

Gibraltar

by Mark Twain *from The Innocents Abroad*

Published in 1869, Mark Twain's book *The Innocents Abroad* tells of his trip through Europe and the Mideast in 1867. In this passage, Twain has arrived in Gibraltar, gateway to the Mediterranean Sea. He is taking a tour of Rock of Gibraltar and has already heard the story of the Queen's Chair which he says is "a legend that had nothing very astonishing about it, even in the first place."

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 hardly 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 a hill not far away, and a soldier said:

"That high hill yonder is called the Queen's Chair; it is because a queen of Spain placed her chair there once 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."

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 vessels seeming like the tiniest little toy boats were turned into noble ships by the telescopes, and other vessels 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 to the sea.

While I was resting ever so comfortably on a rampart, and cooling my baking head in the delicious breeze, an officious guide belonging to another party came up and said:

"Senor, that high hill yonder is called the Queen's Chair—"

"Sir, I am a helpless orphan in a foreign land. Have pity on me. Don't—now don't inflict that most INFERNAL old legend on me anymore today!"

There—I had used strong language after promising I would never do so again; but the provocation was more than human nature could bear. If you had been bored so, when you had the noble panorama of Spain and Africa and the blue Mediterranean spread abroad at your feet, and wanted to gaze and enjoy and surfeit yourself in its beauty in silence, you might have even burst into stronger language than I did.

Questions

1. Find a quotation from the passage that tells what Twain thought about the view.
2. How did the Spanish queen finally get to move from her chair?
3. What did Twain want to do rather than listen to the Queen's Chair legend again?
4. Do you think Twain's description of his Rock of Gibraltar tour encouraged others to go there? Why or why not?