

Timeless classics

A Christmas Carol

By Charles Dickens

Ebenezer Scrooge cares for nothing but money. He hates Christmas because he thinks Christmas is just about wasting money on stupid presents which nobody deserves. On Christmas Eve, Scrooge is visited by the ghost of his former partner Jacob Marley, who was just as greedy as Scrooge. Marley now has to walk the earth as a ghost in punishment for the life he led. He tells Scrooge that he can yet be saved from the same fate and that three ghosts will visit him, the ghosts of Christmas past, present, and future. They will show him the poor life he has led and try to persuade him to choose otherwise in the future. The following extract is about the visit of the Ghost of Christmas Past.

Scrooge lay in this state until the chime had gone three-quarters more, when he remembered, on a sudden, that the Ghost had warned him of a visitation when the bell tolled one. He resolved to lie awake until the hour was passed; and, considering that he could no more go to sleep than go to heaven, this was, perhaps, the wisest resolution in his power. The quarter was so long, that he was more than once convinced he must have sunk into a doze unconsciously, and missed the clock. At length it broke upon his listening ear.

'Ding, dong!'

'A quarter past,' said Scrooge, counting.

'Ding, dong!'

'Half past,' said Scrooge.

'Ding, dong!'

'A quarter to it,' said Scrooge.

'Ding, dong!'

'The hour itself,' said Scrooge triumphantly, 'and nothing else!'

He spoke before the hour bell sounded, which it now did with a deep, dull, hollow, melancholy ONE. Light flashed up in the room upon the instant, and the curtains of his bed were drawn.

The curtains of his bed were drawn aside, I tell you, by a hand. Not the curtains at his feet, nor the curtains at his back, but those to which his face was addressed. The curtains of his bed were drawn aside; and Scrooge, starting up into a half-recumbent attitude, found himself face to face with the unearthly visitor who drew them, as close to it as I am now to you, and I am standing in the spirit at your elbow.

It was a strange figure - like a child, yet not so like a child as like an old man, viewed through some supernatural medium, which gave him the appearance of having receded from the view, and being diminished to a child's proportions. Its hair, which hung about its neck and down its back, was white as if with age; and yet the face had not a wrinkle in it, and the tenderest bloom was on the skin.

Timeless classics

'Are you the Spirit, sir, whose coming was foretold to me?' asked Scrooge.

'I am.'

The voice was soft and gentle. Singularly low, as if instead of being so close beside him, it were at a distance.

'Who, and what are you?' Scrooge demanded.

'I am the Ghost of Christmas Past.'

'Long Past?' inquired Scrooge, observant of its dwarfish stature.

'No. Your past.'

'Your welfare,' said the Ghost.

'Rise, and walk with me.'

It would have been in vain for Scrooge to plead that the weather and the hour were not adapted to pedestrian purposes; that bed was warm, and the thermometer a long way below freezing; that he was clad but lightly in his slippers, dressing gown, and nightcap; and that he had a cold upon him at that time. The grasp, though gentle as a woman's hand, was not to be resisted. He rose, but finding that the Spirit made towards the window, clasped his robe in supplication.

'I am mortal,' Scrooge remonstrated, 'and liable to fall.'

'Bear but a touch of my hand there,' said the Spirit, laying it upon his heart, 'and you shall be upheld in more than this.'

As the words were spoken, they passed through the wall, and stood upon an open country road, with fields on either hand. The city had entirely vanished. Not a vestige of it was to be seen. The darkness and the mist had vanished with it, for it was a clear, cold, winter day, with snow upon the ground.

'Good Heaven!' said Scrooge, clasping his hands together, as he looked about him. 'I was bred in this place. I was a boy here.'

'Your lip is trembling,' said the Ghost. 'and what is that upon your cheek?'

Scrooge muttered, with an unusual catching in his voice, that it was a pimple; and begged the Ghost to lead him where he would.

'You recollect the way?' inquired the Spirit.

'Remember it!' cried Scrooge with fervour; 'I could walk it blindfold.'

'Strange to have forgotten it for so many years,' observed the Ghost.

'Let us go on. These are but shadows of the things that have been. They have no consciousness of us.'

Scrooge said he knew it. And he sobbed.

Extract from "A Christmas Carol" by Charles Dickens, stave 2 The First of the Three Spirits:
<http://www.helsinki.fi/>

Timeless classics

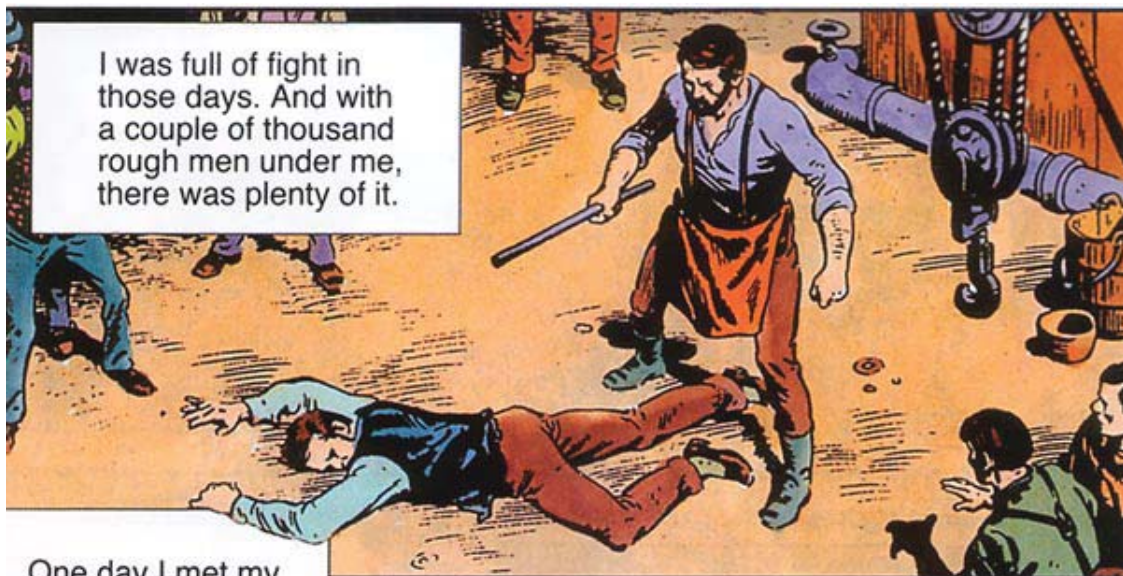
A Connecticut Yankee In King Arthur's Court

By Mark Twain (graphic novel adaptation by Saddleback Publishing inc.)

Mark Twain originally told the story of *A Connecticut Yankee In King Arthur's Court* in 1879, about this Connecticut Yankee who found himself in the court of King Arthur in the year 528. This is what the Yankee told Mark Twain when he came to see him one night:



Timeless classics

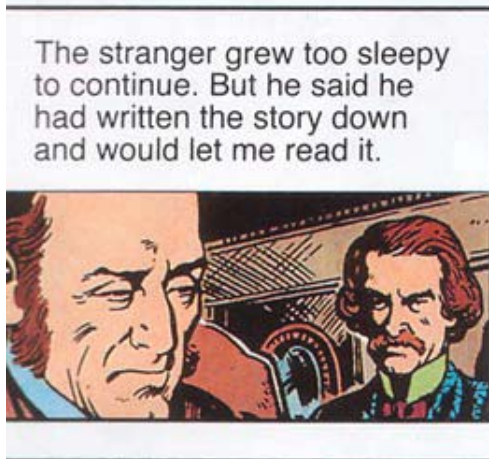
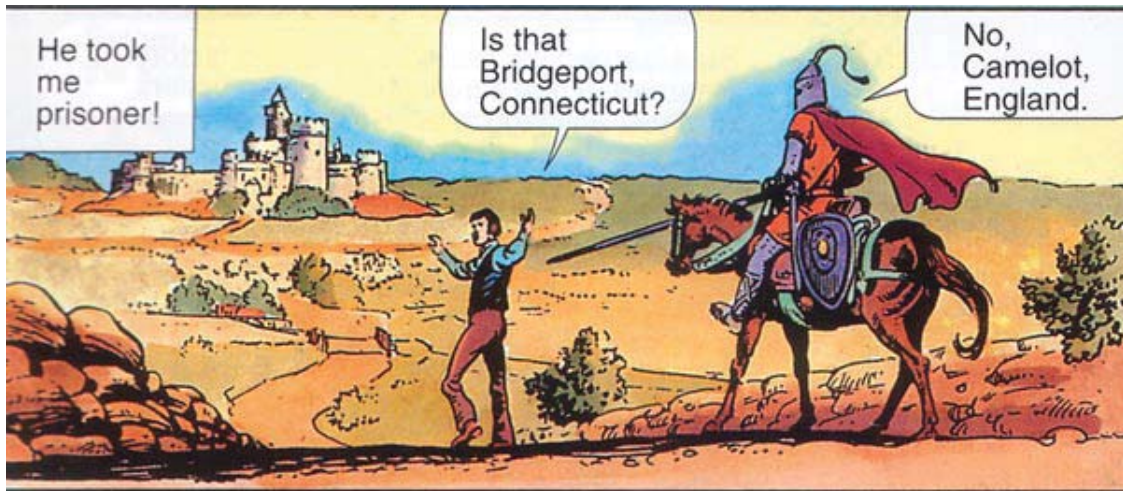


One day I met my match in a fellow named Hercules. We used iron bars against each other, and he gave me a blow on the head that knocked me out.

When I awoke, a man on a horse, right out of a story book, was looking down at me.



Timeless classics




After taking him to his room and helping him to bed, I returned to my own room with the story. I began reading as follows:



Timeless classics

The knight took me to a castle where we entered a huge paved court. I spoke to a young lad standing near me.



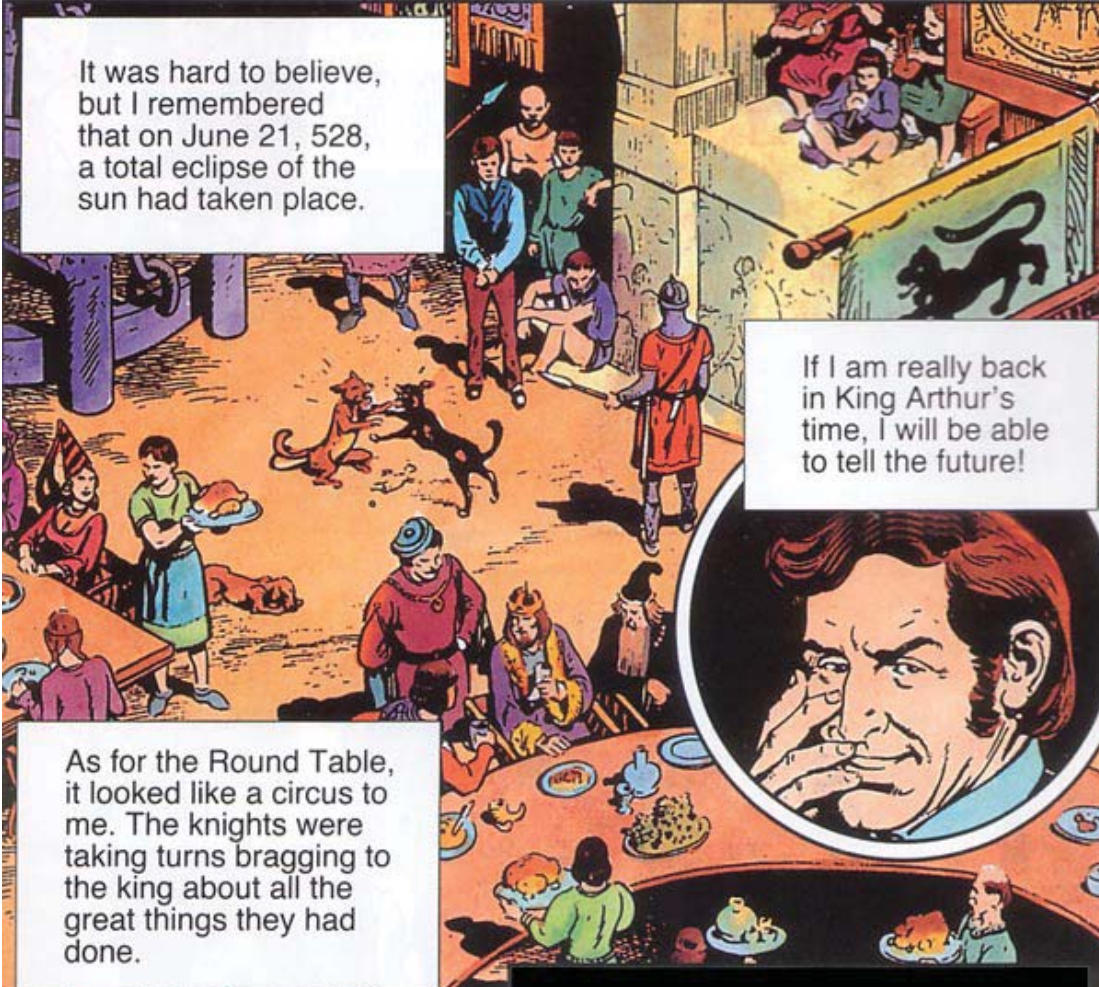
Where am I?
What year is it?
And who are you?

This is King Arthur's court. It is June 20th in the year 528. And I am Clarence.

My heart sank. I had left Connecticut in 1879. I was now thirteen hundred years in the past!

The illustration shows a knight in full armor riding a brown horse through a medieval courtyard. In the background, there are stone buildings, a well, and other people in period clothing. A sign for an inn is visible on the left.

It was hard to believe, but I remembered that on June 21, 528, a total eclipse of the sun had taken place.



If I am really back in King Arthur's time, I will be able to tell the future!

As for the Round Table, it looked like a circus to me. The knights were taking turns bragging to the king about all the great things they had done.

The illustration depicts a busy medieval courtyard. In the foreground, a knight in red armor stands near a young boy in a blue tunic. In the background, a group of people is gathered around a large round table, which is set with food and drink. A black cat is visible on a ledge in the background. A circular inset shows a close-up of a man's face, looking thoughtful with his hand to his chin.