

Peninsula Diary Mayo Hayes O'Donnell

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California Hospitality

Today one seldom hears the words "California Hospitality." Maybe we have grown too fast, maybe the days are too full of business and pleasure to extend hospitality as our forefathers did a century ago, nevertheless Walter Colton has left us a description of that hospitality in 1847 in his diary "Three Years in California," which it is a pleasure to read.

Colton praised Monterey in the following notation: "I have never been in a community that rivals Monterey in its spirit of hospitality and generous regard. Such is the welcome to the privileges of the private hearth, that a public hotel has never been able to maintain itself. You are not expected to wait for a particular invitation, but to come without the slightest ceremony, make yourself entirely at home, and tarry as long as it suits your inclination, be it for a day or for a month. You create no flutter in the family, awaken no apologies, and are greeted every morning with the same bright smile. It is not a smile which flits over the countenance, and passes away like a flake of moonlight over a marble tablet. It is the steady sunshine of the soul within."

The note in the diary of the Rev. Mr. Colton for a Saturday in February makes this statement: "If a stranger you are not expected to bring a formal letter of introduction. No one here thinks any the better of a man who carries the credentials of his character and standing in his pocket. A word or an allusion to recognized persons or places is sufficient. If you turn out to be different from what your first impressions and fair speech promised, still you meet with no frowning looks, no impatience for your departure. You still enjoy in full that charity which suffereth long, and is kind. The children are never told that you are a burden; you enjoy their glad greetings and unsuspecting confidence to the last. And when you finally depart, it will not be without a benison: not perhaps that you are worthy of it; but you belong to the great human family, whose faults often spring from misfortune, and the force of untoward circumstances. Generous, forbearing people of Monterey! There is more true hospitality in one throb of your heart, than circulates for years through the courts and capitals of kings."

We have just observed Ash Wednesday and enjoyed a ball on Shrove Tuesday, so now we may glance back 109

years to Walter Colton's time in Monterey when he too attended a ball in Monterey on Tuesday, Feb. 16, at the home of Thomas Oliver Larkin, the first and only American Consul to California. Of this Cascaron party Colton wrote: "It is past midnight, and I have just come from the house of T. O. Larkin, Esq., where I left the youth, the beauty, the wisdom, and worth of Monterey. There are more happy hearts there than I have met with in any other assemblage since I came to California. This is the sunshine that has followed the war-cloud. This being the last night of the carnival, everyone has broken his last eggshells. But few of them contained cologne or lavender; nearly all were filled with golden tinsel. Ladies and gentlemen too are covered with the sparkling shower, and the lights of the chandeliers are thrown back in millions of mimic rays.

"Two of the young ladies, remarkable for their sprightliness and beauty, broke their eggs on the head of our commodore, and got kissed by way of retaliation. They blushed, but still enjoyed their triumph. I did not venture the 'lex talionis' in this form, but I had eggs, and came off pretty even in the battle. The hens will now have a little peace, and be allowed to hatch their chickens. The origin of this egg-breaking custom I have not been able to learn. It seems lost in the twilight of antiquity. I must leave it to those walking mummies, who love to grope among the catacombs of perished nations; should they discover it, their shouts will almost shake down the Egyptian pyramids."