

Memories of Lagunes
Impressions of Mexico
Chico

USS Lackawana, Mazatlan, Mex. 2/16/76

My dear Mother, I have not written soon because there has been no opportunity of sending mail since our arrival on the Mexican Coast; but as the Pacific mail steamer is expected here in a day or two on its way from Panama to San Francisco I will endeavor to have a line ready to apprise you of my good health and general comfort.

We reached San Blas on the 10th after a pleasant passage of two weeks' sailing from San Francisco. As San Blas is a place of little interest containing only a population of a few hundred and possessing no mentionable attractions, we remained but a short time, and continued our course to this point which we reached yesterday morning. I have been to all these places along the coast during a previous cruise and have no doubt said something of each in previous letters; so that if I should be guilty of repeating the same stories over, you will understand the cause and not attribute it to a chronic disposition to inflict stale yarns upon a helpless reader, but rather refer it to my natural forgetfulness. I don't think that I ever received credit for quite the amount of absent mindedness which used to be awarded to Decatur although I am sure I quite deserved it. You remember he used to be sent to the store for sugar or coffee and was always sure to bring back molasses or vinegar or anything in the world but the right article. Well, I think I did the same thing occasionally but somehow I signally failed to achieve a reputation in that line such as I gained in another equally notorious direction.

You will no doubt at once guess that I refer to my notoriety as the laziest of the family. I know that I deserve that name, and I often wonder how in the world you ~~can~~ ever had the patience to endure my outrageous indolence. I am quite ashamed of it now, and can only forgive myself on the ground that I couldn't help it and "Boys will be boys"! I recall to mind the astonishment I excited in Ellen's mind during one of her visits to Riley by coolly dozing back in a chair when the announcement was made that the cows were in the cornfield, and virtuously exclaiming after a pause--"There the boys sit just as unconcerned. This little speech ran in Ellen's mind for many a day after that and she made me hang my ~~head~~ head many a time by repeating it with all the pardonable exaggerations and adornments that a fertile mind could invent.

However I commenced to remark that San Blas is a little one-horse, ugly, miserable village--the houses of which consist generally of a mere structure of sticks, brush,

stones and palmetto thatched roof arranged in the most primitive style, about fifteen square feet of earth and only possessing a single room which serves for kitchen, bedroom, and parlor. This is the general style of architecture although there are a few moderately fair exceptions. The strangest part is that the old town of San Blas situated on the Bluff a mile or two farther back, although now in a state of ruins, was at one time a thrifty, handsomely built city having every impress of the beauty and refinement of a high order of civilization. The Pirates descended upon it from time to time, however gradually stripping it of its wealth and attractions until at last the better class of inhabitants fled to the interior adding their industry to the growing city of Tepic, while the ~~wretched~~ wretched ones having nothing to fear from the depredations of robbers and only caring to eke out the simple existence which a tropical climate would afford without labor, lazily settled down by the beach near the clams and fish and birds, and founded the present uninviting village of San Blas. Many of the walls of the houses in the old town are still standing, and the old Catholic Church remains with its strong walls and wide doorway and ponderous bell, a monument of the piety and prosperity of a race at that time strong and unimpaired by revolution and degeneration. Revolution! Mexico seems to be near free from that curse of enterprise and advancement. Mazatlan an old and moderately thriving city has nothing worthy of the name of dock or place for landing or shipping goods; the crippled landing is full of holes and dangerous for the unwary stranger, and the waters of the harbor are rendered unsafe by the presence of sunken rocks which might easily be blown to atoms by a slight expenditure of money converted into labor and aided with nitroglycerine or gunpowder. A handsome stone pier was commenced and gotten ell under way when yesterday the ~~telegraph~~ telegram came from the city of Mexico. "Suspend work at once and return the appropriation to the general government which will requite all its resources to suppress the Revolution!" One has to visit any foreign government, especially Mexico, to fully appreciate the noble advantages which our own republican institutions, supported by a brave, intelligent, patriotic people possess over every other. Several of the states of this Godforsaken so-called republic are in open revolution and tomorrow may be the dawn of another Administration which will only draw the first gasps of corrupt existence, fall into inextricable entanglements and die the feeble death of its predecessors. "History

repeats itself"--and repeats itself with astonishing rapidity down here.

We expect to remain here about a week and then take our departure for Guaymos.

After Guaymos LaPaz, and after LaPaz Acapulco and back again to San Blas which we hope may prove our point of departure for the Sandwich Islands. It will seem like home to me to get back there once more and will form an agreeable feature of our cruise to everyone. By the time it may be growing warm enough to make it desirable for us to get away from Mexico anyhow; for when it does get warm here it is warm in earnest, although just now the climate is delightful--neither too hot nor too cold. I visited the city this afternoon having nothing else on hand to do, and spent two or three hours prying about looking into the customs and industries of the place. There is enough evidence of thrift and enterprise among the people to surprise anyone who has only visited such lifeless Mexican ports as LaPaz or Acapulco; and a number of useful factories and foundries and the like are in active operation. The people of course speak Spanish, although many of them have managed to pick up a smattering of English so that it is not difficult for an American to find his way among them even without possessing the slightest knowledge of the Castilian. The inhabitants may be seen of almost every shade of color from the blonde to the Negro black, but the prevailing complexion is that of the dark sallow looking brunette.

Our life on board ship is about the same old story: get up in the morning, wash, and go to bed, with a little variation every day in the shape of drills, and a daily diversion when off duty at some interesting game such as chess. I gained quite a reputation down at San Blas by badly beating their last player who had hitherto considered himself invincible. The first day I won five out of seven games and the next time I got all seven. However there wasn't much glory in that, although it is pleasant to be the best player on board ship. I often think of the pleasant hours which Clayton and I used to spend in that way and I live over the delightful moments of a past that can never return.

Greetings to the family. Yours truly,
CP Rees