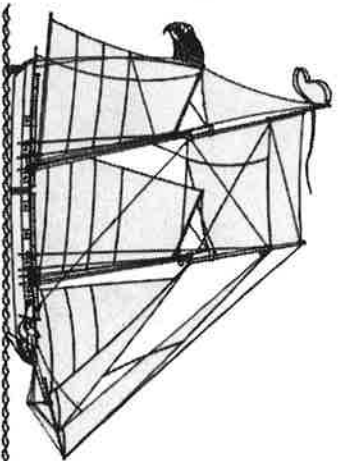




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Mark Twain in Key West

After gold was discovered in California in 1849 the best route from the East Coast of the United States to California was via ship to Central America and first by horse, later by train, across to the Pacific and then by ship to West Coast ports near the gold fields. The ships going in both directions would stop in Key West for coal, water and supplies. In January 1867 a young Mark Twain, Samuel L. Clemens, (1835-1910) stopped in Key West and reported his visit in the San Francisco newspaper the "Alta California."

San Francisco "Alta California,"

March 17, 1867

By Mark Twain

Steamer San Francisco At sea, January 1st

Underway again

All this morning the surfboats were busy bringing New York passengers ashore from the steamer **San Francisco**, and carrying us out to take their places - and all in the midst of a heavy sea and a drenching rain. We took our places in the surfboat at 8 A.M. and with the first stroke of the oars we were soaked to the skin. Yet it was very pleasant. It was quite a picture to get a misty and momentary glimpse of the boat ahead of us through the driving rain, as it rose high upon the crest of a lofty wave, and then sank down, leaving nothing visible in all the wide horizon but the rainy sea.

It was dreary enough on the ship when we got there, squatting around on the wet promenade deck watching baggage and looking soaked, woe-begone and discolorate. We were well satisfied, though, for the boat loads that were leaving the vessel every moment were bound for vastly drearier quarters. We sailed at noon.

Our confounded Choir

Midnight - There goes that choir again:



Mark Twain. Photo credit: Monroe County Library.

"God save the good ship as onward she flies!

We're homeward bound! homeward bound!"

That is well enough - I like that. But usually they do sing the wretchedest old songs in the world. Think of them sitting up there, under these jeweled skies, with

all the ocean around them glistening with whitecaps, piping "Just Before the Battle, Mother!" and "Johnny Comes Marching Home!" and "Lily Dale!" and "Dog Tray." When they sing hymns they do well enough and make good music, but perdition catch their other efforts!

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