A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court

By Mark Twain

A Language-Illustrated Classic

Edited by Michael Clay Thompson

Royal Fireworks Press
Unionville, New York
fortitude, reasoning; it is mere animal training; they are white Indians.”

you never heard them utter a moan or a groan
pron. adv. v. pron. n. adj. n. conj. adj. n.

subj. AVP D.O.

———infinitive clause———

———independent clause———

Here Twain makes use of a special form of the infinitive, the bare infinitive. In a bare infinitive, the to of the infinitive is implied: (to) utter. The bare infinitive is often used with particular verbs of perception, including see, hear, and feel. In this case Twain creates a bare infinitive clause, using the direct object them as a subject of the infinitive. The structure shows the complexities our minds can comprehend. Notice the internal rhyme of moan and groan.

white Indians: Twain is ridiculing stereotypical thinking. We should not assume that an author always agrees with a character. Characters are rarely fictional versions of their authors.
it again, in the murky twilight of tradition, before the
dawn of history, while even Lactantius might be referred
to as “the late Lactantius,” and the Crusades wouldn’t
be born for five hundred years yet? Just as he finished, 
the call-boy came; so, haw-hawing like a demon, he went rattling and clanking out like a crate of loose castings, 
and I knew nothing more. It was some minutes before I came to, and then I opened my eyes just in time to see 
Sir Gareth fetch him an awful welt, and I unconsciously out with the prayer, “I hope to gracious he’s killed!” But by ill-luck, before I had got half through with the words, 
Sir Gareth crashed into Sir Sagramor le Desirous and sent him thundering over his horse’s crupper, and Sir Sagramor caught my remark and thought I meant it for him.

Well, whenever one of those people got a thing into his head, there was no getting it out again. I knew that, so I saved my breath, and offered no explanations. As soon as Sir Sagramor got well, he notified me that there was a little account to settle between us, and he named a day three or four years in the future; place of settlement, the lists where the offense had been given. I said I would be ready when he got back. You see, he was going for the Holy Grail. The boys all took a flier at the Holy Grail now and then. It was a several years’ cruise. They always put in the long absence snooping around, in the most

**Lactantius**: an early Christian author, advisor to Constantine

**crupper**: a strap passed under a horse’s tail to secure the saddle
conscientious way, though none of them had any idea where the Holy Grail really was, and I don’t think any of them actually expected to find it, or would have known what to do with it if he had run across it. You see, it was just the Northwest Passage of that day, as you may say; that was all. Every year expeditions went out holy grailing, and next year relief expeditions went out to hunt for them. There was worlds of reputation in it, but no money. Why, they actually wanted me to put in! Well, I should smile.

And Sir Arnold, and Sir Gauter, knights of the castle, encountered with Sir Brandiles and Sir Kay, and these four knights encountered mightily, and brake their spears to their hands. (p. 95)

In the jousting story we see brake, smote, encountered, gat, peradventure: Twain has enormous sport satirizing the archaic language and pretence of the tale, contrasting the affectations of the knight’s names with the dumb brutality of their jousting.
true, wit ye well it is the very substance of worshipful dear homage and may not lightly be misprized, nor had been, an ye had noted this complexion of mood and mind and understood that that I would I could not, and that I could not I might not, nor yet nor might nor could, nor might-not nor could-not, might be by advantage turned to the desired would, and so I pray you mercy of my fault, and that ye will of your kindness and your charity forgive it, good my master and most dear lord.”

I would I might please thee, sir...good my master and most dear lord.

Sandy’s sentence has 297 words. Twain projects her mind and personality not only through vocabulary but through grammar as well. Hank later refers to her “horizonless transcontinental sentences.” (pp. 247-248)

I couldn’t make it all out—that is, the details—but I got the general idea; and enough of it, too, to be ashamed. It was not fair to spring those nineteenth century technicalities upon the untutored infant of the sixth and then rail at her because she couldn’t get their

misprized: v. not appreciated, not valued
come, my child; let me pray over thee—not for thee, dear abused poor heart and innocent, but for them that be guilty of thy ruin and death, who need it more.”

After his prayer they put the noose around the young girl’s neck, and they had great trouble to adjust the knot under her ear, because she was devouring the baby all the time, wildly kissing it, and snatching it to her face and her breast, and drenching it with tears, and half moaning, half shrieking all the while, and the baby crowing, and laughing, and kicking its feet with delight over what it took for romp and play. Even the hangman couldn’t stand it, but turned away. When all was ready the priest gently pulled and tugged and forced the child out of the mother’s arms, and stepped quickly out of her reach; but she clasped her hands, and made a wild spring toward him, with a shriek; but the rope—and the undersheriff—held her short. Then she went on her knees and stretched out her hands and cried:

“One more kiss—oh, my God, one more, one more,—it is the dying that begs it!”

She got it; she almost smothered the little thing. And when they got it away again, she cried out:

“Oh, my child, my darling, it will die! It has no home, it has no father, no friend, no mother—”

“It has them all!” said that good priest. “All these will I be to it till I die.”

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You should have seen her face then! Gratitude? Lord, what do you want with words to express that? Words are only painted fire; a look is the fire itself. She gave that look, and carried it away to the treasury of heaven, where all things that are divine belong.

Twain repeatedly attacks man’s inhumanity to man, using vivid and heartbreaking stories. There are precedents for such wrenching scenes in great literature, from Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, to Hugo’s *Les Misérables*, to Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, to Sophocles’s *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone*. We must also not forget that scenes such as these actually happened in the history of slavery, and that cruelty, both individual and institutional, continues. Twain’s novel is like tears wrapped in a comedy, an appeal to what Abraham Lincoln called “our better angels.”