

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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### **Gregorian Chant Sung By Indians**

Stevenson's appreciation of the San Carlos Day services at Mission Carmelo on Nov. 6, 1879, as written for the editor of the Californian in Monterey and published in that paper on Nov. 11 of that year, is charming and well worth repeating many times over. He had gone over the hill to the mission in a buggy from the stable of Wolters, accompanied by Adolpho Sanchez. They ate their lunch there and attended the festivities and service in honor of the mission's patron saint.

"I heard the old Indians singing mass," he reported to Bronson in his letter to the editor. That was a new experience and one, I think, well worth hearing. There was an old man who led, and the women so worthily followed. It was like a voice out of the past. They sang by tradition, from the teaching of early missions long since turned to clay:

King Pandian he is dead,  
All your friends are lapped  
in lead,"

The quoting of these lines is another proof that the article, in the form of a letter in the Californian, was written by Stevenson. The quote is from Barnfield, a little known poet of the Elizabethan era, which Stevenson knew and repeated in "The Wreckers." This we are told at the beginning of the article, which was repeated in The Herald in 1922.

Stevenson goes on with his description of the impressive service in the old mission: "And still in that roofless church, you may hear old music. Padre Casanova will, I am sure, be the first to pardon and understand me, when I say that the old Gregorian singing preached a sermon more eloquent than his own. Peace on earth, good will to men, so it seemed to me to say; and to me, a barbarian who hears on all sides evil speech and the roughest by-words about the Indian race, to hear Carmel Indians sing their Latin words with so good a pronunciation and give out those ancient European chants with familiarity and fervor, suggested new and pleasant reflections. Here was an old medieval civilization, and your old primitive barbarian, hand-in-hand, the old devoutly following the other. I could not help thinking that if there had been more priests and few land sharks and Indian agents, there would have

been happier days for a considerable number of human bipeds in your American continent."

Stevenson goes further into the sermon he is probably knowingly preaching to his adopted Californians. "I began by admitting that I was a barbarian," he continues in his letter to Bronson. "Now that I have proved it. I had better pause. That was how it struck 'the stranger'. A fine old church, a fine old race, both brutally neglected; a survival, a memory and a ruin. The U.S. Mint can coin many millions more dollar pieces, but cannot make a single Indian; and when the Carmel church is in the dust, not all the wealth of all the state and territories can replace what has been lost. No man's work can save the Indians from the ruin that awaits them; but the church? How, my dear Bronson? If you and I put together our little mites and through the columns of your paper, wrought upon all hands to interest others in this useful work of protection.

"I feel that the money would be forthcoming before long; and the future little ones of Monterey would clap their hands to see the old church, and learn by the sight of it, more history than ever anyone can manage to teach them out of books.

"I remain, Yours,

The Monterey Barbarian."