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**JUNIOR
CLASSICS**

Mark Twain
**A CONNECTICUT YANKEE
IN KING ARTHUR'S COURT**

Read by **Kenneth Jay**



NA221812D

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Mark Twain

A CONNECTICUT YANKEE IN KING ARTHUR'S COURT

The magical and romantic legend of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table is one of the great stories of the world. The most famous version – *Le Morte d'Arthur* by the 15th-century writer Sir Thomas Malory, which told of Arthur, Excalibur, Merlin, Sir Launcelot, Guinevere, Sir Gawain, the search for the Holy Grail and the final battle between the King and Mordred – is full of excitement, heroism and mystery.

Like most of his generation, Mark Twain, the great 19th-century comic American writer, knew and loved the book. He wrote mainly about his own time – and his greatest successes, such as *Huckleberry Finn* and *Tom Sawyer*, drew on the Mississippi countryside where he grew up. But he also had a wicked sense of humour, and he wanted to show that Malory's picture of brave knights and rescued damsels was not as shiny or honourable as we may like to think.

From the moment the idea came to him, to whisk a modern man (modern = 1880s for Twain) back in time to the heyday of

Camelot, he couldn't resist elaborating on the realities of life in Arthurian times. His Connecticut hero, Hank Morgan, found not a land of grace and ideals but one which was smelly, dangerous, uncomfortable and backward.

Hank finds that life is regarded as cheap, that torture and execution are commonplace, that superstition is everywhere and even Merlin is a con man. Few wash, the music is terrible, living in armour is horrendous and deception is everywhere.

So Hank decides that he will make the best of his situation and introduce 6th-century England to some of the improvements of his contemporary (19th-century) existence – advertising, soap, newspapers, stocks and shares, and the railroad. And, with his superior knowledge, he will become The Boss.

How do the people of an older time take to it? In much the same way, Twain suggests, as we would if someone from the distant future came down and tried to make us live their way: the older people generally

do not like giving up their traditional ways, even though there are very clear advantages and only the youth can adapt.

Yet despite this, Hank cannot but admire some qualities of those knights and their damsels – not least the ability to stand up and fight in steel armour that would crush the contemporary man.

The novel began mainly as a delightful fantasy, but as Twain wrote, the darker side of his own character and view of the human race emerged. He believed in science, economics and practicalities; and government based on the equalities of opportunity that characterised America of Twain's day. He couldn't accept a people who would choose monarchy. *A Connecticut Yankee* shows what can happen when these two very different societies come together.

Notes by Nicolas Soames

Mark Twain was born Samuel Langhorne Clemens in 1835 in Florida, Missouri, though he moved to the Mississippi River town of Hannibal when he was four. He served in the Confederate Army during the Civil War, but by 1863 he was writing regularly, and had adopted the name of Mark Twain. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* was published in 1874, and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* ten years later. Among his other best-known novels is *The Prince and the Pauper* (1872).

He had a difficult life, with both his wife and two daughters dying from illness; and an unfortunate business venture driving him into bankruptcy. This introduced a darker note into his works. But he was recognised in his lifetime as a principal American literary figure. Mark Twain died in 1910.

The music on this recording is taken from the NAXOS catalogue

MACDOWELL SUITES

8.559075

Ulster Orchestra / Yuasa

ANON BELICHA/SALTARELLO 2

8.553131

Ensemble Unicorn

The music was programmed by Nicolas Soames

Cover picture by Hemesh Alles

Abridged by Duncan Steen
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Edited by Sarah Butcher, SBS
Recorded by Simon Duff, Motivation Sound Studio

Mark Twain

A CONNECTICUT YANKEE IN KING ARTHUR'S COURT

Read by **Kenneth Jay**

A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court is one of the great comic fantasies in literature. A Yankee is whisked back in time from America in the second half of the 19th century to 6th-century England, when England was ruled and guided from Camelot by monarch and magician. What happens when a modern (for Twain) man with a background of railroads, advertising, ammunition and soap arrives in the medieval glade and castle? How do the spells of Merlin and the lances of the Knights fare against industrial man? This is a wonderfully comic tale for people of all ages, narrated with infectious humour and character by Kenneth Jay.



Canadian-born **Kenneth Jay** trained at Ryerson in Toronto but has lived and worked in the United Kingdom since 1983 where his theatrical career has ranged from weekly rep to national tours of *Witness for the Prosecution*, *Noises Off* and *Adam's Dream*. Numerous West End appearances include *The Boys Next Door* and *Indian Ink*. He has also toured Europe with *The Imaginary Invalid* and *I Ought To Be In Pictures*. Film and television includes *Emmerdale*, *The Bill*, *Happy Birthday Shakespeare*, *Cousin Bette* and *Hotel*.

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Total time
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