

**THE FIRST MASS,  
AND  
OTHER STORIES**

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The First Mass, and Other Stories by E. M. Brookes & Luis Coloma

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**E. M. BROOKES & LUIS COLOMA**

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THE  
FIRST MASS

AND OTHER STORIES

TRANSLATED FROM  
THE SPANISH OF

LUIS COLOMA, S. J.

BY

E. M. BROOKES



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## CONTENTS.

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THE FIRST MASS, . . . . .	5
TIO PELLEJO; OR, PERFECT RESIGNATION, . . . . .	44
AN EPISODE OF 1812, . . . . .	61
MEN OF VORE, . . . . .	95
MIGUEL, . . . . .	117
DUST AND DIRT, . . . . .	146
A MIRACLE, . . . . .	194
CAIN, . . . . .	225

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## THE FIRST MASS

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### I.

IN Andalusia during summer sudden thunder storms occur very frequently, but they last, in that clear, bright climate no longer than an expression of anger on the face of a child, who a moment afterwards will smile through his tears, for, in like manner, the sun bursts forth brilliantly on one side, while the heavy clouds are discharging torrents of rain on the other. 'The Andalusian peasants then say, that the devil is quarreling with his mother-in-law.'

One of these storms, which are none the less terrible for being short—for does not all in life that goes beyond the bounds of nature and reason enter into the domain of

passion?—burst upon the town of G—  
 on the night of the fifteenth of July, eve  
 of the feast of Our Lady of Carmel, patron-  
 ess of the hospital of the place.

The rain had put out the lights, and  
 drenched the banners and Chinese lanterns  
 that adorned the façade of the church in  
 honor of the festival; but the tempest could  
 not impose silence on the bells in the tower  
 as they announced, not only the morrow's  
 feast, but also the celebration of a First  
 Mass.

At intervals, when the hurricane ceased  
 for a few moments to rage and the thunder  
 to roar, the bells might be distinctly heard  
 as, despising the one and dominating the  
 other, they went ringing on, like one in-  
 spired by truth and helped by reason, sing-  
 ing a joyful 'Alleluia' to all around.

The Carmel Hospital was situated in one  
 of the steep, uneven streets of the upper  
 part of the town; it turned its back, as  
 though despising human greatness, upon  
 an old castle that was once the dwelling of  
 some Spanish grandee, and opened upon a  
 square formed by houses inhabited by the



poor, and over the great doorway was inscribed in large characters;—"Open for the temporal health of the poor, and for the eternal welfare of the rich." Built close against its walls, like a swallow's nest, was a small whitewashed house, perfumed by a plant of mignonette that hung from the roof, and sanctified by a branch of blessed laurel that was tied to the balcony with blue ribbons. (This last ornamentation is very general in the South of Spain.) In this modest abode lived Don Blas the chaplain, with his sister Mariquita, and his nephew Pepito.

On the night to which we refer, the humble dwelling was bright and shining with that cleanliness and order produced by loving hands anxious to prepare a pleasant reception for some expected loved one. He who was expected that night was no other than Pepito himself, the dearly-loved nephew, who had grown up under the care of the two old people like a joyous rose-bush under the shadow of grave cypresses; the abandoned orphan, whom the charity of his uncle and aunt had received when an innocent child, formed into an irreproachable

youth, and at last become a model priest. Pepito (diminutive for Joseph,) as both the old folks called him, had just been ordained in Cadiz, and was coming to celebrate his First Mass in the Church of Our Lady of Carmel, of which his uncle was chaplain.

The latter was an ex-member of the Order of St. Francis, who had been turned out of his convent like many others, at the dispersion of the religious orders of men. He was one of those whom the world, with a certain mixture of pity and contempt, calls—good, simple souls,—(in Spanish they say, *almas de Dios*? God's souls) and who are in truth,—pure humble souls whom God accepts for His own.

For thirty years had he exercised his modest but difficult functions, with that charitable zeal, that constancy, which is the fulfilment of all virtue, that silent abnegation that so few understand, and which is the distinctive character of the learned, the holy, the calumniated Spanish Clergy.

Don Blas was not, however, a man of much learning; he knew no more Latin

than his missal, nor other prayers and offices than those of his Order, contained in his breviary; but what peace of mind! what tranquillity of conscience! what equanimity of temper that nothing could move; what a sense of well-being in his heart which, like that of his Father St. Francis, whom he invoked at all hours, burnt with that immense charity that finds consolation for every sorrow, remedy for every misfortune, and which, like the pelican, is capable of giving its own blood when it has nothing more to give! How sublime, and how attainable by all, was the philosophy of that poor old man, whose only knowledge was the love of God and his neighbor, and who epitomized the Religion whose minister he was in these two words—Our Father! And though there were some who laughed at the simple hearted priest, there were none who did not love and respect him; he possessed the humble superiority of virtue which gently penetrates and persuades without intrusion, unlike the haughty superiority of talent which proudly imposes its opinions and