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Eduardo Palací



By
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CONQUISTADOR

Eduardo Palací

BY
GLADYS MOON



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CONQUISTADOR

by Eduardo Palací

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CONQUISTADOR

Eduardo Palací

IT was mid-morning in Lima, and brilliant sunshine bathed the famous Plaza de Armas as business men hurried to and from the imposing buildings in the centre of Peru's capital city.

Two men, guide books in hand, surveyed the lovely façade of the cathedral with leisured interest.

'Si, señor, it is very beautiful,' said a bystander, 'the finest in Spanish America. The body of the great conquistador, Pizarro, who dissolved the old Inca civilization in blood, is buried here. Señor has seen perhaps some of the treasure towers where the Incas stored their gold and silver?'

None of the men noticed the thin, dark boy who hovered near. His worn clothes hung absurdly on limbs wasted by recent illness, but his brown eyes sparkled with eagerness as he heard the word 'Inca,' for Eduardo Palací could trace his descent through his great-grandmother from this old and powerful civilization. They had spoken of Pizarro, the conquistador—or conqueror. The Spaniard had been a cruel man, but the boy was attracted by the word *conquistador*. 'Palací, the Conquistador' sounded better, though, and he would like to grow up to be a great man.

After a moment the boy moved off and made his slow and rather painful way homewards, for, after twelve months when his life had been despaired of, his thin legs could scarcely support his weight.

Eight years before, after the war which ended in 1883, rough Chilean soldiers had taken the city and swarmed across this famous plaza, and Señora Palací had fled to a farm in the hills. Here, within sight of the snow-capped Andes, Eduardo was born. But when Lima was quiet again, and her son nine months old, his mother made her way back with him.

Prosperity and comfort might have been the lot of the little boy if his father had not unwisely invested his savings in paper money. The speculation failed. Instead of paper money rising in value, it was suddenly scrapped altogether, and that was the end of Palací's savings. Property had to be sold to pay outstanding debts and Eduardo's father had to support his family by shoemaking.

It was Christmas-eve and Eduardo was still only eight when an invitation came from his grandfather, who kept racehorses. Would he like to go to the races held that day? The boy who had spent so many weary months in a sick room shouted for joy at the prospect of seeing the beautiful high-spirited animals with their glossy coats and quick, nervous movements being led out of the paddock.

Evening was drawing on when the old man and the tired, contented child reached home again. They were greeted by Eduardo's mother. 'Here you are at last!' she cried. 'An Englishman has called to invite all the children to a party with a magic-lantern show afterwards. Would you like to go, Eduardo? He seemed a nice Englishman.'

An invitation to a *fiesta* did not come every day—yes, he would go. His father, reading at the table, made no comment. A man of some culture and intellect, the change in his fortunes had disillusioned and embittered him. He had turned, as always, to literature, but rationalistic reading

had led him into the dark paths of infidelity. Palací Senior was not a happy man.

Mother and son left him to his morose thoughts and made their way to the quiet part of the city where the party was to take place. Arriving at an unpretentious-looking building from which the light streamed, his mother left him. Eduardo hesitated. The children hurried in past him, chattering eagerly, but he was doubtful. He had often heard the old Peruvian women say that Englishmen were strange and wicked people who killed and ate children.

Suddenly, a woman made her way to the door, kissed the boy and invited him in. All his fears left him as he put a trembling hand in hers.

The day in the open air had sharpened his appetite and he sat down eagerly with a hundred or more other children to the spread prepared for them. As he swallowed his pudding, an English Christmas pudding, Eduardo wondered why these foreign people were doing this for children they could not possibly know.

The meal over, magic lantern pictures of the life of Christ were shown. To Eduardo, who was taken to church only on Christmas Day and on his birthday, the story was new.

When one of the missionaries—there were four in all—tried to teach them a chorus in Peruvian-Spanish they became very shy. 'Now who has learned the words well enough to say them alone?' asked the missionary. At first there was no response, then a thin arm was nervously raised. Eduardo repeated the words clearly and without hesitation, and the missionary stood him on the table to recite them again. Then, with an invitation to attend the Englishmen's Sunday-school on the following Sunday, the party broke up.

Eduardo had decided that he liked these foreigners, especially the one who had taught

them the chorus, so he was very pleased when the man came to the Palací shop during the week with some shoes for repair. The missionary—his name was Backhouse—recognized the shy boy with the thin, intelligent face and asked his father if he might attend the new Sunday-school. Señor Palací was not interested in religion and his wife was a formal Christian, but this Englishman appeared to be a well-read and good-natured fellow. There could be no harm in it. Yes, the boy could go.

Only fifty children were allowed by their parents to go on the following Sunday. A party was all very well, but to send one's children to such a Sunday-school—that was a different matter. Eduardo enjoyed himself and went home clasping his text tightly and murmuring the words as he walked. He would learn it by heart for next Sunday, but how slowly the days went by!

There were only nine other children at the mission house when he recited his text. Few parents would risk trouble with the law. It was safer to pretend to be good church folk and keep their children away from the missionaries. Besides, one never knew with these foreigners. . . .

Finally, a day came when a solitary small boy knocked at the mission house door, but it was a confident knock because the Englishman was his friend. Mr. Backhouse rubbed his chin ruefully. 'All these weeks of work and the only person who is not suspicious of us is a lad, eight years of age. Is it worth carrying on?' he wondered. But when he picked up his Bible and went to greet the eager-faced child, the missionary knew that it was!

Eduardo continued to frequent the mission house, not once but three times a week. After a prayer, they would sit down together and read the Gospels, verse by verse. Like his father, Eduardo

was greedy for knowledge, and he plied his teacher with endless questions. The day came, too, when the boy began to pray his own prayers aloud, shyly and falteringly, but with increasing confidence as time went on.

Finishing the Gospels, they went on to the Acts of the Apostles and then to the Epistle to the Romans. One day, as they were reading the eighth chapter of that Letter, the boy came to the verse: 'There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.' He stopped and, in a flash of revelation, said, 'Does that mean me?'

'If you believe in Christ as your Saviour, it does,' said the missionary.

The boy sprang to his feet in excitement. 'Then I am really saved!'

They prayed together, and then Eduardo ran home as fast as his thin legs could carry him to read out to his parents the words which had worked a miracle in his heart.

'The boy is out of his mind!' cried his mother. 'Those foreign people are doing him no good. He must never go again.'

Her husband, confirmed cynic that he was, laughed unconcernedly. 'There is no truth in any religion. Leave the boy alone. He will forget all this nonsense in a year or two.'

The next day Eduardo skipped along on his way to the market for the family vegetables, his mind full of his new experience. He squeezed his way with difficulty through the throng of swarthy-skinned women, their black, shiny hair knotted at the back of their heads, their shoulders gay with brightly-coloured shawls. A llama driver shouted for him to get out of the way, and he moved with alacrity. To-day he was at peace with all the world. But here was the old vegetable woman,

her broad straw hat protecting her head from the hot sunshine, seated on the ground by a pile of her wares.

'There is now no condemnation!' sang Eduardo's heart and, before he realized what he was doing, he was shouting the words and telling the astonished bystanders about the wonderful new joy that was his.

Suddenly, a stinging blow on his cheek and the sound of his father's rough angry voice broke in upon his words. 'I'll teach you, my lad, if this is what religion makes you do. Where are the vegetables for dinner? How dare you waste time and worry your mother like this!'

Eduardo's face burned with humiliation as he heard some of the women laugh. It had been wrong to forget the vegetables, he thought, as he was hurried away. This was a test, but he would not give in. He would be a real conquistador for Christ.

The visits to the mission house were not stopped, and as time went on his parents saw that there was a real change in him. His cheerful obedience and unselfishness made them proud of their son. He read voraciously, too, and the missionary, a man of education and culture, guided his choice.

But at four o'clock on one cold winter morning the boy felt that his happy world had come to an end. A message reached him that his English friend was ill with typhoid fever and not likely to live long. The boy hurried to the bedside of the dying man. 'Eduardo,' he said, 'I am going to leave you, and I want you to make me a promise. Will you be a missionary to South America?'

'Yes, yes, I will!' cried the boy, and his friend spoke no more.

At the funeral there was only one Convert present, and he but a twelve-year-old boy who could not understand one word of the English

ceremony. But he prayed, in an agony of grief that God would help him to keep his promise.

An answer seemed to come from an elderly man who saw Eduardo's tears at the graveside. He was a practising Christian, a printer by trade. Would the boy care to help him in the printing of Bibles? Eduardo liked the idea and his parents were willing. Printing was a respectable trade, and this man was not a missionary in the ordinary sense of the word.

Eduardo went to live with him, but the hours of work proved too many for a boy and he often longed for his bed in the cupboard under the stairs. He had to remember, however, that he was going to be a missionary, and a would-be missionary must study. So on six evenings of the week he attended school and worked hard to pass his examinations. Any pocket-money he was given went to pay for fees and books. Passing the ordinary secondary school examinations before he was fourteen, he took a Bible course and was ordained a preacher of the Gospel at seventeen. The English language fascinated him and he mastered his first lessons in the cupboard under the stairs.

Eduardo's first Convert was his aunt. A woman of pure South American Indian blood, she went to hear him preach simply because he was her nephew, became converted and learned to read the Bible. Later, her daughter became the wife of a missionary in Peru.

By now the work of the original missionaries to Peru was bearing fruit, and there was a number of small Christian communities springing up. Great was Eduardo's joy when he was asked to become the pastor of one of these churches.

This did not please his employer. He himself, busily printing and distributing Bibles, made many Converts and was a keen evangelist. He wanted

to take his assistant with him to fresh fields of labour, not seeing that Converts must have a spiritual home such as Eduardo as a pastor was trying to provide for them.

The young man considered, however, that he owed much to the printer and, out of a sense of loyalty, gave up the pastorate. So they set out for the remote mountainous districts, their asses laden with copies of the Scriptures. Eduardo felt that he could not sell something he did not understand, and his method was to read the Bible so regularly and consistently that he could repeat whole chapters by heart. Patiently he endeavoured to explain Divine truth to wayfarers in lonely villages and crowded city streets, and the journey taught him such useful things as the way to keep accounts, to mix with people of every type and social grade, to live and sleep with a minimum amount of discomfort under the open sky.

One day he had a long talk with a wealthy Indian, a Bible and hymn book exchanged hands and prayer was offered. Years after, a missionary was surprised to find a small community of earnest Indian Christians in a wild and lonely place, presided over by the headman of the district. Thus was the painstaking endeavour of the young colporteur rewarded.

Persecution, however, was more often the lot of the travellers and on one occasion Eduardo's complete stock of Bibles was publicly burned.

Arriving soon after this at a country town on the eve of market day, he slept in the open and hired a stall on which to display his wares. He had spent all his money and could not reach home again unless he sold his Bibles, but the shoppers were too busy driving bargains to notice him. He gained their attention by singing at the top of his clear, strong voice. A crowd gathered to listen to this unusual young man as he sang and

talked, and before the day was out every book was sold!

His next tour Eduardo's employer decided to take alone, whilst his assistant had the rather dull job of looking after the printing business in Lima. Unfortunately, before he took charge, the printing office was completely destroyed by fire, and Eduardo had the difficult task, for one so inexperienced, of starting another small business on his own account.

Guatemala was his next objective, a journey of hundreds of miles with only another printing office at the end of it. Although still determined to be loyal to the man who had helped him, Eduardo found the work irksome and longed to give himself to full-time missionary endeavour. On arrival, however, he had found that a member of the original party of English missionaries to Peru was conducting a mission, and he gladly gave his spare time to its service.

His master was angry at this. There could be no divided loyalties. The gifted and enthusiastic young man must put all his endeavours into the business of printing the Bible. If that wasn't good enough for him, he could go!

Now Eduardo's southern blood was up! A statement tantamount to summary dismissal after years of devotion and hard work hurt and angered him. Very well, he would go, maybe abroad, and obtain a degree and never preach again. That would teach him!

A few days later, his mind obstinately made up, Eduardo Palaci found himself in Panama, trying to decide which ship to take. The work on the great Canal was still in progress and the place hummed with activity. Every hotel was crowded with prospectors and American engineers. Labourers—whose ranks had already been decimated by yellow fever—from every republic in

South America thronged the streets and made the nights noisy with riotous celebrations.

'No place for women,' thought Palací, as he sat moodily on the balcony of a hotel on his first Sunday in Panama and listened to the singing of women's voices from somewhere below.

'That's The Salvation Army,' volunteered a North American at his side, 'they haven't been in this place long.'

Interested in something new to him, Eduardo walked out to the plaza in front of the hotel. A young woman, obviously English, was struggling to read out the words of a Spanish hymn. Her grasp of the language was poor and the very mixed crowd was not giving her too good a hearing.

His sympathy and missionary instinct aroused, Palací stepped forward. 'Let me help you. I understand both English and Spanish,' he offered.

The young Salvationist parried with a quiet question, 'Are you saved?'

Palací's face flamed and the text of his childhood flashed into his mind, 'There is now no condemnation. . . .'

'Yes, I am,' he said, and all his feelings of bitter resentment and wounded pride vanished as he stepped to the Captain's side. He had conquered himself.

The next morning the young Englishwoman called at the hotel to give Eduardo a copy of the life-story of Catherine Booth, wife of The Salvation Army's Founder, and to ask him to continue to help the Salvationists so long as he was in Panama. Impressed by the faith and earnestness of these people, he sat down to read the book. Yellow fever had broken out and the district was in quarantine, so he could not leave yet, anyway. As he read, the story of service and soul-winning thrilled him so much that he made up his mind. He would find a job in a printing office and

remain in Panama, and these people would be his people.

A few weeks later he was enrolled as a Salvation Army Soldier, and that night he wrote a letter to his sweetheart, a young Convert of his in Peru. In the days that followed he fought a lonely battle, but came through it a conqueror. The girl's father was opposed to The Salvation Army, and if Eduardo persisted in his association with it the engagement must come to an end. Eduardo gave himself unreservedly to The Salvation Army.

He went to Kingston, Jamaica, twelve months later to be trained for Salvation Army Officership, and it was during that time, in January, 1907, that Kingston experienced a terrible succession of earth tremors. Eight hundred people perished and thousands more had to be rescued from the ruins. The city caught fire and a cageful of lions broke loose from a travelling wild beast show. Feeding the homeless and treating the wounded, Eduardo felt that this was real service.

Some years after this Eduardo Palací was a sick man and passing through a period of great depression. At this zero hour in his experience he decided to marry a West Indian Officer who had agreed to share his life, and to go back to his own people and to the land of his birth. Never slow to act upon a decision, he returned to Peru and took up work with the British and Foreign Bible Society in Lima. The work was after his own heart and he had a wife and a comfortable home, but as time went by he realized that he had a heart hunger for the Organization which he knew was his spiritual home. There seemed nothing to do, however, for by their own act they had cut themselves away from the tremendous opportunities it had afforded them and the fellowship they had learned to prize.

But The Salvation Army was planning a big

push in South America and every bit of man-power was needed. Palací was a linguist with wide experience of soul-winning. Would he go to Buenos Aires? His heart leaped at the chance, but there was his wife to consider and two young children, and it was no soft job that he was offered. Was it fair to them? The struggle was short but intense. He would be a conquistador for Christ, and to the beautiful capital city of the Argentine he went.

Here the four of them lived in one room where they experienced some of the greatest happiness and deepest sorrow of their lives.

Evangeline, the elder child, was taken ill and died within twenty-four hours and, whilst the parents' grief was still fresh, the baby became ill and tossed with fever in a corner of the cold, comfortless room. Eduardo in his extremity wondered if God had forgotten him. Even as he struggled with himself, there was a knock at the door and in came a man he had thought to be thousands of miles away, an old friend, an agent of the British and Foreign Bible Society. Would Palací return to his home town? The Society felt he could not be spared.

The young father looked around the room and realized that the offer would mean comparative comfort and security for his family, but it would also mean a confession that he had made a mistake in coming to Buenos Aires.

For several days the couple sought for guidance, and it was given. Poverty, sickness, bereavement, come what may, it was The Salvation Army for them. They would be conquerors in its ranks for the rest of their days.

The sick baby recovered and grew up to become a Salvation Army Officer herself.

It was as an interpreter that Eduardo Palací first gave service in The Salvation Army and his

perfect command of English has made him one of the finest translators in an Organization which has reduced this task to a very fine art.

The same linguistic ability, which he began to acquire when he was a printer's devil, has enabled him to translate many Salvation Army books into Spanish. He has contributed more than a hundred songs, original or translated, to the latest edition of the Song Book published in Buenos Aires under his direction, and has published a volume of verse of a high order.

'Promise me that when I am gone you will be a missionary to South America.' The words of his boyhood friend have come back again and again to Eduardo Palací, now Chief Secretary of The Salvation Army's work in Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay, for he has proclaimed the Gospel in every republic of South America, by personal evangelism as a Corps and Divisional Officer, by the interpretation of the messages of Leaders from overseas, by the printed word as Editor by frequent broadcasts, and through the work of many young evangelists whom he influenced during his period as Training Principal.

One of his greatest joys on a visit to Lima was the sight of his old father, all unbelief conquered, kneeling at The Army's Mercy Seat.

Trim and upright in his navy blue uniform, Eduardo Palací crossed the sunny Plaza de Armas towards the cathedral where the remains of a Spanish conquistador lie buried. He remembered that as a boy he had toyed with the idea of himself as 'Palací, the Conqueror' and, reviewing the years that lay between, he felt that by God's grace the childhood fancy had become a reality.

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