Mark Twain's Letters from Hawaii Study Guide

Mark Twain's Letters from Hawaii by Mark Twain

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

Mark Twain writes a series of travel letters from Hawaii, intended for publication in the Sacramento Daily Union. Each chapter corresponds to a single letter written by Mr. Twain between the months of April and November of the year 1866. The first three chapters cover Twain's turbulent voyage to Hawaii, where much of the crew becomes seasick and where the author rails against Balboa for naming the uncooperative ocean "Pacific."

Chapters four through six offer Twain's first impressions of Hawaii, which is largely positive. By the end of chapter six, Twain is a full-fledged tourist, joining equestrian tours of Hawaiian landmarks. After advancing a detailed argument of why San Francisco should join the whaling trade, Twain examins in chapters twelve and thirteen Hawaii's legislature, which he finds to be full of buffoonery.

The longest and most involved chapter is fifteen, which relates the detailed account from the officers and crew who survived the burning of the clipper ship Hornet, and who were forced to endure forty-three days adrift on the open sea. Chapters sixteen and seventeen are dominated by the month-long mourning and subsequent burial of Her Royal Highness the Princess Victoria Kamamalu Kaahumanu, heir presumptive to the crown.

Chapter eighteen begins the final arc of the collection as Twain departs Honolulu for Hawaii to see the great volcano. He arrives at Kealakekua Bay, visiting the site of Captain Cook's murder. In chapter twenty-one Twain digresses to tell the story of Lord George Paulet, the foolish Englishman who briefly usurped control of the Hawaiian Islands, and in chapter twenty-two Twain discusses the Hawaiian god Lono.

Twain spends chapter twenty-three thoroughly examining the Hawaiian sugar trade, comparing local sugar production to comparable plantations in the States. After describing Hawaii's more favorable growing conditions, Twain strongly advocates an American interest in Hawaiian farming, even suggesting that a monopoly might be possible. He advises that Americans should consider Chinese "coolie" labor rather than the more expensive white labor.

Chapter twenty-four details Twain's visit to Hawaii's fabled city of refuge, where he and colleague Mr. Brown find ancient human remains in a nearby cave. Soon after, the two men board a ship for the wet, tropical paradise Waiohinu, where Twain encounters a more primitive sample of natives who still worship the Hawaiian shark god. After hiring an English-speaking guide, he departs on the final leg of his journey.

The collection ends with Twain's visit to the crater of Kilauea, a still-active volcano some three miles in diameter. After sunset, Mark Twain and company marvel at the natural wonder as they look upon an infernal landscape of spitting fire and lava. The ruddy glow of the volcano illuminates the sky for miles in every direction.

Chapters 1-3

Chapters 1-3 Summary and Analysis

Mark Twain writes a series of travel letters from Hawaii, intended for publication in the SACRAMENTO DAILY UNION. Each chapter corresponds to a single letter written by Mr. Twain between the months of April and November of the year 1866. The first three chapters cover Twain's turbulent voyage to Hawaii, where much of the crew becomes seasick and where the author rails against Balboa for naming the uncooperative ocean "Pacific."

As Chapter 1 begins, Mark Twain boards the steamer Ajax in a drunken state, like his fellow passengers. The ship is soon beyond the Golden Gate and out to rough seas. After failing to attain his "sea legs" Twain goes below deck with a newly won concussion. The constant rocking of the boat makes life difficult, and several passengers fall seasick. Considering the ocean's violent behavior, Twain questions the wisdom of having named it "Pacific."

In Chapter 2, Twain continues the tale of his voyage. The winds die down due to the intervention of the "old nor'west swell," turning Twain's thoughts to trade winds and oceanic currents. Mark Twain abruptly diverts from his story to rail against Balboa, the explorer who gave the Pacific its name. Twain argues that the ocean is peaceful for only four months a year. The remainder of the time, he observes, the Pacific is rough and disagreeable.

Twain points out that the Ajax plowed through the tangled pacific in just over ten days, arriving only a day later than a faster clipper leaving left San Francisco three weeks before. He argues that steamers, being better suited to rough seas, are superior trade vessels for the Pacific, at least for eight months of the year. With steamers, Twain continues, America can rapidly populate the Hawaiian Islands with Americans, thus regaining the U.S.'s lost foothold in the region. He reminds Californians that there is much profit to be made in Hawaiian trade.

Twain returns to the tale of his voyage. The passengers, bored with sea life, amuse themselves by teasing the ship's livestock, a collection which includes a bull, some sheep and a pig. Anxious for any kind of diversion, the passengers are amused when Twain's colleague, Mr. Brown, is comically overjoyed at learning that someone has selected a name for the pig. Sadly, Dennis the pig enjoys only a short period of celebrity before he is summarily executed and converted into pork chops. Twain passes the time by playing "euchre" with the sailors but is confounded by their strange vernacular.

Twain opens Chapter 3 by confessing that, though he has been landside for two days now, he still hasn't seen enough of Hawaii to yet speak of it with confidence. He therefore returns to his tale of the voyage.

Twain notes that Ajax's officers all have extensive military experience, having served America's Navy in the war. Ajax was intended to serve as a warship, her steam engine laid out horizontally beneath the waterline, hidden from the path of cannonballs. Thinking of the ship's sweltering fire room, Mark Twain advises anyone with romantic seafaring notions against the prospect of becoming a coal shoveler. Firemen, he claims, live an average of five years.

Twain again abandons his tale to press the cause of America's trade with Hawaii. California, he points out, always has a budgetary deficit, effectively causing a drain on the American economy. He compares this to Hawaii, which, for a modest investment on America's part, pays close to half-a-million dollars a year in customs alone. Twain advocates that Congress encourage trade with Hawaii by moderating the taxes. He also reiterates the notion that America should encourage people to relocate to Hawaii.

Convinced that steamers are the best method to convey passengers between America and Hawaii, Twain suggests that America subsidize steamers in exchange for having them carry mail. By way of example, he compares the Ajax, an example of American steamer manufacture, to a hypothetical steamer created by the China Mail Company. The Ajax, he argues, is smaller and thus better able to access harbors. He argues that smaller steamers like the Ajax could be sub-let to the China Mail Company. Twain reminds the reader that the China company isn't likely to release a smaller steamer for another year. He suggests that America not waste any time.

Chapters 4-6

Chapters 4-6 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 4, Mark Twain offers a poetic account of the Ajax's first sighting of the islands Oahu and Molokai. The Ajax raises the Hawaiian and American flags, both identifying its nationality and deferring to the local government. It's Sunday morning, so the steamer is welcomed by church bells. There are now six churches within five miles of an ancient pagan temple.

The ship is welcomed at the pier by several hundred people, roughly half of which are "half-naked" Hawaiians wearing some sort of native dress. Twain pays particular attention to the "very pretty" native women, who ride their horses "astraddle." He is, however, disappointed to see that the King himself is not in attendance.

Twain, ten days unshaven, visits a barber. Afterward, wandering the streets of Honolulu, Twain notes the absence of the creaking ship beneath him; walking on solid ground again proves something of an adjustment. Twain is pleased by Honolulu. It has the sort of homes and estates to which he is accustomed, but in the place of San Francisco's more tiresome qualities, Honolulu offers a touch of the exotic in the form of fragrant plants and an unfamiliar culture. Curiously, Twain also notes that Honolulu is overrun with cats of various shapes and sizes.

Reading over Twain's shoulder, Mr. Brown takes issue with the author's assessment of Hawaii, arguing that Twain ought to mention the more negative aspects of the region, such as the heat or the prodigious number of insects. Twain dismisses these factors as mere trifles, hardly worth mention.

Twain opens Chapter 5 by praising Hotel American, which proves far more comfortable than he had anticipated. He warns however that the washwoman's practice of rock-pounding on garments can prove ruinous to shirt-buttons. Water is plentiful and provided via leaden pipes, though ice is not available. Most fruit, Twain reports, is superior to what might be found stateside. Twain describes several local Hawaiian trees, comparing them favorably with their American counterparts.

Twain isn't impressed with Hawaii's selection of cigars, wines and liquors. He finds their cigars, called Manilas, unsatisfying and weak in flavor. Luckily, a native provides the author with some Oahu tobacco that proves adequate. While liquor is abundant in Hawaii, it isn't of the best quality. Twain cautions anyone thinking to bring American liquor to the islands lest they risk confiscation.

Twain notes that everyone seems to be a ship captain, missionary or a whaler. If not one of those, then he or she is a member of his majesty's government. Mark Twain offers a humorous example of etiquette whereby a newly-met someone moves through

a succession of assumptions regarding who Twain is and what he does and is finally relieved to discover that the author is just an ordinary American citizen.

Twain opens Chapter 6 by complaining of saddle-soreness, launching into the tale of his day-long equestrian adventure. Having stayed overlong in his visit to the Government Prison, Mark Twain is rushed via buggy to join the tour of Diamond Head and the King's Coconut Grove. Twain comically observes that Captain Phelps is far too proud of his ancient, dilapidated horse-and-buggy. Having missed his tour group, Twain—who is none too fond of riding—rents a rather sad-looking horse with which to overtake his group. The horse proves humorously uncooperative, even falling asleep at one point during the trip. Very uncomfortable, Twain rails against the flawed design that is the American saddle.

Twain also warns the reader against the Hawaiian horse trade, arguing that the horses are as poor as the traders are dishonest. He relates a few humorous anecdotes whereby a horse trader tricks a hapless buyer. Twain also gives the reader a quick rundown of how much it costs to buy and feed a horse in Hawaii.

Twain passes the King's Grove, where the king likely vacations in a small cottage. He also passes an ancient heathen temple, where human sacrifices are thought to have once occurred. Twain pauses to reflect on Hawaii's barbaric past, marveling at how far they've come.

Chapters 7-9

Chapters 7-9 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 7, Twain, still on horseback, catches up with his tour group. The trek proves uncomfortably long and takes the group over precipitous terrain. The tour guide unwittingly traps the group between precipices and the rising tide. Luckily a native Hawaiian appears and shows them the path to safety.

Free at last, the entourage soon finds itself at the site of an alleged ancient burial ground, which amounts to a sandy pit filled with human bones. The tourists take several bones as souvenirs. Mark Twain takes some bones as well, but blames the church and government for allowing them to remain uncovered. Mark Twain considers the legend of the supposed ancient battleground, and while the story is pretty enough, he thinks the "battleground" is more likely a mass grave of plague victims.

Once Twain's horse realizes that the group is homeward bound, it bolts ahead of the pack. Later, encouraged by the attention of an attractive young woman, Twain is disappointed to learn that she has concluded, based on his dubious riding behavior, that he is drunk. Twain reflects on how, even in Hawaii, he finds evidence of American culture. Natives often sing American tunes in their own "barbarous tongue." Mark Twain is, however, annoyed by their song selections.

Twain opens Chapter 8 with another equestrian excursion, this time astride a slightly better horse. Twain and colleague Mr. Brown makes their way through the Saturday market. The market is an "exhilarating spectacle" of flowing, brightly clothed women and exotic, tattooed men from the "sunny isles." Noting the sale of poi, Twain speaks disapprovingly. Poi is too sour for his taste. Twain is also disgusted by the idea of sharing a meal eaten with a single finger, particularly since many of the natives look less than clean.

Twain recalls the Saturday market as it used to be, before the laws of white men, when the streets were so choked with people on horseback that white people stayed indoors for fear of being trampled. Since that time the church and government have worked together to tame the market. In particular, notes Twain, the "lascivious" hula dance has been heavily curtailed. Twain also recounts his trip to the Government Prison, which he found cleaner and more livable than any American counterpart, with a veritable garden just out the back door.

In Chapter 9, Twain recounts the "sad" tale of one Mrs. Captain Jollopson. Unfortunately the tale is all but undecipherable until Twain, after the story, explains the tangle of slang and jargon commonly used by island whalers. He compares this slang to vernacular more familiar to his American readers. Twain also apologizes, explaining that he chose this lighter topic because he wasn't yet prepared to address the more involved matter of Pacific whaling traffic.

Chapters 10-12

Chapters 10-12 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 10, Twain tackles the topic of Pacific whaling traffic. The trade is centered in Honolulu. Without whaling, Twain admits, Honolulu would wither away. Nevertheless, Twain advocates that San Francisco divert the trade to its own harbor, bringing in several hundred thousand dollars a year. Twain runs through the numbers on sailors, their ships, and how best to accommodate both. He also looks at the prices of both oil and whalebone and the profit that each might bring San Francisco. He admits that the "palmy days" of whaling are in the past but notes that the market is once again on the rise.

Twain does a side-by-side comparison between San Francisco and Honolulu. Honolulu frowns on its citizens being recruited as sailors - not so San Francisco. San Francisco is also closer to the whaling lines, has a more stable economy, and can insure sailors directly. San Francisco also has the Facilities for chartering, equipping, provisioning and recruiting whalers as well the technology to facilitate communication between client-vessels and investors.

To encourage the relocating of whaling traffic, Twain advocates that San Francisco limit the practice of "pulling"—the practice by which a sailor might sue his captain for wrongful treatment. This, Twain points out, is the biggest reason that Captains are disinclined to do business through San Francisco. He also suggests that San Francisco make a stronger effort to show due respect to whaling captains.

Beginning Chapter 11, Mark Twain speaks of the lovely scenery in Nuuanu Valley. He and his fellow tourists are impressed at seeing sunset in Pari but reason that its charming neighbor, the Kalihi Valley, is prettier still. Twain paints a poetic picture of its wooded inclines contrasted with the nearness of the sea. He also describes the lovely flora and fauna near a mountain stream.

Already on the subject of scenery, Mark Twain describes Sam Brannan's palace, also known as "the Bungalow." Once a handsome estate, complete with veranda and a Corinthian-column-supported portico, the building has since fallen to ruin. The roof is now split open and it stands full of weeds. Though efforts are being made to restore the building to its former glory, Twain believes it is a lost cause.

Not far from "the Bungalow" is the King's palace, located on a plot of land large enough to accommodate a village. It has all the amenities that one might expect from a building intended to house a head of state, including a royal council chamber, an audience chamber and a royal library. While there, Twain is permitted to examine the original royal cloak, made from the bright yellow feathers of the man-of-war or tropic bird as well as a wooden spear some seven centuries old.

Mark Twain opens Chapter 12 by describing the Hawaiian legislature. The government is comprised of three parts: The King, the Nobles and the House of Representatives (also known as the Commons.) The Nobles, backed by The King, have more political clout than the more numerous Common representatives. This is due to a large degree to the king's veto power. Mark Twain notes that in the past when the House denied the King's efforts to rewrite the constitution, the King dismissed the House and then with the Commons out of the way, wrote and ratified the version of the document which persists to the current day.

The legislature consists of half a dozen white men and roughly three times as many natives. The head of the assembly is His Royal Highness M. Kekuanaoa, father of the King. Twain marvels that this old, dignified man served as a warrior savage some half century earlier under the command of Kamehameha I. Twain's opinion of the Legislative Assembly is no greater than his opinion of any similar assembly—which is to say, not very high. Twain describes the proceedings, which involve the usual sort of point and counterpoint of any legislative committee.

Twain apologizes for his six week lapse in correspondence, explaining he has been on the island of Maui. He announces that it will be another five or six weeks until he writes again. He leaves for leaves for the island of Hawaii tomorrow and his Maui notes will not be written until he returns.

Chapters 13-14

Chapters 13-14 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 13, Mark Twain continues to discuss Hawaii's legislature, observing that they seem to have no regular order of business. Jumbled together are motions, resolutions, notices, introduction and the reading of bills. Twain watches as arguments storm back and forth across the floor, as the discussion wanders away from the question before the assembly.

Twain hones in on His Excellency Minister Harris, describing the man in the most unflattering way possible. Twain characterizes Harris as a pseudo-intellectual windbag built upon showmanship and pretense, a career politician who feeds on the Hawaiian government like a parasite.

Twain briefly wonders how it is that these ministers never accuse one another of corruption, wondering whether it is virtue or perhaps because none of them could be trusted to accept a bribe without gossiping about it. He does note, however, that legislative etiquette is generally lacking, with ministers often eating, sleeping and lounging in the hall.

Twain closes the chapter by dispelling the myth surrounding the King of Hawaii. While he was once a drinking, carousing sort, he has since abandoned this lifestyle, fully embracing the responsibility of leadership. Twain also relates the income of the King, suggesting that it is adequate for the modest state in which the King indulges.

Beginning Chapter 14, Mark Twain writes that he has just returned from a three-week trip to Hawaii, but is presently too tired to write at length. He notes that Hawaiian politics is in an uproar over the death of Her Royal Highness the Princess Victoria Kamamalu Kaahumanu, heir presumptive to the crown.

Twain examines Princess Victoria's life, noting that she was educated, an accomplished musician, and a friend to the Royal Hawaiian Church. He also notes that, as the heir presumptive, there was a great deal of interest surrounding her decisions. Despite constant pressure she refused to join the Reformed Catholic Church.

Mark Twain describes the ceremony of handling Victoria's remains. She is to lie in state for four weeks, adorned, decorated and protected by an honor guard. Every night a new chant is sung in the death chamber. Outside, masses of natives howl and wail, many of their number remaining both day and night. Unfortunately, due to the recent disrespectful behavior of whites observing the ceremony, the proceedings are now restricted to natives. Any information that Twain hears must therefore be second hand.

Twain reasons that Hawaiian missionaries are unduly judgmental and presume to know the will of God. He admits that he, too, is judgmental, but characterizes his judgment as qualitatively different in that he claims no divine authority. As a mere human, Twain

admits, his judgment may err. With this said, Twain voices his disagreement with the opinion of Bishop of Honolulu, Mr. Staley, who believes that the Hawaiians were religiously better off before the arrival of American missionaries.

Quoting "Jarves' History of the Sandwich Islands," Twain establishes that Hawaiians, prior to missionary influence, traditionally mutilated the corpse of the departed, and following the death of a high chief, all manner of mayhem was permitted, including gambling, theft, murder and wholesale debauchery. With this in mind, Twain concludes that the Mr. Staley is wrong.

Twain reasons that the throne will now either go to Prince William, a sensible man who happens also to be a heavy drinker, or David Kalakau, the shrewd unassuming man who holds the office of King's Chamberlain. Twain enumerates the many comings and goings of high profile Americans visiting Hawaii and also notes, in a post script, that nineteen sailors were recently rescued from the ocean after forty-three days adrift at sea.

Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary and Analysis

Twain relates a detailed account from the officers and crew who survived the burning of the clipper ship Hornet. After forty-three days adrift on the Pacific, fifteen men (differing from the earlier number of nineteen) drifted ashore, in weak and starving condition. Twain introduces his principle interview subject, third mate John S. Thomas, as a serious, stoic young man of impeccable character.

The Hornet left New York on January 15th, fully manned, carrying a cargo of kerosene, iron, and three engines. The weather was uncommonly good. On April 12th the Hornet hailed a Prussian bark. This would be the last ship to see the Hornet afloat. On May 3rd a crewman, against the captain's orders, went below deck to draw some "bright varnish" with an open flame in hand. The liquid took fire and the flames rapidly spread to the kerosene.

The alarm was sounded. Within ten to fifteen minutes the main mast was aflame, the rigging burned. Within an hour the mizzenmasts were burnt in two and had fallen overboard. Captain Mitchell ordered the lifeboats launched immediately. Little was saved other than a small amount of food. Within forty minutes the provisions were split among the three lifeboats and each was underway. The heat was great, and the sea illuminated for miles.

The captain took command of one of the boats and gave command of the other two to his first and second mate. Then men crafted a crude sail from the Hornet's studding sail and the captain's vessel took the lead with the other two tied in tow. They kept in the track of vessels heading to and from San Francisco.

Food was rationed, each man given a short allowance. For two weeks rain provided adequate water, with crewman using every available container, even boots, for water catchment. In the month that would follow, however, water would prove scarce.

The crew was depressed, yet the captain was still hopeful of reaching the Clarion Islands. A week went by with little conversation. For several days in row they were able to catch dolphins but then never again. On the eighth day rations were halved. As luck would have it, however, they were able to catch and eat a sea turtle.

Ten days passed, with each man taking only meager meals. On the eighteenth day the captain ordered the ships untethered, reasoning that it would triple the chances of one boat seeing rescue. The three boats solemnly bid farewell to one another and parted ways. Mark Twain remarks here that the men have nothing but good to say about Captain Mitchell, who seems as selfless and as steadfast as anyone might wish a leader to be.

On the eighteenth day two skinny birds were caught and divided among the men. Later on that fateful day, Richard, a well liked crewman, passed away. The starving crew never considered the possibility of eating their beloved friend. On the nineteenth day the men began observing an evening prayer. Three days later, on the 21st day, they briefly contacted the chief mate's boat.

One the 24th day the captain decided that reaching the Clarion Isles was an impossibility. Instead he set course for the distant Hawaii and ordered that rations be further reduced. Despite the dire predicament, the captain raised the crew's spirits with humor. Then men sleep little, but when they do they dream of food. On the 28th day rations were reduced once more.

Rations are continually reduced until they finally ran out altogether, after which the men ate rags, boots and the remnants of a butter tub. They began to consider cannibalism when, on June 15th, land was spotted. Seeing the boat was headed for the breakers, natives swam out to guide it in. Twain closes the chapter with a quick rundown of the survivors. His admiration of the crew, and its remarkable captain, is apparent.

Chapters 16-17

Chapters 16-17 Summary and Analysis

As Chapter 16 begins, the princess has now lain in state for a month. The national mourning continues, with foreigners still forbidden from participation due to the shameful behavior of a few early attendants. Mark Twain is happy to learn, however, that foreigners will be allowed to view the finale performances in the palace yard from the veranda of Dr. Hutchinson's house (The Minister of the Interior).

From his vantage point on the veranda, Mark Twain watches as thousands of natives prepare for the ceremony. For a moment Mr. Harris is mistaken for the King. Here Twain digresses to again share his poor opinion of Harris, relating an event in the legislature whereupon Harris was shown up by a common citizen. Presently a dozen native women begin to gesture and wail as the rite begins.

Mr. Brown is critical of the performance, but Twain checks him, reminding his colleague that the "solemn and impressive" rites were rescued from oblivion by Lord Bishop Staley. In light of Twain's later comments regarding Staley, this rebuke is likely facetious. Several more women sing Christian hymns but with words in native Hawaiian. The performance is interrupted by frequent wailing from the native crowd.

Several men play drums for the audience, a performance which isn't to Mark Twain's taste. Brown makes a disparaging comment, and once again Twain rebukes him. Following is a performance of hula dancers, which Brown again criticizes. This time Twain refrains from comment. He too feels that the hula is inappropriate as a funeral rite.

Twain writes that he does not blame the Hawaiians for their lingering love of ancient customs but does fault Bishop Staley for reviving the customs of a "barbarous age." Feeling that the missionaries had deprived the Hawaiians their culture, Bishop Staley actively encouraged the islands to indulge their old customs, forestalling Hawaii's "progress" out of barbarism. Twain claims that even Bishop Staley now recognizes that he was wrong to encourage Hawaiians in this way.

Twain writes that Staley was foolish to think that the "cheap magnificence" of his Catholic rituals would take root in Hawaii's more earthy rites. After all, the Americans have instilled the Hawaiians with a puritan distrust for such things. Twain characterizes the Bishop's Reformed Catholic Church as of the Established Church of England, a faith which even Catholics won't accept as Catholic. Here Twain describes the Bishop's showy services in detail. Twain closes the chapter with a few good words about the French Roman Catholic Mission, also present in Hawaii.

In Chapter 17, Twain's funeral coverage continues. Members of the government assemble for the funeral. Since the princess was not a member of the Reformed

Catholic Church, Twain notes, Staley will not be permitted to officiate. Many people, both foreign and native, gather to watch the funeral procession. With its bright colors, music and constant wailing, the procession proves quite a spectacle. Twain is impressed by the exhaustive list of dignitary attendants.

Having seen enough, Twain quits the procession and moves to the mausoleum. Seeing the building, he is reminded that, in ancient times, the bones of Hawaiian leaders would need to be hidden lest someone make fishhooks from them. Twain reasons that the mausoleum is large enough to accommodate the bones of many kings to come.

The procession's arrival is marked by a gun salute. Prince William and the King (at last) make an appearance. Twain notes a show of suitable deference toward His Majesty and describes the king in favorable terms, claiming that his photographs don't do him justice. Mark Twain notes that the only man drawing more attention than the King is the ostentatious Minister Harris.

In contrast, Twain offers an account of Kamehameha's funeral, held one year before the arrival of missionaries. When the King grew ill, his attendants suggested that men be sacrificed to forestall his illness. The king refused; in lieu of human sacrifice, three hundred dogs were offered instead. A pig was roasted and offered to the corpse so that the departed king would become a god. Since the land was polluted by the king's passing, the new king was forced to live elsewhere. With the king departed to new lands, the chiefs mourned Kamehameha's passing by behaving like beasts and madmen.

In a postscript, Twain adds that one General Van Valkenburgh happened upon a human tooth while idly punching into a wall of lava. Twain wonders how it got into the side of a mountain of lava, seven hundred feet above the valley. He recalls that chiefs' remains were often thrown into volcanoes to keep them from being disturbed.

Chapters 18-19

Chapters 18-19 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 18, Twain is at sea once again to visit the great volcano in Hawaii. The craft, a schooner called "Boomerang," is small for his taste. Twain and the other "quality folk" are squeezed into the "sacred" aft portion of the ship. The remainder of the deck is occupied by natives who lounge upon the floor eating, smoking and socializing. Twain describes his small cabin in unflattering terms and complains that a nearby, perpetually-crowing rooster is a constant annoyance.

Twain is denied sleep through a conspiracy of bugs, rats, and the aforementioned rooster. Taking to the deck, Twain is briefly struck by the beauty of the silvery moonlit sea, only to have his reverie interrupted by a seasick Mr. Brown. Not knowing what to do, Twain does his best to amuse his ill colleague. Finally Twain recites a poem and, hearing the rhyme, Mr. Brown expels the contents of his stomach. Afterward, Brown remarks that, should he ever again find himself seasick again, he would like to hear some more poetry.

The Boomerang lands at Kailua, which is something of a grass-hut suburb. Twain observes a number of ruins supposedly once used and inhabited by Kamehameha I. Kailua is rumored to have been Kamehameha's favorite place of residence, but Mark Twain isn't too impressed. Tired from his trip on the Boomerang, where he was fed nothing but stewed chicken, Twain isn't particularly keen to hear about Kailua.

Twain recalls his recent voyage. The captain of the Boomerang was patient and agreeable despite Twain's constant complaints. Upset at the limited menu, Twain planned to slander the Boomerang in print. Now, on land once more, he realizes he (Twain) was unreasonable. The captain even went through the trouble to make Twain some bread. Granted the bread was terrible, but the hospitality, notes Twain, was there.

Twain rents a horse to travel from Kailua to Kealakekua Bay, warning the reader that while horses may be plentiful in Hawaii, saddles are not. Passing through the Kona district, Twain notes the famous "coffee and orange" section, praising Kona coffee for its flavor and commenting on the blight that caused its recent scarcity. Ultimately, Twain finds the jaunt through Kona to be a pleasant one.

Twain begins Chapter 19 still in Kona, where he is surprised to experience a taste a fair specimen of peach, a fruit he thought doomed to mediocrity in Hawaii due to the country's lack of frost. He also visits some new sugar plantations, noting that plantations in Hawaii yield considerably more product than their Louisiana counterparts and, since they tend to be on high ground, require little irrigation. Much of Kona's fertile land is left unused, the natives showing little interest in leasing or selling. Under protest by Mr. Brown, who tires of books written by preachers, Twain offers a quote concerning a

missionary who, under the pretext of not wanting Hawaiian land to fall into foreign hands, bought up land for resale (to a foreigner) at substantial profit.

Twain observes that Kona's volcanic ground is so porous and full of caves that a man could never hope to drill a well. The volcano itself has lain dormant for more than a lifetime and the ancient Hawaiians did not see fit to leave their fossilized remains in the hardened lava like the Romans of Herculaneum and Pompeii.

Mark Twain arrives at Kealakekua Bay, the very site of Captain Cook's murder. The spray in the air forms ever-present bands of rainbows all about. Kealakekua means "the pathway of the gods," named because the god Lono, who lived on the hillside, would take the namesake causeway down to the ocean. Twain tries to imagine the vicious murder of Cook but finds that he is unable. As night falls, it begins to rain. Twain wishes to leave, as he and Mr. Brown are quite hungry, but the Boomerang is becalmed far from the shore.

Twain digresses to tell the story of Captain Cook, whose death he sees as justifiable homicide. The Hawaiians mistook Captain Cook as the returned god Lono, a delusion which Cook used to his advantage. After abusing and misusing the Hawaiians and levying a harsh tax against them, a native finally rebelled by stealing a boat. In retaliation, Cook planned to seize and hold the King until the boat was returned. Fearing for their king, the natives intervened. Cook, who was hurt in the ensuing scuffle, let out a groan. Hearing this, the Hawaiians knew Cook could not be the god Lono, thus prompting the natives to kill the impostor.

Chapters 20-22

Chapters 20-22 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 20, Mr. Brown plans to steal the slab of rock upon which Captain Cook was murdered. Twain intervenes, reprimanding Brown for his insolence. Unperturbed, Brown considers stealing the stone step onto which Cook drew the old Hawaiian king. Once again, Twain steps in and rebukes Brown. Finally the two men come upon the actual monument to Cook: a copper sheathed stump of a coconut tree with an inscription scratched on one side. The stump is all that remains of a tree shot by cannonball on the day of Cook's murder.

Twain and Mr. Brown are sad, lonely and hungry. The Boomerang is long overdue. Driven by hunger, the two men make comical (and unsuccessful) attempts to collect coconuts from a tree. Finally they hire a young native to scamper up a tree and secure food on their behalf. After a while the Boomerang enters the bay and drops anchor. Mark Twain and Mr. Brown are saved at last.

In Chapter 21, Twain tells the story of Charlton and Lord George Paulet. Charlton was Britain's consul in Honolulu, a crooked man who sat at the center of a great many schemes. He was successfully sued in the Hawaiian courts for a long standing debt of 3,000 pounds. This judgment was reviewed and upheld twice in British courts as well. Charlton was soon joined by other British men in a similar predicament.

On the way back to England, aboard a Queen's ship, Charlton met and aired his grievances to Lord George Paulet. Paulet immediately went to Hawaii and made, under threat of bombardment, a series of ridiculous demands. The lord also levied the Hawaiians with an astronomical, trumped up bill to pay for a multitude of imaginary damages suffered by Englishmen. Seeing that his government was too weak to maintain its rights against Great Britain, the king ceded the islands to Lord Paulet. During this time, Paulet created the monument to Captain Cook. Two weeks later, Paulet's commanding officer, Rear Admiral Thomas, arrived at Honolulu and set things straight, restoring Hawaii's king to the throne.

Twain wakes on the schooner deck to discover that Mr. Brown has taken a canoe to Captain Cook's side of the bay. At the temple of Lono, Twain's thoughts turn to the converted "savages" Obookia and Kanui. Obookia's conversion is the stuff of Sunday school legend, but Kanui's story is less well known. Kanui strayed from the path, allowing himself to be swept up in the California gold rush. He ended his life a pauper.

Twain passes a temple supposedly made by the hands of dead men and spies a bevy of nude women bathing in the ocean. Finally Twain catches up with the wayward Mr. Brown, discovering, much to his dismay, that his esteemed colleague has run off with the Captain Cook monument. Incredulous, Twain demands that Brown return the monument immediately. Mr. Brown reluctantly agrees.

In Chapter 22, Twain writes of Lono. Lono was a king who is elevated to divinity for meritorious service. In an angry moment he slew his wife. Unable to endure the grief, Lono departed the islands on a three cornered raft. Mark Twain also offers a more plausible tale of a jealous man who drove away his wife and then disappeared in an effort to find her.

Twain tells the story of King Liholiho, who dared (with the help of whiskey) to defy the taboo against men and women dining together. Seeing that Liholiho was not struck down, the Hawaiians concluded that the gods were a farce. They burned their idols and warred against their former religious leaders. This act paved the way for the missionaries.

Twain and Mr. Brown take a canoe to the legendary city of refuge, a place where ancient Hawaiians could find refuge no matter the crimes they had committed. Twain marvels at the effort it would have taken to move the large blocks of which it is built and notes that some features therein suggest men of unusually large size. He also observes a cobbled road that seems to be of uncommonly proficient construction. Nearby, the two men spot a breathtaking petrified "waterfall" of lava and explore a series of natural caves.

Chapters 23-25

Chapters 23-25 Summary and Analysis

In Chapter 23, Mark Twain tackles the topic of Hawaii's sugar production, claiming that the country yearly produces up to thirteen thousand pounds of sugar per acre on soil without using manure, a number which far surpasses anything from Louisiana. Since the introduction of bat guano, Hawaii's sugar production has increased by numbers that are "scarcely credible."

Twain gives a quick history of Hawaii's sugar production. Despite being a young industry, Hawaii's sugar production shows astronomical growth. Twain provides a list of yearly production rates, measured in millions of pounds. He also offers a list of sugar yields broken down by region. Twain compares these numbers to the cost and overhead of running a sugar plantation in Louisiana.

Twain looks at sugar plantations currently in operation and offers figures regarding their stability and profitability. He adds that Hawaiian farmers never need fear an early frost. Crops need not be harvested immediately, which means plants have time to lose their green before harvest, making for sweeter product. Twain goes over several figures pertaining to sugar cane growth speed and local irrigation. Twain provides an exhaustive description of a local sugar refinery, including weights, measurements, and predicted yield. Half the refinery is powered by steam, the other half by water.

Twain suggests that a sugar monopoly is a very real possibility and suggests that cheap labor might be had in the form of local Hawaiians or, if the owner prefers, Chinese "coolies" might be imported from overseas. Twain closes out the chapter by predicting that Chinese coolie labor will soon revolutionize California industry, as they are plentiful and work much more cheaply than local white labor.

Chapter 24 opens with Twain and Brown still exploring the tunnels near the fabled city of refuge. The two men explore a dark hole bored into the side of a bluff. Within, they discover skeletal remains. Chagrined, Twain offers a mute apology and returns the remains to their resting place.

Twain and Brown pass yet another bevy of bathing women. Here Twain remarks that, in Hawaii at least, it seems that women are always bathing. It's so commonplace that even whites walk by with barely a glance. He notes that the native woman's modesty seems to extend only to the act of undressing. The two men return to Kealakekua to find not the Boomerang, but the more preferable Emeline at anchor.

Later, aboard the Emeline and amid rough seas, Twain spots a native paddling a canoe against the chopping waves. Thinking that something must be surely be amiss for the man to brave such danger in a canoe, Twain is surprised to discover that the savage wished nothing more than to gift the ship's captain with half a dozen chickens. The

captain explains that such generosity is common for the natives. Twain marvels at how different the native's nature is from that of a white man.

That night, the Emeline hits rough weather, rendering poor Mr. Brown once again seasick. Mark Twain's poetry once more comes to Mr. Brown's rescue, helping him to empty his stomach's contents over the side of the boat.

Twain visits Waiohinu, a wet, tropical paradise of fruit bearing trees and where, in the absence of rivers, natives sip water from hollow, large-bodied trees that serve as natural cisterns. Twain finds Waiohinu natives to be more superstitious than most. They still believe in the shark god and pay only lip service to the Bible.

Twain and Brown buy mounts for the next leg of their journey. Though still some twenty miles away, the volcano Kilauea visibly casts a ruddy glow on the clouds above it. Since the last twenty of the miles is impossible for a layman to navigate, Twain stops to hire a guide. As they approach the volcano, paradise gives way to a blackened, dismal desolation.

In Chapter 25, Twain looks upon the palace of the dread goddess Pele, the crater of Kilauea. At first he is disappointed. The crater seems to him no larger than a cellar. Twain then spies a distant building on the opposite side of the crater. Slowly, the sense of scope begins to register. The crater is some three miles across, the walls over 600 feet high! Figuring that night is the best time to view the volcano, the travelers break for a hearty dinner and then make way to the "look out house."

The volcano is transformed by the sun's absence, looking now like an infernal landscape of spitting fire and lava, lighting the entire area in an eerie red glow. Twain observes white-hot cracks in the otherwise blackened crust of the crater's surface, interrupted by gleaming holes of molten rock. The group departs the mountain, half cooked by its fires. Twain notes a large, illuminated cloud, like a Biblical pillar of fire, visible at the center of the crater. In closing, Twain mentions, almost as an afterthought, that there is a hotel right near the crater. He highly recommends its service.

Characters

Mark Twain

Mark Twain is, at the time in which he writes these letters, a traveling journalist working for the SACRAMENTO DAILY UNION Newspaper. He writes with the intent of publication and therefore seeks to entertain as well as inform. Rather than simply write travel logs of where he goes and what he sees, however, Twain includes himself as a participant within, what is very likely to be, a partly fictionalized story. This suggests that the author is a man of both considerable imagination and ego.

Being a humorist, Twain is inclined to satire, hyperbole, and exaggeration. Anyone who irritates, annoys or otherwise disappoints the author runs the risk of running afoul of his pen. It is apparent in his treatment of both Minister Harris and Bishop Staley that Twain is most outraged by those who seem undeserving of their status. It seems to offend Twain's sensibilities that a man should receive undeserved recognition, and so Twain uses his pen to right the scales of justice.

Twain is not an unreasonable man however. Tired of being fed broiled chicken, Twain considers writing a bad review of the ship "Boomerang," but his conscience won't allow it. After all, the captain went out of his way to bake the author bread and was otherwise pleasant and accommodating. This suggests that Twain, despite his ego, is very much aware of the power he wields and the responsibility it entails.

Mr. Brown

Mr. Brown, a likely fictional character, serves as Mark Twain's literary foil. Whereas Twain is educated and dignified, Mr. Brown is folksy and rough. Whereas Twain is thoughtful and measured, Mr. Brown is impulsive and reactionary. The most marked difference lay in their language: Twain is bombastic; whereas, Mr. Brown speaks more as one might expect of a blue-collar laborer. The contrast between the two, Twain and Brown, makes each seem all the more extreme for the presence of other.

There is a very real sense that Mr. Brown represents a hidden facet of Mark Twain's personality, likely that same part of Twain that takes offense at the self-aggrandizing behavior of others. Mr. Brown is, in this sense, the polar opposite of a Minister Harris or a Bishop Staley. What Mr. Brown lacks in education he makes up for in authenticity. His simple, plain-speaking wisdom is that of the hard-working common man. He is a man of natural substance. No doubt the character appeals to a certain set of his readers.

The character of Mr. Brown allows Twain to put some rhetorical distance between author and text. If ever there is something that Twain himself doesn't feel comfortable saying, he can throw his voice into the mouth of Mr. Brown. Mr. Brown, being a cruder, less complicated sort can be forgiven for saying things that Twain himself would not be. He is, in this respect, Twain's lightning rod for criticism.

Captain Godfrey

Captain Godfrey is the captain of the Ajax, the steamer that brings Mark Twain to the Hawaiian Isles.

King Kamehameha

King Kamehameha is the king of the Hawaiian Isles.

Captain James Cook

Captain James Cook is the English sailor who discovered the Hawaiian isles and was, for a time, mistaken for the returned god Lono.

Lono

Lono is a Hawaiian god. Lono left Hawaii on a three-cornered raft, promising one day to return.

Victoria Kamamalu Kaahumanu

Victoria Kamamalu Kaahumanu is the heir presumptive to the crown and sister to King Kamehameha. Mark Twain reports on the occasion of her funeral.

Mr. Harris

Mr. Harris is Hawaii's Minister of Finance and Attorney General. Mark Twain characterizes him as a pompous buffoon.

Bishop Staley

Staley is the Catholic Bishop of Honolulu. Mark Twain characterizes him as weak, foolish and ineffectual.

Captain Mitchell

Mitchell is the Captain of the Hornet, the ship lost at sea due to fire. Mark Twain characterizes him as a heroic, selfless leader.

Obookia

Obookia is the "sensitive savage" who wept because his fellow Hawaiians did not have the Bible.

Mr. Ingals

Mr. Ingals is the former Secretary of the San Francisco Board of Brokers. Mark Twain refers to his records for information regarding the importance of Hawaiian trade.

Mrs. Captain Jollopson

Mrs. Captain Jollopson is a likely fictional character which Mark Twain uses to demonstrate sailing vernacular.

Mr. M. Kekuanaoa

M. Kekuanaoa is the President of Hawaii's legislative Assembly and the King's father.

Objects/Places

The Ajax

The steamer which Twain rides from San Francisco to Hawaii.

Kealakekua

Kealakekua is Hawaiian for "Path of the Gods." Legend tells that it is the very path walked by the Hawaiian god Lono.

San Francisco

San Francisco is the Californian city where Mark Twain lives and works.

Harp Engine

The Ajax is equipped with a "harp" steam engine, situated horizontally below the waterline to protect it from cannon-fire.

Ancient Heathen Temple

Mark Twain visits an ancient heathen temple where, long ago, Hawaiians supposedly participated in human sacrifice.

Ancient Battleground

Mark Twain visits a large expanse of sand thought to be the site of an ancient battlefield. Twain and his fellow tourists collect human bones from the site.

The City of Refuge

The city of refuge was once a Hawaiian city that provided asylum to anyone, regardless of past misdeeds.

Human Bones

Mark Twain, along with other American tourists, remove human bones from the site of an alleged ancient battleground.

Poi

Poi is a type of edible paste formed from Kalo or Taro plant. It is a staple food for native Hawaiians.

Awa Root

Awa root is a Hawaiian herb thought by some to possess medicinal qualities. It is also used to create an intoxicating beverage.

Government Prison

Mark Twain visits a Hawaiian government prison, which he finds much more pleasant and livable than any American equivalent.

The Hornet

The Hornet is the clipper ship lost at sea to fire. The survivors make their way to the Hawaiian Islands some forty days later.

Themes

Progress

Mark Twain is aware of Hawaii's history, both recent and ancient, and sees Europe's influence as generally beneficial. When addressing Hawaii's distant past, Twain is inclined to use words such as "barbaric" or "savage." Modern Hawaiians, in Twain's mind, are more civilized thanks to the efforts of Christian missionaries. While there is a sense that the author is aware that something has been lost to the Hawaiians, Twain clearly believes that natives are better for the Christian influence and is proud to see how far the Hawaiians have come.

Mark Twain seeks to advance the cause of American interests. He regards Hawaii as an untapped resource with its fertile soil and tropical climate being well suited to the production of sugar cane. He suggests that Americans move to the Hawaiian Islands to secure America's foothold in the region. Twain also suggests, after seeing "coolie" labor in Hawaii, that Californian miners will want to exploit the cheap, plentiful labor of China's impoverished immigrant workers.

A man of varied interests, Mark Twain is fascinated by technology. In the early chapters he discusses the engineering of the Ajax and why vessels of its kind are best suited for shipping cargo across the pacific and thus beneficial to anyone seeking to do business in the "Sandwich Isles." Later he examines the technology of sugar farming and refinement, providing a detailed description of how one center processes its harvest.

Enterprise

As a venture capitalist, Twain sees Hawaii as a potential economic resource. In America, farmers must take care to harvest before the frost, making sugar a risky investment on the occasion of an early winter. In Hawaii there are no similar concerns, as the climate is mild even in winter. The volcanic soil, coupled with the tropical climate, allows for the farming of sugar cane in great abundance and with little risk. In Hawaii, sugar cane will grow in unmodified soil, freeing up the cost of fertilizer. To Twain, the conclusion is obvious: American farmers should move to Hawaii and make a fortune in the sugar trade.

In Mark Twain's Letters from Hawaii, Twain repeatedly favors business over labor. Seeing the success of Hawaii's whaling industry, Twain advocates that San Francisco usurp the industry. He suggests this with full knowledge that such a move will negatively impact the local Hawaiian economy. Twain also suggests that San Francisco encourage whaling captains to uses its port by curtailing a sailor's ability to sue his captain for wrongful treatment.

Typical to a man of his time, Twain subscribes to a commodified notion of labor. He suggests that Chinese "coolies" make valuable employees in that they are cheap and

obedient, advocating that American mine operators import these impoverished workers to expand their enterprises. Twain admits that this cheap immigrant labor will likely result in the loss of local white labor but glibly suggests that whites would rather not work so hard and would prefer a job overseeing coolies. Such macro-scale thinking is necessarily dehumanizing to the laborers themselves.

Religion and Mythology

Despite his own Christian faith, Mark Twain's attitude toward religion is a complicated one. On the one hand, Twain concedes that American missionaries have brought civilization to the "savages" of Hawaii, transforming them from human-sacrificing pagans into honest, hard-working church-goers. He also notes, however, that missionaries tend to be hard, self-righteous and unforgiving, characteristics that don't mesh with Twain's own understanding Christian ideals.

Twain also seems to be strongly partisan with his religion, rushing to the defense of his fellow American Protestants when Bishop Staley suggests that American missionaries have somehow religiously worsened the Hawaiian natives by denying them their native culture. In retaliation, Twain paints an unflattering picture of Staley's Reformed Catholic Church, implying that it is more flash than substance, a mere showy display of ritualized emptiness. He compares Staley's church unfavorably to the simpler, less performed, protestant faiths. Despite his disagreement with American missionaries, Twain still considers himself to a member of their rank and file.

Twain shows virtually no willingness to recognize the validity of Hawaiian religion. He presents the story of Lono as mere folklore, even offering an alternative, more plausible version that debunks Lono's divinity. Confronted by the natives of Waiohinu, Twain is offended by their rejection of the Bible as well as their continued belief in a shark god. He is disgusted by the native tendency to lie about their Christian faith and yet seems unwilling to accept from them an alternative belief system.

Style

Perspective

Much of the content is written from a first person, autobiographical perspective. When there is a cohesive narrative, the narrator and protagonist both are Mark Twain. Letters are written in the past tense, as if the author were relating events from his own experience. The narrative occasionally gives way to essay format, whereon Mark Twain addresses a topic and offers his opinion. The narrative portions are written with an eye toward entertainment. The essay segments, intended to be either informative or persuasive, tend to be more function-oriented.

Mark Twain is a reliable narrator insofar as his biases are obvious to the modern reader. It is apparent that Twain is an American venture capitalist with an eye toward finding profit in Hawaii. While not without a streak of irreverence, Twain is also a Christian man and regards the native Hawaiian religions as backward and barbaric. As a journalist, Twain writes with the intent of newspaper publication. Since it is likely that Twain's work is colored by the expectations of intended audience, it is difficult to separate the author's true opinion from that of his target reader.

During his trip to Hawaii, Mark Twain is accompanied by a (likely fictional) character named "Mr. Brown." Mr. Brown serves as a humorous foil for Twain and, Brown being unrefined in his manners, paints the sometimes caustic Twain as the lesser of two evils. It is clear that the device of Mr. Brown effectively shields Twain from criticism, allowing the author to express views and opinions through Brown that Twain himself wouldn't feel comfortable expressing.

Tone

Twain's tone is defined by context. As a tourist, the author adopts the role of humorist, often painting himself in ridiculous or self-deprecating terms. Writing in this manner, Twain is verbose and florid. When annoyed, Twain shifts to a sarcastic, even mocking tone, whereon the author's language moves from florid to acerbic. Confronted with matters of commerce, Twain abruptly morphs to something of an accountant, his verbosity turned to the purpose of facts and figures. This version of the author leaves nothing to broad strokes, instead seeking to paint any and all relevant factors in meticulous, painstaking detail.

When it comes to his opinion regarding the Hawaiian natives, Twain is conflicted. On the one hand he is fascinated by their history and traditions. On the other, Twain is repulsed by a seemingly barbaric culture very different from the American life to which he is accustomed. When addressing some of the more savage Hawaiian practices, Twain is apt to return to the subject of religion, reminding the reader that, thanks to the

work of Christian missionaries, Hawaiians are much less savage than they might otherwise be.

Mark Twain writes with a self-consciously American voice, as a Californian addressing Californians. He speaks at length concerning the state's financial and political interests, as well as California's standing in the U.S. He sees Hawaii as a capitalist venture for enterprising Californians, advocating American involvement in the whaling industry even after noting the dire impact it would have on local economy. Twain also adopts what the modern reader would likely see as a dehumanizing view of Chinese labor.

Structure

The book is divided into twenty-five chapters, with each chapter representing a travel letter written during Mark Twain's visit to Hawaii. There is little topical cohesion between letters, but individually each letter addresses a narrow scope of discussion. Letters are presented in an organized fashion with each letter segmented into header-defined sections pertaining to matters of a particular interest. The reader can look at the headers and at a glance understand the breadth of the letter's content.

Despite its lack of topical cohesion, Mark Twain's LETTERS FROM HAWAII is arguably also a continuous, first person narrative. The early chapters tell of Mark Twain's trip to Hawaii and his subsequent arrival. On land, Twain adopts the role of tourist, visiting various landmarks and relating his experience through the eyes of an American capitalist. Twain also doffs his journalistic cap to cover the death of a Hawaiian princess and to interview sailors rescued from sea after forty days adrift.

In addition to relating his own experiences on the island, Mark Twain also relates the stories of others. Sometimes, as with the survivors of the Hornet, the account comes firsthand. Twain also shares the work of other authors in an attempt to convey something of Hawaii's history and folklore. Twain speaks at length about Hawaiian customs and how they've changed under European dominance.

Quotes

"We hear all our lives about the 'gentle, stormless Pacific,' and about the 'smooth and delightful route to the Sandwich Islands,' and about the 'steady blowing trades' that never vary, never change, never 'chop around,' and all the days of our boyhood we read how that infatuated old ass, Balboa, looked out from the top of a high rock upon a broad sea as calm and peaceful as a sylvan lake, and went into an ecstasy of delight, like any other Greaser over any other trifle, and shouted in his foreign tongue and waved his country's banner, and named his great discovery 'Pacific'—thus uttering a lie which will go on deceiving generation after generation of students while the old ocean lasts." —Chapter 2, page 10

"It is a matter of the utmost importance to the United States that her trade with these islands should be carefully fostered and augmented. Because—it pays." —Chapter 3, page 20

"I am probably the most sensitive man in the kingdom of Hawaii tonight—especially about sitting down in the presence of my betters. I have ridden fifteen or twenty miles on horseback since 5 P. M., and to tell the honest truth, I have a delicacy about sitting down at all." —Chapter 6, page 44

"Every section of our western hemisphere seems supplied with a system of technicalities, etiquette and slang, peculiar to itself. The above chapter is intended to give you a somewhat exaggerated idea of the technicalities of conversation in Honolulu —bred from the great whaling interest which centers here, and naturally infused in to the vocabulary of the place." —Chapter 9, page 85

"It required several generations to collect the materials and manufacture this cloak, and had the work been performed in the United States, under our fine army contract system, it would have cost the Government more millions of dollars than I can estimate without a large arithmetic and a blackboard." —Chapter 11, page 103.

"Then a special Committee reported back favorably a bill to prohibit Chinamen from removing their male children from the islands, and the report was adopted—which I thought was rather hard on the Chinamen." —Chapter 13, page 114

"I have talked with the seamen and with John S. Thomas, third mate, but their accounts are so nearly alike in all substantial points, that I will merely give the officer's statement and weave into it such matters as the men mentioned in the way of incidents, experiences, emotions, etc." —Chapter 15, page 138

"This great Queen, Kaahumanu, who was 'subjected to abuse' during the frightful orgies that followed the King's death, in accordance with an ancient custom, afterwards became a devout Christian and a steadfast and powerful friend of the missionaries." —Chapter 17, page 193

"In Central Kona there is but little idle cane land now, but there is a good deal in North and South Kona. There are thousands of acres of cane land unoccupied on the island of Hawaii, and the prices asked for it range from one dollar to a hundred and fifty an acre." —Chapter 19, page 210

"At noon I observed a bevy of nude native young ladies bathing in the sea, and went down to look at them. But with a prudery which seems to be characteristic of that sex everywhere, they all plunged in with a lying scream, and when they rose to the surface they only just poked their heads out and showed no disposition to proceed any further in the same direction." —Chapter 21, page 240

"Where did these isolated pagans get this idea of a City of Refuge—this ancient Jewish custom?" —Chapter 23, page 251

"I have visited Haleakala, Kilauea, Wailuku Valley, the Petrified Cataracts, the Pathway of the Great Hog God—in a word, I have visited all the principal wonders of the island, and now I come to speak of one which, in its importance to America, surpasses them all. A land which produces six, eight, ten, twelve, yea, even thirteen thousand pounds of sugar to the acre on unmanured soil!" —Chapter 23, page 257

"You will have Coolie labor in California some day. It is already forcing its superior claims upon the attention of your great mining, manufacturing and public improvement corporations. You will not always go on paying $80 and $100 a month for labor which you can hire for $5. The sooner California adopts Coolie labor the better it will be for her. It cheapens no labor of men's hands save the hardest and most exhausting drudgery—drudgery which neither intelligence nor education are required to fit a man for—drudgery which all white men abhor and are glad to escape from." —Chapter 23, pages 271-272

"Most natives lie some, but these lie a good deal. They still believe in the ancient superstitions of the race, and believe in the Great Shark God and pray each other to death. When sworn by the Great Shark God they are afraid to speak anything but the truth; but when sworn on the Bible in Court they proceed to soar into flights of fancy lying that make the inventions of Munchausen seem poor and trifling in comparison." —Chapter 24, page 287

"Through the glasses, the little fountains scattered about looked very beautiful. They boiled, and coughed, and spluttered, and discharged sprays of stringy red fire—of about the consistency of mush, for instance—from ten to fifteen feet into the air, along with a shower of brilliant white sparks—a quaint and unnatural mingling of gouts of blood and snow flakes!" —Chapter 25, page 296

Topics for Discussion

Why is Mark Twain so intent on promoting the steamer ahead of the clipper? What might be his motivation?

What is the relationship between Mark Twain and Mr. Brown? Do the two men care for one another?

How does Mark Twain's LETTERS FROM HAWAII depict women? Are there any strong female characters? If so, what makes these characters strong?

While aboard the Boomerang, Mark Twain refers to himself and his fellow Americans as "quality folk." What does he mean by this descriptor?

Mark Twain often refers to Hawaiian natives as "savages" and describes their customs as "barbaric." Are these fair terms to use? Why or why not?

Throughout the book, Twain often complains about his accommodations. What do his complaints say about his character?

Foreigners, journalists in particular, were barred from the princess' funereal rites due to their rude criticisms. Does it seem that Twain is similarly guilty of such behavior? Why or why not?

Mark Twain briefly considers writing a bad review of the "Boomerang." What makes him change his mind? What does this say about Twain's character?

Consider Mark Twain's attitude toward the King of Hawaii. How does it differ from his attitude toward other Hawaiian natives? What does this difference, if any, suggest?

Mark Twain wrote these letters with the intent of publication. How do they differ from a typical travel letter that one might write to family or friends?