



# The Friendly Persuasion

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*THE FRIENDLY PERSUASION*



## MUSIC ON THE MUSCATATUCK

NEAR the banks of the Muscatatuck where once the woods had stretched, dark row on row, and where the fox grapes and wild mint still flourished, Jess Birdwell, an Irish Quaker, built his white clapboard house. Here he lacked for very little. On a peg by the front door hung a starling in a wooden cage and at the back door stood a spring-house, the cold spring water running between crocks of yellow-skinned milk. At the front gate a moss-rose said welcome and on a trellis over the parlor window a Prairie Queen nodded at the roses in the parlor carpet—blossoms no nurseryman's catalogue had ever carried and gay company for the sober Quaker volumes: Fox's life, Penn's "Fruits of Solitude," Woolman's "Journal," which stood in the parlor secretary.

Jess had a good wife, a Quaker minister, Eliza Cope before she was wed, and a houseful of children. Eliza was a fine woman, pious and work-brickel and good-looking as female preachers are apt to be: a little, black-haired, glossy woman with a mind of her own.

He had a good business, too. He was a nurseryman with the best stock of berries and fruits west of Philadelphia; in the apple line: Rambo, Maiden Blush, Early Harvest, Northern Spy, a half dozen others; May Duke cherries; Stump the World, a white-fleshed peach; the Lucretia dewberry, a wonder for pies and cobbles. Pears, currant bushes, gooseberries, whatever the land could support or fancy demand in the way of fruits, Jess had them.

There were extras to be had, too, there on the banks of the

Muscatatuck: black bass; catfish that weren't choosy, that would come out of the water with their jaws clamped about a piece of cotton batting. Pawpaws smooth and sweet as nectar, persimmons with an October flavor, service berries tart as spring.

In spring, meadow and roadside breathed flowers; in summer there was a shimmer of sunlight onto the great trees whose shadows still dappled the farmland: sycamore, oak, tulip, shagbark hickory. When fall came a haze lay across the cornfields, across the stands of goldenrod and farewell summer, until heaven and earth seemed bound together—and Jess, standing on a little rise at the back of the house, looking across the scope of land which fell away to the river, would have, in pure content, to wipe his eyes and blow his nose before he'd be in a fit state to descend to the house.

Yet, in spite of this content, Jess wasn't completely happy, and for no reason anyone could have hit upon at first guess. It certainly wasn't having Eliza ride every First Day morning to the Grove Meeting House, there to sit on the elevated minister's bench and speak when the spirit moved her. Jess knew Eliza had had a call to the ministry and was proud to hear her preach in her gentle way of loving-kindness and the brotherhood of man.

No, it wasn't Eliza's preaching nor any outward lack the eye could see that troubled Jess. It was music. Jess pined for music, though it would be hard to say how he'd come by any such longing. To the Quakers music was a popish dido, a sop to the senses, a hurdle waiting to trip man in his upward struggle. They kept it out of their Meeting Houses and out of their homes, too. Oh, there were a few women who'd hum a little while polishing their lamp chimneys, and a few men with an inclination to whistle while dropping corn, but as to real music, sung or played, Jess had no more chance to hear it than a woodchuck.

What chances there were, though, he took. He'd often manage to be around the Methodist Church when they had their mid-week services and he felt a kind of glory in his soul that wasn't entirely religious when the enthusiastic Methodists hit into "Old

Hundred." And when on the Fourth of July, Amanda Prentis soared upwards on the high notes of "The Star-Spangled Banner" only Eliza's determined nudgings could bring Jess back to earth.

This seemed for some time about the best Jess would be able to do in the way of music without having Eliza and her whole congregation buzzing about his ears, the best he could do anyway until he took that trip to Philadelphia and met Waldo Quigley; though of course he had no way of knowing when he was planning the trip that it would turn out as it did.

Jess had been hearing for some time about a new early cherry and he'd made up his mind to go to Philadelphia, and if they were all he'd heard, order some for the Maple Grove Nursery. There wasn't, perhaps, any real need of his going as far as Philadelphia, but to a Quaker, Philadelphia was the place to go if nothing more than a pocket handkerchief was needed. So Eliza packed his valise for him, drove him to Vernon herself and saw him on the train.

The first word Eliza had from Jess was a letter mailed a couple of days after he left. He didn't mention Waldo Quigley in that letter, though as a matter of fact he was already hand in glove with him as Eliza discovered later. The letter was short: health good, scenery pleasant, that was about the whole of it with the exception of a postscript saying, "Thank thee, dear Eliza, for the little packet thee put in my nightshirt pocket."

The "little packet" contained peppermints, and it was through offering one of these to Waldo Quigley that Jess made his acquaintance. Jess was always sociable when he traveled. He used to say that sun, moon and stars were the same everywhere and only the people different and if you didn't get to know them you'd as well have stayed home and milked the cows.

After Waldo Quigley put the peppermint in his mouth he settled his big, portly, black-suited frame onto the seat opposite Jess.



"Well, sir," he said, "you a Hoosier?"

Jess said he was and the big man went on, "Got a president shaping up out your way. Got an up-and-comer there on your prairies, a man who can out-talk a trumpet and out-see a telescope. He's a little giant. Man to elevate somewhat and he'll set our country on its feet. He's the man we need."

Jess sniffed. He was a fiery Republican, as fiery at least as a Quaker's apt to be. "Friend," said he, "the man we need is no little giant, but a big one. Not a man busy rousing up the countryside, setting state against state, but a man with the interest of all at heart, little farmer as well as plantation owner, black as well as white."

Jess could see, "That's Stephen A. Douglas," work up Waldo Quigley's gullet as far as his back teeth but there he stopped the words, said, "Them's my sentiments precisely, Brother Birdwell, them's my very thoughts, only better said."

Jess wrinkled up his big nose. "I see thee's a man of harmony, friend."

"Brother," replied the big man, "you put your tongue to the right word. Harmony's what I preach and harmony's what I practice."

Jess listened to these words, took another look at the big man's black suit and decided that he was a preacher of some sort.

"Is thee, perhaps," he asked mildly, "a minister of the gospel? Though thy habit for a man of the cloth is perhaps a mite unorthodox."

Mr. Quigley cleared his throat, swallowing the last of his first peppermint. "I can't say as I've ever been ordained," he admitted, "but my work's been so much with them that has that I've fallen into a sedate manner of dressing. It strikes me as being a more seemly thing to do. Helps business, too," he added.

"Business?" asked Jess.

"You named it yourself, Mr. Birdwell. Harmony is my business. Do-re-mi. Also la-ti-do. Not forgetting fa-sol. Harmony. The music of the spheres. God's way of speaking to his children. The power

that soothes the savage beast, the song that quiets newborn babes and eases the pangs of the dying man. In a word, music."

"In several words in fact," ruminated Jess. "Is thee then, Brother Quigley, a musician?" he asked.

"Musician? Yes. But I," said he frankly, "am that rather unusual combination, a musical businessman, or perhaps more truly a businesslike musician. There's plenty of men can keep a double entry set of books and there's a number more, though fewer, can tell a grace note from a glissando, but I," handing Jess a card, "can do both."

Jess took the card and read aloud, "Professor Waldo Quigley, Traveling Representative, Payson and Clarke. The World's Finest Organs. Also Sheet Music and Song Books."

Brother Quigley reached out, took the card from Jess and wrote "Personal Compliments" on it.

"I note from your speech you're a Quaker, and knowing the way that sect—not that it ain't the finest in the world," he said politely—"feels about music I wouldn't want you to think I was trying to work against your prejudices—convictions rather. So," he said, handing the card back to Jess, "I write 'Personal Compliments,' to show I'm free of any profit-making motives; that we meet man to man. Pays to be delicate-like where religion is concerned. Pays every time," he said, nodding to Jess.

Jess tried Payson and Clarke over once or twice on his tongue. "Payson and Clarke," he said. "So thee sells Payson and Clarke's. They've got one unless I disremember in the Methodist meeting house at Rush Branch."

"Sure they have," said Brother Quigley. "Sure they have." He took a little red book from an inner pocket and flipped a few pages. "Yes, sir. I sold them that organ three years ago April 19. One more strawberry festival and they'll have it paid for."

"Thee sells a good instrument then. I've heard that organ now and again in passing."

"Good? Mr. Birdwell, it's better than good. Three years ago after them Methodists at Rush Branch heard my concert and song

recital, they said to me, 'Professor Quigley, we don't ever calculate to hear the voice of God any more plain while here on earth.' "

Jess said, "That's carrying it a little far, mebbe," but he was really burning to hear more about the Payson and Clarke.

"Well, of course," Brother Quigley reminded him, "you got to remember they's Methodists. Tending toward the shouting order. But this organ, Methodists aside, is pure gumbo, absolutely pure gumbo."

"Gumbo," Jess repeated.

"Rich. Satisfying. Deep. Gumbo, pure gumbo."

Jess knew a thing or two about organs though it would be hard to say how: perhaps from reading Chalmers' "Universal Encyclopedia," perhaps from an inspection of the Methodist organ. Perhaps in neither way. Knowledge of what you love somehow comes to you; you don't have to read nor analyze nor study. If you love a thing enough, knowledge of it seeps into you, with particulars more real than any chart can furnish. Maybe it was that way with Jess and organs.

So he asked, "How many reeds in a Payson and Clarke?"

"Forty-eight, Brother Birdwell, not counting the tuba mirabilis. But in the Payson and Clarke, number ain't what counts—it's the quality. Those reeds duplicate the human throat. They got timbre." And he landed on the French word the way a hen lands on the water, skeptical, but hoping for the best.

"How many stops?" Jess asked.

"Eight. And that vox humana! The throat of an angel. It cries, it sighs, it sings. You can hear the voice of your lost child in it. Did you ever lose a child, Brother Birdwell?"

"No," said Jess shortly.

"You can hear the voice of your old mother calling to you from the further shore."

"Ma lives in Germantown," said Jess.

If the conversation had followed in this direction, Jess would never have come home with a Payson and Clarke; but in every

nerve Brother Quigley could feel a prospect retreating and he changed his tack.

"The Payson and Clarke comes in four different finishes," he said. "Oak, maple, walnut and mahogany. Got a cabinet that's purely elegant. Most organ's got two swinging brackets. This one's got four. Two for lamps, two for vases. Has a plate mirror over the console. There's not a square inch of unornamented wood in the whole cabinet. No, sir, there's not an inch of dingy, unembellished wood the length and breadth of the cabinet. But, Brother Birdwell, you're a musician yourself. You're not interested in cabinets. You're interested in tone. Tone's what the artist looks for. Tone's what Payson and Clarke's got."

He began to hum under his breath. Low at first, then louder, with occasional words. "Tum-te-tum—the riverside—tum-te-tum—upon its tide."

"That's a likely tune," Jess said.

"Can't do justice to it singing."

But he stopped humming, launched into the words. He had a fine baritone. Flattered a little, Jess thought, but not bad. When he exhaled heavily on a high note, Jess was sorry to find he'd had a nip or two, but before the piece was finished Jess was beating time with his forefinger on the red plush arm of the seat, completely forgetful of the spirits Brother Quigley had surely had.

"What's the piece called?" Jess asked.

"'The Old Musician and His Harp.' It was written to be played on an organ. Mortifies me that you have to hear it first time sung, merely."

"Thee's a good voice," Jess said.

"Fair to middling. Fair to middling, only."

He sank a fat hand in one of his big black pockets and brought up a leather-covered flask. He wiped the mouth carefully on his coat-tail and held it toward Jess.

"Wet your whistle and we'll sing it through together."

Jess shook his head.

"Well, I didn't suppose you would, but it's a pity. Cleans your

pipes. Extends your range. Gives you gumbo." He took a long swig himself.

"Try it with me, Brother Birdwell."

Jess said afterward he didn't have the slightest intention of making a show of himself in a B. & O. parlor car singing "The Old Musician and His Harp," or any other song, for that matter. But that tune was a hard thing to give the go-by; the mind said the words and the toe tapped the time; with the whole body already singing it, that way, opening the mouth to let the words out seemed a mighty small matter and before Jess knew it he was taking the high notes in his fine, clear tenor. Jess had the nose for a really first-class tenor—there never was a first-class tenor with a button nose, and Jess, with his, high-bridged, more Yankee than Quaker, had just the nose for it. Before he and Brother Quigley had finished a couple of verses half the parlor car was joining in the chorus.

Bring my harp to me again,  
Let me hear its gentle strain;  
Let me hear its chords once more  
Ere I pass to yon bright shore.

When they finished Brother Quigley had another nip. "Got to cool the pipes," he said. "Now, Brother Birdwell, when you get to Philly, when you get them cherries located, you stop in at Payson and Clarke's and hear that the way it was meant to be heard. Hear it on the organ. No obligation whatever. Privilege to play for a fellow artist."

Jess hadn't a notion in the world of buying an organ when he went into Payson and Clarke's. He'd got the cherry stock he'd come after, had had a nice visit with his mother, and was ready to start homeward when he thought he'd as well hear "The Old Musician and His Harp," on a Payson and Clarke. Brother Quigley had been clever to him and it was no more than humanly decent to let the man show him what the organ could do. That

was the way he had it figured out to himself before he went in, anyway.

When he'd walked out, the organ was his. He didn't know what he'd do with it; he didn't think Eliza would hear to keeping it; he thought he'd like as not slipped clean away from grace, but he had the papers for the organ in his pocket. He'd paid half cash, the rest to be in nursery stock. Clarke of Payson and Clarke was an orchardist.

As soon as Jess heard Waldo Quigley run his fingers over that organ's keys with a sound as liquid as the Muscatatuck after a thaw he'd known he was sunk. And when he'd found he could chord "The Old Musician" himself, when Waldo Quigley said, "Never knew a man with a better tremolo," when he pumped the air into the organ with his feet and drew it out with his fingers, sounding like an echo of eternity, he began casting up his bank balance in his mind. He was past figuring out the right and wrong of the matter; all he was interested in was getting it, having that organ where he could lay his hands across it, hear whenever he liked those caressing tones.

He managed to get home a few days before the organ arrived. He didn't say a word to Eliza about what he'd done. He figured it was a thing which would profit by being led up to gradually. He talked a good deal in those few days about music; how God must like it or He wouldn't have put songbirds in the world, and how the angels were always pictured with harp and zithern.

Eliza was not receptive. "Thee's neither bird nor angel, Jess Birdwell, and had the Lord wanted thee, either singing or plucking a harp, thee would be feathered now one way or another."

There'd been an early snow the day the organ arrived; a foot or two on the level, much more in the drifts. Jess himself brought the organ home from Vernon on the sled.

Eliza knew what it was the minute she laid eyes on the box, for all Jess' care in covering it over with an old rag carpet. Jess' talk about birds and angels had made her fearful of something of

the kind, only she hadn't thought it'd be as bad as an organ; a flute, or maybe a French harp he could go down cellar and play had been the worst her imaginings had pictured for her. But she knew it was an organ before Jess had got the covering off the crate, and was out in the snow by the time Enoch had the horses out of the traces.

"What's this thee's bringing home, Jess Birdwell?"

Though she knew well enough. She just wanted to hear him put his tongue to it.

"It's a Payson and Clarke," Jess said, still trying to be gradual.

But it was no use. "It's an organ," Eliza said. "Jess, Jess, what's thee thinking of? Bringing this thing here? Me, a recorded minister and the house full of growing children. What's the neighbors to think? What's the Grove Meeting to think?"

If she'd kept on in this sorrowful strain Jess would like as not have got shut of the organ, but Eliza didn't stop there.

"Jess Birdwell," she said, "if thee takes that organ in the house, I stay out. Thee can make thy choice. Thee can have thy wife or thee can have that instrument; but both, thee cannot have."

Jess had a heart as soft as pudding, and if Eliza'd said Please, if she'd let a tear slide out of her soft black eye, that organ would have been done for; but commands, threats, that was a different matter entirely.

Jess called to the hired man who'd taken the horses to the barn, "Come and give me a hand with this organ, Enoch."

A heart soft as pudding, till someone took it on himself to tell Jess which way to turn, then the pudding froze, and if you weren't careful you'd find yourself cut to the bone on an ice splinter. A mild man until pushed, but Jess solidified fast with pushing.

Eliza saw the granite coming, but she was of martyr stock herself and felt the time had come to suffer for the right. She sat flat down in the snow, or as flat as petticoats and skirts would let her. There in the snow she sat and said, "Jess Birdwell, here I stay until that organ is taken away."

Jess said, "We'll uncrate it where it stands, Enoch, then carry

it up to the house. No use having the weight of the crate to move, too."

So they went to work on it, got it out of its case and the excelsior packing. Enoch kept his eye on Eliza sitting there in the snow. She made him feel uncomfortable, as if the least he could do would be to give her his coat to sit on.

"Well, let's not dally here, Enoch," Jess said, seeming not to even see Eliza. "Let's get it up to the house."

As they went up the path to the house, straining and puffing through the snow, Enoch said, "Ain't she liable to catch her death of cold there?"

"I figure," said Jess, "that when the snow melts through the last petticoat she'll move."

He was wrong about that. Eliza was wet to the skin before she came up to the house. She had sat there casting up the matter in her mind, but she knew that when Jess was set he was a problem for the Lord. And she had enough respect for both to leave them to each other. There was nothing ever to be gained, she thought, by dissension. Peace, she could at least have. Jess had just finished dusting the organ when Eliza came in, went to the stove and stood there steaming.

"Jess," she asked, "is thee set on having this organ? Remembering thy children and my ministry, is thee still set?"

"Yes, Eliza," Jess said, "I'm set."

"Well," she said, "that's settled;" and being on the whole a reasonable as well as a pious woman, she added, "It will have to go in the attic."

"I'd thought of that," Jess said, "and I'm willing."

So that's the way it was done. The organ was put in the attic and from there it could be heard downstairs, but not in any full-bodied way. It took the gumbo out of it—having it in the attic—and besides Jess was careful not to play it when anyone was in the house. He was careful, that is, until the day the Ministry and Oversight Committee called. He was careful that day, too; it was Mattie who wasn't careful, though unlucky's more the word for it.



Jess had noted right off that Mattie had a musical turn. She'd learned to pick out "The Old Musician" by herself, with one hand, and when Jess discovered this, he taught her the bass chords so that she could play for him to sing. That was a bitter pill for Eliza to swallow, and just what she'd feared: the children becoming infected with Jess' weakness for music. Still, she couldn't keep herself from listening when the deep organ notes with Jess' sweet tenor flying above them came seeping down through the ceiling into the sitting-room below.

But in spite of Jess' being careful, in spite of Eliza's being twice as strict as usual, and speaking at the Hopewell Meeting House with increased gravity, the matter got noised about. Not that there was an organ at Birdwells': there wasn't anything definite known, anything you could put your finger on. It was just a feeling that Friend Birdwell wasn't standing as squarely in the light as he'd done at one time. Perhaps someone had heard a strain of organ music coming out of an attic window some spring evening, but more than likely it was just the guilty look Eliza had.

However that may be, the Ministry and Oversight Committee came one night to call. It was nearing seven; supper had been over for some time, the dishes were washed and the table was set for breakfast. Jess and Eliza were in the sitting-room resting after the heat and work of the day and listening to the children who were playing duck-on-rock down by the branch.

The Committee drove up in Amos Pease's surrey, but by the back way, leaving the rig at the carriage-house, so that the first sign Jess and Eliza had of visitors was the smell of trodden mint. Amos Pease wasn't a man to note where he put his feet down when duty called.

Eliza smelled it first and stepped over to the west window to see who was coming. She saw, and in a flash she knew why. "It's the Ministry and Oversight," she said, and her voice shook, but when Amos Pease knocked at the door she was sitting in her rocker, her feet on a footstool, one hand lying loose and easy in the other.