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Pete's Rheumatism

By E. E. HARRIMAN.

He was from sunny Italy and had been in equally sunny California for nine years. From his wagon he sold vegetables and fruit at the two mining camps in Calaveras County, and everyone called him Pete; that was as near as they cared to come to his real name.

Pete was jolly, sunny-tempered and kindly. He knew by name every child on his route, and his customers often wondered whether he did not give away in fruit to the little rascals half his profit. He carried his money in a long buckskin purse, and the children never grew tired of watching him make change. He would cup his hand under the mouth of the purse, which he had opened, then he would grip the bottom with his right hand and shake gently, holding the purse nearly level, and the silver would crawl slowly out into the waiting palm. When he was obliged to change a large bill his hand plunged into another pocket and pulled out a large roll of greenbacks. Then the children stared and said, "O-o-oh, chee!"

"I should think you would be afraid to carry so much money, Pete," Mrs. Holcomb, the wife of a mine foreman once said to him.

"For why?" asked Pete, lifting his eyebrows. "Nobody bother Pete."

"You can't tell," said Mrs. Holcomb. "Some one might rob you, someone from outside who didn't know you the way we do."

Pete laughed and shrugged his shoulders. Everything was a joke to him. "He try-a treeck like-a dat, me, I'm poke-a heem in da eye weeth onion. Make-a heem cry. How that do?" and Pete squinted at her.

"Oh, go on, you silly man!" laughed Mrs. Holcomb. "I almost hope some holdup man does rob you if you feel like that."

Pete kept on his placid way from camp to camp. He never carried a weapon, and he laughed at people who advised him to do so. Generally he sang as he rode, and anyone who was coming received plenty of warning of his presence.

At one place between the camps Pete had to turn a sharp corner, where his outer wheels ran within a foot of the edge of a cliff. At the middle of the turn he could have extended his arm and dropped his whip straight down for four hundred feet without its touching anything in its fall. Just beyond the turn came a sharp rise where the horses had to pause halfway up for breath; in the middle of the grade was a little level place just long enough for a wagon and team. His horses knew it for a resting place and always stopped there; Pete usually let them do as they pleased on the grades.

On the side of the road away from the cliff stood a big pine. It was almost eight feet in diameter at the height of a man above the root; and the ground sloped abruptly down from the tree to the narrow road, so that the inner wheel of the wagon made a sharp angle with the bank. At that place ruts were cut into the rock deep enough to hold the wheels from slipping sidewise; and no man who rode round that turn ever doubted the wisdom of the roadmaker.

Pete sometimes eyed the big pine and thought what an ideal place it would be for a holdup when someone had stopped on the upgrade to let his team breathe. A man could hide behind that tree and give no evidence of his presence until he stepped out, gun in hand. Always he laughed at himself for his farcies, scouting the idea of such a thing. It was perfectly ridiculous to think of so remote a possibility; only Pete did not think in just those words. More likely he thought in his mining-camp dialect, "Rats! No chances like-a dose."

Then, just when he felt absolutely safe, folks began to talk about the road agent who had held up two rigs over on the road to the Progress Mine. That was eighteen miles away. Eighteen miles is not much for a road agent.

"Pete, you better buy a gun," said a miner. "I like a Bisley myself, but some takes more to the old frontier gun. Seein' as you hain't had any practice throwin' a shotgun, mebber you'd better get a scatter gun."

"I don't like-a dat; dose road-agent shoot first, talk afterwards. No-a carry gun. Too good-a mark for shoot. Road-a agent see dose gun, blim! Pete have hole in heem."

"Mebber you're right, but I dunno," said the miner. "I'd pack a six under my left leg, with the butt stickin' out handy. You can get a gun out that a-way mighty quick and come a-smokin'."

Pete made one concession to the conditions—he hid the bulk of his money in a small can under a pile of potatoes. In his pocket he carried only what he needed for making change.

A week went by, and word came of another holdup; that time it occurred on the other side of Pete's road. The inhabitants began to breathe more easily, feeling sure that the bandit must be working south. After he had crossed the south fork of the river there would be no more danger. Then came a report that he had held up and robbed four men in a wagon just over the line in Tuolumne County. Calaveras folk took heart.

"Headin' south," said old Tom Muddock. "He'll most likely turn east and git out into the farmin' country in the San Joaquin."

"Thank goodness, we're shut of him anyhow," said Bill Tobin. "Don't care a hoot where he goes, just as long as he don't hang round here."

"Big joke on him if he ever held you up, Bill," chuckled Tom. "A box of matches and a jackknife that come round the Horn—that's about what he'd git off'n you. Now if he ketches Sairy, it'd be more of a family calamity, seeing as she always keeps the cash."

"And a blamed good thing there's some one in my family that does keep the coin, which is a plaguy sight more'n there is in yourn."

"Well," retorted Tom, "glad he's gone and left us, anyway."

The whole camp echoed this sentiment in spirit if not in words. They felt a strong sense of relief to know that the bandit was working south away from the mines. Men who had gone back to the old habit of carrying a "six" gun left it at home once more. The stage driver almost ceased his suddenly acquired habit of driving with a heavy forty-five calibre revolver under his left thigh, with its handle well out for grasping—almost, but not quite; for while passing certain parts of the road he still would bring the revolver out from beneath the seat of the cushion to the more favorable position. Where conditions were most auspicious for robbery he went armed and ready for instant action; along the stretches where a bandit had little cover he placed his weapon in a safe place.

Pete drove over the same road that the stage followed. At no time did he carry any weapon more deadly than the knife he used for cutting the tops of carrots and parsnips.

It had almost two weeks since the bandit was shown any activity, and Pete was singing as he drove up the grade to the new camp. With his elbows on his knees and the reins loose in his lax fingers, he sat humped over, singing his own version of a popular melody.

The horses turned the sharp elbow above the tall cliff and jogged along to the sharper grade. They settled to their work at the first rise and Pete went right on singing. At the half-way stage they stopped for their regular breathing spell. With a jingle of metal rings and a squeaking of worn leather, the off horse shook him-

self; then both horses quivered and jerked on their firmly placed feet, as if to check a furious jump at its inception. A bit of dirt rolled down the bank.

Pete lifted his head and stopped singing. He spoke to the horses; but the animals did not need reproof, for after one swift glance up the slope at the tree they settled into quietness.

"What-a da mat' weeth you? Why you make-a da lil' jump, huh? Foolish!"

"Stick 'em up!" said a voice, and a long arm quickly thrust a revolver past the side of the tree. "Git a move on ye, dago!"

Still maintaining his half-strooping position in the seat, Pete thrust his hands above his head. The bandit came out and down to the bank, coming his heels in deep to avoid sticking too fast.

"Get down!" he ordered. "Make it lively, too! The stage is due here in twenty minutes, and I want to get through with you first."

"Meestar, you be patient' weeth me," said Pete, rising with apparent pain and difficulty. "De rheumatiz, he one ver' bad t'ing. He hurt-a so bad. You ever have rheumatiz, meestar?"

"Never mind what I've had; you get a move on," said the bandit.

"Sure, meestar. Be patient', please," said Pete, getting down backward over the front wheel, with many groans. "Not-a get-a mad weeth me, meestar. Dose rheumatiz, he awful bad t'ing to have. Me, I hope you never get-a heem."

Impatiently the bandit stepped closer and reached a hand to help him down from the wheel. He was in a hurry to take Pete's money and make him helpless, before the stage came grating down the upper half of the steep grade. A curve would hide it until it came within forty yards, and he wanted to be ready for it.

Pete was terribly clumsy, and the bandit lifted him a little and pulled on his arm. With a sharp cry of pain, the Italian slipped and caught at the arm that helped him. His entire weight fell on the bandit, who was standing on sloping ground, and both men went down against the wheel, with Pete on top.

It was strange that a little fall like that should make such a change in Pete. The stiffness all went out of his legs and his back, his arms became tremendously strong, and he acted with incredible speed. With a quick thrust of his strong hand he jammed the bandit's head under the upcurve of the front wheel. His knee landed in the man's stomach, and with a hard wrench on his wrist Pete took his revolver. Poking the muzzle into the bandit's ribs, he jerked him to his feet.

"How you like-a dat, hey? You smart rob! You-a march-a walk frow! Queeck!" Whirling the bandit round and jabbing him hard in the back, he added, "Come-a, babies! Pull along, boys!"

Obediently, the horses leaned into their collars and started the wagon. Walking ahead of them and guiding the bandit with a cocked revolver, Pete led the team up the second grade to a place where a thoughtful roadmaker had widened the cut. Here his team swung off the road close to the bank in a curved recess.

The horses stopped at the word, and barely had the grinding of the wheels ceased when Pete heard the stage coming. As it swung round the curve just ahead the driver caught sight of Pete and his prisoner and slowed up. Stopping alongside, he looked down at Pete and grinned.

"Caught something, eh, Pete? Looks kinda blue round the gills, like he didn't relish getting prodded with a gun. Who is he?"

"Bring-a da rope," ordered Pete, disregarding the question. "You take-a heem down to the sheriff weeth compliments of Pete. Aha, you smart rob! You-a bandittal' Rheumatiz ver' bad to have-a, but Pete no have-a heem, not never. Look-a!"

And Pete began a wild dance in the grit and dust of the roadway. The driver set a firm hand on the bandit's shirt collar, and his lone passenger began to tie him.

"Hey, you crazy dago! Lower the hammer on that gun, or you'll plug the wrong man!" yelled the driver, for Pete was wildly waving the gun as he danced. He stopped, grinned, lowered the hammer and looked up.

"Rheumatiz! Huh!" was all he said as he stepped on the hub and climbed to the seat.

(The End.)

Phillips Oppenheim is famous everywhere as a writer of clever novels. One of his most absorbing tales will begin on this page in our next issue. "The Kingdom of the Blind" depicts one of the supreme though secret struggles of the war, the fight of the British War Office against the German Secret Service. When you have reached the last thrilling scene you will agree with us that it is one of the most interesting stories ever written of the Great Conflict.

Germany's New Army.

The new army of Germany will be based on a voluntary service, with a total establishment of 100,000 men, including 4,000 officers. The force will be made up of 21 infantry regiments, eighteen cavalry squadrons and seven artillery regiments. The Government contemplates an annual expenditure upon it of 5,000,000,000 marks.

Minard's Liniment Relieves Colds, etc.

Web-Footed Folks.

Occasionally it happens that a boy or girl is born with webbed feet—that is to say, with toes united by fleshy tissue. It is a phenomenon called "syndactyly."

This eccentricity is apt to be handed down from generation to generation in a family, appearing in some of its members, but not in others.

The Magazine of Heredity describes one such case, in a branch of an old New England family. The paternal grandfather was web-footed and bequeathed his peculiar toes to a son, who passed them along to three of his six children.

If these people were to intermarry for three or four generations with another web-footed family, all the children born would exhibit the peculiarity. For nature, curiously enough, seems always willing to perpetuate freaks of any kind.

A "Doonum."

In issuing regulations that are to govern the transfer of land in Palestine the high commissioner, Sir Herbert Samuel, helps to put into the language a word that will be new to most readers of English: the word "doonum," a measure of land. The regulations, intended to protect Zionists, oblige everyone who wishes to sell land to get the written consent of the administration; and to get it he must describe the character and situation of the land and name the price. The buyer must be a resident of Palestine and can buy under the new ordinance not more than three hundred doonums of farming land or more than thirty doonums of city real estate. A doonum is one forty-fourth of an acre.

The British flag was first hoisted over Kimberley, South Africa, fifty years ago.

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What we call freaks, or "sports," in the animal or the vegetable world are nature's little experiments. It is by his means that she creates new species and varieties. Some anthropologists are of opinion that all human beings were originally black and that the first white man was a sport. It might be said that many white people to-day respond to that description, though not in the same sense.

Bringing Up Father.

"Father," said James, "why is it they say that the child is father to the man?"

Mr. Jones shivered. The elucidation of an abstruse problem like this was rather more than he felt equal to. Therefore, he temporized.

"Well—er—because it is so, I suppose."

"Oh, then, if that's so, pa," answered the youngster brightly, "I'm going to see if I can't get you a ticket for the theatre to-morrow and a half-dollar to spend. I always said if I was a father I wouldn't be so stingy as the rest of 'em. Go along, pa, and have a good time while you are young! I never had the chance!"

Whereupon Jones smiled reflectively and handed out the needed. A smart boy like Jim, he considered, deserved it.

Minard's Liniment for Burns, etc.

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