

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Mementos of RLS**

"In the Steps of R. L. S.," is the title of an article appearing in Everybody's Weekly, an English publication. The author is Willard Connely, who introduces himself as "a literary pilgrim following in Robert Louis Stevenson's footsteps in this centenary year." He continues to say that he traveled very nearly round the world to complete the pilgrimage – to Scotland, Switzerland, France, the United States and the islands of the Pacific. But everywhere he went R.L.S. left the mark of his rare personality.

Illustrating the article in the English magazine, are a portrait of R.L.S. by John S. Sargent, a pencil drawing by Percy F. Spence, made in Sydney, Australia; R.L.S. at the age of four years, when he was living in Edinburgh; five pictures showing houses in which the author-poet had lived including "the house in Monterey in California, where R.L.S. wrote his superb story 'The Pavilion on the Links,' during his first visit to the Far West in 1879; "Skerryvere" the house in Bournemouth which was completely destroyed by a bomb in the recent war; "Swanston" near Edinburgh, which gets its name from the "Swanston Edition" of the novelist's collected works, the home in Samoa, where Stevenson ended his days, and No. 8 Howard Place, Edinburgh, where he was born.

Mr. Connely has this to say of his visit to Monterey (in what year there is no mention): ... "of the two sojourns which Stevenson made to California it was a scene identified with the earlier one – California in 1879 when he went out there to be married – and I wanted to visit. I wanted to see in Monterey the house of the French doctor, with whom R.L.S. lived alone for about three months and in whose house he wrote what many regard as one of his three greatest short stories, 'The Pavilion on the Links'. There also he wrote 'The Amateur Emigrant' and in those surroundings it was that he found his descriptive material for "The Old Pacific Capital," which includes that inspired passage on the woods and the Pacific."

"While the Californians in San Francisco have memorialized Stevenson with a fine monument bearing in bronze a ship in full sail" writes Mr. Connely. "I cannot say as much for Monterey. I discovered that the habitat of the doctor had dwindled to an Italian lodging house with an old gray billy goat standing guard atop an adjacent rubbish heap. It was a wooden house painted white, not in good repair, with a creaky, narrow veranda high up. Gaining admittance – the place was nearly bare of lodgers at the

time – I was shown most of the rooms, and I tried to guess which of them, so far from Scotland, had witnessed the creation of 'The Pavilion on the Links.' Perhaps it was the bedroom which looked to the east"

What a change Mr. Connely would see now if he should return to Monterey for this 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Stevenson on November 13, when the Monterey History and Art Association will sponsor an observance of the date. The photograph of the Stevenson House which appears in the English magazine was taken many years ago. The front windows are boarded up, there is no fence or sidewalk and altogether it is a sorry looking place. We shall send Mr. Connely a new picture and a story of the restoration and the gifts which have been received to make the interior interesting and attractive

In the following lines the author was much more complimentary to Monterey: "Preceding thence to the cliff above the bay, whose shoreline Stevenson said General Sherman had compared to a bent fishing hook, I found nothing changed about that shore, and the ocean coming in, as Stevenson again said, 'bombarded the bay with never-dying surf.'

"Yet there was much more to Monterey itself," he continues, "it well repaid a ramble just to catch its flavor, which Stevenson so relished. A lingering air of Mexico and old Spain clung to it, both in its government house, with its steep balustrade and in the primitive theater with its curious wooden curtain."

Hanging on the wall at the Stevenson House for all visitors to see and admire is a bas-relief by Augustus St. Gaudens, the most eminent American sculptor of that day and since. It was given to Isabel Field, the stepdaughter of R.L.S. by the artist himself and she writes from her Santa Barbara home that a larger one hangs in the hall at Princeton University and the original is in St. Giles Cathedral in Edinburgh.

It was in 1887 soon after Stevenson's arrival in New York, that St. Gaudens found R.L.S. propped up in bed in a little hotel in 11<sup>th</sup> Street in Greenwich Village. But St. Gaudens had once said that he would gladly go 1,000 miles for a setting and Stevenson consented, the sketch to be made while he remained in bed. The result was the famous medallion showing Stevenson bolstered up by three large pillows, knees up, against them a manuscript in one hand, and the other hand holding an upraised pencil.

To H.D. Maybury we extend our thanks for the magazine.