The Hermit of San Clemente

Only Inhabitant of an Inland Sixty Miles Off the California Coast.

The Butte Miner

November 15, 1894

San Clemente island, which lies 60 miles west one-half south of Point Loma lighthouse, on the southern coast of California, is 18% miles long, with an average width of 2% miles and an area of 51% square miles. It is a lonesome spot, suggestive of Spanish buccaneers and pirates generally. It rears its ugly head of black plutonic rock nearly 2,000 feet above the sea level, and in the deep gulches treasures a few sumac trees as a miser guards his gold. Cactus abounds. Natural water tanks in the rock are found on the edges of the plateaus. They were worn by rocks whirled around in holes during heavy rainfalls. The water in these tanks has saved the lives of many a thirsty mariner who has put in there for a supply of the life giving fluid. It was here that Cabrillo landed in October, 1542, after discovering Han Diego harbor. He named the island La Victoria, after one of his smaller ships, the present name having been given a century later.

There is but one human being on San Clemente, the hermit herder, Tom Gallagher. Tom is a character with a history. Bis shaggy head and beard and curious attire give him the look of a savage, but Tom is very much of a white man in his heart, even though he has lived alone with his sheep for over 20 years. Occasionally a straggling junk seeking abalone, or now and then a fisherman, stops in the cave of San Clemente, brings Tom the news and furnishes him with supplies. To loosen Tom's tongue the explorer must have handy a chew of tobacco and a drink of whisky. He has a favorite water tank somewhere, but he never tells its location. Whisky is a novelty to this hermit, but it never causes him to forget himself sufficiently to reveal the details of his mainland life. He was a fisherman somewhere between San Diego and Monterey bay. He had good prospects, but one day he took it into his head to live alone on San Clemente. That is about all that Tom will say of himself.

There are people who claim to know Tom's history, and it is a romantic story, they say, with a love affair in it, of course. The woman jilted him, and he sought the island cloister. Tom lives in a comfortable hut, with a vegetable patch, chickens, a goat and his sheep. His is a regular Robinson Crusoe outfit, except that there is no man Friday to serve him. This lord of San Clemente docs not want servants. He simply wants to be let alone, with only his animals and his gun for companions.—San Francisco Chronicle.

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