A Journey to California

I left Boston, Nov. 28th 1867, for New York, where I was to meet my mother and aunt, with whom I was to sail on the 30th for California. It was Thanksgiving day, and the cars were filled with persons, going to celebrate this New England festival at the various points upon the road. My uncle after having procured me a seat, bade me good bye, and the train was soon rushing along on its way to New York. We arrived at Springfield about noon, where we stopped half an hour for dinner. We then continued on our way down the winding Connecticut, passing through Hartford and New Haven and reaching New York at dark. The locomotive was then uncoupled and a team of horses attached to each car, which drew us through a long tunnel, running under a portion of the city, and into the depot, it being against the law to run locomotives through the streets. At the depot my aunt was awaiting me, and we were soon in our comfortable rooms at the St. Nicholas, where I again saw my mother after being absent for three weeks, which was a longer time than I had ever separated from her before. The next morning, in company with my aunt, I visited Wall St. to make some arrangements with regard to our steamer tickets. In passing along the street, one could but notice the immense quantity of gold and silver, in the form of bricks bars and coin displayed in the windows of the banks and brokers offices.

After our return to the hotel, while in the office, I accidentally found my cousin, a student at Yale, who had been spending Thanksgiving in New Jersey with some friends.

In the afternoon I visited Barnum museum, which was much enlarged since I visited it last. The chief attraction here, at the time, was the gorilla, recently brought from Africa, and said to be very strong and ferocious; but to me he did not appear much more formidable than a large monkey.

The same evening, as my cousin wished to see the “Black Crook” performed at Niblo’s Garden, he invited me to accompany him, and I enjoyed the play very much. The scenes were exceedingly beautiful, especially the final one, which was brilliantly illuminated with a red light.

On the following morning, Nov. 30th, we were up in good season and went down to the wharf to take possession of our state rooms aboard the Arizona, considered the finest steamer on the line. It was a busy scene on the steamer and wharf: people were hurrying to and fro; friends were bidding each other good bye; porters and hackmen were constantly bringing on piles of baggage and all was bustle and confusion. At length the gong sounded, and the porter, with his loud “all ashore who are going,” caused the adieus to be hastily repeated, and soon the steamer was cleared of all except the passengers, who crowded to the side, and as the guns were fired and the great vessel began slowly to move off, stood waving their hats and handkerchiefs to the crowd upon the pier and continuing to do so as long as they were in sight.

We sailed down the beautiful bay, passing Fort Lafayette and through the Narrows, and seeing numerous vessels at anchor in the Lower Bay. At length we reached Sandy Hook, and the pilot, who had been taking us out of the bay, went down the side into a little boat, which had been sent for him from a pilot-schooner, lying by at a short distance.
Then the great wheels began again to revolve, and we moved swiftly out into the ocean, and turned southward down the coast of New Jersey, which we remained in sight of for the rest of the day. That night was very cold, the water in the fire-buckets freezing quite hard.

We were obliged to retire early, as we found it very comfortless sitting up. The next day no comfort was to be found anywhere, except close to the steam heaters in the cabin and staterooms, and most of the passengers were as miserable as it was possible for them to be, being generally attacked by the malady, so prevalent among landsmen, known as sea-sickness.

The steamer was now bearing us into warmer latitudes, and each day the temperature grew milder. On the 2nd and 3rd nothing occurred, except that we sighted a schooner, whose foremast had been carried away, and the captain, thinking that she might be in distress, put about and signaled her, but the answer was that she did not need assistance, therefore we continued on our course.

About this time, I do not remember precisely on what day, we saw several porpoises, which played about the bows for some time; they reminded me very much of the pictures I had often seen of seals.

On the 4th we sighted San Salvador; it was the first land we had seen since leaving the Jersey coast, and we were all of course very glad to see it. The island is a small, barren, sandy, and unattractive-looking place, and one would hardly think that Columbus could have been very favorably impressed with this his first specimen of the New World.

All that day we were passing among the Bahamas, and the islands looked very beautiful with their strip of snowy beach, fringed with foaming breakers and beyond, the broad band of emerald-green water gradually blending into the deep dark blue of the ocean. Flying-fish now began to be seen very frequently, and it was a great amusement with us to watch them flash suddenly from the water, skim for a few rods over the surface, and then disappear as suddenly as they had appeared.

On the morning of the 5th we were passing through the Windward Channel with the coast of Cuba in plain sight on our right, the mountains towering high above the ocean, thickly wooded to their summit and stretching down the coast as far as eye could see and the whole forming a most magnificent landscape, while far away to the left like a dim blue cloud, we could indistinctly make out the outlines of Hayti. We did not lose sight of Cuba until late in the afternoon, when it gradually faded away in the dim distance and could not be distinguished from the blue sky of the Horizon. Towards evening we sighted the Island of Nevassa, lying west of the southern promontory of Hayti, whose coast lies just within sight. This is a very small island, and is noted for the large quantities of guano shipped to various parts of the world; several vessels were lying at anchor and loading with this article when we passed. The guano is dug from the top of the island—which is very considerably elevated above the sea—and is thence conveyed through long shutes into lighters which take it out to the ships.

We were now fairly into the Caribbean Sea and for the next two days we were bowling along with the trade wind on our quarter, which made it quite rough; but this is
always the condition of this remarkable sea and by the second day we were pretty well accustomed to it.

It was a favorite amusement with me to stand on the lower deck, which was not very high above the water, and watch by the hour the dark blue waves, capped with crests of glittering white foam.

The steamer would give a great lurch to one side, and the opposite paddle-wheel would be lifted high out of the water, and seem to hang motionless waiting for the next plunge, and then down it would go churning the water into snowy foam and causing the waves to mount higher and higher until they threatened to wash over the bulwharks(sic) and inundate the deck. The tops of the waves occasionally did wash over and once while standing by the side with my aunt and one or two others, a big boisterous roller more ambitious than his fellows, came sweeping along, dashed his cap in our faces and gave us a salt-water bath gratis. Unfortunately for my aunt she had no other dress to put on, as our trunks were packed and in the hold, so she was obliged to retire to her state-room until her clothes could be dried at the galley fire.

On the morning following the incident I have just mentioned (It was Sunday the 8th of December) I was up before it was light to catch the first glimpse of Aspinwall. For a long time I strained my eyes in vain, but at length I dimly made out a low flat coast ahead of us. As it grew lighter and as we drew nearer the coast, I could see that we were approaching the mouth of a bay with sandy banks on either side covered with low trees and bushes. Instead of going straight across the bay to the town, we made the circuit of it, on account of the channel I suppose, and describing almost a circle glided up to the wharf after a passage of over eight days from New York. There was a crowd of natives on the wharf, in very thin and scanty clothing and with tremendous broad-brimmed hats.

The scene upon the shore was very strange and foreign to me; the rank vegetation, the tall palm-trees, the queer-looking huts and the large scavenger-birds perched upon their roofs and upon the neighboring trees, were so unlike anything I had ever seen before that it hardly seemed possible that but a few days had suffered to carry one away from all the familiar scenes of home. It was with much regret that we bade adieu to our home of a week, which had become endeared to most of us even in that short time.

We landed on the wharf about 8 A.M. and proceeded down the long covered way leading to the shore, under which the waves dashed and gurgled with a hollow sound. Passing from the wharf through a large wooden gate, guarded by two soldiers in red uniforms, stationed there by the Company, we emerged into a short sandy street extending to the main thoroughfare through which ran the railroad track. On one side of this street was a large white frame building, used by the Company as an office, or for some similar purpose; it was surrounded by a yard and garden, in which we noticed large rose-bushes in full bloom, and also a tall branching shrub, covered with creamy bell-shaped blossoms, the name of which we learned was the “Gloria Mundi.” A group of palm-trees, the first of which I had ever obtained a near view, stood in front of the house. They were several in number and grew close together, apparently having a common root, their smooth slender trunks rose to the highth(sic) of fifty feet or upwards, crowned at the
top with large tufts of beautiful fern-like leaves. Enormous bunches of cocoanuts, covered with their thick green husks and looking very unlike the ones we see at home, were clustered around the tops of the trees, adding greatly to the beauty of their appearance.

At length we reached the cars, which stood in the center of the principal street of the town and around which swarmed a crowd of natives of both sexes with every imaginable kind of tropical fruit for sale, and yelling their respective merits at the top of their lungs. The cars were different from those at home, being narrower and shorter with low seats, which, instead of being cushioned, were constructed like our ordinary cane-bottomed chairs, while there were no glass windows, only blinds, which could be lowered when needed to exclude sun or rain. When we were fairly seated in the cars, we had an opportunity to observe everything around us: native men and boys crowded and struggled through the narrow aisle selling fans, cigars, fruits, nick-nacks, and counterfeit pearls, which they passed off for genuine ones—a rather lucrative business, I should think, as they brought from two to three dollars each. The place in which the cars stood could hardly be called a street, first because it was so broad and also because it was built up only on one side. The houses on this side were large brick or adobe buildings; several of them were hotels and eating-houses; I noticed in one a billiard-saloon, in another the lower floor was occupied by stores, while still another somewhat apart from the rest, was evidently a private residence, though it appeared more like a jail with its unglazed windows, protected by heavy iron shutters and looking very strange and foreign indeed. At length the train moved off, and we were quickly out of the town and dashing along towards Panama between two masses of tropical vegetation the like of which I had hardly even dreamed of before. There were the broad-leaved banana(sic) trees, loaded with fruit and looking more like gigantic ferns than anything else I could think of; there were several species of palm-trees with clusters of fruit, unknown to me, hanging from their tops; there too were the great rose-wood and mahogany trees, lifting their dark green heads high above the surrounding vegetation and entwined with rope-like vines, which, climbing up their massive trunks and creeping out to the extremities of their long limbs, would drop down and take root in Mother Earth whence they came. At intervals we passed native villages, which consisted of only a few huts, built of cane and thatched with grass and leaves; they swarmed with men women and children particularly the latter, many of whom entirely lacked clothing of any kind. At one of these villages in which the train stopped, we noticed a small shop where long strips of meat were sold by the yard—a custom which I had heard of but never seen before.

The train made several short stoppages at the houses of some employees of the road; these were generally pretty white frame buildings and were surrounded by a picket fence enclosing a yard full of orange lemon and banana(sic)-trees, loaded with fruit and looking very beautiful. At one of these stoppages, while looking out of the window, I noticed that the ground was covered with a small plant with delicate pink flowers, which I discovered to be the sensitive plant, so carefully nourished at home; the stalks were thick and in some instances almost woody; while the old leaves would not close at the touch as the young ones would.
We crossed the muddy Chagres several times on iron bridges; for wooden ones would be eaten away and undermined by the ants and other insects of the country which are so destructive that even the telegraph poles have to be sanded.

Near the middle of the Isthmus the country is much higher than in the vicinity of Aspinwall; and, in fact, on the whole northern side the country is low and flat and abounds in swamps and jungles, while in the interior we saw many beautiful mountains which were thickly wooded to their very summits, many of the trees being a perfect mass of white blossoms and standing out in beautiful contrast to the dark green foliage. As we passed a small stream, I caught a momentary glimpse of a very picturesque little water-fall, tumbling over a small precipice but it was only a glimpse, and the train dashed on, hiding it from my sight behind the tangled mass of trees and vines.

A long screech from the whistle at length announced our approach to Panama, and we soon arrived at a covered depot, built upon the wharf, amid a babel of tongues that was perfectly indescribable. We passed from the cars to the tender, which lay at the other end of the wharf, between two lines of soldiers who were stationed there to keep back the crowd of natives which thronged the wharf on all sides and through which it would have been next to an impossibility to have made our way, had it not been for this protection. The tender was a very small steamer, built for the purpose of carrying passengers to the steamship, which always lay at anchor several miles out in the bay, not being able to come nearer on account of the shallowness of the water.

Our six hundred passengers were crammed into this little craft with some difficulty, and we now realized for the first time the feelings of chickens, packed in coops for market or of cattle being shipped by rail from one point to another. Soon the wheels began to turn and the steamer moved away from the wharf and proceeded down the bay to where the Montana, the consort of the Arizona lay at anchor some seven miles distant.

She went at a very snails pace; but even this had its advantages as it enabled us to get a good view of the old walled town of Panama, with its red brick houses, some of them in ruins and with young trees growing in the crevices of the walls, at the tall round towers of its mission church rising high above all other buildings, and looking altogether so foreign and so like the pictures I had often seen of Spanish American towns, that it seemed impossible for one not to know, without being told, in what part of the world he was. There were a dozen or more vessels lying in the bay, several of them being steamships, one of these I noticed in particular, it was the U.S. sloop-of-war Suwanee a double-ender with pilot-houses at both ends and a portable rudder which could be changed at pleasure.

Many of the vessels were foreigners and near the Montana lay a large full-rigged English merchantman, her hull painted green, but looking very clumsy and ungraceful in spite of her imposing size. A full opportunity for observing all this was afforded us, as we crept along on our way to the Montana, and we were beginning to tire of our slow progress when at last we brought up close to the side of the great steamer and soon the little tender was pouring out its stream of human life, which flowed over the gang-plank and dispersed itself throughout this great floating hotel, which was to be our home for the next two weeks.
All that afternoon we lay at anchor, occasionally changing our position slightly, as the current shifted, so that our view was not always the same: thus at one time we could see from our state-room door, far away across the waters of the broad bay, a lofty mountain-range stretching away to the outward, while at another we could catch a glimpse of the little settlement near the anchorage or of some little islet rising high above the water and clothed to its summit in a robe of verdure. Towards the middle of the afternoon the baggage arrived in two lighters which are large boats very much resembling canal-barges—towed by the tender which brought the passengers onboard. The baggage of the cabin-passengers was stowed in the hold through a small port-hole close to the water-line, while that of the steerage passengers had to hoisted(sic) over the side and lowered down into their quarters through the hatch-way by means of a derrick and a small floating steam-engine kept there for such purposes.

At nine o’clock that evening the anchor was weighed the guns boomed forth their farewell and the Montana sailed down the bay on her way to San Francisco. For the next three days nothing of importance occurred, as we ran along the coast of Costa Rica and Nicaragua for two days, while on the third we were not in sight of land at any time. On the fourth day from Panama we were in sight of some very high mountains though we could not see the coast; they were said to be forty miles inland, while we were about sixty miles from the coast, thus making them about a hundred miles distant.

I also heard that they were from eight to ten thousand feet high, and I judged from the distance we had sailed that they were in San Salvador or Guatemala. On the 13th (the fifth day from Panama) we ran along the coast of Mexico all day. The country was mountainous and of a dark brown color from the chaparral which covered the mountains in every direction. We saw many flying fish after leaving Panama, though I had supposed that they were not common on the Pacific coast. Occasionally a shoal of porpoises would swim alongside the ship sometimes coming very close to us, so that we had a good opportunity to observe them, and though the steamer generally made ten miles an hour yet they would keep up with us for a long distance with apparent ease, even leaping out of the water in the exuberance of their strength and spirits.

One day as I was looking over the side from the lower deck I saw what appeared to be a small snake; I watched the water for a little while and soon saw another which was undoubtedly a small striped brown and white snake; at first I thought they were dead, but after watching a little while longer, I saw another which lifted up its head from the water, so I concluded that they were either sea snakes or that they had drifted out to sea from some river into which they had fallen. We saw no houses or other signs of human life on this coast, and in fact on all the coast from Panama to San Francisco all appeared a silent and deserted wilderness.

We arrived at Acapulco on the morning of the 17th where we were to deliver freight and take on coal. We had been running close to the coast all the morning when the steamer suddenly turned into a little indentation in the shore, where no town was visible and which appeared to extend inland for a short distance only; but still we kept on, and soon discovered a narrow opening between the mountains which they had hid before by appearing to fit closely together, and through which we now glided into a beautiful land-locked bay surrounded by mountains at whose foot lay the town of Acapulco. Now that
we were in the bay it was almost impossible to tell where we had entered and it seemed as though we were lying in some peaceful inland lake.

We made fast to a large iron bouy (sic) anchored near the center of the harbor, and very soon a boat containing the Health Officer of the port put off from the shore, and that official came onboard to let the captain know the state of health in the town, as it would not be safe to allow the passengers to land if any epidemic prevailed there. The boat of the Health Officer had hardly left the steamer before a great crowd of boats and canoes shot out from the sandy beach in front of the town and made with all speed towards us. The first that reached us were some trim little row-boats with striped awnings to shield their passengers from the burning sun; these might be swung down into an upright position in the centre of the boat while she was taking in her load of shore-goers for they are used only for taking visitors ashore by which business they make a very good profit as they charge half a dollar a head. Most of these boats were carpeted and cushioned very tastefully, and were named from eminent American generals as Sherman and Grant, while one took its name from the presidents of the two republics The Lincoln and Juarez.

Being invited to go ashore by a gentleman, whose acquaintance I had made, I took my place in one of these little craft together with a dozen or more others. Our united weight brought the gunwale down nearly to the level of the water and I thought it was rather ticklish business especially when I remember the great sharks I had seen swimming around the steamer, and considered how easy it would be for one of them to crunch off a leg or arm in case of an upset; but I soon began to feel easier as we shot out from the crowd of boats and as the rowers pulled with long and steady strokes towards the shore, making the little craft fairly fly through the smooth water, barely ruffled by a gentle breeze, which made us all feel as though we would like nothing better than to glide on in this way throughout the whole day. We passed dozens of boats and canoes, hurrying to the steamer to dispose of their cargoes, and in a short time reached the shore and grounded with a thump on the sandy beach, here the rowers leaped out into the shallow water and pulled the boat higher up on the sand; then a plank was placed from the boat to the dry land, on which precarious footing we all soon reached the shore. After having paid the boatman and engaged him to be on hand when we wished to return, we proceeded to “do” the town at our leisure(sic).

The first place that I visited was the stands where fruit was sold; they were situated under a very large tree which spread its branches far out in every direction, and afforded shade for nearly all of them. All the fruits of this climate were to be found here, and of course every one invested in it pretty freely, though for my own part I ate very little as I had been advised before leaving the steamer not to do so, however I put up a good supply for future use, and did not repent it afterwards. I then bought a goodsized piece of coral and a pair of very pretty shells for a dime which I thought was very cheap though I suppose that the native woman who sold them to me thought that she had decidedly the best of the bargain. Leaving our purchases in the care of a fruit-stand-keeper we went farther up into the town to see all that was to be seen, which was not very much in the eyes of a traveler but to me everything was new and interesting. Near the
centre of the town stood an old Catholic church evidently built a century or more ago; in its belfry hung several old bells whose cracked and discordant tones rung out with a harsh and clanging sound very unlike our own church-bells. Near this church there was also a small open place or square in the centre of which was the basin of what was evidently once a large brick fountain, long since overgrown with moss and weeds and perfectly dry.

All the houses in the town with the exception of a few were built of adobe and had thatched or tiled roofs, the eaves of which came down so low that they could almost be reached with the hand from the ground thus giving the street a very queer appearance especially, as there were no sidewalks except where the stores were situated. When we had gone through the town pretty thoroughly we returned to the fruit-stands where we stayed a short time before going aboard again.

About noon we returned to the steamer with baskets hats and handkerchiefs crammed with oranges, lemons, limes, bananas, pineapples, etc.; we soon had them stowed away in our state-rooms, and most of the boys, at least, were observed to be in a chronic state of sucking oranges or eating bananas for the rest of the voyage.

The steamer was completely surrounded with boats and canoes filled with natives in very primitive costume the majority of them indeed being reduced to a broad palm-leaf hat and a very dirty shirt. The manner of selling fruit and other articles was curious: on a person’s signifying a desire to purchase, a coil of rope was thrown up to him, with a basket attached about midway from the extremities; in this the money was lowered and then the basket, filled with the desired article, was drawn up, the native keeping hold of his end of the rope and steadying it as it ascended. One of the natives in a boat divested himself of his clothing—which operation did not occupy a very great amount of time, as he had no paper-collar or neck-tie to take off and as he was not likely to become embarrassed with a knot in his shoe-strings—and jumped into the water, where he dived for silver, thrown overboard for him, notwithstanding that the sharks were swimming all around the vessel. He expressed great disgust when some nickel cents were thrown to him and he had his dive for nothing.

At 4 P.M. the gun was fired as a signal for all boats to leave the steamer and, at 5 we cast off from the bouy and sailed slowly out of the bay. I never shall forget the beauty of that harbor; shut in on every side by mountains, covered with vegetation and without a glimpse of the ocean whence we came, it only seemed as though we were lying in some peaceful inland lake. As we moved towards the mouth of the harbor it was impossible to tell where the entrance was, and not until we were almost in it could a break in the mountains be observed. Gradually, as we rounded the point, the picturesque little town, with its low thatched roofs, overlooked by the rude fort of earthwork and bordered by its snowy beach, disappeared and the green wall closed behind it. We continued in sight of land for the rest of the day and nothing of any note occurred.

On the following morning we were still in sight of land and the sea was like a mirror, not a breeze ruffling its glassy surface, though the long regular swell of the ocean made the steamer roll slightly.

The day being Sunday, in the afternoon service was held in the cabin, an Episcopalian minister officiating; a small table, draped as usual with the American flag,
served as a pulpit, though it had the disadvantage of being in the centre of the cabin so that the minister could not face all his hearers at once. About five in the afternoon we reached Manzanillo, a place much smaller than Acapulco, the principal buildings being the residence of the consul and a few other houses, evidently erected by foreigners or belonging to the government, all the rest of the town consisting of a mere collection of huts straggling irregularly over the stretch of ground between the mountains and the beach. Very few boats came off here, and those that did come contained a rather poor fruit at very high prices, so that very little trade was carried on.

A boat containing some officials came off to the steamer; they were all dressed in the full Mexican costume: broad-brimmed hats, jackets adorned with a row of silver buttons down the front, pants very broad at the bottom and slashed, while in the place where the stripe comes on a pair of military pants was another row of silver buttons, set very close together. They were accompanied by a couple of soldiers, dressed in a uniform of red pants and blue coat, with a cap like that worn in the U.S. Army; but in spite of their brilliant colors they were very dirty and unsoldierly appearing men, and did not look as though they would be worth much in a fight. There were many large sharks in this bay, and one was constantly seeing them swimming about, their dark triangular fins visible above the surface and cutting the water like a knife, always on the alert for any scraps or offal which might be thrown from the steamer, when they would turn over on their side, displaying great double rows of saw-like teeth and would gulp down the floating morsel at a mouthful.

Manzanillo seemed as inaccessible from the interior as Acapulco had, being shut in by the mountains in every direction, whose steep sides were covered with chaparal and cactus, the latter reaching the height of small trees with most of their branches growing at right-angles with the trunk and then turning short up again and rising into the air without a single curve. We saw a mule-train beginning to wind up the mountains, as we anchored, which proved that there was some other means of entering this secluded nook than from the sea. As it grew dark one by one bright fires sprang up all along the shore where the natives were probably cooking their suppers: whatever they were doing the fires had a very pretty effect and I shall not soon forget the scene.

Soon after this as I felt very much like the youth who wasn’t lazy but was “born tired,” I withdrew to my narrow top shelf for the night, and do not remember anything further except indistinctly hearing the gun fired at our departure.

The following day no land was visible as we were crossing the Gulf of California, whose waters were stained a clay-red in blotches and patches of some extent, which gave the sea a very singular appearance. I was told that this was caused by the Colorado river discharging its waters into the head of the gulf after flowing for some distance through a re-clay bed. We passed Cape St. Lucas on the 18th; there were no signs of vegetation upon this barren coast nothing but rocks and sand-hills, with a little scanty parched-looking grass here and there, stretching away as far as the eye could reach. This cape is at the southern extremity of Lower California and belongs to Mexico.
On the 18th and 19th no land was visible and nothing relieved the monotony of the scene. We ran very slowly now, as by the rules of the S.S. Company the steamer was not allowed to enter San Francisco before the 22nd.

On the 20th we were in plain sight of the California coast, which was very bold and rugged and appeared to be covered with pine or cedar trees, that stood out sharply defined against the sky. December 21st was dull and uneventful, though of course there was some stir of preparation for the landing on the following day; we ran very slowly, as we were only a hundred and eighty miles from our destination at noon. About three or four o’clock on the morning of the 22nd, we awoke to find the steamer pitching and rolling at a tremendous rate; the wind whistling through the rigging overhead like a gigantic aeolian harp and our trunks sliding up and down the state-room with each successive roll of the ship. We lay quiet however until daylight when I got up and dressed myself and stepped out on the deck; the wind immediately tore the door out of my grasp and it required all my strength to shut it again. I then walked down the deck to the cabin-stairs, which were situated just opposite the paddle-box and to reach which one was obliged to pass through a narrow covered passage between the paddle-box and the upper-works of the steamer where our state-rooms were situated. The force of the wind here was perfectly tremendous, as it was compressed in so narrow a space, and it was with the greatest difficulty that I could keep from being blown off my feet before reaching the stair-way door. The storm had arisen about 12 o’clock that night and increased in violence until the captain, finding that it would be impossible to enter port with such a wind and sea, put about and faced the wind to avoid being blown ashore. For the first time I realized the expression “waves mountain high,” for they really did seem like mountains, especially when one stood in the stern where the great vessel could be seen to poise herself on the summit of a wave, and then plunge down into the abyss below, until one would catch his breath in expectation of the shock, while right astern of us, and towering high above our heads as we sank down into the trough, boiled and foamed the angry wave, as though in impotent fury at our escape. The wheel in the stern was manned by two men as the violence of the waves was such that the one in the bow was not sufficient to control the rudder. The steamer had just enough steam on to keep her head to the wind so that we made very little progress during the day. I thought that after all I heard of the serenity of this ocean, that this was anything but “Pacific,” though up to this no one had had any reason to complain of bad weather, as the sea for the most part had been as smooth as glass.

On the forward deck it was next to an impossibility for a man to keep his feet, and a line was extended from the pilot-house to the cabin-stairway, by which the officers and sailors might pass along the deck with safety.

At the table very few were present, as most of the passengers were confined to their state-rooms by sea-sickness; for my own part I was not at all affected by the violent motion of the ship, which so upset others, and in fact I rather enjoyed it than otherwise, as I had never seen any very rough weather before. The storm continued to rage with
unabated fury until evening when the wind began to go down, and by nine o’clock it had so far moderated as to allow of the steamer’s being put about and headed once more towards San Francisco.

The captain said that he had not experienced so severe a storm on that coast for sixteen years. Although it was Sunday no service was held the ministers were all too sick to officiate, and most of their congregation were in no better condition. Everyone went to bed that night feeling somewhat easier, though some were alarmed in the night by the frequent stoppages and soundings which were made, as the captain did not know where we were, and as it would have been dangerous to proceed without those precautions. The next morning on rising I found that the storm was over, though there was a heavy swell on as is usual after a blow. A heavy fog hid everything from our sight, and no one had any idea where San Francisco was, or rather where we were; the general opinion seemed to be that we had drifted during the night far north of that port, perhaps even to the coast of Oregon. But at length our doubts and fears were all dispelled by the lifting of the fog, which revealed to us the land some two or three miles distant, and which land proved to be the California coast a short distance south of San Francisco. When this became known there was of course a great change in our feelings; before all had felt gloomy and sad, now every one was overjoyed at the prospect of reaching land safely again, especially as no one liked the idea of spending the Christmas holidays tossing about on the ocean shut out from all the enjoyments and recreations which make that season so dear to us all.

Many of our passengers were Californians, returning from a visit to friends and relatives at “home”, as they style the Eastern States, and as we drew nearer the mouth of the bay familiar landmarks began to be pointed out with joyful exclamations. Among the prominent points was the Cliff House on the sea-shore just outside the Golden Gate and built as its name implies on a low cliff, at whose base the sea continually breaks. Just in front of the Cliff House and only a little way from the land are the Seal Rocks so called from the great numbers of seals which come out of the water and bask in the sunshine on their steep and slippery sides, sometimes even climbing to the summit of the highest ones. As we passed these rocks we could see the great rollers sweep over the highest of them, which must have been sixty or seventy feet high, completely hiding them for a moment, while perfect cataracts of water poured down their sides making a magnificent spectacle. Gradually the ocean narrowed into the bay as we passed through the far-famed Golden Gate through which so many thousands had gone before us and out of which had sailed such countless treasures of shining wealth dug from the bosom of this golden state. In my opinion the bay well merits the praises that have been bestowed upon it; it stretched out before us as far as the eye could reach, while on either side rose high hills with no trees growing on their brown sides, and with no vegetation of any kind, yet in spite of their barrenness, looking more beautiful than any I had seen before. On one side of the Golden Gate is Fort Point, a large substantial brick building which we saluted as we passed, while on an island on the left hand side of the bay stands Fort Alcatraz very similar in appearance to the one just mentioned. Just opposite San Francisco is a third fort, whose name I do no know, situated like Fort Alcatraz on a small island.
We had now come about opposite the city and a queer looking city it was: built over several hills and at that distance appearing to have no regularity or order in its arrangement, it looked as though the houses perched upon the hills would some day slide down upon those below them and add still more to the general confusion.

We passed along the greater part of the water-front of the city before we arrived at the wharf of the Pacific Mail Co., which was a large covered building, upon which a crowd had congregated to witness our arrival: an event which probably excited considerable interest as we learned afterward through the papers that doubts were entertained as to our safety during the storm, which was said to be the most violent one experienced on the coast since 1849. Presently the lines were made fast to the wharf, the gang-plank was thrown out and here ended my voyage to California, after a passage of twenty three days form New York and fifteen from Panama, though I do not here wind up my narrative. The steamer was immediately inundated by a swarm of porters, hackmen, omnibus-drivers and the like, all shouting the names of the different hotels for which they were running.

We had intended stopping at the Cosmopolitan; but a runner from the Lick house came onboard with a card from a friend who had stopped there but a short time before, advising us to go to that hotel, as it was considered the best in the city and commending us to the care of the proprietor. Our plan therefore was changed, and with much regret we bade adieu to the Montana, and were soon installed in an elegant coach belonging to the above mentioned hotel, which takes its name from its owner Mr. Lick. After all our luggage had been piled on, we started slowly down the wharf and arrived at the great wooden gates which separate it from the streets outside, and through which the crowds are not allowed to come, and passing between two rows of men, drawn up very much after the manner of soldiers on each side of the way, gained the open street at last. We afterwards learned that it was customary for a crowd to collect as we had seen them, on “steamer day” to have a look at all who came from “home.” The streets of the city were broad and in most instances well paved, while on either side in the yards of the dwelling-houses the grass was as fresh and green as though it had been May instead of December, and in the flower-beds were beautiful white lilies in full bloom, looking still more beautiful after the recent rains. We proceeded for a long distance up hill and down before we reached the more business portion of the city and drew up before the door of the Lick house, occupying the front of nearly one block. We were shown upstairs into a large finely-carpeted hall with a parlor adjoining, while directly at the head of the stairs was a small room, with a counter across its front, used as an office.

We were next conducted to our rooms which were just across the hall from the dining room; they consisted of three elegantly furnished apartments and a bath-room all approached by a short hall, branching off from the main one and closed by a door. Soon after being established in our new quarters, we went into breakfast, though it was after ten o’clock and were astonished at the beauty and taste displayed in the dining-hall. It is entered on three sides by massive doors of mahogany and laurel so heavy that it is an effort to open or shut them;