovely as a dream, and as lonesome as Sunday. The air was full of the smell of flowers, and the buzzing of insects, and the twittering of birds, and there were no people, no wagons, there was no stir of life, nothing going on. The road was mainly a winding path with hoof-prints in it, and now and then a faint trace of wheels on either side in the grass — wheels that apparently had a tire as broad as one’s hand.

Presently a fair slip of a girl, about ten years old, with a cataract of golden hair streaming down over her shoulders, came along. Around her head she wore a hoop of flame-red poppies. It was as sweet an outfit as ever I saw, what there was of it. She walked indolently along, with a mind at rest, its peace reflected in her innocent face. The circus man paid no attention to her; didn’t even seem to see her. And she — she was no more startled at his fantastic make-up than if she was used to his like every day of her life. She was going by as indifferently as she might have gone by a couple of cows; but when she happened to notice me, *then* there was a change! Up went her hands, and she was turned to stone; her mouth dropped open, her eyes stared wide and timorously, she was

the picture of astonished curiosity touched with fear. And there she stood gazing, in a sort of stupefied fascination, till we turned a corner of the wood and were lost to her view. That she should be startled at me instead of at the other man, was too many for me; I couldn't make head or tail of it. And that she should seem to consider me a spectacle, and totally overlook her own merits in that respect, was another puzzling thing, and a display of magnanimity, too, that was surprising in one so young. There was food for thought here. I moved along as one in a dream.

As we approached the town, signs of life began to appear. At intervals we passed a wretched cabin, with a thatched roof, and about it small fields and garden patches in an indifferent state of cultivation. There were people, too; brawny men, with long, coarse, uncombed hair that hung down over their faces and made them look like animals. They and the women, as a rule, wore a coarse tow-linen robe that came well below the knee, and a rude sort of sandal, and many wore an iron collar. The small boys and girls were always naked; but nobody seemed to know it. All of these people stared at me, talked about me, ran into the huts and fetched out their families to gape at me; but nobody ever noticed that other fellow, except to make him humble salutation and get no response for their pains.

In the town were some substantial windowless houses of stone scattered among a wilderness of thatched cabins; the streets were mere crooked alleys, and unpaved; troops of dogs and nude children played in the sun and made life and noise; hogs roamed and rooted contentedly about, and one of them lay in a reeking wallow in the middle of the main thoroughfare and suckled her family. Presently there was a distant blare of military music; it came nearer, still nearer, and soon a noble cavalcade wound into view, glorious with plumed helmets and flashing mail and flaunting banners and rich doublets and

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|----|
| PREFACE | 3 |
| A WORD OF EXPLANATION | 5 |
| HOW SIR LAUNCELOT SLEW TWO GIANTS, AND MADE A CASTLE FREE | 7 |
| THE STRANGER'S HISTORY | 10 |
| Chapter I. CAMELOT | 13 |
| Chapter II. KING ARTHUR'S COURT | 16 |
| Chapter III. KNIGHTS OF THE TABLE ROUND | 22 |
| Chapter IV. SIR DINADAN THE HUMORIST | 28 |
| Chapter V. AN INSPIRATION | 32 |
| Chapter VI. THE ECLIPSE | 38 |
| Chapter VII. MERLIN'S TOWER | 45 |
| Chapter VIII. THE BOSS | 52 |
| Chapter IX. THE TOURNAMENT | 59 |
| Chapter X. BEGINNINGS OF CIVILIZATION | 66 |
| Chapter XI. THE YANKEE IN SEARCH OF ADVENTURES | 71 |
| Chapter XII. SLOW TORTURE | 80 |
| Chapter XIII. FREEMEN | 85 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Chapter XIV. “DEFEND THEE, LORD” | 94 |
| Chapter XV. SANDY’S TALE | 99 |
| Chapter XVI. MORGAN LE FAY | 108 |
| Chapter XVII. A ROYAL BANQUET | 115 |
| Chapter XVIII. IN THE QUEEN’S DUNGEONS | 125 |
| Chapter XIX. KNIGHT-ERRANTRY AS A TRADE | 136 |
| Chapter XX. THE OGRE’S CASTLE | 140 |
| Chapter XXI. THE PILGRIMS | 148 |
| Chapter XXII. THE HOLY FOUNTAIN | 161 |
| Chapter XXIII. RESTORATION OF THE FOUNTAIN | 172 |
| Chapter XXIV. A RIVAL MAGICIAN | 181 |
| Chapter XXV. A COMPETITIVE EXAMINATION | 193 |
| Chapter XXVI. THE FIRST NEWSPAPER | 206 |
| Chapter XXVII. THE YANKEE AND THE KING TRAVEL INCOGNITO | 217 |
| Chapter XXVIII. DRILLING THE KING | 226 |
| Chapter XXIX. THE SMALLPOX HUT | 231 |
| Chapter XXX. THE TRAGEDY OF THE MANOR-HOUSE | 238 |
| Chapter XXXI. MARCO | 249 |
| Chapter XXXII. DOWLEY’S HUMILIATION | 257 |
| Chapter XXXIII. SIXTH CENTURY POLITICAL ECONOMY | 265 |
| Chapter XXXIV. THE YANKEE AND THE KING SOLD AS SLAVES | 278 |
| Chapter XXXV. A PITIFUL INCIDENT | 290 |
| Chapter XXXVI. AN ENCOUNTER IN THE DARK | 298 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Chapter XXXVII. AN AWFUL PREDICAMENT | 302 |
| Chapter XXXVIII. SIR LAUNCELOT AND KNIGHTS TO THE RESCUE | 310 |
| Chapter XXXIX. THE YANKEE'S FIGHT WITH THE KNIGHTS | 313 |
| Chapter XL. THREE YEARS LATER | 325 |
| Chapter XLI. THE INTERDICT | 334 |
| Chapter XLII. WAR! | 339 |
| Chapter XLIII. THE BATTLE OF THE SAND BELT | 352 |
| Chapter XLIV. A POSTSCRIPT BY CLARENCE | 366 |
| FINAL P.S. BY M.T. | 368 |