Paquita's Christmas Tree

[Catholic World.]

Paquita's father had quarrelled with his padrone. That was how the trouble began. The "banker" had received his ten per cent. on Domenico's passage-money, and had acted as middle-man between him and the contractor who handled the "assisted" immigrant after his arrival in this land of promise; but, not content with the handsome commission from both employer and laborer, had now for the third time caused his dismissal from the dock where he was working on the city dumps, in order to obtain another commission. Domenico, though as tractable as most of his class, resented his interrupted good fortune. He was making the princely sum of one dollar and a half a day. He had trusted Fabroni implicitly, with an instinct of utter helplessness, and when he discovered that his dismissal was a trick of his to obtain a fresh commission from his new employer and himself, all the hot blood of the choleric Neapolitan was roused, and he swore silently, by all he held sacred, to "fix" his traitorous friend.

For three weeks he had returned empty-handed to the miserable tenement that, with scores of others of his countrymen, he called home, if the sweet word could be applied to Mulberry Bend equally with the sunny hillside overlooking the Bay of Naples where he was born. He had been induced to mortgage his little garden there and his few belongings to pay for his ticket to this El Dorado, where work was plenty and wages plenty. He had worked well and faithfully for the first year, and when he could manage to scrape together the few dollars necessary had sent for his wife and child. For a time how happy they had been! for now Domenico had a roof over his head; whereas before Carmellita and the little one had arrived he had burrowed at night in the dump where he worked by day. The exorbitant rent of nine dollars a month for the two little back rooms left them little margin for enjoyment, but, with their racial characteristics, they were as gay and light-hearted as children when Sundays gave them a chance.

Then had come this heavy blow. It was just too much for Domenico's patience and forbearance, and he bided his time to "fix" Fabroni.

The Italian, like the Chinaman, is born a gambler. His soul is in the game from the moment the cards are upon the table, and often his stiletto is in it too.

On Sundays Domenico was sure of meeting Fabroni in the "Battle Axe" round the corner. The following Sunday he went there, and was not disappointed. Fabroni was there and betting heavily. The game of cards, like the game of life, went against Domenico, and watching stealthily he saw what he suspected, and in a blind fury, amid a torrent of abusive Italian, he lunged at Fabroni striking him full in the throat. Fabroni was "fixed."

An affair of this kind is not unusual since "the Bend" has become a suburb of Naples; but generally the offender gets off scot free unless he is caught red-handed, as was Domenico. That was seven months ago, and he was still in jail awaiting his trial, while Carmellita was trying to make both ends meet for herself and little Paquita. She had secured work at sorting rags, and was earning just enough to keep body and soul together when a new trial was laid upon her.

When walking through the Italian quarter of New York one feels translated to a foreign shore. A picturesque if untidy element has been added to our population. Here dark eyes are flashing, white teeth gleaming, and soft speech falls pleasantly on the ear. The vivid and nondescript costumes of the women lend a tinge of color to the dark slums they inhabit. Dark haired mothers, some of them scarcely out of their teens, stand with their babies at the breast gossiping at the street-corners; or, while tending the innumerable stands, nod and smile at the few Americanos who pass that way.

But to-day, while every one was happily busy over the approaching Christmas festivities, there was one who did not smile, one whose soft black eyes were almost blind from weeping, whose toil-worn hands were forcedly idle while she sought, sorrowing, the little maid who was the core of her heart.

A little crowd stood around her while she talked to the officer, the more accomplished among them translating roughly her fluent speech while she told for the hundredth of the loss of Paquita. The little one had been taken away up to Sixth Avenue by some of the older children to see the sights, the shops laden with Christmas goods, the brilliantly lighted stores and streets. Some one, a visiting King's Daughter perhaps, had opened to her fervid imagination the pleasing fiction of Santa Claus. Young fir-trees supported by four uprights of rough pine were inseparably connected with the vision of "Santa Claus." That every tree bore as its natural product, amid its stiff green branches, every conceivable cake, toy, clothing, fruit, and pleasure ever devised by infantile desire, was an article of faith as firmly planted in that little heart as was belief in the Virgin Mother whose highly colored lithograph made gay the dark wall of an "inside bed-room."

For days after her little pilgrimage she had talked of nothing else but her Christmas tree. That she was debarred from that luxury never entered the gay little head. Little eight-year old had as yet no knowledge of the grinding necessity that compelled the poor mother to pick, pick, pick from morning to midnight that she might add the sum of thirty four cents a day to the little hoard that kept the wolf from the door, and fed the hungry little stomach when her own was often empty.

But now the busy fingers were idle, while the poor mother was running about distracted seeking up and down for Paquita, Paquita!

All she knew was, that the child had not been locked in as usual when she had gone to her work. She had begged so hard for permission to go down to Pasquel's to examine the chimney through which "Santa Clausa" would be sure to come if he found his way at all to "the Bend"; she had spent an hour there, then had disappeared.

The officer listened as sympathetically as was to be expected; then suggested that Carmellita come with him to the Elizabeth street station and make inquiries. But no child had been brought in answering to Paquita's description, and the mother was going out again, weeping broken-heartedly, when some one suggested the Gerry Society. A young policeman off duty, whose heart was touched into remberance of his own little one at home, offered to go up with her to the Society's rooms at Twenty-third street.

Carmellita had her first ride on the elevated, and her first glimpse of a life beyond the squalor of the "Bend"; but the novelties did not impress her—all feelings were swallowed up in eagerness to reach the end of her journey and find a clue to her child's whereabouts.

When they entered the large handsome building devoted to the interests of one of the city's greatest charities they found trace of the little runaway. A member of the Society had seen her standing to look in a restaurant window, gazing wistfully at the tempting dainties displayed within. For some little time he had been watching her, and when questioned she had turned big, frightened eyes to his, but had remained dumb to the harsh, strange tongue. As the soft brown eyes were lifted to his he saw another pair of eyes that had once looked with love into his own, but were now hidden under a low mound fast whitening under December snows. He offered the little waif his hand, which she took willingly enough, and carried her off to the Society's rooms. There, by the help of an interpreter, she told of her long journey to Sixth Avenue in search of a Christmas tree, but could not tell the name of the street where she lived.

All the way home to his place in Tremont Mr. Brownlee was haunted by Paquita's glorious eyes. He wondered what his wife would say to the half formed plan he had in his mind of adopting the little one so strangely thrown in his path, as if to take the place of his own. He remembered Anita's ardent temperament and wondered if it allowed for transference of affection. He felt he knew nothing of her prejudices, for though he had married an Italian he lacked the sympathy that could divine the outcome of her violent grief at the death of her child. Whether it would close the door to new affection, or widen her heart to the acceptance of an adopted child, he knew not.

But whether she was agreeable or not, the natural mother had the first claim. Oh, to have seen her as she stood tearful and frightened at Manager Duncume's desk! To all her pleadings he had but one answer. Paquita would be retained there until inquiries could be made as to whether her parents were able to maintain her or not; if they were not, then she would be placed in an atmosphere different from Mulberry Bend. But mother-love flourishes as hardily in Mulberry Bend as in the more sanitary portions of the great city, and the mother-heart was aching as she trudged back again to her wretched home, made doubly wretched now that the light of the world had gone out from her. Why had God premitted such a thing to happen? Paquita was her all. Would He premit her to be childless as well as worse than widowed? No! no! no!

She turned over and over in her mind all sorts of wild projects for the restoration of her child. She had no one to appeal to—but stay, there was the padre. She hurried to his house only to find that he was out. She turned away and thought of the police captain, who had listened to her before with kindness even though he had but half understood her. She found her way to him again, and with a small newsboy's help told her pitiful little story. With the instinct of her race she read his sympathy in his face, and, throwing herself on her knees, she begged and besought his influence in a flood of Italian in which was mingled wounded mother-love, prayer, and bereavement, with tears and sobs that moved even that stoic, accustomed as he was to the daily tragedies of "the Bend." She, poor mother, saw in him the podesta of her own little town and home, and when he explained to her that they must await the investigation made by the Society, her grief turned to anger; but when he learnt that she was the wife of Domenico Cambrio, he felt that the restoration of Paquita was impossible. Then her despair was uncontrollable, and she left him plotting vengeance on the terrible miscreants who had stolen her child.

To walk again the two and a half miles that lay between her and the Society's rooms was as nothing to the intrepid heart of the mother; and there she took up her station until she would catch a glimpse of the dear little dark head. She knew, nothing, therefore, of the officer, accompanied by Mr. Brownlee, who was going about among her voluble neighbors gathering the details of the piteous story of her husband's sad crime, her own unavailing efforts to support herself and the child, and at every step collecting proof of what they were looking for—that Carmellita, with all her passion of affection, was incapable of taking care of her child.

But she thought better; and to uphold her argument held under her skirt an ugly looking bull-dog pistol she had purchased that morning, and had every intention of using it. It was well for the officer, who was doing only what his duty called for, that the poor crazed creature did not run against him that day.

When it grew dark and everything was closed up for the night, she found her way back again to the miserable place she could call her own, and found the padre there waiting for her. He talked to her, reasoned with her, soothed but did not comfort her. What was the use of his telling her that it looked as if God had a hand in it, that Paquita with her beauty would be adopted by some rich man perhaps, and educated far beyond what her mother could do for her at the best of times? What did he know of the savage fear gnawing at the mother's heart? What did he, on the plane above all human passion, reek of the exquisite pain that was making of this poor woman's life a hell? With sad eyes, full of tears, he could only bow his head before the storm, and raise his heart silently to the God above who once gave to His own Mothers's heart just such a pang. By the great common law of maternal instinct, poor Carmellita was experiencing the depth of anguish that stabbed that other Mother's heart as she too "sought her Child sorrowing."

As the great city was waking to life at six the next morning Carmellita was at her station at the door of the Society's rooms. Again a gamin came to her aid with that ready tact and sympathy the poor always have to bestow on each other. He soon found out the true inwardness of the case, and came to Carmellita with the intelligence that constant rubbing against his neighbors had engendered, and explained to her that the man that was going to take Paquita was the one who found her, that he lived in Tremont, and that she could go there first and catch him alone on the lonely road, use the bull-dog that his sharp eyes had discovered, and thus secure Paquita against all claims on her. That he could not go with her and witness the grand climax was a great grief; but as he gave her all his small earnings to pay her fare, there were none left for himself, and he was forced, much against his will, to remain behind.

How she waited that long, cold winter's day; how she suffered from cold, hunger, and fatigue, only God knew. But at length she found herself getting off the train at Tremont, watching the kidnapper wait for a covered wagon to draw up to the platform, place a large bundle into it that she felt to be her Paquita, step back into the depot for something there, and then she fled, ran like a deer down the straight, narrow road, sheltered by trees on either hand, and then sank exhausted by the roadside.

There she crouched, waiting like some animal at bay, till she heard the sound of wheels; then dragged herself to her full height, the bull-dog clutched tightly in her right hand. Nearer, nearer came the wheels; closer and closer came the moment when she meant to send a fellow-being to an unprepared grave. No thought was in her disordered mind but vengeance, no plan but to rid the word of the monster cruel enough to steal her child from her.

As the carriage lamp flashed full in her face she heard a sound that froze the blood in her veins, a sound that chilled to the very centre the poor tortured heart that had suffered so much.

Paquita laughed.

Laughing! and her mother not with her! Was it true, then, what the padre said, that Paquita would soon forget her? Was it the best thing that Paquita was taken from her?

"O Dio! Dio!" she moaned, and the murderous weapon slipped from her nerveless fingers.

Paquita's laugh had saved her mother's soul, and the life of her benefactor.

The wagon had gone three times its length before Carmellita recovered herself. She looked after the fast disappearing vehicle, and then ran rapidly after it. As it toiled slowly up the hill she gained on it every moment and when it turned into the great wide roadway, guarded by the heavy stone gate-posts, she could easily distinguish it among the shadows of the trees, and followed more closely. What her object was she scarcely knew now that her heart had been defeated of its terrible intent, she wanted to look but once more on the little face that was once all hers before she yielded to the fearful sense of drowsiness that was creeping over her.

She crept forward to the square of light that was thrown across the asphalt walk, and looked into the room. It was all aglow with firelight and the soft radiance cast from a large shaded lamp with its crimson shade. Its beauty repelled and attracted her as she felt dimly that in the scale with that scene of comfort her pallet and crust, irradiated as they were with divine mother-love, would have no showing with her tiny daughter.

Still she gazed, fascinated by the alluring interior, when she saw a woman enter. She was tall and dark—Carmellita recognizing her readily as one of her own race—and moved with a languid grace that accorded well with the whole air of refinement that clung about her. She held a handkerchief in her tightly clinched hand and her eyes were heavy with tears. With a convulsive sob she threw herself before an easel on which rested a pastel portrait of a little girl of Paquita's age. No interpreter was needed to tell the watching mother outside the storm of feeling that was tearing at the other's heart. As in a mirror she saw her own feelings portrayed, only in this case the angel of death was the one whose hand was heavy on a human heart. The bereaved mother outside watched the desolate mother within, in a passion of pity: a wave of conflicting emotions swept across her soul, and she turned, staggered down the steps, and almost fell in the arms of the coachman who had come around to shut the gates. He held her from him while he sharply scrutinized her tear-stained face, but could make nothing of her broken speech. His big Irish heart took in the fact that she was a woman, alone and in trouble, and he led her around to the servant's entrance, where he saw that she was warmed and fed. With returning strength came renewed courage, and she rose to go; but good Michael knew that his master would not turn a dog into the streets on that cold night, and he left her in the hall a moment while he went to acquaint Mr. Brownlee of the situation.

Through the open door the mother saw and heard Paquita again. Mrs. Brownlee had her upon her lap, and was trying to soothe and comfort her. In her own sweet mother tongue, made sweeter by the refined accent of a cultured woman, little Patiquita was being coaxed and petted into accepting the good fortune that she had fallen into. She held in her arms a large French doll, that it hurt to her heart for Mrs. Brownlee to see, but she had pressed the bambola into its new owner's arms with none the less friendly insistence. Paquita had examined gravely the first handsome doll she had ever seen, but while holding it close had murmured: "I want my mother!" in her pretty patois. She was carried to the table and given food and drink such as she never dreamed of; "but still she murmured: "Madre mia! Madre mia!" She was told of toys more gorgeous than the wonderful beauty in her arms, and assured that they would all be hers if she would be good and stay quietly with her new friends; but still came that little heart-cry: "Madre mia! Madre mia!" that was answered in silent longing by the lonely figure in the hallway. With infinite patience the lonely mother inside went over and over again the attractions to be found in her new home: but always the little pitiful cry answered her: "Madre mia! Madre mia!" At last Mr. Brownlee thought of a Christmas-tree, and hurrying out through the long window and across the porch, he had Michael cut ruthlessly the young fir growing so tall and straight near the path.

"Them Dagoes are persistent creatures," said Michael, slashing away, "but the kid ain't a circumstance in queer lingo to the poor woman in the kitchen"; and he told of the outcast he had befriended, receiving permission readily enough to stow her away somewhere for the night.

Once more the same roof sheltered Paquita and her mother. Poor Carmellita had almost made up her mind to steal away and leave the child in her new surroundings to heal the wound in the heart of the woman who, while smarting under the blow of the loss of her own, could be kind to another's child. But all night long there sounded in the ears of both mothers: "Madre mia! Madre mia!" while the little one slept the sound, dreamless sleep of childhood.

Christmas morning dawned clear and cold. The breakfast table, with its snowy damask, its silver and china and glass, was temptingly laden and wreathed in holly and fir. In a corner of the room stood the fir-tree bearing a generous load of its newly-acquired fruit, and Paquita's large eyes grew larger when she saw the realization of her ambition. She laughed and chattered like a little magpie this morning, but nothing they could say or do would induce her to put off the old shabby frock she had on when she was picked up by Mr. Brownlee. What her object was they could not divine, but refrained from questioning her, only too glad to have her apparently reconciled and happy in her new position.

Breakfast was progressing in the kitchen as enjoyably as in the dining-room, and Carmellita's heart failed her this morning as she heard the prattling in the next room. She stole off when she could to her station in the hall and locked in again.

Paquita was standing on the hearth-stone, her arms laden with toys, her little old shawl over her head, and a most rebellious look on her firm young mouth. She was announcing her intention to go to her mother. Mrs. Brownlee was lying back in her chair half crying, half laughing at the pathetic stubborness of the little waif in whose loyal heart no bribe, no creature comfort, no promises could efface the passionate longing to share all her good fortune with the "madre."

"But you cannot find your mother: she is not here," said Mr. Brownlee. But she only looked at him with wide open, imploring eyes whose look went to his heart, so like they were to those other eyes.

"Speak to her, Anita," he said: "say anything if she will stay," in a tone that betrayed to his wife the hope he had been indulging in.

"See, little one," she said, leading her to the door, "your mother is not not here."

But she was!

Before either Mr. Brownlee or his wife could realize what had happened Paquita was in her mother's arms, and the hungry heart was taking its fill of long denied, passionate kisses.

Carmellita, kneeling, held in her arms the shabby but very happy little daughter, who in turn never let go of the Persian beauty she called her own, and in a seemingly never-ending stream of fervid patios poured forth the history of her adventures.

So, after all, Paquita had her Christmas-tree; and Carmellita found that the seeming cross was a blessing in disguise; for never again did those two have to breathe the foul air of Mulberry Bend. A place was made for the mother in the Brownlee household, and Paquita became in fact the daughter of the house and was sent to school. More than that, poor Domenico, more sinned against than sinning, was giving an immediate trial, in place of being left in the Tombs to languish for years as he might have done. But his life never again crossed Carmellita's. "Manslaughter in the second degree" was was the verdict, and he went to spend the remainder of his days in prison, where he shortly died a victim to the "assisted" immigrant trade that, thanks to God and the well-organized charities of the city, is fast losing its worst features.

Across the silence of the years Carmellita often looks back to those dark early days, and in murmuring a prayer for the repose of Domenico's soul, mingles with it of one thanksgiving for the the blessed chance that led Paquita on a quest for a Christmas-tree.

A GIFT SAVED A LIFE.

Timely Recommendation by a Well-Known Member of Parliament.

COUNTY OF CARLETON

TO WIT: I, JEAN HUDCON, of the City of Ottawa, in the County of Carleton, carpenter, do solemnly declare that I live at No. 105 St. Andrew-street, City of Ottawa, that I am a carpenter by trade and am 50 years of age. For the past nine years, since June, 1886, I have had Eczema all over my body, hands, arms, legs, face and head, in fact, was perfectly covered with the complaint, which caused me to be covered with sores from head to foot. I have doctored with several doctors here in Ottawa, and have taken all kinds of patent medicines that I heard were good for the blood. Only one doctor out of about seven said that I could be cured, and he has been doctoring me for three years, and his treatment proved a failure the same as the rest. I have been very bad of late, until Mr. S. S. Ryckman, M.P., of Hamilton, Ont., gave me some of his Koootenay Cure, which was on the 30th of April, 1895. After taking the medicine for four days, I began to feel better, and have continued to get better every day since, the sores having disappeared, and I feel better in every way. Should you want further proofs of my cure I can furnish you with hundreds of names of persons who will testify as to my condition for the past nine years, as I am a poor man, and there are plenty there who know my case well. St. Joseph's Society consists of 900 members.

And I make this solemn declaration conscientiously believing it to be true, and knowing it is of the same force and effect as if made under oath, and by virtue of the Canada Evidence Act, 1893.

(Signed) JEAN HUDCON.

Taken and acknowledged before me at the City of Ottawa, in the County of Carleton, this 8th day of November, 1895.

(Signed) N. A. BELCOURT.

The Yankee Young Idea.—In the following case there is a comical touch of the American bounce which Mr. Macrae thinks is a not uncommon feature of American character, either of old or young. In the Brooklyn Sunday School a small boy was asked the question: "Who was the first man?" to which the child promptly replied: "General Washington." The teacher smiled, but said: "Did you never hear of Adam?" "Why, yes, I've heard of Adam; but I didn't know you were counting foreigners."

If the Baby is Cutting Teeth,

Be sure and use that old, and well-tried remedy, Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup for children teething. It soothes the child, softens the gums, allays all pains, cures wind colic and is the best remedy for diarrhœa. Twenty-five cents a bottle.

FLOATING KIDNEY.

This Sounds Strange, But it is a Recognized Disease

Any Way—The Victim Given up by Five Doctors, Acknowledges a Cure and says Dodd's Kidney Pills Did the Curing.

Gilbert Ont 12 1895.

The Dodd's Medicine Co.

Gentlemen—Some time in December, 1894, I was taken sick, and had to quit work for fourteen months. I was attended at various times and took medicine from five doctors. They agreed in calling my disease floating kidney, and the other two thought it was some form of spinal disease. I got no help, was still in bed, and all pronounced my disease incurable.

About this time, some friend advised me to take Dodd's Kidney Pills. I was reduced to a skeleton and suffering in bed and day. I had taken about three boxes, when I was able to get out and walk a few steps. I kept on taking the pills and getting better, until now I have taken eighteen boxes, with the result that I can say I am able to work again and perfectly cured of what was considered an incurable kidney disease or spinal trouble.

You are at liberty to use this certificate for the benefit to all who suffer and desire a cure, and believe me to be

Yours gratefully

SAMUEL KERNAHAN.

Branch 232, C. M. B. A.

Montreal Dec 6.—Last night Branch No 232, C. M. B. A., held their annual meeting for the purpose of receiving the reports of the different officers, and the nomination of office bearers for the ensuing year. Mr. J. J. Ryan, the president, occupied the chair. The following members were nominated to hold the different positions during the coming year:

J. J. Ryan, Chancellor; G. A. Carpenter and A. Brunet, Presidents; J. A. Beaudoin, first Vice-President; T. M. Ireland, second Vice President; W. E. Durack, Treasurer; A. C. Coleman, Financial-Secretary; L. E. Chocquette, Recording Secretary; W. J. McCaffrey, Assistant-Secretary; J. Gannon, Marshall; B. A. Leprohon, Guard; Committees, Messrs. P. Kelly, Cowan and McDonald; representatives to the Grand Council, which meets in Ottawa next year, P. Kelly; Alternate, J. J. Ryan.]

The Branch then appointed committees to carry out the arrangements for their annual social, which will be held in the Queen's Hall, on Friday evening, the 24th January.

ANOTHER DISCOVERY

Of Interest to Bicycle Riders.

A well known bicycle rider has made a discovery that will be good news to all who locomote on the wheel. He says:

Since I first began to ride a wheel, which is several years ago, I have been subject to more or less chafing and irritation. Sometimes when heated the itching inside my legs would be so severe that I would feel compelled to forego riding for a time. Nothing that I tried did any material good until my attention was drawn to an advertisement of Dr. Chase's Ointment for all itching of the skin. I tried it and almost from the moment it touch the skin the itching stopped. I also find its occasional use prevents chafing. Further evidence of the efficacy of this preparation is given by Chas. Roe, foreman Central Press Agency, Toronto, who was trouble with Itching Skin of the most aggravated kind. When the skin became heated during sleep from too much clothing would wake up with absolute pain from digging into the flesh with his nails. Chase's Ointment gave relief from the first application and permanently cured. Price 60c.

Flattery never emanates from great souls. It is an attribute of small minds, who thus still further belittle themselves to enter into the vital being of the persons about whom they crawl.

Chronic Derangements of the Stomach, Liver and Blood, are speedily removed by the active principle of the ingredients entering into the composition of Parmelee's Vegetable Pills. Those Pills act specifically on the deranged organs, stimulating to action the dormant energies of the system, thereby removing disease and renewing life and vitality to the afflicted. In this lies the great secret of the popularity of Parmelee's Vegetable Pills.

To the heart there are no insignificant events; it magnifies all things; it puts in the same balance the fall of an empire and the fall of a woman's glove, and oftentimes the glove outweights the empire.

She Know All About It.—There are two large cemeteries in Dublin, and the interments, in one and the other are almost entirely a matter of religion. The present Recorder tried a case in which a nice little child would have been an important witness, but was objected to as being too young. "My dear girl," said the judge, "do you know the meaning of an oath?" "Oh, yes, sir, I know very well," said she. "Well, try her, your honour; ask a question or two," said the objecting barrister. The Recorder, embarrassed by the need of avoiding controversy, said, "Well, do you know where people go when they die?" "Yes, sir,' said she; "the good people go to Glasnevin, and the bad people to Mount Jerome."

Can Recommend It. Mr. Enos Bornberry, Tuscarora, writes: "I am pleased to say that Dr. Thomas' Eclectric Oil is all that you claim it to be, as we have been using it for years, both internally and externally, and have always received benefit from its use. It is our family medicine, and I take great pleasure in recommending it."