

МАРК ТБЕН

EXTRACT FROM
CAPTAIN STORMFIELD'S
VISIT TO HEAVEN

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Mark Twain

Extract from Captain Stormfield's Visit to Heaven

CHAPTER I

Well, when I had been dead about thirty years I begun to get a little anxious. Mind you, had been whizzing through space all that time, like a comet. *Like* a comet! Why, Peters, I laid over the lot of them! Of course there warn't any of them going my way, as a steady thing, you know, because they travel in a long circle like the loop of a lasso, whereas I was pointed as straight as a dart for the Hereafter; but I happened on one every now and then that was going my way for an hour or so, and then we had a bit of a brush together. But it was generally pretty one-sided, because I sailed by them the same as if they were standing still. An ordinary comet don't make more than about 200,000 miles a minute. Of course when I came across one of that sort – like Encke's and Halley's comets, for instance – it warn't anything but just a flash and a vanish, you see. You couldn't rightly call it a race. It was as if the comet was a gravel-train and I was a telegraph despatch. But after I got outside of our astronomical system, I used to flush a comet occasionally that was something

like. We haven't got any such comets – ours don't begin. One night I was swinging along at a good round gait, everything taut and trim, and the wind in my favor – I judged I was going about a million miles a minute – it might have been more, it couldn't have been less – when I flushed a most uncommonly big one about three points off my starboard bow. By his stern lights I judged he was bearing about northeast-and-by-north-half-east. Well, it was so near my course that I wouldn't throw away the chance; so I fell off a point, steadied my helm, and went for him. You should have heard me whiz, and seen the electric fur fly! In about a minute and a half I was fringed out with an electrical nimbus that flamed around for miles and miles and lit up all space like broad day. The comet was burning blue in the distance, like a sickly torch, when I first sighted him, but he begun to grow bigger and bigger as I crept up on him. I slipped up on him so fast that when I had gone about 150,000,000 miles I was close enough to be swallowed up in the phosphorescent glory of his wake, and I couldn't see anything for the glare. Thinks I, it won't do to run into him, so I shunted to one side and tore along. By and by I closed up abreast of his tail. Do you know what it was like? It was like a gnat closing up on the continent of America. I forged along. By and by I had sailed along his coast for a little upwards of a hundred and fifty million miles, and then I could see by the shape of him that I hadn't even got up to his waistband yet. Why, Peters, *we* don't know anything about comets, down here. If you want to see comets that *are* comets, you've got to go outside of

our solar system – where there’s room for them, you understand. My friend, I’ve seen comets out there that couldn’t even lay down inside the *orbits* of our noblest comets without their tails hanging over.

Well, I boomed along another hundred and fifty million miles, and got up abreast his shoulder, as you may say. I was feeling pretty fine, I tell you; but just then I noticed the officer of the deck come to the side and hoist his glass in my direction. Straight off I heard him sing out – “Below there, ahoy! Shake her up, shake her up! Heave on a hundred million billion tons of brimstone!”

“Ay-ay, sir!”

“Pipe the stabboard watch! All hands on deck!”

“Ay-ay, sir!”

“Send two hundred thousand million men aloft to shake out royals and sky-scrapers!”

“Ay-ay, sir!”

“Hand the stuns’ls! Hang out every rag you’ve got! Clothe her from stem to rudder-post!”

“Ay-ay, sir!”

In about a second I begun to see I’d woke up a pretty ugly customer, Peters. In less than ten seconds that comet was just a blazing cloud of red-hot canvas. It was piled up into the heavens clean out of sight – the old thing seemed to swell out and occupy all space; the sulphur smoke from the furnaces – oh, well, nobody can describe the way it rolled and tumbled up into the skies, and

nobody can half describe the way it smelt. Neither can anybody begin to describe the way that monstrous craft begun to crash along. And such another powwow – thousands of bo's'n's whistles screaming at once, and a crew like the populations of a hundred thousand worlds like ours all swearing at once. Well, I never heard the like of it before.

We roared and thundered along side by side, both doing our level best, because I'd never struck a comet before that could lay over me, and so I was bound to beat this one or break something. I judged I had some reputation in space, and I calculated to keep it. I noticed I wasn't gaining as fast, now, as I was before, but still I was gaining. There was a power of excitement on board the comet. Upwards of a hundred billion passengers swarmed up from below and rushed to the side and begun to bet on the race. Of course this careened her and damaged her speed. My, but wasn't the mate mad! He jumped at that crowd, with his trumpet in his hand, and sung out —

“Amidships! amidships, you – !¹ or I'll brain the last idiot of you!”

Well, sir, I gained and gained, little by little, till at last I went skimming sweetly by the magnificent old conflagration's nose. By this time the captain of the comet had been roused out, and he stood there in the red glare for'ard, by the mate, in his shirt-sleeves and slippers, his hair all rats' nests and one suspender

¹ The captain could not remember what this word was. He said it was in a foreign tongue.

hanging, and how sick those two men did look! I just simply couldn't help putting my thumb to my nose as I glided away and singing out:

"Ta-ta! ta-ta! Any word to send to your family?"

Peters, it was a mistake. Yes, sir, I've often regretted that – it was a mistake. You see, the captain had given up the race, but that remark was too tedious for him – he couldn't stand it. He turned to the mate, and says he —

"Have we got brimstone enough of our own to make the trip?"

"Yes, sir."

"Sure?"

"Yes, sir – more than enough."

"How much have we got in cargo for Satan?"

"Eighteen hundred thousand billion quintillions of kazarks."

"Very well, then, let his boarders freeze till the next comet comes. Lighten ship! Lively, now, lively, men! Heave the whole cargo overboard!"

Peters, look me in the eye, and be calm. I found out, over there, that a kazark is exactly the bulk of a *hundred and sixty-nine worlds like ours*! They hove all that load overboard. When it fell it wiped out a considerable raft of stars just as clean as if they'd been candles and somebody blew them out. As for the race, that was at an end. The minute she was lightened the comet swung along by me the same as if I was anchored. The captain stood on the stern, by the after-davits, and put his thumb to his nose and sung out —

“Ta-ta! ta-ta! Maybe *you’ve* got some message to send your friends in the Everlasting Tropics!”

Then he hove up his other suspender and started for’ard, and inside of three-quarters of an hour his craft was only a pale torch again in the distance. Yes, it was a mistake, Peters – that remark of mine. I don’t reckon I’ll ever get over being sorry about it. I’d ‘a’ beat the bully of the firmament if I’d kept my mouth shut.

But I’ve wandered a little off the track of my tale; I’ll get back on my course again. Now you see what kind of speed I was making. So, as I said, when I had been tearing along this way about thirty years I begun to get uneasy. Oh, it was pleasant enough, with a good deal to find out, but then it was kind of lonesome, you know. Besides, I wanted to get somewhere. I hadn’t shipped with the idea of cruising forever. First off, I liked the delay, because I judged I was going to fetch up in pretty warm quarters when I got through; but towards the last I begun to feel that I’d rather go to – well, most any place, so as to finish up the uncertainty.

Well, one night – it was always night, except when I was rushing by some star that was occupying the whole universe with its fire and its glare – light enough then, of course, but I necessarily left it behind in a minute or two and plunged into a solid week of darkness again. The stars ain’t so close together as they look to be. Where was I? Oh yes; one night I was sailing along, when I discovered a tremendous long row of blinking lights away on the horizon ahead. As I approached, they begun to

tower and swell and look like mighty furnaces. Says I to myself —

“By George, I’ve arrived at last – and at the wrong place, just as I expected!”

Then I fainted. I don’t know how long I was insensible, but it must have been a good while, for, when I came to, the darkness was all gone and there was the loveliest sunshine and the balmiest, fragrantest air in its place. And there was such a marvellous world spread out before me – such a glowing, beautiful, bewitching country. The things I took for furnaces were gates, miles high, made all of flashing jewels, and they pierced a wall of solid gold that you couldn’t see the top of, nor yet the end of, in either direction. I was pointed straight for one of these gates, and a-coming like a house afire. Now I noticed that the skies were black with millions of people, pointed for those gates. What a roar they made, rushing through the air! The ground was as thick as ants with people, too – billions of them, I judge.

I lit. I drifted up to a gate with a swarm of people, and when it was my turn the head clerk says, in a business-like way —

“Well, quick! Where are you from?”

“San Francisco,” says I.

“San Fran —*what?*” says he.

“San Francisco.”

He scratched his head and looked puzzled, then he says —

“Is it a planet?”

By George, Peters, think of it! “*Planet?*” says I; “it’s a city.

And moreover, it's one of the biggest and finest and – ”

“There, there!” says he, “no time here for conversation. We don't deal in cities here. Where are you from in a *general* way?”

“Oh,” I says, “I beg your pardon. Put me down for California.”

I had him *again*, Peters! He puzzled a second, then he says, sharp and irritable —

“I don't know any such planet – is it a constellation?”

“Oh, my goodness!” says I. “Constellation, says you? No – it's a State.”

“Man, we don't deal in States here. *Will* you tell me where you are from *in general* – *at large*, don't you understand?”

“Oh, now I get your idea,” I says. “I'm from America, – the United States of America.”

Peters, do you know I had him *again*? If I hadn't I'm a clam! His face was as blank as a target after a militia shooting-match. He turned to an under clerk and says —

“Where is America? *What* is America?”

The under clerk answered up prompt and says —

“There ain't any such orb.”

“*Orb*?” says I. “Why, what are you talking about, young man? It ain't an orb; it's a country; it's a continent. Columbus discovered it; I reckon likely you've heard of *him*, anyway. America – why, sir, America – ”

“Silence!” says the head clerk. “Once for all, where – are – you —*from*?”

“Well,” says I, “I don't know anything more to say – unless I

lump things, and just say I'm from the world."

"Ah," says he, brightening up, "now that's something like! *What world?*"

Peters, he had *me*, that time. I looked at him, puzzled, he looked at me, worried. Then he burst out —

"Come, come, what world?"

Says I, "Why, *the* world, of course."

"*The* world!" he says. "H'm! there's billions of them!.. Next!"

That meant for me to stand aside. I done so, and a sky-blue man with seven heads and only one leg hopped into my place. I took a walk. It just occurred to me, then, that all the myriads I had seen swarming to that gate, up to this time, were just like that creature. I tried to run across somebody I was acquainted with, but they were out of acquaintances of mine just then. So I thought the thing all over and finally sidled back there pretty meek and feeling rather stumped, as you may say.

"Well?" said the head clerk.

"Well, sir," I says, pretty humble, "I don't seem to make out which world it is I'm from. But you may know it from this — it's the one the Saviour saved."

He bent his head at the Name. Then he says, gently —

"The worlds He has saved are like to the gates of heaven in number — none can count them. What astronomical system is your world in? — perhaps that may assist."

"It's the one that has the sun in it — and the moon — and Mars" — he shook his head at each name — hadn't ever heard of them,

you see – “and Neptune – and Uranus – and Jupiter – ”

“Hold on!” says he – “hold on a minute! Jupiter.. Jupiter.. Seems to me we had a man from there eight or nine hundred years ago – but people from that system very seldom enter by this gate.” All of a sudden he begun to look me so straight in the eye that I thought he was going to bore through me. Then he says, very deliberate, “Did you come *straight here* from your system?”

“Yes, sir,” I says – but I blushed the least little bit in the world when I said it.

He looked at me very stern, and says —

“That is not true; and this is not the place for prevarication. You wandered from your course. How did that happen?”

Says I, blushing again —

“I’m sorry, and I take back what I said, and confess. I raced a little with a comet one day – only just the least little bit – only the tiniest lit – ”

“So – so,” says he – and without any sugar in his voice to speak of.

I went on, and says —

“But I only fell off just a bare point, and I went right back on my course again the minute the race was over.”

“No matter – that divergence has made all this trouble. It has brought you to a gate that is billions of leagues from the right one. If you had gone to your own gate they would have known all about your world at once and there would have been no delay. But we will try to accommodate you.” He turned to an under

clerk and says —

“What system is Jupiter in?”

“I don’t remember, sir, but I think there is such a planet in one of the little new systems away out in one of the thinly worlded corners of the universe. I will see.”

He got a balloon and sailed up and up and up, in front of a map that was as big as Rhode Island. He went on up till he was out of sight, and by and by he came down and got something to eat and went up again. To cut a long story short, he kept on doing this for a day or two, and finally he came down and said he thought he had found that solar system, but it might be fly-specks. So he got a microscope and went back. It turned out better than he feared. He had roused out our system, sure enough. He got me to describe our planet and its distance from the sun, and then he says to his chief —

“Oh, I know the one he means, now, sir. It is on the map. It is called the Wart.”

Says I to myself, “Young man, it wouldn’t be wholesome for you to go down *there* and call it the Wart.”

Well, they let me in, then, and told me I was safe forever and wouldn’t have any more trouble.

Then they turned from me and went on with their work, the same as if they considered my case all complete and shipshape. I was a good deal surprised at this, but I was diffident about speaking up and reminding them. I did so hate to do it, you know; it seemed a pity to bother them, they had so much on their hands.

Twice I thought I would give up and let the thing go; so twice I started to leave, but immediately I thought what a figure I should cut stepping out amongst the redeemed in such a rig, and that made me hang back and come to anchor again. People got to eying me – clerks, you know – wondering why I didn't get under way. I couldn't stand this long – it was too uncomfortable. So at last I plucked up courage and tipped the head clerk a signal. He says —

“What! you here yet? What's wanting?”

Says I, in a low voice and very confidential, making a trumpet with my hands at his ear —

“I beg pardon, and you mustn't mind my reminding you, and seeming to meddle, but hain't you forgot something?”

He studied a second, and says —

“Forgot something?... No, not that I know of.”

“Think,” says I.

He thought. Then he says —

“No, I can't seem to have forgot anything. What is it?”

“Look at me,” says I, “look me all over.”

He done it.

“Well?” says he.

“Well,” says I, “you don't notice anything? If I branched out amongst the elect looking like this, wouldn't I attract considerable attention? – wouldn't I be a little conspicuous?”

“Well,” he says, “I don't see anything the matter. What do you lack?”

“Lack! Why, I lack my harp, and my wreath, and my halo, and my hymn-book, and my palm branch – I lack everything that a body naturally requires up here, my friend.”

Puzzled? Peters, he was the worst puzzled man you ever saw. Finally he says —

“Well, you seem to be a curiosity every way a body takes you. I never heard of these things before.”

I looked at the man awhile in solid astonishment; then I says —

“Now, I hope you don’t take it as an offence, for I don’t mean any, but really, for a man that has been in the Kingdom as long as I reckon you have, you do seem to know powerful little about its customs.”

“Its customs!” says he. “Heaven is a large place, good friend. Large empires have many and diverse customs. Even small dominions have, as you doubtless know by what you have seen of the matter on a small scale in the Wart. How can you imagine I could ever learn the varied customs of the countless kingdoms of heaven? It makes my head ache to think of it. I know the customs that prevail in those portions inhabited by peoples that are appointed to enter by my own gate – and hark ye, that is quite enough knowledge for one individual to try to pack into his head in the thirty-seven millions of years I have devoted night and day to that study. But the idea of learning the customs of the whole appalling expanse of heaven – O man, how insanely you talk! Now I don’t doubt that this odd costume you talk about is the fashion in that district of heaven you belong to, but you won’t be

conspicuous in this section without it.”

I felt all right, if that was the case, so I bade him good-day and left. All day I walked towards the far end of a prodigious hall of the office, hoping to come out into heaven any moment, but it was a mistake. That hall was built on the general heavenly plan – it naturally couldn’t be small. At last I got so tired I couldn’t go any farther; so I sat down to rest, and begun to tackle the queerest sort of strangers and ask for information, but I didn’t get any; they couldn’t understand my language, and I could not understand theirs. I got dreadfully lonesome. I was so down-hearted and homesick I wished a hundred times I never had died. I turned back, of course. About noon next day, I got back at last and was on hand at the booking-office once more. Says I to the head clerk —

“I begin to see that a man’s got to be in his own Heaven to be happy.”

“Perfectly correct,” says he. “Did you imagine the same heaven would suit all sorts of men?”

“Well, I had that idea – but I see the foolishness of it. Which way am I to go to get to my district?”

He called the under clerk that had examined the map, and he gave me general directions. I thanked him and started; but he says —

“Wait a minute; it is millions of leagues from here. Go outside and stand on that red wishing-carpet; shut your eyes, hold your breath, and wish yourself there.”

“I’m much obliged,” says I; “why didn’t you dart me through when I first arrived?”

“We have a good deal to think of here; it was your place to think of it and ask for it. Good-by; we probably sha’n’t see you in this region for a thousand centuries or so.”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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