A Conscript's Chrstmas.

BY JOEL CHANDLER HARRIS.

From The Century:

"But it's the law," said Captain Mosely. The captain had been wounded in Virginia, and was entitled to a discharge, bu t he acepted the position of conscript officer. He had the grit and discipline of a veteran, and a persistence in carrying out his purposes that gave him the name of "Hardhead" in the army. He was tall and muscular, but his drooping left shoulder showed where a Federal ball had found lodgement. His closely cropped beard was slightly streaked with gray, and his face would have been handsome had not determination left its rude handwriting there.

The two rode on in silence a little space, the cold mists, driven by the wind, tingling in their faces. Presently Private Chadwick, who had evidently been ruminating over the matter, resumed the thread of complaints.

"They tell me," he said, "that it's heap easier to make a bad law than it is to make a good one. It takes a lot of smart men a long time to make a good one, but a passel of blunderbusses can patch a bad one up in a little or no time. That's the way I look at it.

"What's the name of this chap we are after? Israel Spurlock? I'd like to know, by George, what's the the matter with him! What makes him so plague-taked important that two men have to be sent on a wild-goose chase after him? They yerked him into the army, an' he yerked himself out, an' now the word is that the war can't go on unless Israel Spurlock is on hand to fling down his gun an' run when he hears a bung-shell playin' a tune in the air.

Captain Moseley coughed to hide a smile.

"It's just like I tell you, Cap'in The news is we had a terrible victory at Chattanooga, but I notice in the Atlanta papers that the Yankees ain't no further north than they was before the fight; an' what makes it wuss, they are warmin' themselves in Chattanooga, whilst we are shiverin' outside. I reckon if Isreal Spurlock had been on hand at the right time an' in the right place, we'd drove the Yanks plumb back to Nashville. Lord! I hope we'll have him on the skirmish line the next time we surround the enemy an' drive him into a town as big as Chattanooga."

Private Chadwick kept up his complaints for some time, but they failed to disturb the serenity of the captain, who urged his horse forward through the mist, closely followed by his companion. They finally left the valley, passed over the foothills, and began the ascent of Sugar Mountain. Here their journey became less disagreeable. The road, winding and twisting around the mountain, had been cut through a dense growth of trees, and these proved to be something of a shelter. More-over, the road sometimes brought the mountain between the travelers and the wind, and these were such comfortable intervals that Mr. Chadwick ceased his complaints and rode along good-humoredly.

The two horsemen had gone about a mile, measuring the mountain road, though they were not more than a quarter of a mile from the foot, when they came suddenly on na old man sitting in a sheltered place by the side of the road. They came on the stranger so suddenly that their horses betrayed alarm, and it was all they could do to keep the animals from slipping and rolling into the gorge at their left. The old man was dressed in a suit of gray jeans, and wore a wool hat, which, although it showed the signs of constant use, had somehow managed to retain its original shape. His head was large and covered with a profusion of iron-gray hair, which was neatly combed. His face was round, but the lines of character obliterated all suggestions of chubbiness. The full beard that he wore failed to hide the evidence of firmness and determination; but around his mouth a serene smile lingered, and humor sparkled in his small brown eyes.

"Howdy, boys, howdy!" he exclaimed. "Tired as they look to be, you'er straddlin'right peart creeturs. A flirt or two more an' they'd 'a' flung you down the hill, an' 'a' follered along after you, headstall an' stirrup. They done like they were n't expectin' ermpany in and aroun' here."

The sonorous voice and deliberate utterance of the old man bespoke his calling He was evidently a minister of the gospel. This gave a clue to Captain Moseley's memory.

[To be Continued.]

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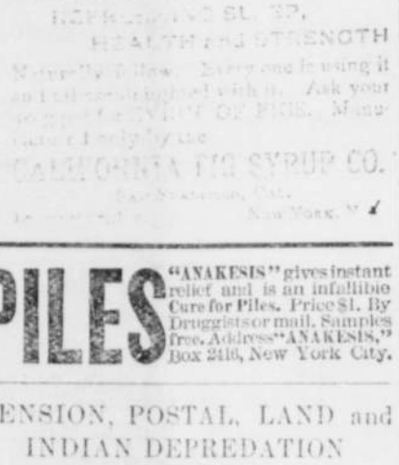

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