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FOUR MEXICAN-SPANISH FAIRY-TALES FROM
AZQUELTÁN, JALISCO

BY J. ALDEN MASON

THE following four fairy-tales were collected by the writer in the pueblo of Azqueltán, state of Jalisco, Mexico, January, 1912. This little village is the centre of a small and rapidly disintegrating population of an isolated branch of the Tepehuane, heretofore, but probably incorrectly, known as Tepecano. The collection of these few tales was merely incidental to a more extended study of the language and religious customs of the group, made under the auspices of the International School of American Archæology and Ethnology in Mexico.

Like most of the Indian peoples of Mexico, the aboriginal culture of the people has been greatly changed under Spanish influence, practically all phases of primitive material culture having almost entirely disappeared, and native language, mythology, and religion being on the verge of extinction. Of native mythology, it has been possible to secure only comparatively few mythological texts from the older natives. The native mythology has, however, to a great extent been replaced by European material of the familiar "fairy-tale" type introduced by the Spanish. These are known in considerable numbers by the natives.

The four tales here given are European fairy-tales. In some of the incidents a slight assimilation to Mexican customs is noted; but, on the whole, there is a remarkably close adherence to incidents and customs pertinent only to European traditions, and entirely foreign to the life of the Mexican Indian.

I. THE FROG-WOMAN (*Cuento de la Ranita*)

Once there was a king who had two sons, one of whom was betrothed to a maiden. The other prince went one day to the edge of the lake to water the donkeys, and there the Frog-Woman appeared to him. She asked him to marry her, and he finally agreed. So he went to his father and asked him to give him the necessary money, so that he

might marry the Frog-Woman. The king was surprised, and asked him why he wished to serve the Frog-Woman, but nevertheless gave him the money.

Then the king ordered both of his daughters-in-law to be dressed in elegant clothes, in order that he might see which of the two was the more womanly; and he gave to each a dog and a bird. He gave instructions that the two princes be kept secluded in the castle, and then went to see his daughters-in-law.

First, all sat down to a banquet, and then the king expressed his desire to dance with his daughters-in-law. First he danced with the maiden; and while so engaged, the Frog-Woman seized some chicken-bones from the table, and began to cast magic spells by means of them. When the maiden saw this, she desired to do the same. Then the king left her, and began to dance with the Frog-Woman, who continued casting the bones while dancing; but no sooner did she begin to throw them than they changed into pure gold. When the maiden saw this, she was more anxious than ever to do the same, and, seizing some chicken-bones from the table, she likewise cast them; but the first bone hit the Frog-Woman on the head and killed her.

2. CINDER-MARY (*Cuento de Maria Ceniza*)

Once there was a poor orphan-girl who lived in an ash-hole belonging to the Black Moors. One day when one of them went there to throw out the ashes, he saw her, and asked her to come to their house. There they asked her name; but the poor girl did not know her own name, nor were they able to discover it. Finally they gave her the name of Maria Ceniza (Cinder-Mary). Now, the Black Moors were witches; but they did not wish Cinder-Mary to learn the fact, so they gave her a black sheep's skin and a half-*real*¹ of soap, and sent her to the river, telling her not to waste the soap, but to wash the sheep-skin until it was as white as a pod of cotton.

Cinder-Mary knelt by the river and wept, because she could not wash the sheep-skin as the Moors had commanded her. Suddenly there appeared a lady, who asked her why she was weeping; and Cinder-Mary replied, that, if she could not wash the black sheep-skin as white as a pod of cotton, the Black Moors would kill her. Then the lady told her that she would bring her two white stones with which she would be able to wash the black sheep-skin. Presently she returned, and soon Cinder-Mary had washed the sheep-skin as white as a pod of cotton. Then the lady gave her a magic wand, and told her that when she needed anything, she need only speak to the wand. Then, placing a tiny star on Cinder-Mary's forehead, she disappeared.

Now, one of the Black Moors had a daughter; and when she saw

¹ 1 real = 12.5 centavos, Mexican code.

the star on the forehead of Cinder-Mary, she was very jealous, and asked her mother to have a black lamb killed, that she also might go to the river to wash the skin. So, going to the river, she commenced to weep; and when the lady appeared to her and asked her why she was weeping, she replied that it was because she could not wash the black sheep-skin. Then she asked her if she would not put a star on her forehead likewise, but the lady replied that she would put nothing but "mango de burro" there. Then the girl returned to the house of the Black Moors.

Another day the Moors said to Cinder-Mary that they were going to mass, and they left her behind to prepare the breakfast. "If you have not a good breakfast ready when we return, we shall kill you," they said. Then Cinder-Mary asked her magic wand to give her a dress such as had never before been seen in the world, and some shoes, in order that she might go to mass. Then she followed a little behind the Moors, and entered the church; and neither the Moors nor the rest of the people recognized her. When the priest saw her, he was much impressed with her beauty, and thought that she would make an excellent wife for the prince; so he gave orders that double guards be stationed at the doors of the parish, and that she be not allowed to leave. This, however, did not deter Cinder-Mary, who fastened some wings to her back, so that they might not catch her. The guards tried to restrain her, but only succeeded in catching one of her shoes. Then she flew back to the house of the Moors and ordered her magic wand to prepare a breakfast with good food. Soon the Moors came home, and began to talk about the beautiful maiden whom they had seen with a star which illumined everything up to the grand altar; but it was Cinder-Mary.

Then the king ordered his men to search all the villages and ranchos for the maiden who had left the shoe behind. Soon they came to the house of the Black Moors, and found Cinder-Mary's other shoe. They were about to carry the daughter of the Moor to the king, when a little dog commenced to howl, saying, "Mango de Burro goes, and Star of Gold remains." Then the king's retainers demanded to see the other maiden who was hidden in the house. Accordingly they left the girl who had the "mango de burro" on her forehead, and carried Cinder-Mary to the king, that she might marry the prince. There was a grand wedding, and Cinder-Mary was given a castle in which to live with the prince.

Soon afterwards the Black Moors came to the castle and asked that they be allowed to louse Cinder-Mary. They came to her while she was bathing, with her hair loose, and commenced to louse her. Suddenly they stuck a pin into her head, so that she became enchanted and flew away, for they were afraid that she would denounce them

because they were witches. Then they left without as much as saying good-by.

When her attendants came for Cinder-Mary, she was gone, and the only living being they could find was a dove in a cypress-tree. Then they went to the head servant and asked him how much he would give them for the dove which they had found singing in the cypress-tree, and which said in its song that it wanted to see the king in his palace. The dove, they said, was crying piteously. The servant went at once to the king and told him about the dove. Then the king asked him how much he wanted for bringing the dove to him; and the servant replied, that if he would give him five hundred pesos, he would bring it. The king agreed, and the servant went and brought him the bird. While stroking its back, the king found a pin stuck in its head, and pulled it out. Immediately the bird became Cinder-Mary. Then he asked her why the Black Moors had thus bewitched her; and she replied, that it was because they were witches, and were afraid that she would denounce them.

Then the king ordered that the Moors be brought before him, and he condemned them all to be burned to death with green wood. But Cinder-Mary entered the palace where she was to live, and locked the door, so that no one might open it for five days. When at last the door was opened, it was a virgin who was shut in there.

3. THE BIRD OF THE SWEET SONG (*Cuento del Pajaro del Dulce Canto*)

Once there was an old man who was blind, and the sorcerers whom he consulted told him that the only thing which would cure his blindness was a certain sweet-voiced bird. So his son started out to find the bird. Soon he came to a rancho, where he found a dead man who had no one to bury him. Feeling reverence for the dead, he sought a man to attend the corpse, and then sent for a priest to bury him. The priest inquired of the messenger whether he came on his own business or for another, remarking that it were better if the other should himself come to present his requests. Nevertheless he went, and the corpse was buried with responses. Then the boy went on his way.

Soon afterwards he met in the road the spirit of the dead man to whom he had given the charity of burial. It had assumed the form of a Fox, who asked him where he was going, and why. He replied that he was going to the country of the Moors to fetch the bird of the sweet song. Then the Fox told him that it was very near, and that he would give him a horse to assist him. The Fox knew whether the horse was given pasture or not. He further advised him that if he should find the Moors with their eyes open, it was a sign that they were sleeping, but that if their eyes were closed, then he should know

that they were wide awake. But the Fox warned him that he must not carry away any of the beautiful maidens which he would find in the house of the Moors.

Soon the boy arrived at the castle of the Moors, and entered. There he found the Moors with their eyes open, and by this he knew that they were sleeping. Many birds were there in beautiful cages; but he passed these by, and took a plain, common cage in which was a homely bird, for he knew that this was the bird of the sweet song. Likewise he seized one of the beautiful maidens, contrary to the Fox's orders, mounted a wooden horse which he found there, and flew through the window.

Then the Moors awakened, and pursued them, and soon overtook them. They carried the boy and the maiden back to their castle, and imprisoned them there. Soon the Fox re-appeared to him, and said, "You did not do as I instructed you." He then told him that the maiden was in the garden and would speak to no one, and that the bird refused to sing, but that he had gone for some charcoal, and begged permission of the Moors to give her two pieces. Then she at once began to talk, the bird to sing, and the horse to neigh.

Soon afterward the boy again seized the maiden and the bird, mounted the horse, and flew away. Again the Fox re-appeared, warning them not to cross the river with the bargemen, for, should they attempt to do so, they would never reach the other shore; but, disregarding the warning, they kept on until they came to the river where they met the bargemen. These said that they did not have room for all to cross at once, but that they would first cross with the maiden, the bird, and the horse, and later return for the boy. The girl, bird, and horse were safely landed on the other shore, and the bargemen then returned for the boy; but when they reached the middle of the river, the boat was upset. Now, it happened that there was a sabino-tree in the middle of the river, and the boy held tightly to this.

Then suddenly the Fox appeared on the river-bank, and told him to hold tight until he made a rope. So he began to pull the hairs out of his tail, and twisted them to form a rope. When it was long enough, he threw it out to the boy, and told him to tie it about his waist, so that he might pull him ashore. Reaching the shore, the boy went sadly home, leaving the bird of the sweet song, the maiden and the horse, on the other side of the river.

When the blind father heard that his son had lost the bird of the sweet song, he again went to the sorcerers, who told him that the sole remedy now for his blindness was to bathe in the sea every afternoon. The first day that he went there, an ugly Worm appeared, and told him that if he would give him one of his three daughters, he would cure his infirmity. Returning, he told his daughters of this;

and they agreed, that, if the Worm would cure their father, one of them would go with the Worm. So the next afternoon the old man took his eldest daughter; but when she saw the Worm, she was horrified, and said that she would never go with such an ugly creature. The next afternoon when the blind father went to bathe, he took his second daughter; but she likewise refused to go when she saw the ugliness of the Worm. Now, only the youngest remained, but she said that she would gladly do anything if only her father might be cured. So she went with him the next afternoon when he went to bathe. Then the ugly Worm appeared, and asked her if she were willing to go with him. Turning to her father, she asked him to give her his blessing. Then from the sea there came a great wave which carried the maiden and the Worm out to sea with it.

4. THE STORY OF THE SUN AND THE MOON (*Cuento del Sol y la Luna*)¹

Once there was a soldier who saw a maiden in his house one night. He thought he might have been dreaming when he saw her, and decided to watch again the next night. When she appeared again, he lighted a candle, that he might see how beautiful she was; but no sooner had he done so, than he received a blow in the face which caused him to drop the candle and spill a drop of wax on the floor. Then the maiden disappeared. "I will go and search for her," said the soldier, and he set out.

Soon he met on the road two brothers who were fighting about their inheritance. One of them said to the other, "Here comes a man who will know how to arrange it." When the soldier came up to them, he asked, "What are you doing, my good men?" And they replied, "We are fighting over our inheritance." — "My father," said one of them, "had these magical boots, this magical cudgel, and this hat; and my brother wishes to inherit all of them. So I told him that you would arrange the matter for us." The soldier agreed, and told the boys to run a race to a near-by hill and back. "Whoever arrives here first," said he, "will be the owner of all that your father possessed." The boys agreed, and started off; but when they returned, the soldier had disappeared with the magical objects. "Did I not tell you that he would settle the matter for us?" said one to the other.

Then the soldier went on, taking three leagues at a step, with the aid of his magic boots, until he came to the house of the Sun. Entering, he said to the old woman there, "Good evening, grandmother!" —

¹ Compare Sergio Hernández de Soto, *Cuentos populares de Extremadura*, in *Biblioteca de las tradiciones populares españolas*, vol. x (1886): "El mágico Palermo," p. 48; "El Castillo de 'Irás y no volverás,'" p. 63; "Don Juan Jugador," p. 76; "Fernando," p. 90; and Note, p. 105. Antonio Machado y Alvarez, *Cuentos populares españoles*, *Ibid.*; vol. i, p. 126. — ED.

“What are you doing here, my good son?” she asked. “When my son comes home, he will eat you!” Soon they heard the Sun approaching; and when he came in, he was very angry. “Mamma, mamma!” he cried. “Here is a human being! Give him to me! I will eat him!” But the old woman only replied, “No, my son! It is only a poor traveller, who is stopping here.” And then she gave the Sun a little box on the ear.

Then the soldier went on, taking three leagues at a step, until he came to the house of the Moon, and went within to greet the occupants. Seeing an old woman, he said to her, “Good evening, grandmother!” — “Why have you come here, my good son?” she asked. “My son will come home and eat you!” And soon arrived the Moon, very angry, and cried out, “Here is a human being! Give him to me! I will eat him!” But the old woman, the mother of the Moon, merely replied, “No, my son, you must not eat him. It is only a poor traveller, who is stopping here.” Then she boxed his ears.

The soldier went on until he came to the house of the mother of the Wind. Here he found the Wind weeping because his mother had just died. So he said to the Wind, “What will you give me if I revive her?” — “Would that you could do so, my friend!” cried the Wind. “If you succeed, I will go with you to seek your lady.” Then the soldier hit the old woman three times with his magic cudgel, and she rose up and began to talk. Then the soldier said, “Let us go to seek my lady. I will go ahead, and you follow behind.” Then he set out at such a pace that the Wind was unable to keep up with him. “It is these boots which make me travel so fast,” he said to the Wind. “Lend me one of them,” replied the Wind. “Then we may converse as we go.”

Finally the Wind said, “Wait here a little while. I will go to see the maiden for whom we are searching.” Presently he arrived, and found the mother of the maiden warming herself. He entered very briskly; and the old woman said, “Daughter, go to your sister and give her food.” So the girl went to carry the food. Then the Wind said, “I told the soldier to follow a little ways behind.”

Soon the soldier came in, and did not stop until he had looked through the entire house for his lady. After opening the seven doors, he at last found her, and she immediately commenced to give thanks to God. Then she and the soldier began to arrange a plan of escape from the place where she was confined. He told her to get a comb, a brush of pine needles, a thimbleful of ashes, and another of salt. Then he gave her a piece of the magic hat, a bit of the boot, and another piece of the cudgel. He embraced her, and they left the room where she had been imprisoned. Then they fled.

Soon the old woman found that they were gone, and commenced to

pursue them, and soon drew near to them. "Throw down the piece of comb!" said the soldier; and immediately there grew up a thick brush behind them, and the fugitives fled on. Soon the old woman was near overtaking them again, and the girl threw behind them the brush; and immediately there grew up a wood of spiny pine-trees, and the fugitives fled on. Again the old woman came nearer, and this time they threw down the thimble of ashes, and there appeared a fog of great density, and the fugitives fled on. But again the old woman approached them; and this time they threw down the thimble of salt, and there appeared behind them a great river. Then the old woman sat down on the bank and began to weep, crying, "Oh, ungrateful daughter! The grain of corn will return in the spring of water!" Then the girl turned to the soldier, and said, "You have released me from the prison where I was confined, but not from the curse which my mother has laid upon me."

Soon the soldier said to the maiden, "I will leave you here a little while, and go to see my parents." — "Very well," she replied. "I will tie three knots in your belt. In one I will tie my clothes; the second is that you may not forget me; and the third is that you do not allow your parents, nor your brothers and sisters, nor any of your kinsfolk, to embrace you." So the soldier went home and met his family; but at night, while he was sleeping, his grandmother came and embraced him, and immediately he forgot the maiden whom he had left at the spring of water.

Then the parents of the soldier decided to marry him with another woman, and the wedding was about to be celebrated. Then there came to the wedding the maiden whom the soldier had left at the spring of water, begging that she be allowed to give an entertainment at the wedding feast. So, when all were assembled, she took two little doves, and said to them, "You remember, ungrateful little dove, that you released me from the prison where I was confined, but from the curse of my mother, no!" — "Kurukuku, I do not remember." — "You remember, ungrateful little dove, that you left me at the spring of water." — "Kurukuku, I believe that I am beginning to remember." — "You remember, ungrateful little dove, that I tied my clothes in your belt." Then the little dove remembered, and the soldier embraced the maiden and they went away. But the other woman they killed, and so ends the story of the Sun and the Moon.

PHILADELPHIA, PA.,

June 1, 1912.