

**UNCLE PETE.**

**His Anxious Wait for Riches That Never Came.**



**U**NCLE PETE was ruminating. However, this was nothing new, as he had done but little else since the time he was a mite of a darky, watching the sparks fly up from the burning log-heaps scattered over "old master's" new ground and die away in the dusky spring evening. He would sit upon a stump with the dark, freshly-plowed ground about him giving forth odors of earth and torn green roots, while the frogs in the shallow, shining branch, marked with willows, sang a happy, monotonous refrain.

His kinks were turning from black to gray and many a problem as knotty as his wool and just as powerless to be straightened had passed through his brain. His great passion was wealth—'twas the only thing he cared for. He had dreamed of it in boyhood—it seemed a pity those log-heaps sparks were not real gold—had striven for it in his way in manhood, and now that old age had begun to pay court to him in a sly and wholly unaccountable manner, he still dreamed of and strove for wealth. When a boy, he would grasp every peculiar-looking rock lying in his path, with the hope that it might bring him a fortune. The sun glancing on a piece of glass would cause his lazy legs to move faster than was customary, for perhaps it might be a nugget of gold lying there especially for him. But he found to his disappointment many times that "all was not gold that glittered."

Uncle Pete had never been taught to read, and was too lazy to work hard. In fact, he shirked dreadfully. Like "ole brer rabbit" in those wondrous days when animals were gifted with speech—the recital of which fills every childish heart with the pleasant emotions—he did all of the grunting and comparatively no work. He lived with old master's grandson, Marse Bob, as a cropper, and invariably came out in debt to him on an average of forty dollars a year. Each Christmas Marse Bob would storm at him, and threaten to send him away, but Uncle Pete was sly and would "lay low" until Marse Bob's sweet little wife drove all angry thoughts from his mind, and then he began to put in his best work, usually making sundry suggestions "bout de fattening hogs," and ashes, salt, sulphur and coppers for the horses, mules and colts, until Marse Bob finally finished a contract with him almost before the thought of beginning had entered his mind. It would burst upon him each time like a thunderbolt, and with an internal groan, began the turning of new leaves. But those leaves became dog-eared with too little turning and much fingering. So Uncle Pete lived on at his kind benefactor's, with his progeny of grandchildren and one unmarried daughter, the idol of his heart.

Uncle Pete was ruminating on this warm, damp January day. The prospect from his cabin door did not invite very pleasant thoughts, but he was paying no attention to the gloom.

The clouds hung wet and gray over the fields, road and pine grove, which was the only green spot in sight. A maul lay before the fire hardening for the next day's work—splitting rails. That was nothing to Uncle Pete, either, for he knew very well, the sinner, he would get out of half his work by sharpening wedges for the other hands, making himself uselessly useful.

"Now, if I could dig into dat gully and fine a gale mine, wouldn't I be rich?" he mused. "Gret big peeces, big as my fists, den I could set up at the big 'onse like folks, and not work my poor ole self to deat', sighing, as he got up to turn his maul. "But den dat Marse Bob's land, s'pose 'twould be his gale. Nor dat ain't right neither. What I fine is mine. Ef I was to fine a quarter out yonder. I reckon it would be my quarter, and dat gale mine would, too," so scared his thoughts to a realm where roads were lined with gold instead of red mud, and palaces in the places of pine trees faced them, and he was richest of all in the country. He was awakened from those yellow-toned reveries by some one hollowing: "Peter, you Peter, why don't you answer me?"

"Sir?" rousing himself and standing in his doorway to see Marse Bob on the fence some distance away.

"What are you doing?"

"Burning my maul for to-morrow."

"Well, you can do that to-night. You always get mighty smart at the wrong time anyway. Go on to the house and help the other boys shuck corn."

Uncle Pete got up and crossed the field with reluctant footsteps, while Marse Bob growled to himself on the

laziness of the "colored race" in general.

Sunday morning came, and with it guests at the big house, as usual. Uncle Pete went up to black boots and build fires, as was his custom—one he adopted himself and one he invariably kept. Marse Bob's wife's brother was there and, as Peter came in, he asked:

"What kind of weather, Peter?"

"Lubly, sir, lubly," was the reply he always gave, no matter what the weather might be. Hot or cold, wet or dry, Sunday morning was always "lubly" to Uncle Pete.

"Where did you get that shirt, Peter?" came Frank's lazy tones from the depth of a feather bed, from where he could just see Peter, whose shoes were shining brighter than his ebony face, sitting on the wood-box rubbing away with brush and blacking for all he was worth.

"Bought it!" with a proud glance.

"You ought to be a good citizen with such a shirt as that on. Let me see! Stars all over and a striped sailor collar. Stars and stripes, pretty good!" Uncle Pete gave a complacent smile as Frank spoke in a half sleepy, half mischievous tone.

"How's the crops? Going to get rich this fall, aren't you?"

"Well, mebbe so, I can't say, but I know one thing, you would like to have a smile," as Peter placed both shoes side by side, and shut up the blacking-box.

Uncle Pete's black features lit up in quite a marvelous manner, as Frank offered him what he loved next to money.

"Yes, sar, deed I would, sar," bowing and rubbing his hands gleefully.

"Hand me that flask on the table. Now, here is your smile," detaching the silver drinking cup from the bottom of the flask and pouring the clear red liquid into it, which ran out with a jolly gurgle from the mouth of the bottle.

"You drink fust, Marse Frank."

"O, no, Peter, I never drink. I carry it about in case of an accident."

"Well," smacking his black lips, and wrenching the cup from the pitcher of water, "if I owned dat dream accidents would be foreber happen'ing," grinning and bowing himself out. He turned his steps towards the kitchen after leaving Frank's room. There he sat himself down to wait for the coffee pot. This coffee pot was a great consolation to Uncle Pete; he never went to his work without first draining it, even eating the grounds. It was too good to waste. He was a great deal more likely to be on hand when breakfast was over than most of the family when it was ready.

It was raining—and not only raining, but pouring—and had been for an hour. Uncle Pete sat in front of his huge fire-place, which was filled with burning logs, and nodded, while mammy pieced up a quilt with colors so startling, such as pink and yellow, side by side, or green and blue with each other vied. Their pride and delight, a piece of ebony impudence done up in checked homespun, sat by the little window, reading. Laboriously she spelled out the words, more laboriously absorbed their meanings. Now and then mammy would give a grunt, or "dat's so," sometimes coming in at the most absurd times, for she never understood what Angeline was reading; there was such an interval between each word, the one had escaped her memory before the other was called out.

Uncle Pete still nodded and bobbed his head around dangerously at times, for it did seem that it would pop off. He was thoroughly awake all at once.

"How to get ri-eh rich," drawled Angeline. Uncle Pete was all excitement in a moment and exclaimed feverishly: "Read on, nigger!" Angry looked up astonished; she was not accustomed to being addressed that way by her admiring father.

"Write to J-a-m-e-s H-a-r-l-i-n-g, Harling, C-o-u-n-t-y-I-a-n-d Courtland street, New York; I dunno what dat street means after dat word. It can't spell nuthin' cordin to my notion. I reckon it must mean ah, I dunno. Hit was just got thar by mistake, dat's it. Dat typewriter got jess a little too much onto dat."

"Ugh, humph!" assented Uncle Pete indifferently; but his little black eyes were sparkling, and after awhile he got up, stretched, and looked at the elements. They were clearing up a little, so putting on his great coat, which struck his "dumpty" little figure about the heels, he sallied forth to the preacher's, his dearest friend and closest ally. He found him at home making foot-mats, as he usually did in wet weather.

"Howdy does" being over, Uncle Pete set forth in a most cautious manner to feel around and learn what the preacher thought of the scheme he had hidden in the back part of his head.

"Brother Hambleton, does you reckon you will ebber get rich workin' 'mongst dem shucks?"

"What! git rich? I aint a working fur riches. I am workin' fur de Lord. Ef He wants me to get rich He will make me, I reckon. And anudder thing, I never thought about it," replied the unworlly old fellow.

"Well, ef you will juss read here in dis newspaper, you 'll see swainp," pulling it out of his pocket.

"What's it 'bout?"

"Gittin' rich," dropping his voice to a whisper. Brother Hambleton pulled out his brass-rimmed glasses, put them on his nose, and grasped the paper. He scanned it closely for awhile, and then said: "Hit must be this here. Riches air very desirable things, but there is something more desirable yet, and that is health. Now, this can be obtained by taking Green Leaf tonic."

"Hole on, Brer Hambleton, you ain't readin' the right one; leastwise it don't sound like dat what Angeline read," exclaimed Uncle Pete in some alarm. Was the fortune, which seemed in his grasp, to run through his fingers like so much water, only leaving them damp as a sign it had been there?

"Well, how did it start, Brother Peter?" asked Rev. Benjamin Hambleton, looking over his glasses in a grave

manner, as much as to say: "Brother Peter, I see afraid you've had a very large smile dis day, and you dreamed dat thing."

"Oh, I don't 'zactly mermemable, but hit wusn't dat, and I heard her read it sho'," with some excitement. "Look again, Brer Hambleton." Benjamin Hambleton once again looked over the paper, and then was about to give it up in despair, when a little advertisement in the ten-cent column caught his eye. He read it out, and Uncle Pete almost wept for joy as he heard the sentence he thought he should never hear again.

"Now, what do you propose to do?" inquired Benjamin Hambleton.

"I says for you to write to dat man, and see what he says. We'll share profits. Of course you kin have more 'half," generously.

"Mos' haff," indignantly. "Mos' haff, when I does all de writin' and reading?"



"HOW TO GET RICH."

No, sir! I gits whole haff or not write."

"All right, all right," hurriedly, as visions of a lost fortune again float before him. Amiability being restored, they worked and plotted together like old cronies should. The letter was written and posted; they had only to wait a week or two before they could dress up and live like folks in the big 'onse. Uncle Pete began to wear "the biggest" air imaginable. He became lazier than ever, and plagued Marse Bob almost out of his wits. The negroes all wondered what had got into Uncle Pete. He usually bade them good morning in the pleasantest manner, but now it was with the condescension of a monarch. Angeline was no longer the "apple of his eye." She found herself not noticed at all, and thereby became sulky and switched about more than ever while she walked. But it all was lost upon Uncle Pete. He was going to get rich in his old age, and that was all he wanted. He dreamed of it at night, and went a-day dreaming over it too.

Uncle Pete was too talkative, however, to let his secret remain one longer than a few days. He had no idea he had "let the cat out of the bag," but before one week had expired all the negroes on the plantation knew he had discovered a method for getting rich, and all were on the qui vive for discovery, but they did not let Uncle Pete have an inkling of their intentions.

One Saturday afternoon as the clouds in the west began to lose some of their exquisite coloring, for night was creeping on, all of the hands, Uncle Pete included, had gathered about the back door of the big house. All eyes were centered upon Marse Bob, who stood on the stone steps with a stone jug in one hand and a cup in the other. Every face was wreathed in smiles at the thought of a dram. As Marse Bob poured out the liquid which ran with such a good old sound: "So good, good, good, good," it seemed to say; he talked and gave much good, good, good, good advice while he distributed it around. The darkeys had just wiped their mouths on their coat sleeves, preparatory to leaving, when a little negro boy came up with the mail. Marse Bob glanced over it hastily, and called out: "Holloa, here, Peter—a postal for you."

"Yes, sir," responded Uncle Pete, stepping up with happy expectation in his tones and movements.

"Shall I read it for you?" with a twinkle in his eyes, for he had read it while speaking, and had heard something of Peter's boasting lately.

"Yes, sir, s'pose you do," responded Peter, who was feeling generous after his smile. He didn't care just then if all the darkeys in Christendom knew how he did rich.

Marse Bob cleared his throat, while all the hands turned around to hear what Uncle Pete's correspondent had to say.

"How to get rich. Eat nothing, wear nothing and work like old nicks."

There was a slight of laughter from every pair of lips save Uncle Peter's. He was dumb with disappointment and rage. He said not a word, but turned away and walked off "a sadder and a wiser man."

It is a month later. Riches are never mentioned by Peter now. He is cured. His fellow-workmen plagued his poor old life almost out of him, until one morning he turned like a wounded lion at bay and made them all fly. Since that time he has lived in peace. A curious coolness grew up between him and the preacher at one time, but the genial nature of both old darkeys has thawed that out and they are the same old cronies, only they never speak of wealth to each other.—Mrs. F. M. Stewart, in Atlanta Constitution.

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