

Sacramento Daily Union
April 16, 1866

San Francisco to Sandwich Islands—No. 1

(Correspondence of the Union)

On Board Steamer Ajax
Honolulu (H. I.), March 18th.

Climatic

We arrived here today at noon, and while I spent an hour or so talking, the other passengers exhausted all the lodging accommodations of Honolulu. So I must remain on board the ship tonight. It is Very warm in the stateroom, no air enters the ports. Therefore, have dressed in a way which seems best calculated to suit the exigencies of the case. A description of this dress is not necessary. I may observe, however, that I bought the chief article of it at “Ward’s.”

There are a good many mosquitoes around tonight and they are rather troublesome; but it is a source of unalloyed satisfaction to me to know that the two millions I sat down on a minute ago will never sing again.

Sea-Going Outfit

I will “bunch” the first four or five days of my “log” of this voyage and make up a few paragraphs therefrom.

We backed out from San Francisco at 4 P.M., all full—some full of tender regrets for severed associations, others full of buoyant anticipations of a pleasant voyage and a revivifying change of scene, and yet others full of schemes for extending their business relations and making larger profits. The balance were full of whisky. All except Brown. Brown had had a couple of peanuts for lunch, and therefore one could not say he was full of whisky, solely, without shamefully transcending the limits of truth.

Our little band of passengers were well and thoughtfully cared for by the friends they left weeping upon the wharf as ever were any similar party of pilgrims. The traveling outfit conferred upon me began with a naval uniform, continued with a case of wine, a small assortment of medicinal liquors and brandy, several boxes of cigars, a bunch of matches, a fine tooth comb and a cake of soap, and ended with a pair of socks. (N.B.—I gave the soap to Brown, who bit into it, and then shook his head and said that, “as a general thing, he liked to prospect curious foreign dishes and find out what they were like, but he couldn’t go that”—and threw it overboard.) This outfit is a fair sample of what our friends did for all of us. Three of our passengers—old sea captains, whalers—Captain Cuttle, Captain Phelps and Captain Fitch (fictitious names)—had bought eight gallons of whisky, and their friends sent them eleven gallons more. (N. B.—Owing

to head winds and a rough sea, this outfit did not hold out; the nineteen gallons were ample for the proposed eight-day voyage, but we were out upwards of ten days, you see. The whalers were all dry and unhappy this morning.)

“Making Sail”

Leaving all care and trouble and business behind in the city, now swinging gently around the hills and passing house by house and street by street out of view, we swept down through the Golden Gate and stretched away toward the shoreless horizon. It was a pleasant, breezy afternoon, and the strange new sense of entire and perfect emancipation from labor and responsibility coming strong upon me, I went up on the hurricane deck so that I could have room to enjoy it. I sat down on a bench, and for an hour I took a tranquil delight in that kind of labor which is such a luxury to the enlightened Christian—to wit, the labor of other people. Captain Godfrey was “making sail,” and he was moving the men around briskly. He made short work of the job, and his orders were marked by a felicity of language which challenged my admiration. Said he:

“Let go the main-hatch. Belay! Haul away on your tops’l jib! Belay! Clew up your top-gallants’l spanker boom halliards! Belay! Port your gaff-tops’l sky-scrapers! Belay! Lively, you lubbus! Take a reef in the lee scuppers! Belay! Mr. Baxter, it’s coming on to blow at about four bells in the hog-watch; have everything taut and trim for it. Belay!”

The ship was rolling fearfully. At this point I got up and started over to ask the Captain if it wouldn’t be a good idea to belay a little for a change, but I fell down. I then resumed my former seat. For twenty minutes after this I took careful note of how the Captain leaned his body to port when the ship lurched to starboard, and hard to larboard when she lurched to port, and then got up to practice a little. I only met with moderate success, though, and after a few extraordinary evolutions, fetched up against the mainmast. The concussion did not injure the mast perceptibly, but if it had been a brick house the case might have been very different. I proceeded below, rather discouraged.

Several Effects of the Turbulent Sea

I found twenty-two passengers leaning over the bulwarks vomiting and remarking, “Oh, my God!” and then vomiting again. Brown was there, ever kind and thoughtful, passing from one to another and saying, “That’s all right—that’s all right, you know—it’ll clean you out like a jug, and then you won’t feel so ornery and smell so ridiculous.”

The sea was very rough for several days and nights, and the vessel rolled and pitched heavily. All but six or eight of us took their meals in bed constantly, and remained shut up in the staterooms day and night. The saloons and decks looked deserted and lonesome. But gradually the sea sick unfortunates convalesced until our dinner complement was augmented to fifteen or twenty. There were frames or “racks” on the tables to keep the dishes in their places, but they did not always succeed in doing it. An occasional heavy lurch would hoist out a dozen and start them prospecting for the deck. Brown was bitterly opposed to the racks, and said he “Wasn’t raised to eat out of them brick moulds.” No rack would answer for soup. The soup plate had to be held in the hand and nicely tilted from side to side to accommodate the fluid to the pitching of the ship. The chairs were not fastened to the floor, and it was fun to see a procession of gentlemen go sliding backwards to the bulkhead, holding their soup plates on a level with their breasts, and

giving their whole attention to preventing the contents from splashing out. They would come back with the flowtide and sail away again on the ebb. It would not do to set a glass of water down. The attentive waiters kept bringing water to Brown, who was always talking, and would not see the glass set down in time to make his remark heard: "Frank, don't bring me any water; have to drink it at a gulp to keep it from spilling, and I've had more'n enough already." And yet about once every two minutes some passenger opposite would put up his hands and shrink behind them and exclaim, "Your water, Mr. Brown! your water! Look out for your water!" and lo, the suffering Brown would find his glass once more replenished and canting dangerously to leeward. It would be instantly seized and emptied. At the end of a quarter of an hour Brown had accomplished nothing in the way of dinner, on account of these incessant watery interruptions. The boy Frank brought another glass of water, and said, "Will you have some beefsteak, Mr. Brown?" "Take that water and go to blazes with it! Beefsteak! no! I've drank eleven gallons of water in fifteen minutes, and there ain't room enough in me for a sirloin steak off'm a sand-fly!"

Journal

Heaving my "log," I find the following entries on my tablets:

Wednesday, 7th—Left San Francisco at 4 P.M.; rough night.

Thursday—Weather still rough. Passengers nearly all sick; only half a dozen at breakfast out of thirty.

Friday—Strong gale all night; heavy sea on this evening; black overhead.

Saturday—Weather same, or more so.

You can take that four-days dose of your infamous "Pacific," Mr. Balboa, and digest it, and you may consider it well for your reputation in California that we had pretty fair weather the balance of the voyage. If we hadn't, I would have given you a blast in this letter that would have made your old dry bones rattle in your coffin—you shameless old foreign humbug!

MARK TWAIN

(Source: *California Digital Newspaper Collection*,

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