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 rousted 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

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 blowed 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 rousted 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."

"In that case, O REVOOR," says I.

I hopped onto the carpet and held my breath and shut my eyes and

wished I was in the booking-office of my own section. The very

next instant a voice I knew sung out in a business kind of a way -

"A harp and a hymn-book, pair of wings and a halo, size 13, for

Cap'n Eli Stormfield, of San Francisco! - make him out a clean bill

of health, and let him in."

I opened my eyes. Sure enough, it was a Pi Ute Injun I used to

know in Tulare County; mighty good fellow - I remembered being at

his funeral, which consisted of him being burnt and the other

Injuns gauming their faces with his ashes and howling like

wildcats. He was powerful glad to see me, and you may make up your

mind I was just as glad to see him, and feel that I was in the

right kind of a heaven at last.

Just as far as your eye could reach, there was swarms of clerks,

running and bustling around, tricking out thousands of Yanks and

Mexicans and English and Arabs, and all sorts of people in their

new outfits; and when they gave me my kit and I put on my halo and

took a look in the glass, I could have jumped over a house for joy,

I was so happy. "Now THIS is something like!" says I. "Now," says

I, "I'm all right - show me a cloud."

Inside of fifteen minutes I was a mile on my way towards the cloud-

banks and about a million people along with me. Most of us tried

to fly, but some got crippled and nobody made a success of it. So

we concluded to walk, for the present, till we had had some wing

practice.

We begun to meet swarms of folks who were coming back. Some had

harps and nothing else; some had hymn-books and nothing else; some

had nothing at all; all of them looked meek and uncomfortable; one

young fellow hadn't anything left but his halo, and he was carrying

that in his hand; all of a sudden he offered it to me and says -

"Will you hold it for me a minute?"

Then he disappeared in the crowd. I went on. A woman asked me to

hold her palm branch, and then SHE disappeared. A girl got me to

hold her harp for her, and by George, SHE disappeared; and so on

and so on, till I was about loaded down to the guards. Then comes

a smiling old gentleman and asked me to hold HIS things. I swabbed

off the perspiration and says, pretty tart -

"I'll have to get you to excuse me, my friend, - I ain't no hat-

rack."

About this time I begun to run across piles of those traps, lying

in the road. I just quietly dumped my extra cargo along with them.

I looked around, and, Peters, that whole nation that was following

me were loaded down the same as I'd been. The return crowd had got

them to hold their things a minute, you see. They all dumped their

loads, too, and we went on.

When I found myself perched on a cloud, with a million other

people, I never felt so good in my life. Says I, "Now this is

according to the promises; I've been having my doubts, but now I am

in heaven, sure enough." I gave my palm branch a wave or two, for

luck, and then I tautened up my harp-strings and struck in. Well,

Peters, you can't imagine anything like the row we made. It was

grand to listen to, and made a body thrill all over, but there was

considerable many tunes going on at once, and that was a drawback

to the harmony, you understand; and then there was a lot of Injun

tribes, and they kept up such another war-whooping that they kind

of took the tuck out of the music. By and by I quit performing,

and judged I'd take a rest. There was quite a nice mild old

gentleman sitting next me, and I noticed he didn't take a hand; I

encouraged him, but he said he was naturally bashful, and was

afraid to try before so many people. By and by the old gentleman

said he never could seem to enjoy music somehow. The fact was, I

was beginning to feel the same way; but I didn't say anything. Him

and I had a considerable long silence, then, but of course it

warn't noticeable in that place. After about sixteen or seventeen

hours, during which I played and sung a little, now and then -

always the same tune, because I didn't know any other - I laid down

my harp and begun to fan myself with my palm branch. Then we both

got to sighing pretty regular. Finally, says he -

"Don't you know any tune but the one you've been pegging at all

day?"

"Not another blessed one," says I.

"Don't you reckon you could learn another one?" says he.

"Never," says I; "I've tried to, but I couldn't manage it."

"It's a long time to hang to the one - eternity, you know."

"Don't break my heart," says I; "I'm getting low-spirited enough

already."

After another long silence, says he -

"Are you glad to be here?"

Says I, "Old man, I'll be frank with you. This AIN'T just as near

my idea of bliss as I thought it was going to be, when I used to go

to church."

Says he, "What do you say to knocking off and calling it half a

day?"

"That's me," says I. "I never wanted to get off watch so bad in my

life."

So we started. Millions were coming to the cloud-bank all the

time, happy and hosannahing; millions were leaving it all the time,

looking mighty quiet, I tell you. We laid for the new-comers, and

pretty soon I'd got them to hold all my things a minute, and then I

was a free man again and most outrageously happy. Just then I ran

across old Sam Bartlett, who had been dead a long time, and stopped

to have a talk with him. Says I -

"Now tell me - is this to go on forever? Ain't there anything else

for a change?"

Says he -

"I'll set you right on that point very quick. People take the

figurative language of the Bible and the allegories for literal,

and the first thing they ask for when they get here is a halo and a

harp, and so on. Nothing that's harmless and reasonable is refused

a body here, if he asks it in the right spirit. So they are

outfitted with these things without a word. They go and sing and

play just about one day, and that's the last you'll ever see them

in the choir. They don't need anybody to tell them that that sort

of thing wouldn't make a heaven - at least not a heaven that a sane

man could stand a week and remain sane. That cloud-bank is placed

where the noise can't disturb the old inhabitants, and so there

ain't any harm in letting everybody get up there and cure himself

as soon as he comes.

"Now you just remember this - heaven is as blissful and lovely as

it can be; but it's just the busiest place you ever heard of.

There ain't any idle people here after the first day. Singing

hymns and waving palm branches through all eternity is pretty when

you hear about it in the pulpit, but it's as poor a way to put in

valuable time as a body could contrive. It would just make a

heaven of warbling ignoramuses, don't you see? Eternal Rest sounds

comforting in the pulpit, too. Well, you try it once, and see how

heavy time will hang on your hands. Why, Stormfield, a man like

you, that had been active and stirring all his life, would go mad

in six months in a heaven where he hadn't anything to do. Heaven

is the very last place to come to REST in, - and don't you be

afraid to bet on that!"

Says I -

"Sam, I'm as glad to hear it as I thought I'd be sorry. I'm glad I

come, now."

Says he -

"Cap'n, ain't you pretty physically tired?"

Says I -

"Sam, it ain't any name for it! I'm dog-tired."

"Just so - just so. You've earned a good sleep, and you'll get it.

You've earned a good appetite, and you'll enjoy your dinner. It's

the same here as it is on earth - you've got to earn a thing,

square and honest, before you enjoy it. You can't enjoy first and

earn afterwards. But there's this difference, here: you can

choose your own occupation, and all the powers of heaven will be

put forth to help you make a success of it, if you do your level

best. The shoe-maker on earth that had the soul of a poet in him

won't have to make shoes here."

"Now that's all reasonable and right," says I. "Plenty of work,

and the kind you hanker after; no more pain, no more suffering - "

"Oh, hold on; there's plenty of pain here - but it don't kill.

There's plenty of suffering here, but it don't last. You see,

happiness ain't a THING IN ITSELF - it's only a CONTRAST with

something that ain't pleasant. That's all it is. There ain't a

thing you can mention that is happiness in its own self - it's only

so by contrast with the other thing. And so, as soon as the

novelty is over and the force of the contrast dulled, it ain't

happiness any longer, and you have to get something fresh. Well,

there's plenty of pain and suffering in heaven - consequently

there's plenty of contrasts, and just no end of happiness."

Says I, "It's the sensiblest heaven I've heard of yet, Sam, though

it's about as different from the one I was brought up on as a live

princess is different from her own wax figger."

Along in the first months I knocked around about the Kingdom,

making friends and looking at the country, and finally settled down

in a pretty likely region, to have a rest before taking another

start. I went on making acquaintances and gathering up

information. I had a good deal of talk with an old bald-headed

angel by the name of Sandy McWilliams. He was from somewhere in

New Jersey. I went about with him, considerable. We used to lay

around, warm afternoons, in the shade of a rock, on some meadow-

ground that was pretty high and out of the marshy slush of his

cranberry-farm, and there we used to talk about all kinds of

things, and smoke pipes. One day, says I -

"About how old might you be, Sandy?"

"Seventy-two."

"I judged so. How long you been in heaven?"

"Twenty-seven years, come Christmas."

"How old was you when you come up?"

"Why, seventy-two, of course."

"You can't mean it!"

"Why can't I mean it?"

"Because, if you was seventy-two then, you are naturally ninety-

nine now."

"No, but I ain't. I stay the same age I was when I come."

"Well," says I, "come to think, there's something just here that I

want to ask about. Down below, I always had an idea that in heaven

we would all be young, and bright, and spry."

"Well, you can be young if you want to. You've only got to wish."

"Well, then, why didn't you wish?"

"I did. They all do. You'll try it, some day, like enough; but

you'll get tired of the change pretty soon."

"Why?"

"Well, I'll tell you. Now you've always been a sailor; did you

ever try some other business?"

"Yes, I tried keeping grocery, once, up in the mines; but I

couldn't stand it; it was too dull - no stir, no storm, no life

about it; it was like being part dead and part alive, both at the

same time. I wanted to be one thing or t'other. I shut up shop

pretty quick and went to sea."

"That's it. Grocery people like it, but you couldn't. You see you

wasn't used to it. Well, I wasn't used to being young, and I

couldn't seem to take any interest in it. I was strong, and

handsome, and had curly hair, - yes, and wings, too! - gay wings

like a butterfly. I went to picnics and dances and parties with

the fellows, and tried to carry on and talk nonsense with the

girls, but it wasn't any use; I couldn't take to it - fact is, it

was an awful bore. What I wanted was early to bed and early to

rise, and something to DO; and when my work was done, I wanted to

sit quiet, and smoke and think - not tear around with a parcel of

giddy young kids. You can't think what I suffered whilst I was

young."

"How long was you young?"

"Only two weeks. That was plenty for me. Laws, I was so lonesome!

You see, I was full of the knowledge and experience of seventy-two

years; the deepest subject those young folks could strike was only

A-B-C to me. And to hear them argue - oh, my! it would have been

funny, if it hadn't been so pitiful. Well, I was so hungry for the

ways and the sober talk I was used to, that I tried to ring in with

the old people, but they wouldn't have it. They considered me a

conceited young upstart, and gave me the cold shoulder. Two weeks

was a-plenty for me. I was glad to get back my bald head again,

and my pipe, and my old drowsy reflections in the shade of a rock

or a tree."

"Well," says I, "do you mean to say you're going to stand still at

seventy-two, forever?"

"I don't know, and I ain't particular. But I ain't going to drop

back to twenty-five any more - I know that, mighty well. I know a

sight more than I did twenty-seven years ago, and I enjoy learning,

all the time, but I don't seem to get any older. That is, bodily -

my mind gets older, and stronger, and better seasoned, and more

satisfactory."

Says I, "If a man comes here at ninety, don't he ever set himself

back?"

"Of course he does. He sets himself back to fourteen; tries it a

couple of hours, and feels like a fool; sets himself forward to

twenty; it ain't much improvement; tries thirty, fifty, eighty, and

finally ninety - finds he is more at home and comfortable at the

same old figure he is used to than any other way. Or, if his mind

begun to fail him on earth at eighty, that's where he finally

sticks up here. He sticks at the place where his mind was last at

its best, for there's where his enjoyment is best, and his ways

most set and established."

"Does a chap of twenty-five stay always twenty-five, and look it?"

"If he is a fool, yes. But if he is bright, and ambitious and

industrious, the knowledge he gains and the experiences he has,

change his ways and thoughts and likings, and make him find his

best pleasure in the company of people above that age; so he allows

his body to take on that look of as many added years as he needs to

make him comfortable and proper in that sort of society; he lets

his body go on taking the look of age, according as he progresses,

and by and by he will be bald and wrinkled outside, and wise and

deep within."

"Babies the same?"

"Babies the same. Laws, what asses we used to be, on earth, about

these things! We said we'd be always young in heaven. We didn't

say HOW young - we didn't think of that, perhaps - that is, we

didn't all think alike, anyway. When I was a boy of seven, I

suppose I thought we'd all be twelve, in heaven; when I was twelve,

I suppose I thought we'd all be eighteen or twenty in heaven; when

I was forty, I begun to go back; I remember I hoped we'd all be

about THIRTY years old in heaven. Neither a man nor a boy ever

thinks the age he HAS is exactly the best one - he puts the right

age a few years older or a few years younger than he is. Then he

makes that ideal age the general age of the heavenly people. And

he expects everybody TO STICK at that age - stand stock-still - and

expects them to enjoy it! - Now just think of the idea of standing

still in heaven! Think of a heaven made up entirely of hoop-

rolling, marble-playing cubs of seven years! - or of awkward,

diffident, sentimental immaturities of nineteen! - or of vigorous

people of thirty, healthy-minded, brimming with ambition, but

chained hand and foot to that one age and its limitations like so

many helpless galley-slaves! Think of the dull sameness of a

society made up of people all of one age and one set of looks,

habits, tastes and feelings. Think how superior to it earth would

be, with its variety of types and faces and ages, and the

enlivening attrition of the myriad interests that come into

pleasant collision in such a variegated society."

"Look here," says I, "do you know what you're doing?"

"Well, what am I doing?"

"You are making heaven pretty comfortable in one way, but you are

playing the mischief with it in another."

"How d'you mean?"

"Well," I says, "take a young mother that's lost her child, and - "

"Sh!" he says. "Look!"

It was a woman. Middle-aged, and had grizzled hair. She was

walking slow, and her head was bent down, and her wings hanging

limp and droopy; and she looked ever so tired, and was crying, poor

thing! She passed along by, with her head down, that way, and the

tears running down her face, and didn't see us. Then Sandy said,

low and gentle, and full of pity:

"SHE'S hunting for her child! No, FOUND it, I reckon. Lord, how

she's changed! But I recognized her in a minute, though it's

twenty-seven years since I saw her. A young mother she was, about

twenty two or four, or along there; and blooming and lovely and

sweet? oh, just a flower! And all her heart and all her soul was

wrapped up in her child, her little girl, two years old. And it

died, and she went wild with grief, just wild! Well, the only

comfort she had was that she'd see her child again, in heaven -

'never more to part,' she said, and kept on saying it over and

over, 'never more to part.' And the words made her happy; yes,

they did; they made her joyful, and when I was dying, twenty-seven

years ago, she told me to find her child the first thing, and say

she was coming - 'soon, soon, VERY soon, she hoped and believed!'"

"Why, it's pitiful, Sandy."

He didn't say anything for a while, but sat looking at the ground,

thinking. Then he says, kind of mournful:

"And now she's come!"

"Well? Go on."

"Stormfield, maybe she hasn't found the child, but I think she has.

Looks so to me. I've seen cases before. You see, she's kept that

child in her head just the same as it was when she jounced it in

her arms a little chubby thing. But here it didn't elect to STAY a

child. No, it elected to grow up, which it did. And in these

twenty-seven years it has learned all the deep scientific learning

there is to learn, and is studying and studying and learning and

learning more and more, all the time, and don't give a damn for

anything BUT learning; just learning, and discussing gigantic

problems with people like herself."

"Well?"

"Stormfield, don't you see? Her mother knows CRANBERRIES, and how

to tend them, and pick them, and put them up, and market them; and

not another blamed thing! Her and her daughter can't be any more

company for each other NOW than mud turtle and bird o' paradise.

Poor thing, she was looking for a baby to jounce; I think she's

struck a disapp'intment."

"Sandy, what will they do - stay unhappy forever in heaven?"

"No, they'll come together and get adjusted by and by. But not

this year, and not next. By and by."

CHAPTER II

I had been having considerable trouble with my wings. The day

after I helped the choir I made a dash or two with them, but was

not lucky. First off, I flew thirty yards, and then fouled an

Irishman and brought him down - brought us both down, in fact.

Next, I had a collision with a Bishop - and bowled him down, of

course. We had some sharp words, and I felt pretty cheap, to come

banging into a grave old person like that, with a million strangers

looking on and smiling to themselves.

I saw I hadn't got the hang of the steering, and so couldn't

rightly tell where I was going to bring up when I started. I went

afoot the rest of the day, and let my wings hang. Early next

morning I went to a private place to have some practice. I got up

on a pretty high rock, and got a good start, and went swooping

down, aiming for a bush a little over three hundred yards off; but

I couldn't seem to calculate for the wind, which was about two

points abaft my beam. I could see I was going considerable to

looard of the bush, so I worked my starboard wing slow and went

ahead strong on the port one, but it wouldn't answer; I could see I

was going to broach to, so I slowed down on both, and lit. I went

back to the rock and took another chance at it. I aimed two or

three points to starboard of the bush - yes, more than that -

enough so as to make it nearly a head-wind. I done well enough,

but made pretty poor time. I could see, plain enough, that on a

head-wind, wings was a mistake. I could see that a body could sail

pretty close to the wind, but he couldn't go in the wind's eye. I

could see that if I wanted to go a-visiting any distance from home,

and the wind was ahead, I might have to wait days, maybe, for a

change; and I could see, too, that these things could not be any

use at all in a gale; if you tried to run before the wind, you

would make a mess of it, for there isn't anyway to shorten sail -

like reefing, you know - you have to take it ALL in - shut your

feathers down flat to your sides. That would LAND you, of course.

You could lay to, with your head to the wind - that is the best you

could do, and right hard work you'd find it, too. If you tried any

other game, you would founder, sure.

I judge it was about a couple of weeks or so after this that I

dropped old Sandy McWilliams a note one day - it was a Tuesday -

and asked him to come over and take his manna and quails with me

next day; and the first thing he did when he stepped in was to

twinkle his eye in a sly way, and say, -

"Well, Cap, what you done with your wings?"

I saw in a minute that there was some sarcasm done up in that rag

somewheres, but I never let on. I only says, -

"Gone to the wash."

"Yes," he says, in a dry sort of way, "they mostly go to the wash -

about this time - I've often noticed it. Fresh angels are powerful

neat. When do you look for 'em back?"

"Day after to-morrow," says I.

He winked at me, and smiled.

Says I, -

"Sandy, out with it. Come - no secrets among friends. I notice

you don't ever wear wings - and plenty others don't. I've been

making an ass of myself - is that it?"

"That is about the size of it. But it is no harm. We all do it at

first. It's perfectly natural. You see, on earth we jump to such

foolish conclusions as to things up here. In the pictures we

always saw the angels with wings on - and that was all right; but

we jumped to the conclusion that that was their way of getting

around - and that was all wrong. The wings ain't anything but a

uniform, that's all. When they are in the field - so to speak, -

they always wear them; you never see an angel going with a message

anywhere without his wings, any more than you would see a military

officer presiding at a court-martial without his uniform, or a

postman delivering letters, or a policeman walking his beat, in

plain clothes. But they ain't to FLY with! The wings are for

show, not for use. Old experienced angels are like officers of the

regular army - they dress plain, when they are off duty. New

angels are like the militia - never shed the uniform - always

fluttering and floundering around in their wings, butting people

down, flapping here, and there, and everywhere, always imagining

they are attracting the admiring eye - well, they just think they

are the very most important people in heaven. And when you see one

of them come sailing around with one wing tipped up and t'other

down, you make up your mind he is saying to himself: 'I wish Mary

Ann in Arkansaw could see me now. I reckon she'd wish she hadn't

shook me.' No, they're just for show, that's all - only just for

show."

"I judge you've got it about right, Sandy," says I.

"Why, look at it yourself," says he. "YOU ain't built for wings -

no man is. You know what a grist of years it took you to come here

from the earth - and yet you were booming along faster than any

cannon-ball could go. Suppose you had to fly that distance with

your wings - wouldn't eternity have been over before you got here?

Certainly. Well, angels have to go to the earth every day -

millions of them - to appear in visions to dying children and good

people, you know - it's the heft of their business. They appear

with their wings, of course, because they are on official service,

and because the dying persons wouldn't know they were angels if

they hadn't wings - but do you reckon they fly with them? It

stands to reason they don't. The wings would wear out before they

got half-way; even the pin-feathers would be gone; the wing frames

would be as bare as kite sticks before the paper is pasted on. The

distances in heaven are billions of times greater; angels have to

go all over heaven every day; could they do it with their wings

alone? No, indeed; they wear the wings for style, but they travel

any distance in an instant by WISHING. The wishing-carpet of the

Arabian Nights was a sensible idea - but our earthly idea of angels

flying these awful distances with their clumsy wings was foolish.

"Our young saints, of both sexes, wear wings all the time - blazing

red ones, and blue and green, and gold, and variegated, and

rainbowed, and ring-streaked-and-striped ones - and nobody finds

fault. It is suitable to their time of life. The things are

beautiful, and they set the young people off. They are the most

striking and lovely part of their outfit - a halo don't BEGIN."

"Well," says I, "I've tucked mine away in the cupboard, and I allow

to let them lay there till there's mud."

"Yes - or a reception."

"What's that?"

"Well, you can see one to-night if you want to. There's a

barkeeper from Jersey City going to be received."

"Go on - tell me about it."

"This barkeeper got converted at a Moody and Sankey meeting, in New

York, and started home on the ferry-boat, and there was a collision

and he got drowned. He is of a class that think all heaven goes

wild with joy when a particularly hard lot like him is saved; they

think all heaven turns out hosannahing to welcome them; they think

there isn't anything talked about in the realms of the blest but

their case, for that day. This barkeeper thinks there hasn't been

such another stir here in years, as his coming is going to raise. -

And I've always noticed this peculiarity about a dead barkeeper -

he not only expects all hands to turn out when he arrives, but he

expects to be received with a torchlight procession."

"I reckon he is disappointed, then."

"No, he isn't. No man is allowed to be disappointed here.

Whatever he wants, when he comes - that is, any reasonable and

unsacrilegious thing - he can have. There's always a few millions

or billions of young folks around who don't want any better

entertainment than to fill up their lungs and swarm out with their

torches and have a high time over a barkeeper. It tickles the

barkeeper till he can't rest, it makes a charming lark for the

young folks, it don't do anybody any harm, it don't cost a rap, and

it keeps up the place's reputation for making all comers happy and

content."

"Very good. I'll be on hand and see them land the barkeeper."

"It is manners to go in full dress. You want to wear your wings,

you know, and your other things."

"Which ones?"

"Halo, and harp, and palm branch, and all that."

"Well," says I, "I reckon I ought to be ashamed of myself, but the

fact is I left them laying around that day I resigned from the

choir. I haven't got a rag to wear but this robe and the wings."

"That's all right. You'll find they've been raked up and saved for

you. Send for them."

"I'll do it, Sandy. But what was it you was saying about

unsacrilegious things, which people expect to get, and will be

disappointed about?"

"Oh, there are a lot of such things that people expect and don't

get. For instance, there's a Brooklyn preacher by the name of

Talmage, who is laying up a considerable disappointment for

himself. He says, every now and then in his sermons, that the

first thing he does when he gets to heaven, will be to fling his

arms around Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and kiss them and weep on

them. There's millions of people down there on earth that are

promising themselves the same thing. As many as sixty thousand

people arrive here every single day, that want to run straight to

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and hug them and weep on them. Now mind

you, sixty thousand a day is a pretty heavy contract for those old

people. If they were a mind to allow it, they wouldn't ever have

anything to do, year in and year out, but stand up and be hugged

and wept on thirty-two hours in the twenty-four. They would be

tired out and as wet as muskrats all the time. What would heaven

be, to THEM? It would be a mighty good place to get out of - you

know that, yourself. Those are kind and gentle old Jews, but they

ain't any fonder of kissing the emotional highlights of Brooklyn

than you be. You mark my words, Mr. T.'s endearments are going to

be declined, with thanks. There are limits to the privileges of

the elect, even in heaven. Why, if Adam was to show himself to

every new comer that wants to call and gaze at him and strike him

for his autograph, he would never have time to do anything else but

just that. Talmage has said he is going to give Adam some of his

attentions, as well as A., I. and J. But he will have to change

his mind about that."

"Do you think Talmage will really come here?"

"Why, certainly, he will; but don't you be alarmed; he will run

with his own kind, and there's plenty of them. That is the main

charm of heaven - there's all kinds here - which wouldn't be the

case if you let the preachers tell it. Anybody can find the sort

he prefers, here, and he just lets the others alone, and they let

him alone. When the Deity builds a heaven, it is built right, and

on a liberal plan."

Sandy sent home for his things, and I sent for mine, and about nine

in the evening we begun to dress. Sandy says, -

"This is going to be a grand time for you, Stormy. Like as not

some of the patriarchs will turn out."

"No, but will they?"

"Like as not. Of course they are pretty exclusive. They hardly

ever show themselves to the common public. I believe they never

turn out except for an eleventh-hour convert. They wouldn't do it

then, only earthly tradition makes a grand show pretty necessary on

that kind of an occasion."

"Do they an turn out, Sandy?"

"Who? - all the patriarchs? Oh, no - hardly ever more than a

couple. You will be here fifty thousand years - maybe more -

before you get a glimpse of all the patriarchs and prophets. Since

I have been here, Job has been to the front once, and once Ham and

Jeremiah both at the same time. But the finest thing that has

happened in my day was a year or so ago; that was Charles Peace's

reception - him they called 'the Bannercross Murderer' - an

Englishman. There were four patriarchs and two prophets on the

Grand Stand that time - there hasn't been anything like it since

Captain Kidd came; Abel was there - the first time in twelve

hundred years. A report got around that Adam was coming; well, of

course, Abel was enough to bring a crowd, all by himself, but there

is nobody that can draw like Adam. It was a false report, but it

got around, anyway, as I say, and it will be a long day before I

see the like of it again. The reception was in the English

department, of course, which is eight hundred and eleven million

miles from the New Jersey line. I went, along with a good many of

my neighbors, and it was a sight to see, I can tell you. Flocks

came from all the departments. I saw Esquimaux there, and Tartars,

Negroes, Chinamen - people from everywhere. You see a mixture like

that in the Grand Choir, the first day you land here, but you

hardly ever see it again. There were billions of people; when they

were singing or hosannahing, the noise was wonderful; and even when

their tongues were still the drumming of the wings was nearly

enough to burst your head, for all the sky was as thick as if it

was snowing angels. Although Adam was not there, it was a great

time anyway, because we had three archangels on the Grand Stand -

it is a seldom thing that even one comes out."

"What did they look like, Sandy?"

"Well, they had shining faces, and shining robes, and wonderful

rainbow wings, and they stood eighteen feet high, and wore swords,

and held their heads up in a noble way, and looked like soldiers."

"Did they have halos?"

"No - anyway, not the hoop kind. The archangels and the upper-

class patriarchs wear a finer thing than that. It is a round,

solid, splendid glory of gold, that is blinding to look at. You

have often seen a patriarch in a picture, on earth, with that thing

on - you remember it? - he looks as if he had his head in a brass

platter. That don't give you the right idea of it at all - it is

much more shining and beautiful."

"Did you talk with those archangels and patriarchs, Sandy?"

"Who - I? Why, what can you be thinking about, Stormy? I ain't

worthy to speak to such as they."

"Is Talmage?"

"Of course not. You have got the same mixed-up idea about these

things that everybody has down there. I had it once, but I got

over it. Down there they talk of the heavenly King - and that is

right - but then they go right on speaking as if this was a

republic and everybody was on a dead level with everybody else, and

privileged to fling his arms around anybody he comes across, and be

hail-fellow-well-met with all the elect, from the highest down.

How tangled up and absurd that is! How are you going to have a

republic under a king? How are you going to have a republic at

all, where the head of the government is absolute, holds his place

forever, and has no parliament, no council to meddle or make in his

affairs, nobody voted for, nobody elected, nobody in the whole

universe with a voice in the government, nobody asked to take a

hand in its matters, and nobody ALLOWED to do it? Fine republic,

ain't it?"

"Well, yes - it IS a little different from the idea I had - but I

thought I might go around and get acquainted with the grandees,

anyway - not exactly splice the main-brace with them, you know, but

shake hands and pass the time of day."

"Could Tom, Dick and Harry call on the Cabinet of Russia and do

that? - on Prince Gortschakoff, for instance?"

"I reckon not, Sandy."

"Well, this is Russia - only more so. There's not the shadow of a

republic about it anywhere. There are ranks, here. There are

viceroys, princes, governors, sub-governors, sub-sub-governors, and

a hundred orders of nobility, grading along down from grand-ducal

archangels, stage by stage, till the general level is struck, where

there ain't any titles. Do you know what a prince of the blood is,

on earth?"

"No."

"Well, a prince of the blood don't belong to the royal family

exactly, and he don't belong to the mere nobility of the kingdom;

he is lower than the one, and higher than t'other. That's about

the position of the patriarchs and prophets here. There's some

mighty high nobility here - people that you and I ain't worthy to

polish sandals for - and THEY ain't worthy to polish sandals for

the patriarchs and prophets. That gives you a kind of an idea of

their rank, don't it? You begin to see how high up they are, don't

you? just to get a two-minute glimpse of one of them is a thing for

a body to remember and tell about for a thousand years. Why,

Captain, just think of this: if Abraham was to set his foot down

here by this door, there would be a railing set up around that

foot-track right away, and a shelter put over it, and people would

flock here from all over heaven, for hundreds and hundreds of

years, to look at it. Abraham is one of the parties that Mr.

Talmage, of Brooklyn, is going to embrace, and kiss, and weep on,

when he comes. He wants to lay in a good stock of tears, you know,

or five to one he will go dry before he gets a chance to do it."

"Sandy," says I, "I had an idea that I was going to be equals with

everybody here, too, but I will let that drop. It don't matter,

and I am plenty happy enough anyway."

"Captain, you are happier than you would be, the other way. These

old patriarchs and prophets have got ages the start of you; they

know more in two minutes than you know in a year. Did you ever try

to have a sociable improving-time discussing winds, and currents

and variations of compass with an undertaker?"

"I get your idea, Sandy. He couldn't interest me. He would be an

ignoramus in such things - he would bore me, and I would bore him."

"You have got it. You would bore the patriarchs when you talked,

and when they talked they would shoot over your head. By and by

you would say, 'Good morning, your Eminence, I will call again' -

but you wouldn't. Did you ever ask the slush-boy to come up in the

cabin and take dinner with you?"

"I get your drift again, Sandy. I wouldn't be used to such grand

people as the patriarchs and prophets, and I would be sheepish and

tongue-tied in their company, and mighty glad to get out of it.

Sandy, which is the highest rank, patriarch or prophet?"

"Oh, the prophets hold over the patriarchs. The newest prophet,

even, is of a sight more consequence than the oldest patriarch.

Yes, sir, Adam himself has to walk behind Shakespeare."

"Was Shakespeare a prophet?"

"Of course he was; and so was Homer, and heaps more. But

Shakespeare and the rest have to walk behind a common tailor from

Tennessee, by the name of Billings; and behind a horse-doctor named

Sakka, from Afghanistan. Jeremiah, and Billings and Buddha walk

together, side by side, right behind a crowd from planets not in

our astronomy; next come a dozen or two from Jupiter and other

worlds; next come Daniel, and Sakka and Confucius; next a lot from

systems outside of ours; next come Ezekiel, and Mahomet, Zoroaster,

and a knife-grinder from ancient Egypt; then there is a long

string, and after them, away down toward the bottom, come

Shakespeare and Homer, and a shoemaker named Marais, from the back

settlements of France."

"Have they really rung in Mahomet and all those other heathens?"

"Yes - they all had their message, and they all get their reward.

The man who don't get his reward on earth, needn't bother - he will

get it here, sure."

"But why did they throw off on Shakespeare, that way, and put him

away down there below those shoe-makers and horse-doctors and

knife-grinders - a lot of people nobody ever heard of?"

"That is the heavenly justice of it - they warn't rewarded

according to their deserts, on earth, but here they get their

rightful rank. That tailor Billings, from Tennessee, wrote poetry

that Homer and Shakespeare couldn't begin to come up to; but nobody

would print it, nobody read it but his neighbors, an ignorant lot,

and they laughed at it. Whenever the village had a drunken frolic

and a dance, they would drag him in and crown him with cabbage

leaves, and pretend to bow down to him; and one night when he was

sick and nearly starved to death, they had him out and crowned him,

and then they rode him on a rail about the village, and everybody

followed along, beating tin pans and yelling. Well, he died before

morning. He wasn't ever expecting to go to heaven, much less that

there was going to be any fuss made over him, so I reckon he was a

good deal surprised when the reception broke on him."

"Was you there, Sandy?"

"Bless you, no!"

"Why? Didn't you know it was going to come off?"

"Well, I judge I did. It was the talk of these realms - not for a

day, like this barkeeper business, but for twenty years before the

man died."

"Why the mischief didn't you go, then?"

"Now how you talk! The like of me go meddling around at the

reception of a prophet? A mudsill like me trying to push in and

help receive an awful grandee like Edward J. Billings? Why, I

should have been laughed at for a billion miles around. I

shouldn't ever heard the last of it."

"Well, who did go, then?"

"Mighty few people that you and I will ever get a chance to see,

Captain. Not a solitary commoner ever has the luck to see a

reception of a prophet, I can tell you. All the nobility, and all

the patriarchs and prophets - every last one of them - and all the

archangels, and all the princes and governors and viceroys, were

there, - and NO small fry - not a single one. And mind you, I'm

not talking about only the grandees from OUR world, but the princes

and patriarchs and so on from ALL the worlds that shine in our sky,

and from billions more that belong in systems upon systems away

outside of the one our sun is in. There were some prophets and

patriarchs there that ours ain't a circumstance to, for rank and

illustriousness and all that. Some were from Jupiter and other

worlds in our own system, but the most celebrated were three poets,

Saa, Bo and Soof, from great planets in three different and very

remote systems. These three names are common and familiar in every

nook and corner of heaven, clear from one end of it to the other -

fully as well known as the eighty Supreme Archangels, in fact -

where as our Moses, and Adam, and the rest, have not been heard of

outside of our world's little corner of heaven, except by a few

very learned men scattered here and there - and they always spell

their names wrong, and get the performances of one mixed up with

the doings of another, and they almost always locate them simply IN

OUR SOLAR SYSTEM, and think that is enough without going into

little details such as naming the particular world they are from.

It is like a learned Hindoo showing off how much he knows by saying

Longfellow lives in the United States - as if he lived all over the

United States, and as if the country was so small you couldn't

throw a brick there without hitting him. Between you and me, it

does gravel me, the cool way people from those monster worlds

outside our system snub our little world, and even our system. Of

course we think a good deal of Jupiter, because our world is only a

potato to it, for size; but then there are worlds in other systems

that Jupiter isn't even a mustard-seed to - like the planet Goobra,

for instance, which you couldn't squeeze inside the orbit of

Halley's comet without straining the rivets. Tourists from Goobra

(I mean parties that lived and died there - natives) come here, now

and then, and inquire about our world, and when they find out it is

so little that a streak of lightning can flash clear around it in

the eighth of a second, they have to lean up against something to

laugh. Then they screw a glass into their eye and go to examining

us, as if we were a curious kind of foreign bug, or something of

that sort. One of them asked me how long our day was; and when I

told him it was twelve hours long, as a general thing, he asked me

if people where I was from considered it worth while to get up and

wash for such a day as that. That is the way with those Goobra

people - they can't seem to let a chance go by to throw it in your

face that their day is three hundred and twenty-two of our years

long. This young snob was just of age - he was six or seven

thousand of his days old - say two million of our years - and he

had all the puppy airs that belong to that time of life - that

turning-point when a person has got over being a boy and yet ain't

quite a man exactly. If it had been anywhere else but in heaven, I

would have given him a piece of my mind. Well, anyway, Billings

had the grandest reception that has been seen in thousands of

centuries, and I think it will have a good effect. His name will

be carried pretty far, and it will make our system talked about,

and maybe our world, too, and raise us in the respect of the

general public of heaven. Why, look here - Shakespeare walked

backwards before that tailor from Tennessee, and scattered flowers

for him to walk on, and Homer stood behind his chair and waited on

him at the banquet. Of course that didn't go for much THERE,

amongst all those big foreigners from other systems, as they hadn't

heard of Shakespeare or Homer either, but it would amount to

considerable down there on our little earth if they could know

about it. I wish there was something in that miserable

spiritualism, so we could send them word. That Tennessee village

would set up a monument to Billings, then, and his autograph would

outsell Satan's. Well, they had grand times at that reception - a

small-fry noble from Hoboken told me all about it - Sir Richard

Duffer, Baronet."

"What, Sandy, a nobleman from Hoboken? How is that?"

"Easy enough. Duffer kept a sausage-shop and never saved a cent in

his life because he used to give all his spare meat to the poor, in

a quiet way. Not tramps, - no, the other sort - the sort that will

starve before they will beg - honest square people out of work.

Dick used to watch hungry-looking men and women and children, and

track them home, and find out all about them from the neighbors,

and then feed them and find them work. As nobody ever saw him give

anything to anybody, he had the reputation of being mean; he died

with it, too, and everybody said it was a good riddance; but the

minute he landed here, they made him a baronet, and the very first

words Dick the sausage-maker of Hoboken heard when he stepped upon

the heavenly shore were, 'Welcome, Sir Richard Duffer!' It

surprised him some, because he thought he had reasons to believe he

was pointed for a warmer climate than this one."

All of a sudden the whole region fairly rocked under the crash of

eleven hundred and one thunder blasts, all let off at once, and

Sandy says, -

"There, that's for the barkeep."

I jumped up and says, -

"Then let's be moving along, Sandy; we don't want to miss any of

this thing, you know."

"Keep your seat," he says; "he is only just telegraphed, that is

all."

"How?"

"That blast only means that he has been sighted from the signal-

station. He is off Sandy Hook. The committees will go down to

meet him, now, and escort him in. There will be ceremonies and

delays; they won't he coming up the Bay for a considerable time,

yet. It is several billion miles away, anyway."

"I could have been a barkeeper and a hard lot just as well as not,"

says I, remembering the lonesome way I arrived, and how there

wasn't any committee nor anything.

"I notice some regret in your voice," says Sandy, "and it is

natural enough; but let bygones be bygones; you went according to

your lights, and it is too late now to mend the thing."

"No, let it slide, Sandy, I don't mind. But you've got a Sandy

Hook HERE, too, have you?"

"We've got everything here, just as it is below. All the States

and Territories of the Union, and all the kingdoms of the earth and

the islands of the sea are laid out here just as they are on the

globe - all the same shape they are down there, and all graded to

the relative size, only each State and realm and island is a good

many billion times bigger here than it is below. There goes

another blast."

"What is that one for?"

"That is only another fort answering the first one. They each fire

eleven hundred and one thunder blasts at a single dash - it is the

usual salute for an eleventh-hour guest; a hundred for each hour

and an extra one for the guest's sex; if it was a woman we would

know it by their leaving off the extra gun."

"How do we know there's eleven hundred and one, Sandy, when they

all go off at once? - and yet we certainly do know."

"Our intellects are a good deal sharpened up, here, in some ways,

and that is one of them. Numbers and sizes and distances are so

great, here, that we have to be made so we can FEEL them - our old

ways of counting and measuring and ciphering wouldn't ever give us

an idea of them, but would only confuse us and oppress us and make

our heads ache."

After some more talk about this, I says: "Sandy, I notice that I

hardly ever see a white angel; where I run across one white angel,

I strike as many as a hundred million copper-colored ones - people

that can't speak English. How is that?"

"Well, you will find it the same in any State or Territory of the

American corner of heaven you choose to go to. I have shot along,

a whole week on a stretch, and gone millions and millions of miles,

through perfect swarms of angels, without ever seeing a single

white one, or hearing a word I could understand. You see, America

was occupied a billion years and more, by Injuns and Aztecs, and

that sort of folks, before a white man ever set his foot in it.

During the first three hundred years after Columbus's discovery,

there wasn't ever more than one good lecture audience of white

people, all put together, in America - I mean the whole thing,

British Possessions and all; in the beginning of our century there

were only 6,000,000 or 7,000,000 - say seven; 12,000,000 or

14,000,000 in 1825; say 23,000,000 in 1850; 40,000,000 in 1875.

Our death-rate has always been 20 in 1000 per annum. Well, 140,000

died the first year of the century; 280,000 the twenty-fifth year;

500,000 the fiftieth year; about a million the seventy-fifth year.

Now I am going to be liberal about this thing, and consider that

fifty million whites have died in America from the beginning up to

to-day - make it sixty, if you want to; make it a hundred million -

it's no difference about a few millions one way or t'other. Well,

now, you can see, yourself, that when you come to spread a little

dab of people like that over these hundreds of billions of miles of

American territory here in heaven, it is like scattering a ten-cent

box of homoeopathic pills over the Great Sahara and expecting to

find them again. You can't expect us to amount to anything in

heaven, and we DON'T - now that is the simple fact, and we have got

to do the best we can with it. The learned men from other planets

and other systems come here and hang around a while, when they are

touring around the Kingdom, and then go back to their own section

of heaven and write a book of travels, and they give America about

five lines in it. And what do they say about us? They say this

wilderness is populated with a scattering few hundred thousand

billions of red angels, with now and then a curiously complected

DISEASED one. You see, they think we whites and the occasional

nigger are Injuns that have been bleached out or blackened by some

leprous disease or other - for some peculiarly rascally SIN, mind

you. It is a mighty sour pill for us all, my friend - even the

modestest of us, let alone the other kind, that think they are

going to be received like a long-lost government bond, and hug

Abraham into the bargain. I haven't asked you any of the

particulars, Captain, but I judge it goes without saying - if my

experience is worth anything - that there wasn't much of a hooraw

made over you when you arrived - now was there?"

"Don't mention it, Sandy," says I, coloring up a little; "I

wouldn't have had the family see it for any amount you are a mind

to name. Change the subject, Sandy, change the subject."

"Well, do you think of settling in the California department of

bliss?"

"I don't know. I wasn't calculating on doing anything really

definite in that direction till the family come. I thought I would

just look around, meantime, in a quiet way, and make up my mind.

Besides, I know a good many dead people, and I was calculating to

hunt them up and swap a little gossip with them about friends, and

old times, and one thing or another, and ask them how they like it

here, as far as they have got. I reckon my wife will want to camp

in the California range, though, because most all her departed will

be there, and she likes to be with folks she knows."

"Don't you let her. You see what the Jersey district of heaven is,

for whites; well, the Californian district is a thousand times

worse. It swarms with a mean kind of leather-headed mud-colored

angels - and your nearest white neighbor is likely to be a million

miles away. WHAT A MAN MOSTLY MISSES, IN HEAVEN, IS COMPANY -

company of his own sort and color and language. I have come near

settling in the European part of heaven once or twice on that

account."

"Well, why didn't you, Sandy?"

"Oh, various reasons. For one thing, although you SEE plenty of

whites there, you can't understand any of them, hardly, and so you

go about as hungry for talk as you do here. I like to look at a

Russian or a German or an Italian - I even like to look at a

Frenchman if I ever have the luck to catch him engaged in anything

that ain't indelicate - but LOOKING don't cure the hunger - what

you want is talk."

"Well, there's England, Sandy - the English district of heaven."

"Yes, but it is not so very much better than this end of the

heavenly domain. As long as you run across Englishmen born this

side of three hundred years ago, you are all right; but the minute

you get back of Elizabeth's time the language begins to fog up, and

the further back you go the foggier it gets. I had some talk with

one Langland and a man by the name of Chaucer - old-time poets -

but it was no use, I couldn't quite understand them, and they

couldn't quite understand me. I have had letters from them since,

but it is such broken English I can't make it out. Back of those

men's time the English are just simply foreigners, nothing more,

nothing less; they talk Danish, German, Norman French, and

sometimes a mixture of all three; back of THEM, they talk Latin,

and ancient British, Irish, and Gaelic; and then back of these come

billions and billions of pure savages that talk a gibberish that

Satan himself couldn't understand. The fact is, where you strike

one man in the English settlements that you can understand, you

wade through awful swarms that talk something you can't make head

nor tail of. You see, every country on earth has been overlaid so

often, in the course of a billion years, with different kinds of

people and different sorts of languages, that this sort of mongrel

business was bound to be the result in heaven."

"Sandy," says I, "did you see a good many of the great people

history tells about?"

"Yes - plenty. I saw kings and all sorts of distinguished people."

"Do the kings rank just as they did below?"

"No; a body can't bring his rank up here with him. Divine right is

a good-enough earthly romance, but it don't go, here. Kings drop

down to the general level as soon as they reach the realms of

grace. I knew Charles the Second very well - one of the most

popular comedians in the English section - draws first rate. There

are better, of course - people that were never heard of on earth -

but Charles is making a very good reputation indeed, and is

considered a rising man. Richard the Lion-hearted is in the prize-

ring, and coming into considerable favor. Henry the Eighth is a

tragedian, and the scenes where he kills people are done to the

very life. Henry the Sixth keeps a religious-book stand."

"Did you ever see Napoleon, Sandy?"

"Often - sometimes in the Corsican range, sometimes in the French.

He always hunts up a conspicuous place, and goes frowning around

with his arms folded and his field-glass under his arm, looking as

grand, gloomy and peculiar as his reputation calls for, and very

much bothered because he don't stand as high, here, for a soldier,

as he expected to."

"Why, who stands higher?"

"Oh, a LOT of people WE never heard of before - the shoemaker and

horse-doctor and knife-grinder kind, you know - clodhoppers from

goodness knows where that never handled a sword or fired a shot in

their lives - but the soldiership was in them, though they never

had a chance to show it. But here they take their right place, and

Caesar and Napoleon and Alexander have to take a back seat. The

greatest military genius our world ever produced was a brick-layer

from somewhere back of Boston - died during the Revolution - by the

name of Absalom Jones. Wherever he goes, crowds flock to see him.

You see, everybody knows that if he had had a chance he would have

shown the world some generalship that would have made all

generalship before look like child's play and 'prentice work. But

he never got a chance; he tried heaps of times to enlist as a

private, but he had lost both thumbs and a couple of front teeth,

and the recruiting sergeant wouldn't pass him. However, as I say,

everybody knows, now, what he WOULD have been, - and so they flock

by the million to get a glimpse of him whenever they hear he is

going to be anywhere. Caesar, and Hannibal, and Alexander, and

Napoleon are all on his staff, and ever so many more great

generals; but the public hardly care to look at THEM when HE is

around. Boom! There goes another salute. The barkeeper's off

quarantine now."

Sandy and I put on our things. Then we made a wish, and in a

second we were at the reception-place. We stood on the edge of the

ocean of space, and looked out over the dimness, but couldn't make

out anything. Close by us was the Grand Stand - tier on tier of

dim thrones rising up toward the zenith. From each side of it

spread away the tiers of seats for the general public. They spread

away for leagues and leagues - you couldn't see the ends. They

were empty and still, and hadn't a cheerful look, but looked

dreary, like a theatre before anybody comes - gas turned down.

Sandy says, -

"We'll sit down here and wait. We'll see the head of the

procession come in sight away off yonder pretty soon, now."

Says I, -

"It's pretty lonesome, Sandy; I reckon there's a hitch somewheres.

Nobody but just you and me - it ain't much of a display for the

barkeeper."

"Don't you fret, it's all right. There'll be one more gun-fire -

then you'll see.

In a little while we noticed a sort of a lightish flush, away off

on the horizon.

"Head of the torchlight procession," says Sandy.

It spread, and got lighter and brighter: soon it had a strong

glare like a locomotive headlight; it kept on getting brighter and

brighter till it was like the sun peeping above the horizon-line at

sea - the big red rays shot high up into the sky.

"Keep your eyes on the Grand Stand and the miles of seats - sharp!"

says Sandy, "and listen for the gun-fire."

Just then it burst out, "Boom-boom-boom!" like a million

thunderstorms in one, and made the whole heavens rock. Then there

was a sudden and awful glare of light all about us, and in that

very instant every one of the millions of seats was occupied, and

as far as you could see, in both directions, was just a solid pack

of people, and the place was all splendidly lit up! It was enough

to take a body's breath away. Sandy says, -

"That is the way we do it here. No time fooled away; nobody

straggling in after the curtain's up. Wishing is quicker work than

travelling. A quarter of a second ago these folks were millions of

miles from here. When they heard the last signal, all they had to

do was to wish, and here they are."

The prodigious choir struck up, -

We long to hear thy voice,

To see thee face to face.

It was noble music, but the uneducated chipped in and spoilt it,

just as the congregations used to do on earth.

The head of the procession began to pass, now, and it was a

wonderful sight. It swept along, thick and solid, five hundred

thousand angels abreast, and every angel carrying a torch and

singing - the whirring thunder of the wings made a body's head

ache. You could follow the line of the procession back, and

slanting upward into the sky, far away in a glittering snaky rope,

till it was only a faint streak in the distance. The rush went on

and on, for a long time, and at last, sure enough, along comes the

barkeeper, and then everybody rose, and a cheer went up that made

the heavens shake, I tell you! He was all smiles, and had his halo

tilted over one ear in a cocky way, and was the most satisfied-

looking saint I ever saw. While he marched up the steps of the

Grand Stand, the choir struck up, -

The whole wide heaven groans,

And waits to hear that voice."

There were four gorgeous tents standing side by side in the place

of honor, on a broad railed platform in the centre of the Grand

Stand, with a shining guard of honor round about them. The tents

had been shut up all this time. As the barkeeper climbed along up,

bowing and smiling to everybody, and at last got to the platform,

these tents were jerked up aloft all of a sudden, and we saw four

noble thrones of gold, all caked with jewels, and in the two middle

ones sat old white-whiskered men, and in the two others a couple of

the most glorious and gaudy giants, with platter halos and

beautiful armor. All the millions went down on their knees, and

stared, and looked glad, and burst out into a joyful kind of

murmurs. They said, -

"Two archangels! - that is splendid. Who can the others be?"

The archangels gave the barkeeper a stiff little military bow; the

two old men rose; one of them said, "Moses and Esau welcome thee!"

and then all the four vanished, and the thrones were empty.

The barkeeper looked a little disappointed, for he was calculating

to hug those old people, I judge; but it was the gladdest and

proudest multitude you ever saw - because they had seen Moses and

Esau. Everybody was saying, "Did you see them? - I did - Esau's

side face was to me, but I saw Moses full in the face, just as

plain as I see you this minute!"

The procession took up the barkeeper and moved on with him again,

and the crowd broke up and scattered. As we went along home, Sandy

said it was a great success, and the barkeeper would have a right

to be proud of it forever. And he said we were in luck, too; said

we might attend receptions for forty thousand years to come, and

not have a chance to see a brace of such grand moguls as Moses and

Esau. We found afterwards that we had come near seeing another

patriarch, and likewise a genuine prophet besides, but at the last

moment they sent regrets. Sandy said there would be a monument put

up there, where Moses and Esau had stood, with the date and

circumstances, and all about the whole business, and travellers

would come for thousands of years and gawk at it, and climb over

it, and scribble their names on it.