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THE HOLY LAND EXCURSION.

LETTER FROM "MARK TWAIN."

[SPECIAL TRAVELLING CORRESPONDENT OF THE ALTA.]

[Number Two.]

The Flag in a Foreign Land--The Gate of the Mediterranean--Impregnable Gibraltar--Sight Seeing--Geologic and Historic--Portrait of an Old Acquaintance--Other Portraits--Brown Redivivus.

GIBRALTAR, June 30th.

Land Ho!

EDITORS ALTA: All hands were called on deck at ten o'clock this morning by the news that land was in sight. Within the hour we were fairly within the Strait of Gibraltar, with the tall yellow-splashed hills of Africa on our right, with their bases veiled in a blue haze and their summits swathed in clouds—the same being according to Scripture, which says that "clouds and darkness are over the land." The words were spoken of this particular portion of Africa, I believe. On our left were the granite-ribbed domes of old Spain. The Strait is only thirteen miles wide in its narrowest part.

At short intervals, along the Spanish shore, were quaint-looking old stone towers—Moorish, we thought, but learned better afterwards. In former times the Morocco rascals used to coast along the Spanish Main in their boats till a safe opportunity seemed to present itself, and then dart in and capture a Spanish village, and carry off all the pretty women they could find. It was a pleasant business, and was very popular. The Spaniards built these watch-towers on the hills to enable them to keep a sharper lookout on the Moroccan speculators.

It was a bright, breezy morning, and the picture on either hand was very beautiful to eyes weary of the changeless sea. The ship's company were uncommonly cheerful. But while we stood admiring the cloud-capped peaks and the lowlands robed in misty gloom, a finer picture burst upon us and chained every eye like a magnet—a stately ship, with canvas piled on canvas till she was one towering mass of bellying sail! She came speeding over the sea like a great bird. Africa and Spain were forgotten. All homage was for the beautiful stranger. While everybody gazed, she swept grandly by and flung the Stars and Stripes to the breeze! Quicker than thought, hats and handkerchiefs flashed in the air, and a cheer went up! She was beautiful before—she was radiant now. Many a one on our decks know then for the first time how tame a sight his country's flag is at home compared to what it is in a foreign land. To see it is to see a vision of home itself and all its idols, and feel a thrill that would stir a river of sluggish blood.

The Pillars of Hercules.

We were approaching the famed Pillars of Hercules, and already the African one, "Ape's Hill," a grand old mountain with summit streaked with granite ledges, was in sight. The other, the great Rock of Gibraltar, was yet to come. The ancients considered the Pillars of Hercules the head of navigation and the end of the world. The information the ancients didn't have, was very voluminous. Think of the Children of Israel poking around in the desert forty years instead of cutting across; think of Peter trying to walk on the water when he had never practiced; think of Joseph getting his brothers into his power after they had treated him so shabbily and then not hanging them a little. The ancients didn't know much. Even the prophets wrote book after book and epistle after epistle, yet never once hinted at the existence of a great continent on our side of the water, yet they must have known it was there, I should think. They knew beforehand what was going to happen, and surely they ought to have known what already existed. But no, they left the ancient public to believe that the Pillars of Hercules was the head of navigation, and Columbus was the first practical prophet to come out and tell them any better.

The Rock of Gibraltar.

In a few moments a lonely and enormous mass of rock, standing seemingly in the centre of the wide strait and apparently washed on all sides by the sea, swung magnificently into view, and we needed no tedious travelled parrot to tell us it was Gibraltar. There could not be two rocks like that in one kingdom.

The Rock of Gibraltar is about a mile and a half long, I should say, by 1,400 to 1,500 feet high—is a quarter of a mile wide at its base. One side and one end of it come about as straight up out of the sea as the side of a house, the other end is irregular and the other side is a steep slant which would be very hard for an army to climb. At the foot of this slant is the walled town of Gibraltar—or rather the town occupies part of the slant. Everywhere—on hillside, on precipice, by the sea, on the heights,—everywhere you choose to look, Gibraltar is clad with masonry and bristling with guns. It makes a striking and lively picture, however you look at it. It is shoved out into the sea on the end of a flat, narrow strip of land, and is suggestive of a "gob" of mud on the end of a shingle. A few hundred yards of this flat ground at its base belongs to the English, and then, extending across the strip from the Atlantic to the Mediterranean, a distance of a quarter of a mile, comes the "Neutral Ground," a space two or three hundred yards wide, which is free to both parties.

Tiresome Repetition.

"Are you going through Spain to Paris?" That question was bandied about the ship day and night from Fayal to Gibraltar, and I thought I never could get so tired of hearing any one combination of words again, or more tired of answering, "I don't know." At the last moment six or seven made up their minds to go, and did go, and I felt a sense of relief at once—nobody could ask me the worn-out old question any more. But behold how annoyances repeat themselves. We had no sooner gotten rid of the Spain nuisance than the Gibraltar guides started another: "That high hill yonder is called the Queen's Chair; it is because one of the Queens of Spain placed her chair there when the French and Spanish troops were besieging Gibraltar, and said she would never move from the spot till the English flag was lowered from the fortresses. If the English hadn't been gallant enough to lower the flag for a few hours one day, she'd have had to break her oath or die up there."

We rode on asses and mules up the steep, narrow streets and entered the subterranean galleries the English have blasted out in the rock. These galleries are like spacious railway tunnels, and at short intervals in them great guns frown out upon sea and town through portholes five or six hundred feet above the ocean. There is a mile or so of this subterranean work, and it must have cost a vast deal of money and labor. The gallery guns command the peninsula and the harbors of both oceans, but they might as well not be there, I should think, for an army could not climb the perpendicular wall of the rock anyhow. Those lofty portholes afford superb views of the sea, though. At one place, where a jutting crag was hollowed out into a great chamber, whose furniture was huge cannon and whose windows were portholes, a glimpse was caught of the Queen's Chair, and the inevitable old story was repeated and respectfully submitted to.

On the topmost pinnacle of Gibraltar we halted a good while, and no doubt the mules were tired. They had a right to be. The military road was good, but rather steep, and there was a good deal of it. The view from the narrow ledge was magnificent; from it ships that looked like the tiniest little toy-boats were turned into noble ships by the telescopes, and other ships that were fifty miles away, and even sixty, they said, and invisible to the naked eye, could be clearly distinguished through those same telescopes. Below, on one side, we looked down upon an endless mass of batteries, and on the other straight down into the sea. The Queen's chair was near at hand, and we heard the old story over again.

Geologic Theories.

Gibraltar has stood several protracted sieges, one of them of nearly four years duration (it failed), and the English only captured it by stratagem. The wonder is that anybody should ever dream of trying so impossible a project as taking it by assault—and yet it has been tried more than once.

The Moors held the place twelve hundred years ago, and a staunch old castle of theirs of that date still frowns from the middle of the town, with moss-grown battlements and sides well scarred by shots fired in battles and sieges that are forgotten now. A secret chamber, in the rock behind it, was discovered some time ago, which contained a sword of exquisite workmanship, and some quaint old armor of a fashion that antiquaries are not acquainted with, though it is supposed to be Roman. Roman armor and Roman relics, of various kinds, have been found in a cave in the sea extremity of Gibraltar; history says Rome held this part of the country about the Christian era, and these things seem to confirm the statement.

In that cave, also, are found human bones, crusted with a very thick, stony coating, and wise men have ventured to say that those men not only lived before the flood, but as much as ten thousand years before it. It may be true—it looks reasonable enough—but as long as these fellows can't vote any more the matter can be of no great public interest. In this cave, likewise, are found skeletons and fossils of animals that exist in every part of Africa, yet within memory and tradition have never existed in any portion of Spain save this lone peak of Gibraltar! So the theory is that the channel between Gibraltar and Africa was once dry land, and that the low, neutral neck between Gibraltar and the Spanish hills behind it was once ocean, and of course that these African animals, being over at Gibraltar (after rock, perhaps—there is plenty there), got closed out when the great change occurred. The hills in Africa, across the channel, are full of apes, and there are now, and always have been, apes on the rock of Gibraltar—but not elsewhere in Spain! The subject is an interesting one.

Personnel of Gibraltar.

There is an English garrison at Gibraltar of 6,000 or 7,000 men, and so uniforms of flaming red are plenty; and red and blue, and undress costumes of snowy white, and also the queer uniform of the bare-kneed Highlander; and one sees soft-eyed Spanish girls from San Roque, and veiled Moorish beauties (I suppose they are beauties) from Tarifa, and turbaned, sashed and trowsered Moorish merchants from Fez, and long-robed, bare-legged, ragged Mohammedan devils from Petouan and Tangier, some brown, some yellow and some as black as virgin ink—and Jews from all around, in gaberdine, skull cap and slippers, just as they are in pictures and theatres, and just as they were three thousand years ago, no doubt. You can easily understand that a crowd like ours, made up from fifteen or sixteen States of the Union, found enough to stare at in this shifting panorama of fashion today. They were constantly exclaiming, "How like Mr. Forrest's Othello that big turbaned, wide-browed black African is!—and the long-bearded Jew yonder, in his full robe, looks like all the Shylocks I ever saw!" I was so busy looking that I hardly ever asked any questions. Occasionally my conscience smote me, but I quieted it with the reflection that I had taken pains to give Brown the strictest instructions to ask questions and find out everything—to pry into all matters that presented themselves and leave nothing undiscovered that could be of lively interest to the public of the Pacific coast.

One or Two of Our Own Party.

We have got one or two people in our party who are an eternal annoyance to everybody. I do not count the Oracle in that list. I will explain that the Oracle is an innocent old ass, who doesn't know enough to come in when it rains, but who eats for four, and is vulgar, and smells bad, and looks wiser than the whole Academy of France would have any right to look, and never uses a one-syllable word when he can "go two better," and never by any possible chance knows the meaning of any long word he uses, or ever gets it in the right place. Yet who will serenely venture an opinion on the most abstruse subject, and back it up complacently with quotations from authors who never existed, and finally when cornered will slide to the other side of the question, say he has been there all the time, and come back at you with your own spoken arguments, only with the big words all tangled, and play them in your very teeth as original with himself. He reads a chapter in the guide-books, mixes the facts all up, with his miserable memory, and then goes off to inflict the whole thing on somebody as stuff which has been festering in his brain for years, and which he gathered at college from erudite authors who are dead, now, and out of print. This morning at breakfast he pointed out at the widow and said:

"Do you see that there of them out there on that African coast?—it's one of them Pillars of Hercules, I should say—and there's the ultimate one alongside of it."

"The ultimate one—that is a good word—but the Pillars are not both on the same side of the strait." (I saw he had been fooled by a carelessly-written sentence in the Guide Book.)

"Well, it ain't for you to say, nor for me. Some authors states it that way, and some states it different. Old Gibbons don't say nothing about it—just shirks it complete—Gibbons always done that when he got stuck—but there is Rolamton, what does he say? Why he says that they was both on the same side, and Trinculian, and Sobaster, and Syracos, and Langomarganbl—"

"Oh, that will do—that's enough. If you have got your hand in for inventing authors and testimony, I have got nothing more to say—let them be on the same side."

We don't mind the Oracle. We rather like him. Brown says Solomon was a fool to him. We can tolerate the Oracle very easily; but we have got a poet and a born ass on board, and they do worry the company. The one gives copies of his execrable verses to Consuls, commanders, hotel keepers, Arabs, Dutch, anybody and everybody, and passes himself off as the acknowledged successor of the late lamented Lord Byron! His poetry is all very well on shipboard, notwithstanding when he wrote an "Ode to the Ocean in a Storm" in one half hour, and an "Apostrophe to the Rooster in the Waist of the Ship" in the next, the transaction was considered to be rather abrupt; but when he sends a mess of rhymes to the Governor of Fayal and others in Gibraltar, with the compliments of the Laureate of the Ship, it is not popular with the passengers.

The other personage I have mentioned is young and green, and not bright, not learned and not wise. He will be, though, some day, if he recollects the answers to all his questions. He is known about the ship as the "Interrogation Point," and this by constant use has become shortened to "Interrogation." He has distinguished himself twice already. In Fayal they pointed out a hill and told him it was eight hundred feet high and eleven hundred feet long. And they told him there was a tunnel two thousand feet long and one thousand feet high running through the hill, from end to end. He believed it. He told it, discussed it, and read it from his notes. Brown said: "Well, yes, it is a little remarkable—curious tunnel altogether—stands up out of the top of the hill about two hundred feet, and one end of it sticks out of the hill about nine hundred!"

Here in Gibraltar he grabs these educated British officers and deluges them with buncombe braggadocio about America and the wonders she can perform. He told one of them a couple of our gun-boats could come here and knock Gibraltar into the Mediterranean Sea! And he rode a mule all day and then was not forthcoming when the driver of it (the creature they call a "scorpion") came for his money. And he dickered and fussed over some cents in a bargain with a poor devil Arab for some fruit in front of the hotel, in the presence of an audience of many nations, till some of the passengers snatched him away and threatened to hang him.

Such are two of our passengers—the rest will pass muster in Europe and elsewhere, never fear.

MARK TWAIN.

Mr. Brown's Report.

Mr. Brown has exhausted Gibraltar and handed in his report. It is comprehensive. Its substance is to the effect that all nations of the earth are represented in its population, and an English shilling buys four drinks.

M. T.