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Beth's Convert.

BY JULIA MILLS DUNN.

Beth Rayburn came home from school one autumn afternoon, and ran up stairs two steps at a time, just for the sake of working off her superfluous energy. As she reached the last landing, she came face to face with the doctor and Ann Jacobs, an old servant who had been long in the family. They were talking in a low voice, but, low as they spoke, Beth caught the words of Mrs. Jacobs.

'Yes, Dr. Lloyd, it's all very well to prescribe dainties and comforts for the mistress, if one has the money. But—her voice sank to a whisper.

'Is it so bad as that?' asked Dr. Lloyd.
'Not a dollar in the house, sir. And the last medicine you ordered could not be had at the drug store, for the druggist refused to let it go without the money, and there was nothing to pay for it. But yet she's that strong, and seems to be getting along so finely, that if we could only have the money to buy the medicine—'

'Beth,' called a low voice from a room across the hall, is it you, dear?

Beth went in softly. The room was large and sunny; in the fireplace a few bits of wood, barrel staves, that Ann had brought from the alley, blazed cheerfully. Mrs. Rayburn was lying in bed, propped up by pillows. Her wavy yellow hair, that was so like Beth's was wound round her head like a crown, and her blue eyes were bright with a keen glitter that Beth had never noticed there before.

'Did you have good lessons at school to day, Beth?'

'Oh, mamma, I forgot to tell you—I am to be promoted to-morrow. Mr. Atwood was so pleased. He said, right before the class, You're Hugh Rayburn's own child, and he was the brightest student I ever knew.'

A quick flush rose to Mrs. Rayburn's cheek, and she turned away her head to hide the tears that sprang to her eyes. 'He was your papa's schoolfellow, dear, and there was a friendly rivalry between them always. And now you may run down-stairs and play while I rest awhile. I shall be very proud of my little girl one of these days.'

A sound of music came upstairs from the street below. Beth slipped down lightly, one arm thrown over the banister as she ran, and opened the hall door. At the area door, two swarthy Italians with violins were playing a lively national air, while a child about Beth's own age, with red cheeks and soft dark eyes, danced gaily to the merry strains, stopping now and then to hold out to each passer-by a tin cup for pennies. The violins rang loud and clear, the little girl danced with so much spirit and was so pretty and bright that people were glad to drop a penny or two in the cup, and soon it was quite full. A boy passing by with a pitcher of beer bought at the corner saloon up the street, stopped and gave the players a drink from the pitcher, politely offering it first to the little girl, who smiled and shook her head.

'No like beer, dank you,' she said. 'It make Carlotta's head ache. Then spying Beth on the step, she held up the cup of pennies with a saucy shrug.

Beth came nearer. 'Are they all yours?' she asked eagerly. Carlotta pointed her red lips in childish impatience.

'Bah! no they are all Jacopo's he is the boss. All we get, Guiseppa and I, we must give to him, though, to be sure, Guiseppa is drunk most of the time, and does not know or care. But up here—' nodding her curly head toward the park, whose tall trees Beth could dimly discern at a distance, 'there is a place filled with people who laugh and are kind, and give me, oh, so much money! Once a man gave me silver dollar.'

Beth's heart beat fast. If she could only go to the place where money was given away, and get some for her sick mother! She could not dance, to be sure, but perhaps some of these kind people who were so good to little children would know that her mother was sick and send her some. Perhaps—

The men started up the street again, playing as they walked.

Carlotta, who had met Beth at the foot of the steps, took her by the hand and started after.

Come she said coaxingly, with a smile that showed all her white even teeth, 'let us go together. If you do not like it, you can come back.'

Guiseppa, with the effect of his last

drink added to his former potations was staggering along unsteadily. His comrade, seeing his condition, and thinking to pass it off as a joke, lest some policeman might espy the situation and carry Guiseppa off to the station, took his arm, and began to chatter volubly, affecting great amusement at Guiseppa's apparent drolleries. But Jacopo need not have feared. No policeman was in sight except one farther down the street who had overtaken the boy with the pitcher, and was engaged in sampling the contents. Guiseppa gave a lurch forward, and Jacopo adroitly threw his arm around the drunken man to support him and shook his violin bow at Carlotta.

'Come,' he called in Italian, 'and bring the little friend with you.'

'Together, you will get all the money in the Casino.' They are a pretty pair, Beth, with her delicate complexion and thick braid of yellow hair. Carlotta, with her lustrous dark eyes and crimson cheeks, redder now from her recent exercise.

'I'll go as far as the door of the place you tell about,' said Beth, 'I do love music, and your dancing is so pretty. Do you like to dance, Carlotta?'

The child threw back her curly head defiantly. She was a spirited little creature, who had the ability to defend herself in a childish way, when circumstances required.

'Sometimes I like it when the sun is bright and warm, and Guiseppa is not drunk. But when I have had no dinner, or it rains, or Jacopo beats me—'

'Beats you—you, Carlotta?' Beth's eyes were wide open with horror. She drew back, and tried to pull her hand away from her new-found companion, but Carlotta held her fast in a tight clasp.

'But I must go back now, indeed I must, Carlotta—dear Carlotta, let me go.'

Jacopo turned around with a fierce scowl. 'You will go with us, do you hear? I have a place where I look up little girls when they do not mind me.'

Beth gave a wild scream of terror but no one but Carlotta heard her in the confusion of those noisy streets, and she only tightened her hold on Beth's hand.

'Don't scream,' she said in a suppressed tone, 'if you do he will beat you. But if you will come along to the dance room we will watch the people in their fine clothes, and dance for them awhile, and then, when Jacopo and Guiseppa are drinking we will slip out together back to your pretty home.'

Scarcely understanding Carlotta's words spoken in her pretty broken English, but comprehending that she could go back, Beth resisted no longer, but went on.

Into a long basement, bright, with gaudy frescoes and much tawdry gilt paper on the walls, dazzling with the glare of gas, though the sun still shone brightly outside, the children followed Jacopo and Guiseppa. Close to the entrance, on each side of the room, was a bar where liquors were sold.

All along the sides of the room were little tables with men seated around them playing cards or dice.

At the farther end of the room was a raised platform which did duty as a stage, and close by the platform was a battered old piano on which a young man was playing. He wore no coat, and his shirt sleeves, white and full, looked like inflated balloons. When he saw Carlotta, he beckoned her forward.

'Come up here and give us a dance, he said with a grin, 'and who is this little girl, eh?'

Beth shrank back frightened, but Carlotta threw up her head defiantly. 'I am tired,' she pouted, 'and I'm not going to dance now.'

At a table near sat two men, absorbed in a game of cards.

'Look there,' said the younger, 'isn't it a shame to see such a child as that in such a place as this?'

'Some little beggar they have picked up, probably,' replied the other indifferently. The game is mine again. What is that?'

He half turned, and saw Jacopo, who had come forward from the bar, his violin under his arm, a glass of beer in one hand, his bow in the other.

'Dance!' he muttered in a low tone, dance you little beggar or feel this. He raised his bow over Beth's head, in another moment the cruel blow would have descended on her

when she chanced to recognize the man whose back was toward her.

Papa! she shrieked, and ran to him for protection, clinging with her arms around his neck. In the bitter humiliation of that moment, Judge Rayburn realized the depth of his degradation. He rose with Beth in his arms, his eyes flashing with anger.

So you have stolen this child, have you? he demanded; you will soon see whether you will dare to strike a child of mine, you vile wretch.

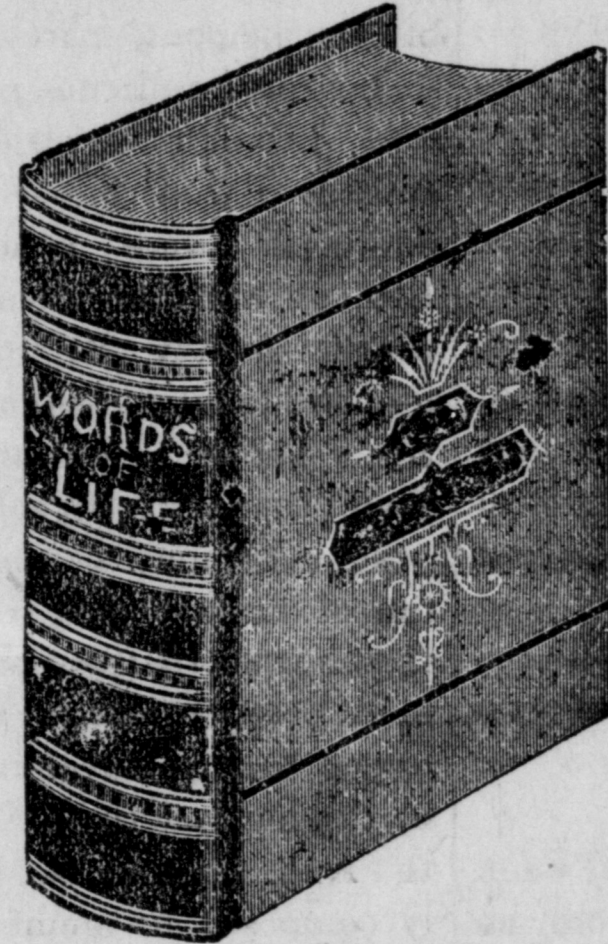
But Beth, still clinging to his neck with all her might, cried out in her childish, penetrating tones: No, no, he did not steal me, papa, I came all my own self with Carlotta. We were going to dance for money to buy mamma some medicine to make her well again. But I am so afraid here, please, papa, dear papa, take me home.

Judge Rayburn sank back into his chair white with a sudden faintness that smote him to heart, only for a moment, then rising and facing the staring, silent crowd that had gathered around, lifted his right hand solemnly.

I call you all to witness this oath, he said, in loud, clear tones. I promise, by God's help, to abstain from the use of all intoxicants from this time henceforth and forever.

He strode through the crowd that parted right and left before him, and went out into the gathering twilight with Beth in his arms, her bright head resting on his shoulder.

He is an older man now, and his wife and daughter are proud of the brilliant talent that has made him eminent and honored in his profession but he never recalls, even in his most secret thoughts, that scene in the dance house without a blush of shame.—Moline, Ill.



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Rev. Mr. Mowatt is one of the pulpits forces of the provincial capital and his sermons are for all time rather than for a day. "Words of Life" is a volume intended to help, cheer and comfort all classes of sinners within the church fold as well as those without.

The St. John Telegraph says of the book:—

WORDS OF LIFE, is the title of a volume of 32 sermons by Rev. A. J. Mowatt, pastor of St. Paul's Presbyterian church, Fredericton. The author is widely and favorably known as a preacher of some originality and learning and more than ordinary earnestness and power. His sermons will, no doubt, have many readers in the attractive form in which they are here presented. Mr. Mowatt modestly says of them: "For years my sermons have been published from week to week in the local press, and this volume is but an extension of that work. The sermons make no claim to literary merit. I send them forth as I have been giving them to my people from Sabbath to Sabbath. I have no time to elaborate—no time for fine writing, finished literary work. They have been words of life to some souls. They have helped, cheered, comforted others. They have been a message from Heaven to many."

The frontispiece of the book bears a life-like portrait of the reverend author. The mechanical work of the volume is highly creditable to the Reporter publishing office Fredericton, whence it is issued.

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