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THE PASSING OF THE OLD CHIEFTAN

Historic Figure In San Diego, California, Old Matawhur, Goes to Join His Fathers

(San Francisco Chronicle.)

A tragedy is surely measured by its quality in finality. It is this quality of terrible finality that last week made the death of Chief Cinon Duro and the consequent passing of the Mesa Grande Indians as a tribe so tragic a moment in the history of the Indian affairs of this state. It is the tragedy, soon or late, of every Indian tribe in this country. Both the sentimentalists and the less imaginative ethnologists can take look and feel a thrill of pity—the death was so utterly past; the death of that white-haired weary old Indian, who remembered the Mission fathers and the tribal hate when the tribe was a tribe.

Cinon Duro (the Spanish translation of the Indian, Mata Whur—hard road, i. e. a rock) was born at the beginning of the last century. He remembered the early struggle of the fathers at Santa Ysabel Mission; he remembered the death of Father Gregorio, who nearly a hundred years ago tried to make his peace with the tribe at the little mud church, and, with his crucifix lifted high, was shot full of arrows by this painted people, who could not understand. Cinon remembered his child's error on that day. He described it to one who had befriended him, not a great while before his death.

All through the long intervening years he has lived near the mission, under the cherry trees flower and fruit. Old Cinon, as the whites call him, was the oldest surviving Indian, and with him rested many a sacred legend and chant that the white man will now never know; legends and ceremonials that have come down to him from his tragic forefathers; chants that have a tremendous interest to the ethnologists.

There was a strange primitive mystical strain in the old man's blood; he was the born romanticist, and the tribesmen knew it and had made him not only chief, but can-

torio, "Singer of the People," and he loved his trust.

When a strange white man came up from the valley below to learn from Cinon the legends he guarded so carefully, he found the old chief, weather-beaten and wrinkled, clothed in rags, herding goats on Mount Volcan looking over the Santa Ysabel valley, the valley that had seen his whole tribal drama. The old man was looking with dim forgetful eyes into the sunset, leaning on a crooked manzanita staff.

When the stranger from the white man's far-off city asked him to tell his story of the creation and offered him a handful of silver, the old man turned dumbly away, and the Indian who had guided the stranger heard him utter, "He asks Cinon to sell his father's birthright!"

Yet it was but a short time after when Cinon came to a white woman's door and asked to tell his stories. It was a white woman who had lived and loved long among the tribe. Cinon trusted her. He said:

"I have no son to tell my stories to. I give them to you. You have given me corn in the bad years and grapes and figs. When it is sunset come to me on that hill. I tell them to you when the sky is yellow." And so the old man gave to the friend he trusted, though half-starved, he refused to sell to a stranger to write down in a strange tongue.

"Then End Has Come."

Cinon Duro lay a very great while dying after the cruel accident with his horse that was the beginning of the end. One of the saddest things about his stoical suffering was his consciousness of the end—not his own end, but the end of the tribe, that zealously through the endless years he had led to the little mud chapel on the hill, and as zealously taught the old chants and rites and festivals of his own people.

"Homon-e sone! Son, son homon-e!" he moaned over and over. They were the last words he uttered. "The end has come! All, all is over!"

The great pain he suffered he bore with splendid stoicism; once he whispered in Spanish to the friend who bent over him: "If you would leave me I could die; it is your loving kindness that keeps me here. Go away and close the door."

When that patient old man finally passed away the whole countryside mourned. The white people of Mesa Grande are singularly sympathetic toward the dying tribe; they appreciate the tragedy of Cinon's unguided charges, and went to the funeral in the little chapel with tearful eyes and a sympathy they did not analyze.

The little church standing on a hill among the oaks and poplars is, within, one of those tragic places that voice the upward striving of a primitive people. The old women stood around sobbing, between their chants, bright handkerchiefs tied over their white hair, the candles of the Indian acolytes weirdly lighting up their furrowed faces, their feet bare and black from the long wanderings of scores of years. The bright-clothed little babies crooned and wailed, clinging to the skirts of the weeping women. Only the men were silent. The whole tragedy seemed written in their eyes. It was a realization of defeat and finally so poignant it made the tears come. And when Old Antonio, the brother of the dead chief broke down and wailed aloud, leaning on his stick, his white head bowed and his face twisted with pain, something seemed to snap within one: it had grown too bitter for tears.

The dead chief lay in a plain open coffin, gay flowers packed close about his still resigned face. The box stood between four chairs, and the candles shed a pale light over the whole scene; the old men and women pressing close, those who understood, the young braves with bright neck cloths and gayly clad girls silent and self-conscious in the outer circle—the new generation who could not comprehend. The acolytes held their candles waveringly; their stolid brown faces were dirty and tearful, and they watched the strange still face wonderingly.

The Aged Reader.

Old Angela, an Indian woman of near a hundred years, read the office for the dead. I say read: the long Latin service she chanted, she knows quite by heart, as she knows every office of the church. Father La Pointe can not come often from Escondido, and Old Angela has been lay reader for a score of years.

Then the tragic little procession wound out into the church yard, a little Indian boy at the head bearing the cross high, with a wreath bound around it. In this little sordid city of the dead, neglected mounds and wooden crosses, a sudden realization of death seemed to strike the bright colored crowd. The wailing of the women rose to a shriller and more piercing strain and the moaning of the men made a terrible minor.

They stood shaken with sobs about the open grave. An Indian stepped forward and ruthlessly nailed down the black box. The thud of the hammer strokes was terrible. Old Antonio watched with a tense self-control then burst into dreadful sobs. Then the chant for the dead—a strange Indian chant—was taken up by the women, rising higher and higher in the bright air, with a note of utter abandonment.

The white strangers leaned on the boundary fence trying to appear conservatively unmoved, their eyes filling and sobs rising. In a far corner of the yard knelt an old stout woman in red calico before a little grave. The general loss to her was merged in her personal loss, and the tears streamed down her furrowed face as she beat her breast with bony, work-worn hands.

On the outer edge of the circle of Indians, looking on at the ceremony with a strange tragic disdain, stood the loneliest figure in that little churchyard, a half-breed, the son of a degenerate Englishman of noble family. The boy's dark, proud un-Indian features and slighter frame are belied by the tragic eyes of his mother's race. To the Americans who watched him, old Cinon's flushed race seemed greatly simple beside that birthright of humiliation and alien desires.

Feast of the Dead.

Now came the time to honor their own strange gods, the gods the white man has never been able to understand. Old Antonio, the dead man's brother, to whom had passed the plumes of chiefship without its authority, conducted the great festa for the dead, assisted by the remnants of the original tribe, the old men who had struggled through the years around the dead chief: Narciso, Ramon, Basilio, Jose el Carmelo and Chrysantho.

The festa of the dead lasts seven

days, the culmination being the great Dance of the Remembrance, when trophies and gifts are sent to the dead man, to typify the last remembrance in which he is to be held.

The Dance of the Remembrance was at night, and we drove to the festa ground as day was falling into dark. The big court with its border of little branch-built partitions was almost deserted but for a crowd of Indian cowboys on restless little ponies, clustered in the center of the square, laughing and jesting; the new generation who laughs at the tribe and at the old men who still believe in the strange rites. The little ramada houses fronting on the court were busy and lit within; at the dooryards sat the women with their crowds of black-eyed little ones as quiet as the purple evening itself.

Then the ramada grew darker, the purple becoming dense, giving way to the black; and the big stars came out. An old man began to build a great fire, muttering strange chants. The crimson glow in the darkness weirdly lit the watching faces. The cowboys scattered with much dust and a clatter of spurs into the darkness. An the feeble old man sat on a bench within the red circle, leaning on their staves; their lit faces seemed full of memories. A great quiet had come. There was only the snap of the fire and the hurrying upward of sparks that seemed futile against the immensity of the stars. It all somehow seemed to typify the kindly life of the dead old man, its tumult over, purple starlit peace came down at last.

The came a terrible sound of moaning from the dark ramada. The fire had died to a great pile of glowing coals. The old men within the red circle began to moan softly and the wailing without rose to a piercing chant of dreadful sorrow, the strange words making it seem the more sinister. Then a weird figure leaped out of the darkness, dancing from side to side, keeping shrilly, clad only in a skirt of eagle feathers, the body ribbed and striped with blue and white paint. It was grotesque. But no one laughed.

The awful chant from the dark had taken on a strange din as of animals, and out of the black emerged the most dreadful sight I have ever seen; a great close-huddled crowd of inhuman creatures creeping along the ground after the fantastic dancer with his clapping sticks—wild hair, and feathers, and painted bodies emitting inhuman cries and dreadful moans. There

was something appalling and primitive in the sight, and one realized for the first time the tenuity of the early fathers.

On they came, their awful clamor becoming more intense, a perfect frenzy seeming to govern them. They would have crawled through the great bed of coals but for the leaping prevention of the circle of chanting spectators.

The whole square had awakened to vivid life; a great crowd of dark-skinned Indians wailed and cried as if hypnotized as they watched the painted leaders in the center. Only on the outer edge of the circle stood the Indian boys, smoking cigarettes nonchalantly and laughing at the grotesque show. One realized suddenly that Cinon's day and the old tribal days were over. There stood the future in those young men.

The first figure of the Dance of the Remembrance typified the search for the dead man through the after-world, each brave disguised as the animal that was his totem, and the remainder of the strange rite was devoted to a weird dancing back and forth of the whole assemblage of old Indians, bearing various articles to the smoldering heap of coals—yards and yards of bright calico, a coat, a hat, bags of tobacco, fruit and little meal cakes. The great wreaths of violet smoke blurred the chanting dancers and wailing spectators. One heard only their keen crying and the rhythmic beat of their feet.

The danced until the sky grew pale and the stars faded, gradually encroaching on the embers and beating them into the dust.

The chant had grown fainter and fainter, and as the naked, weary, painted things crept back finally to the ramadas, it died quite away, and the faint whitish beginning of dawn stretched behind the shadowy live oaks on the dark hill behind.

Thus ended the last festival of the dead. In another year there will be few of these old Indians left on the Mesa Grande reservation. Old Antonio, with his pathetic plumes of a dead chiefship, will certainly not live through the rigor of the coming winter. And Cinon's mournful prophecy is realized, "Homon-e sone!"

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