

## A CONVERT OF THE MISSION

*by Bret Harte*

The largest tent of the Tasajara camp meeting was crowded to its utmost extent. The excitement of that dense mass was at its highest pitch. The Reverend Stephen Masterton, the single erect, passionate figure of that confused medley of kneeling worshipers, had reached the culminating pitch of his irresistible exhortatory power. Sighs and groans were beginning to respond to his appeals, when the reverend brother was seen to lurch heavily forward and fall to the ground.

At first the effect was that of a part of his performance; the groans redoubled, and twenty or thirty brethren threw themselves prostrate in humble imitation of the preacher. But Sister Deborah Stokes, perhaps through some special revelation of feminine intuition, grasped the fallen man, tore loose his black silk necktie, and dragged him free of the struggling, frantic crowd whose paroxysms he had just evoked. Howbeit he was pale and unconscious, and unable to continue the service. Even the next day, when he had slightly recovered, it was found that any attempt to renew his fervid exhortations produced the same disastrous result.

A council was hurriedly held by the elders. In spite of the energetic protests of Sister Stokes, it was held that the Lord "was wrestlin' with his sperrit," and he was subjected to the same extraordinary treatment from the whole congregation that he himself had applied to THEM. Propped up pale and trembling in the "Mourners' Bench" by two brethren, he was "striven with," exhorted, prayed over, and admonished, until insensibility mercifully succeeded convulsions. Spiritual therapeutics having failed, he was turned over to the weak and carnal nursing of "womenfolk." But after a month of incapacity he was obliged to yield to "the flesh," and, in the local dialect, "to use a doctor."

It so chanced that the medical practitioner of the district was a man of large experience, of military training, and plain speech. When, therefore, he one day found in his surgery a man of rude Western type, strong-limbed and sunburned, but trembling, hesitating and neurotic in movement, after listening to his symptoms gravely, he asked, abruptly: "And how much are you drinking now?"

"I am a lifelong abstainer," stammered his patient in quivering indignation. But this was followed by another question so frankly appalling to the hearer that he staggered to his feet.

"I'm Stephen Masterton--known of men as a circuit preacher, of the Northern California district," he thundered--"and an enemy of the flesh in all its forms."

"I beg your pardon," responded Dr. Duchesne, grimly, "but as you are suffering from excessive and repeated excitation of the nervous system, and the depression following prolonged artificial exaltation--it makes little difference whether the cause be spiritual, as long as there is a certain physical effect upon your BODY--which I believe you have brought to me to cure. Now--as to diet? you look all wrong there.

"My food is of the simplest--I have no hankering for fleshpots," responded the patient.

"I suppose you call saleratus bread and salt pork and flapjacks SIMPLE?" said the doctor, coolly; "they are COMMON enough, and if you were working with your muscles instead of your nerves in that frame of yours they might not hurt you; but you are suffering as much from eating more than you can digest as the veriest gourmand. You must stop all that. Go down to a quiet watering-place for two months."

...

"I go to a watering-place?" interrupted Masterton; "to the haunt of the idle, the frivolous and wanton--never!"

"Well, I'm not particular about a 'watering-place,'" said the doctor, with a shrug, "although a little idleness and frivolity with different food wouldn't hurt you--but you must go somewhere and change your habits and mode of life COMPLETELY. I will find you some sleepy old Spanish town in the southern country where you can rest and diet. If this is distasteful to you," he continued, grimly, "you can always call it 'a trial.'"

Stephen Masterton may have thought it so when, a week later, he found himself issuing from a rocky gorge into a rough, badly paved, hilly street, which seemed to be only a continuation of the mountain road itself. It broadened suddenly into a square or plaza, flanked on each side by an irregular row of yellowing adobe houses, with the inevitable verandaed tienda in each corner, and the solitary, galleried fonda, with a half-Moorish archway leading into an inner patio or courtyard in the center.

The whole street stopped as usual at the very door of the Mission church, a few hundred yards farther on, and under the shadow of the two belfry towers at each angle of the facade, as if this were the ultima thule of every traveler. But all that the eye rested on was ruined, worn, and crumbling. The adobe houses were cracked by the incessant sunshine of the half-year-long summer, or the more intermittent earthquake shock; the paved courtyard of the fonda was so uneven and sunken in the center that the lumbering wagon and faded diligencia stood on an incline, and the mules with difficulty kept their footing while being unladen; the whitened plaster had fallen from the feet of the two pillars that flanked the Mission doorway, like bandages from a gouty limb, leaving the reddish core of adobe visible; there were apparently as many broken tiles in the streets and alleys as there were on the heavy red roofs that everywhere asserted themselves--and even seemed to slide down the crumbling walls to the ground. There were hopeless gaps in grille and grating of doorways and windows, where the iron bars had dropped helplessly out, or were

bent at different angles. The walls of the peaceful Mission garden and the warlike presidio were alike lost in the escalating vines or leveled by the pushing boughs of gnarled pear and olive trees that now surmounted them. The dust lay thick and impalpable in hollow and gutter, and rose in little vapory clouds with a soft detonation at every stroke of his horse's hoofs. Over all this dust and ruin, idleness seemed to reign supreme. From the velvet-jacketed figures lounging motionless in the shadows of the open doorways--so motionless that only the lazy drift of cigarette smoke betokened their breathing--to the reclining peons in the shade of a catalpa, or the squatting Indians in the arroyo--all was sloth and dirt.

The Rev. Stephen Masterton felt his throat swell with his old exhortative indignation. A gaudy yellow fan waved languidly in front of a black rose-crested head at a white-curtained window. He knew he was stifling with righteous wrath, and clapped his spurs to his horse.

Nevertheless, in a few days, by the aid of a letter to the innkeeper, he was installed in a dilapidated adobe house, not unlike those he had seen, but situated in the outskirts and overlooking the garden and part of the refectory of the old Mission. It had even a small garden of its own--if a strip of hot wall, overburdened with yellow and white roses, a dozen straggling callas, a bank of heliotrope, and an almond tree could be called a garden. It had an open doorway, but so heavily recessed in the thick walls that it preserved seclusion, a sitting-room, and an alcoved bedroom with deep embrasured windows that however excluded the unwinking sunlight and kept an even monotone of shade.

Strange to say, he found it cool, restful, and, in spite of the dust, absolutely clean, and, but for the scent of heliotrope, entirely inodorous. The dry air seemed to dissipate all noxious emanations and decay--the very dust itself in its fine impalpability was volatile with a spicelike piquancy, and left no stain.

A wrinkled Indian woman, brown and veined like a tobacco leaf, ministered to his simple wants. But these wants had also been regulated by Dr. Duchesne. He found himself, with some grave doubts of his effeminacy, breakfasting on a single cup of chocolate instead of his usual bowl of molasses-sweetened coffee; crumbling a crisp tortilla instead of the heavy saleratus bread, greasy flapjack, or the lard-fried steak, and, more wonderful still, completing his repast with purple grapes from the Mission wall. He could not deny that it was simple--that it was even refreshing and consistent with the climate and his surroundings. On the other hand, it was the frugal diet of the commonest peasant--and were not those peons slothful idolaters?

At the end of the week--his correspondence being also restricted by his doctor to a few lines to himself regarding his progress--he wrote to that adviser:

"The trembling and unquiet has almost ceased; I have less nightly turmoil and visions; my carnal appetite seems to be amply mollified and soothed by these viands, whatever may be their ultimate effect upon the weakness of our common sinful nature. But I should not be truthful to you if I did not warn you that I am viewing with the deepest spiritual concern a decided tendency toward sloth, and a folding of the hands over matters that often, I fear, are spiritual as well as temporal. I would ask you to consider, in a spirit of love, if it be not wise to rouse my apathetic flesh, so as to strive, even with the feeblest exhortations, against this sloth in others--if only to keep one's self from falling into the pit of easy indulgence."

What answer he received is not known, but it is to be presumed that he kept loyal faith with his physician, and gave himself up to simple walks and rides and occasional meditation. His solitude was not broken in upon; curiosity was too active a vice, and induced too much exertion for his indolent neighbors, and the Americano's basking seclusion, though unlike the habits of his countrymen, did not affect them. The shopkeeper and innkeeper saluted him always with a

profound courtesy which awakened his slight resentment, partly because he was conscious that it was grateful to him, and partly that he felt he ought to have provoked in them a less satisfied condition.

Once, when he had unwittingly passed the confines of his own garden, through a gap in the Mission orchard, a lissome, black-coated shadow slipped past him with an obeisance so profound and gentle that he was startled at first into an awkward imitation of it himself, and then into an angry self-examination. He knew that he loathed that long-skirted, womanlike garment, that dangling, ostentatious symbol, that air of secrecy and mystery, and he inflated his chest above his loosely tied cravat and unbuttoned waistcoat with a contrasted sense of freedom. But he was conscious the next day of weakly avoiding a recurrence of this meeting, and in his self-examination put it down to his self-disciplined observance of his doctor's orders. But when he was strong again, and fitted for his Master's work, how strenuously he should improve the occasion this gave him of attacking the Scarlet Woman among her slaves and worshipers!

His afternoon meditations and the perusal of his only book--the Bible--were regularly broken in upon at about sunset by two or three strokes from the cracked bell that hung in the open belfry which reared itself beyond the gnarled pear trees. He could not say that it was aggressive or persistent, like his own church bells, nor that it even expressed to him any religious sentiment. Moreover, it was not a "Sabbath" bell, but a DAILY one, and even then seemed to be only a signal to ears easily responsive, rather than a stern reminder. And the hour was always a singularly witching one.

It was when the sun had slipped from the glaring red roofs, and the yellowing adobe of the Mission walls and the tall ranks of wild oats on the hillside were all of the one color of old gold. It was when the quivering heat of the arroyo and dusty expanse of plaza was blending with the soft breath of the sea fog that crept through the clefts of the coast range, until a refreshing balm seemed to fall like a benediction

on all nature. It was when the trade-wind-swept and irritated surfaces of the rocky gorge beyond were soothed with clinging vapors; when the pines above no longer rocked monotonously, and the great undulating sea of the wild-oat plains had gone down and was at rest. It was at this hour, one afternoon, that, with the released scents of the garden, there came to him a strange and subtle perfume that was new to his senses. He laid aside his book, went into the garden, and, half-unconscious of his trespass, passed through the Mission orchard and thence into the little churchyard beside the church.

Looking at the strange inscriptions in an unfamiliar tongue, he was singularly touched with the few cheap memorials lying upon the graves--like childish toys--and for the moment overlooked the papistic emblems that accompanied them. It struck him vaguely that Death, the common leveler, had made even the symbols of a faith eternal inferior to those simple records of undying memory and affection, and he was for a moment startled into doubt.

He walked to the door of the church; to his surprise it was open. Standing upon the threshold, he glanced inside, and stood for a moment utterly bewildered. In a man of refined taste and education that bizarre and highly colored interior would have only provoked a smile or shrug; to Stephen Masterton's highly emotional nature, but artistic inexperience, strangely enough it was profoundly impressive. The heavily timbered, roughly hewn roof, barred with alternate bands of blue and Indian red, the crimson hangings, the gold and black draperies, affected this religious backwoodsman exactly as they were designed to affect the heathen and acolytes for whose conversion the temple had been reared. He could scarcely take his eyes from the tinsel-crowned Mother of Heaven, resplendent in white and gold and glittering with jewels; the radiant shield before the Host, illuminated by tall spectral candles in the mysterious obscurity of the altar, dazzled him like the rayed disk of the setting sun.

A gentle murmur, as of the distant sea, came from the altar. In his naive bewilderment he had not seen the few kneeling figures in the shadow of column and aisle; it was not until a man, whom he recognized as a muleteer he had seen that afternoon gambling and drinking in the fonda, slipped by him like a shadow and sank upon his knees in the center of the aisle that he realized the overpowering truth.

HE, Stephen Masterton, was looking upon some rite of Popish idolatry! He was turning quickly away when the keeper of the tienda-- a man of sloth and sin--gently approached him from the shadow of a column with a mute gesture, which he took to be one of invitation. A fierce protest of scorn and indignation swelled to his throat, but died upon his lips. Yet he had strength enough to erect his gaunt emaciated figure, throwing out his long arms and extended palms in the attitude of defiant exorcism, and then rush swiftly from the church. As he did so he thought he saw a faint smile cross the shopkeeper's face, and a whispered exchange of words with a neighboring worshiper of more exalted appearance came to his ears. But it was not intelligible to his comprehension.

The next day he wrote to his doctor in that quaint grandiloquence of written speech with which the half-educated man balances the slips of his colloquial phrasing:

Do not let the purgation of my flesh be unduly protracted. What with the sloth and idolatries of Baal and Ashteroth, which I see daily around me, I feel that without a protest not only the flesh but the spirit is mortified. But my bodily strength is mercifully returning, and I found myself yesterday able to take a long ride at that hour which they here keep sacred for an idolatrous rite, under the beautiful name of "The Angelus." Thus do they bear false witness to Him! Can you tell me the meaning of the Spanish words "Don Keyhotter"? I am ignorant of these sensuous Southern languages, and am aware that this is not the correct spelling, but I have striven to give the phonetic equivalent.

It was used, I am inclined to think, in reference to MYSELF, by an idolater.

P.S.--You need not trouble yourself. I have just ascertained that the words in question were simply the title of an idle novel, and, of course, could not possibly refer to ME.

Howbeit it was as "Don Quixote"--that is, the common Spaniard's conception of the Knight of La Mancha, merely the simple fanatic and madman--that Mr. Stephen Masterton ever after rode all unconsciously through the streets of the Mission, amid the half-pitying, half-smiling glances of the people.

In spite of his meditations, his single volume, and his habit of retiring early, he found his evenings were growing lonely and tedious. He missed the prayer meeting, and, above all, the hymns. He had a fine baritone voice, sympathetic, as may be imagined, but not cultivated. One night, in the seclusion of his garden, and secure in his distance from other dwellings, he raised his voice in a familiar camp-meeting hymn with a strong Covenanters' ring in the chorus. Growing bolder as he went on, he at last filled the quiet night with the strenuous sweep of his chant. Surprised at his own fervor, he paused for a moment, listening, half frightened, half ashamed of his outbreak. But there was only the trilling of the night wind in the leaves, or the far-off yelp of a coyote.

For a moment he thought he heard the metallic twang of a stringed instrument in the Mission garden beyond his own, and remembered his contiguity to the church with a stir of defiance. But he was relieved, nevertheless. His pent-up emotion had found vent, and without the nervous excitement that had followed his old exaltation. That night he slept better. He had found the Lord again--with Psalmody!

The next evening he chanced upon a softer hymn of the same simplicity, but with a vein of human tenderness in its aspirations, which his more hopeful mood gently rendered. At the conclusion of the first verse he was, however, distinctly conscious of being followed by the same twanging sound he had heard on the previous night, and which even his untutored ear could recognize as an attempt to accompany him. But before he had finished the second verse the unknown player, after an ingenious but ineffectual essay to grasp the right chord, abandoned it with an impatient and almost pettish flourish, and a loud bang upon the sounding-board of the unseen instrument. Masterton finished it alone.

With his curiosity excited, however, he tried to discover the locality of the hidden player. The sound evidently came from the Mission garden; but in his ignorance of the language he could not even interrogate his Indian housekeeper. On the third night, however, his hymn was uninterrupted by any sound from the former musician. A sense of disappointment, he knew not why, came over him. The kindly overture of the unseen player had been a relief to his loneliness. Yet he had barely concluded the hymn when the familiar sound again struck his ears. But this time the musician played boldly, confidently, and with a singular skill on the instrument.

The brilliant prelude over, to his entire surprise and some confusion, a soprano voice, high, childish, but infinitely quaint and fascinating, was mischievously uplifted. But alas! even to his ears, ignorant of the language, it was very clearly a song of levity and wantonness, of freedom and license, of coquetry and incitement! Yet such was its fascination that he fancied it was reclaimed by the delightful childlike and innocent expression of the singer.

Enough that this tall, gaunt, broad-shouldered man arose and, overcome by a curiosity almost as childlike, slipped into the garden and glided with an Indian softness of tread toward the voice. The moon shone full upon the ruined Mission wall tipped with clusters of

dark foliage. Half hiding, half mingling with one of them--an indistinct bulk of light-colored huddled fleeces like an extravagant bird's nest--hung the unknown musician. So intent was the performer's preoccupation that Masterton actually reached the base of the wall immediately below the figure without attracting its attention. But his foot slipped on the crumbling debris with a snapping of dry twigs. There was a quick little cry from above. He had barely time to recover his position before the singer, impulsively leaning over the parapet, had lost hers, and fell outward. But Masterton was tall, alert, and self-possessed, and threw out his long arms. The next moment they were full of soft flounces, a struggling figure was against his breast, and a woman's frightened little hands around his neck. But he had broken her fall, and almost instantly, yet with infinite gentleness, he released her unharmed, with hardly her crisp flounces crumpled, in an upright position against the wall. Even her guitar, still hanging from her shoulder by a yellow ribbon, had bounded elastic and resounding against the wall, but lay intact at her satin-slippered feet. She caught it up with another quick little cry, but this time more of sauciness than fear, and drew her little hand across its strings, half defiantly.

"I hope you are not hurt?" said the circuit preacher, gravely.

She broke into a laugh so silvery that he thought it no extravagance to liken it to the moonbeams that played over her made audible. She was lithe, yet plump; barred with black and yellow and small-waisted like a pretty wasp. Her complexion in that light was a sheen of pearl satin that made her eyes blacker and her little mouth redder than any other color could. She was small, but, remembering the fourteen-year-old wife of the shopkeeper, he felt that, for all her childish voice and features, she was a grown woman, and a sudden shyness took hold of him.

But she looked pertly in his face, stood her guitar upright before her, and put her hands behind her back as she leaned saucily against the wall and shrugged her shoulders.

"It was the fault of you," she said, in a broken English that seemed as much infantine as foreign. "What for you not remain to yourself in your own CASA? So it come. You creep so--in the dark--and shake my wall, and I fall. And she," pointing to the guitar, "is a'most broke! And for all thees I have only make to you a serenade. Ingrate!"

"I beg your pardon," said Masterton quickly, "but I was curious. I thought I might help you, and--"

"Make yourself another cat on the wall, eh? No; one is enough, thank you!"

A frown lowered on Masterton's brow. "You don't understand me," he said, bluntly. "I did not know WHO was here."

"Ah, BUENO! Then it is Pepita Ramirez, you see," she said, tapping her bodice with one little finger, "all the same; the niece from Manuel Garcia, who keeps the Mission garden and lif there. And you?"

"My name is Masterton."

"How mooch?"

"Masterton," he repeated.

She tried to pronounce it once or twice desperately, and then shook her little head so violently that a yellow rose fastened over her ear fell to the ground. But she did not heed it, nor the fact that Masterton had picked it up.

"Ah, I cannot!" she said, poutingly. "It is as deefeeicult to make go as my guitar with your serenade."

"Can you not say 'Stephen Masterton'?" he asked, more gently, with a returning and forgiving sense of her childishness.

"Es-stefen? Ah, ESTEBAN! Yes; Don Esteban! BUENO! Then, Don Esteban, what for you sink so melank-olly one night, and one night so fierce? The melank-olly, he ees not so bad; but the fierce--ah! he is weeked! Ess it how the Americano make always his serenade?"

Masterton's brow again darkened. And his hymn of exultation had been mistaken by these people--by this--this wanton child!

"It was no serenade," he replied, curtly; "it was in the praise of the Lord!"

"Of how mooch?"

"Of the Lord of Hosts--of the Almighty in Heaven." He lifted his long arms reverently on high.

"Oh!" she said, with a frightened look, slightly edging away from the wall. At a secure distance she stopped. "Then you are a soldier, Don Esteban?"

"No!"

"Then what for you sink 'I am a soldier of the Lord,' and you will make die 'in His army'? Oh, yes; you have said." She gathered up her guitar tightly under her arm, shook her small finger at him gravely, and said, "You are a hooombog, Don Esteban; good a' night," and began to glide away.

"One moment, Miss--Miss Ramirez," called Masterton. "I--that is you--you have--forgotten your rose," he added, feebly, holding up the flower. She halted.

"Ah, yes; he have drop, you have pick him up, he is yours. I have drop, you have pick ME up, but I am NOT yours. Good a' night, COMANDANTE Don Esteban!"

With a light laugh she ran along beside the wall for a little distance, suddenly leaped up and disappeared in one of the largest gaps in its ruined and helpless structure. Stephen Masterton gazed after her stupidly, still holding the rose in his hand. Then he threw it away and re-entered his home.

Lighting his candle, he undressed himself, prayed fervently--so fervently that all remembrance of the idle, foolish incident was wiped from his mind, and went to bed. He slept well and dreamlessly. The next morning, when his thoughts recurred to the previous night, this seemed to him a token that he had not deviated from his spiritual integrity; it did not occur to him that the thought itself was a tacit suspicion.

So his feet quite easily sought the garden again in the early sunshine, even to the wall where she had stood. But he had not taken into account the vivifying freshness of the morning, the renewed promise of life and resurrection in the pulsing air and potent sunlight, and as he stood there he seemed to see the figure of the young girl again leaning against the wall in all the charm of her irrepressible and innocent youth. More than that, he found the whole scene re-enacting itself before him; the nebulous drapery half hidden in the foliage, the cry and the fall; the momentary soft contact of the girl's figure against his own, the clinging arms around his neck, the brush and fragrance of her flounces--all this came back to him with a strength he had NOT felt when it occurred.

He was turning hurriedly away when his eyes fell upon the yellow rose still lying in the debris where he had thrown it--but still pure, fresh, and unfaded. He picked it up again, with a singular fancy that it was the girl herself, and carried it into the house.

As he placed it half shyly in a glass on his table a wonderful thought occurred to him. Was not the episode of last night a special providence? Was not that young girl, wayward and childlike, a mere neophyte in her idolatrous religion, as yet unsteeped in sloth and ignorance, presented to him as a brand to be snatched from the burning? Was not this the opportunity of conversion he had longed for--this the chance of exercising his gifts of exhortation that he had been hiding in the napkin of solitude and seclusion? Nay, was not all this PREDESTINED? His illness, his consequent exile to this land of false gods--this contiguity to the Mission--was not all this part of a supremely ordered plan for the girl's salvation--and was HE not elected and ordained for that service? Nay, more, was not the girl herself a mere unconscious instrument in the hands of a higher power; was not her voluntary attempt to accompany him in his devotional exercise a vague stirring of that predestined force within her? Was not even that wantonness and frivolity contrasted with her childishness--which he had at first misunderstood--the stirrings of the flesh and the spirit, and was he to abandon her in that struggle of good and evil?

He lifted his bowed head, that had been resting on his arm before the little flower on the table--as if it were a shrine--with a flash of resolve in his blue eyes. The wrinkled Concepcion coming to her duties in the morning scarcely recognized her gloomily abstracted master in this transfigured man. He looked ten years younger.

She met his greeting, and the few direct inquiries that his new resolve enabled him to make more freely, with some information--which a later talk with the shopkeeper, who had a fuller English vocabulary, confirmed in detail.

"YES! truly this was a niece of the Mission gardener, who lived with her uncle in the ruined wing of the presidio. She had taken her first communion four years ago. Ah, yes, she was a great musician, and could play on the organ. And the guitar, ah, yes--of a certainty. She

was gay, and flirted with the caballeros, young and old, but she cared not for any."

Whatever satisfaction this latter statement gave Masterton, he believed it was because the absence of any disturbing worldly affection would make her an easier convert.

But how continue this chance acquaintance and effect her conversion? For the first time Masterton realized the value of expediency; while his whole nature impelled him to seek her society frankly and publicly and exhort her openly, he knew that this was impossible; still more, he remembered her unmistakable fright at his first expression of faith; he must "be wise as the serpent and harmless as the dove." He must work upon her soul alone, and secretly. He, who would have shrunk from any clandestine association with a girl from mere human affection, saw no wrong in a covert intimacy for the purpose of religious salvation. Ignorant as he was of the ways of the world, and inexperienced in the usages of society, he began to plan methods of secretly meeting her with all the intrigue of a gallant. The perspicacity as well as the intuition of a true lover had descended upon him in this effort of mere spiritual conquest.

Armed with his information and a few Spanish words, he took the yellow Concepcion aside and gravely suborned her to carry a note to be delivered secretly to Miss Ramirez. To his great relief and some surprise the old woman grinned with intelligence, and her withered hand closed with a certain familiar dexterity over the epistle and the accompanying gratuity. To a man less naively one-ideaed it might have awakened some suspicion; but to the more sanguine hopefulness of Masterton it only suggested the fancy that Concepcion herself might prove to be open to conversion, and that he should in due season attempt HER salvation also. But that would be later. For Concepcion was always with him and accessible; the girl was not.

The note, which had cost him some labor of composition, simple and almost businesslike as was the result, ran as follows:

"I wish to see you upon some matter of grave concern to yourself. Will you oblige me by coming again to the wall of the Mission tonight at early candlelight? It would avert worldly suspicion if you brought also your guitar."

The afternoon dragged slowly on; Concepcion returned; she had, with great difficulty, managed to see the senorita, but not alone; she had, however, slipped the note into her hand, not daring to wait for an answer.

In his first hopefulness Masterton did not doubt what the answer would be, but as evening approached he grew concerned as to the girl's opportunities of coming, and regretted that he had not given her a choice of time.

Before his evening meal was finished he began to fear for her willingness, and doubt the potency of his note. He was accustomed to exhort ORALLY--perhaps he ought to have waited for the chance of SPEAKING to her directly without writing.

When the moon rose he was already in the garden. Lingered at first in the shadow of an olive tree, he waited until the moonbeams fell on the wall and its crests of foliage. But nothing moved among that ebony tracery; his ear was strained for the familiar tinkle of the guitar--all was silent. As the moon rose higher he at last boldly walked to the wall, and listened for any movement on the other side of it. But nothing stirred. She was evidently NOT coming--his note had failed.

He was turning away sadly, but as he faced his home again he heard a light laugh beside him. He stopped. A black shadow stepped out from beneath his own almond tree. He started when, with a gesture that seemed familiar to him, the upper part of the shadow seemed to fall

away with a long black mantilla and the face of the young girl was revealed.

He could see now that she was clad in black lace from head to foot. She looked taller, older, and he fancied even prettier than before. A sudden doubt of his ability to impress her, a swift realization of all the difficulties of the attempt, and, for the first time perhaps, a dim perception of the incongruity of the situation came over him.

"I was looking for you on the wall," he stammered.

"MADRE DE DIOS!" she retorted, with a laugh and her old audacity, "you would that I shall ALWAYS hang there, and drop upon you like a pear when you shake the tree? No!"

"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 why? You would that I PLAY it, and when my uncle say 'Where go Pepita? She is loss,' someone shall say, 'Oh! I have hear her tink-a-tink in the garden of the Americano, who lif alone.' And then--it ess finish!"

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.

"But you played on the wall the other night, and tried to accompany me."

"But that was lass night and on the wall. I had not speak to you, you had not speak to me. You had not sent me the leetle note by your peon." She stopped, and suddenly opening her fan before her face, so that only her mischievous eyes were visible, added: "You had not

asked me then to come to hear you make lof to me, Don Esteban. That is the difference."

The circuit preacher felt the blood rush to his face. Anger, shame, mortification, remorse, and fear alternately strove with him, but above all and through all he was conscious of a sharp, exquisite pleasure-- that frightened him still more. Yet he managed to exclaim:

"No! no! You cannot think me capable of such a cowardly trick?"

The girl started, more at the unmistakable sincerity of his utterance than at the words, whose full meaning she may have only imperfectly caught.

"A treek? A treek?" she slowly and wonderingly repeated. Then suddenly, as if comprehending him, she turned 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 toward 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, 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 liv with the Padre at the Mission--you moost seek her there! My mortal BODY," she added, with a mischievous smile, "say to you, 'good a' night, Don Esteban.'" She dropped him a little curtsy and--ran away.

"One moment, Miss Ramirez," said Masterton, eagerly; but she had already slipped beyond his reach. He saw 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 re-enter 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 a spiritual weakness in him to have resented 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 "Sister 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 upon his feelings.

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 in 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, childlike voice rose with the very words that he had sung. The few defects were those of purely oral imitation, the accents, even the slight reiteration of the "s," were Pepita's own:

Cheildren oof the Heavenly King, As ye journey essweetly ssing;  
Essing your great Redeemer's praise, Glorioos in Hees works and  
ways.

He was astounded. Her recollection of the air and 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 swelled his throat:

We are traveling home to God, In the way our farzers trod, They are  
happy now, and we Soon their happiness shall see.

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 abatis, but if she had pierced it in her delicate crape dress, so could 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 tracing of ebony and ivory made by the rising moon, he was dazzled, but evidently his irruption into the orchard had not been as lithe and silent as her own, 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 increased as he recognized the flounces 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 toward a tiled roof that was now visible as projecting over the presidio 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 her first cry, the young girl turned and tried to bury 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 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 as he caught her and for an instant she lapsed, exhausted, in his arms. But, alas! even in that moment he suddenly drew her toward him, and kissed her as only a lover could!

The wire grass was already yellowing on the Tasajara plains with the dusty decay of the long, dry summer when Dr. Duchesne returned to Tasajara. He came to see the wife of Deacon Sanderson, who, having for the twelfth time added to the population of the settlement, was not "doing as 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, "And what has become of Mr. Masterton, who used to be in your--vocation?" A long groan came from the deacon.

"Hallo! 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 forever. 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 tents of the idolaters; he is the consort of Papists 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 Bulkley, 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 a guest at the board of a Jesuit priest, visiting the schools of the Mission where this young Jezebel 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 striving with sinners, fat and rosy from native wines and fleshpots, and even vain and gaudy in colored apparel? And last of all, didn't Brother Bulkley 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 Jezebel 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!"