

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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California By Sea

Today we will continue the description of California as traveled by sea, written by Henryk Sienkiewicz, a Polish writer, who won the Nobel prize for his famous book "Quo Vadis." The description was translated by Stefan Koper of the Army Language School Polish Department.

"The black rock along the coast looked from the distance as if completely covered by vermin, stirring and crawling like caterpillars, shining from the morning dew. These were sea lions. When the ship came closer some of them threw their huge bodies into the water, splashing it into thousands of particles. Others, especially the old males, raised their heads and opening their jaws greeted us with the bull's low roar, while the females half their size, barked at us as a flock of dogs. A swarm of grey and white sea gulls soared above those rocks, and still higher the hot sun shone.

"Seen from the distance the high shore surmounted by towering cliffs, over which appeared the green tops of trees. Here and there a stream rushed down white as a milky cascade. Sometimes a fisherman's hut appeared, small, adhering to the rock like a beetle or snail's shell. In a word, it was a beautiful seascape, full of simplicity, sun, air and water. The whole of our company admired it; there was no one in the cabins below. All were sitting on the deck. Delight was seen on the faces.

"Nice weather, the beautiful sea and landscape there is no seasickness. The old "Mohongo" shivers as if her engines would burst. Let her shiver. We do not care, we are sailing. Similar feeling is always on any ship during good weather. The sick people feel better, the sad ones more mirthful. We are sailing forward; behind us extends the wide path of the foam beaten by the ship's paddlewheels, over us the seagulls fly. We play throwing them cores of apples. Several birds dive for each one, the cry arises. Noise and disorder. One gull catches the core and cries with joy – the others with anger. They probably abuse each other and then a new apple core makes an arc toward the water and everything is repeated from the beginning, and we laugh as at the wittiest joke. Such are the passengers' amusement.

"After awhile another novelty. "What's that? They ask on the ship's deck. There is a sea turtle, which has

become entangled in the paddlewheels. The ship slows down, sailors draw out the unfortunate turtle, and the steward assures us that we will have it in the soup at supper. We answer with a general hurrah!

Some passengers would like to swim. Others among them myself, listen to the stories told by a traveler who by the way is a liar. Such individual is found on every ship. He has a paper shirt color, a hat with a frayed brim, and he keeps his hands in his pockets. He assures us that we will see the flying fish soon.

"Calling on my recollection of zoology for help, I shyly interrupt him and ask if he is not of the opinion that one could find flying fish closer to the equator. "Is it so?" he asks, not being put out of countenance at all and winking at me. 'Have you seen a sea serpent?'

"No.'

"That's fine because I haven't either.'

"Everybody laughs and he is the victor because there is no more talk about the flying fish but everyone talks about the sea monster which neither of us have seen.

"I have not seen such a joyful company in my whole life. Any reason, however small, is good enough to cause laughter, and we burst out laughing like children. From below deck for instance, appears a Chinese head. He looks around and called with a nasal voice, 'Jeh-hang! Jeh-hang!' Soon on the whole ship one can hear 'Jeh-hang!' and for all questions there is only one answer, 'Jeh-hang!' The exultations all around. It seems to me I am in bedlam, but I myself am absolutely no better than the others.

"It is dinner time. We have broth of turtle with pepper, beef with pepper itself. It is too much even for Americans. Some laugh, others are angry with the cook, still others ironically call stewards for more pepper. In the meantime a Negro lights the lamps, dinner is coming to an end and we go again to the deck."

(To be continued)