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Convert of the

Rev. Stephen Masterton, a circuit preacher of northern California, while conducting a revival at Tazajasa, succumbs to the physical and spiritual strain brought on by his religious labors. He is ordered away to a sleepy old Spanish town in the southern country to recuperate. There, while gaining health and strength, he is much shocked by being a constant witness of the (to him) iniquitous religious exercises of the Catholic mission adjoining his residence. One night, while sojourning himself by singing hymns in the garden, he hears the tinkling of a guitar, apparently endeavoring to accompany his voice. The same thing happens the next evening, and on the third night, at the conclusion of his psalm, a childish but fascinating voice is mischievously uplifted in a Spanish love song. Impelled by curiosity, he approaches the wall of the garden, and stumbles the singer, a beautiful young girl, who falls off the wall into his arms. She talks to him a moment coquettishly. Tells him that she is Pepita Ramirez, daughter of the mission gardener. The next day the preacher convinces himself that he has caused to convert this girl to true Christianity. He sends her a note privately, appointing a meeting at the wall the evening which Pepita, clad in black lace from head to foot, appears by coming.

"You haven't brought your guitar," he continued, still more awkwardly, as he noticed that she held only a long black fan in her hand.

"For what? You would that I play it, and when my uncle says: 'Where go, Pepita, she is in love, some one shall say: 'Oh! I have heard her tink-a-tink in the garden of the American, who'll blame?' And then--it was finished!"

Masterton began to feel exceedingly uncomfortable. There was something in this situation that he had not dreamed of. But with the persistency of an awkward man he went on:

"Are you the devil?"

her round black eyes full upon him and dropped her fan from her face.

"And what for you ask me to come here then?"

"I wanted to talk with you," he began, "on far more serious matters." "I wished to--" but he stopped. He could not address this quaint child-woman, staring at him in black-eyed wonder, in either the measured or the impetuous terms with which he would have exhorted a maturer responsible being. He made a step towards her; she drew back, striking at his extended hand half impatiently, half mischievously with her fan.

He flushed--and then burst out bluntly, "I want to talk with you about your soul."

"My what?"

"Your immortal soul, unhappy girl. What have you to make with that? Are you a devil?" Her eyes grew rounder and though she faced him boldly.

"I am a minister of the gospel," he said, in hurried entreaty. "You must hear me for a moment. I would save your soul!"

"My immortal soul! If with the padre at the mission--you must seek her there! My mortal body," she added, with a mischievous smile, "say to you, 'good night, Don Esteban.' She dropped him a little curtsy and--ran away."

"One moment, Miss Ramirez," said Masterton, eagerly, but she had already stopped beyond his reach. He saw



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her little black figure passing swiftly beside the moonlit wall, saw it suddenly slide into a shadowy fissure, and vanish.

In his blank disappointment he could not bear to reenter the house he had left so sanguinely a few moments before, but walked moodily in the garden. His discomfiture was the more complete since he felt that his defeat was owing to some mistake in his methods, and not the incorrigibility of his subject.

Was it not spiritual weakness in him to have presented so sharply the girl's imputation that he wished to make love to her? He should have borne it as Christians had even before now borne slander and false testimony for their faith. He might even have accepted it, and let the triumph of her conversion in the end prove his innocence. Or was his purpose incompatible with that sisterly affection he had so often preached to the women of his flock? He might have taken her hand, and called her "Sisters Pepita," even as he had called Deborah "Sister." He recalled the fact that he had for an instant held her struggling in his arms; he remembered the thrill that the recollection had caused him, and somehow it now sent a burning blush across his face. He hurried back into the house.

The next day a thousand wild ideas took the place of his former settled resolution. He would seek the padre, this custodian of the young girl's soul; he would convince him of his error, or beseech him to give him an equal access to her spirit! He would seek the uncle of the girl, and work up his feelings. He would begin his missionary work with Conception, and then enlist her in the task of saving Pepita's soul. But remembering the old woman's singular conduct--by the light of Pepita's revelation--he shrank from her questioning glances. A dreadful suspicion that she might have divined some secret impelling power in his nature, that he had not dreamed of himself, began to haunt him.

Then for three or four days he resolved to put the young girl from his mind, trusting after the fashion of his kind for some special revelation from a supreme source as an indication for his conduct. This revelation presently occurred, as it is apt to occur when wanted.

One evening his heart leaped at the familiar sound of Pepita's guitar. He could see that she was not upon it, but the distance. Whatever his ultimate intention now, he hurriedly ran into the garden. The sound came from the former direction, but as he unhesitatingly approached the mission wall he could see that she was not upon it, and as the notes of her guitar were struck again, he knew that they came from the other side. But the chords were a prelude to one of his own hymns, and he stood entranced as her sweet, child-like voice rose--with the very words that he had sung. The few defects were those of purely oral imitation, the accents even the slight retention of the "s." were Pepita's own:

"We are traveling home to God, In the way our fathers trod. They are happy now and soon their happiness shall see."

He was astounded. Her recollection of the air and the words was the more wonderful, for he remembered now that he had only sung that particular hymn once. But to his still greater delight and surprise her voice rose again in the second verse, with a touch of plaintiveness that he had never heard:

children of the Heavenly King, As ye journey eastwardly sing; Eating your great Redeemer's praise, Glorious in His works and ways.

The simple, almost childish words--so childish that they might have been the fitting creation of her own childish lips--here died away with a sweep and crash of the whole strings. Breathless silence followed, in which Stephen Masterton could feel the beatings of his own heart.

"Miss Ramirez," he called in a voice that scarcely seemed his own. There was no reply. "Pepita!" he repeated; it was strangely like the accent of a lover, but he no longer cared. Still the singer's voice was silent.

Then he ran swiftly beside the wall, as he had seen her run, until he came to the fissure. It was overgrown with vines and brambles, almost as impenetrable as an abattoir, but if she had pierced it in her delicate crasse dress, so would he! He brushed roughly through, and found himself in a glimmering aisle of pear trees close by the white wall of the mission church.

For a moment, in that intricate tracery of ebony and ivory made by the rising moon, he was dazzled, but evidently his intrusion into the orchard had not been as lithe and silent as he had hoped. For a figure in a parti-colored dress suddenly started into activity, and running from the wall began to course through the trees until it became apparently a part of that involved pattern. Nothing daunted, however, Stephen Masterton pursued, his speed increasing as he recognized the fineness of Pepita's barred dress, but the young girl had the advantage of knowing the locality, and could evade her pursuer by unsuspected turns and doubles.

For some moments this fanciful sylvan chase was kept up in perfect silence; it might have been a woodland nymph pursued by a wandering shepherd. Masterton presently saw that she was making towards a tiled roof that was now visible as projecting over the garden wall, and was evidently her goal of refuge. He redoubled his speed; with skillful audacity and sheer strength of his broad shoulders he broke through a dense Ceanothus hedge which Pepita was swiftly skirting, and suddenly appeared between her and her house.

With the first cry, the young girl turned and tried to hurry herself in the hedge; but in another stride the circuit preacher was at her side and caught her panting figure in his arms.

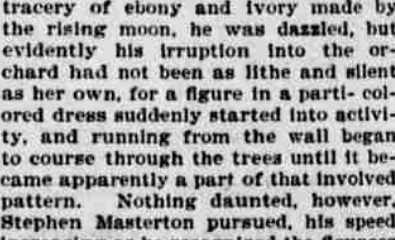
While he had been running he had swiftly formulated what he should do and what he should say to her. To his simple appeal for her companionship and willing ear he would add a brotherly tenderness, that should invite her trustfulness in him; he would confess his wrong and ask her forgiveness of his abrupt solicitations; he would propose to teach her the more hymns; they would practice psalmody together; even this priest, the custodian of her soul, could not object to that; but chiefly he would thank her; he would tell her how she had pleased him, and this would lead to more serious and thoughtful converse. All this was in his mind while he ran, was upon his lips when he caught her, and for an instant she lapsed, exhausted, in his arms. But, alas! even in that moment he suddenly drew her towards him and kissed her on the forehead.

The wire grass was already yellowing on the Tazajasa plains with the dusty dews of the long dry summer, when Dr. Duchesne returned to Tazajasa. He came to see the wife of Deacon Sanderson, who, having for the 12th time added to the population of the settlement was not "doing so well" as everybody--except, possibly, Dr. Duchesne--expected. After he had made this hollow-eyed, over-burdened, undernourished woman as comfortable as he could in her rude, neglected surroundings, to change the dreary chronicle of suffering he turned to the husband, and said: "After what has become of M.

schools of the mission where this young Jesabel of a singer teaches the children to chant in unknown tongues? Didn't he find him living with a wrinkled Indian witch who called him 'Padrone,' and speaking her gibberish? Didn't he find him, who left here a man mortified in flesh and spirit and pale with native wines and flesh pots, and even vain and gaudy in colored apparel? And last of all, didn't Brother Bulkiy hear that a rumor was spread far and wide that this miserable backslider was to take to himself a wife--in one of these strange women--that very Jesabel who seduced him? What do you call that?"

"It looks a good deal like human nature," said the doctor, musingly, "but I call it a cure!"

The End.



Caught.

Masterton, who used to be in your-vocation?" A long groan came from the deacon.

"Hullo! I hope he has not had a relapse," said the doctor, earnestly. "I thought I'd knocked all that nonsense out of him--I beg your pardon--I mean," he added, hurriedly, "he wrote to me only a few weeks ago that he was picking up his strength again and doing well!"

"In his weak, gross, sinful flesh--yes, no doubt," returned the deacon, scornfully, "and, perhaps, even in a worldly sense, for those who value the vanities of life; but he is lost to us, for all time, and lost to eternal life for ever. Not," he continued in sanctimonious vindictiveness, "but that I often had my doubts of Brother Masterton's steadfastness. He was too much given to imagery and song."

"But what has he done?" persisted Dr. Duchesne.

"Done! He has embraced the Scarlet Woman!"

"Dear me!" said the doctor, "so soon? Is it anybody you knew here--not anybody's wife? Eh?"

"He has entered the Church of Rome," said the deacon, indignantly; "he has forsaken the God of his fathers for the gods of the idolaters; he is the consort of Parisians and the slave of the Pope!"

"But are you sure?" said Dr. Duchesne, with perhaps less concern than before.

"Sure," returned the deacon, angrily; "didn't Brother Bulkiy, on account of warning reports made by a God-fearing and soul-seeking teamster, make a special pilgrimage to this land of Sodom to inquire and spy out its wickedness. Didn't he find Stephen Masterton steeped in the iniquity of practicing on an organ--he that scorned even a violin or harmonium in the tents of the Lord--in an idolatrous chapel, with a foreign female Papist for a teacher? Didn't he find him the guest at the board of a Jesuit priest, visiting the

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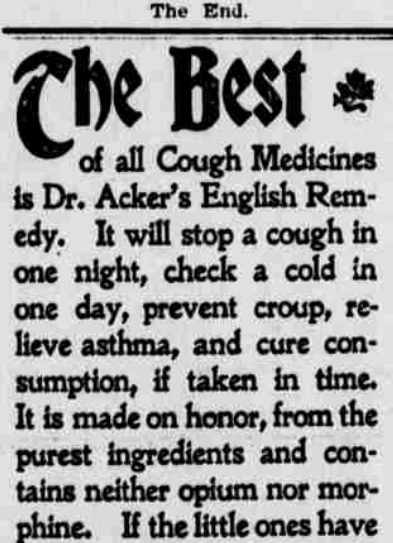
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