

The Storyteller.

PEDRO: THE TALE OF A YOUNG TRAMP.

(By A. E. BUCHANAN, in the *Catholic World*.)

It was evening time—evening for the labouring man; for the aged one also; and for the tired, foot-sore beggar-boy, who trudged along to the only roof that sheltered him, and to the hard master who had beguiled him from his happy home in Southern Italy to work for the daily bread of them both.

Pedro was only a tiny boy when Dodo Ramsay—so-called—took him "for a sail in a beautiful ship to see the fine prairie-land;" but he was not too young to realise that all he then saw was considerably unlike, and not to be compared with, his own dear home; and this thought left an aching void in his young heart, which seemed to increase as he grew older, even though he had the consolation of hearing Dodo once say that he was only to be with him "just while he was a boy."

At nightfall it was Pedro's duty to return from the city with the pence that he had earned by singing and playing on the little harp that he carried and played all day long. Sometimes he was so fortunate as to earn several dollars, but if he were ever compelled to return with a less sum than one dollar a summary chastisement was visited upon him for the deficiency; and it happened that this evening the poor boy was returning with only 60 cents, after a day of untiring efforts to gain more. This was, happily a rare occurrence.

Well knowing what awaited him, Pedro had scarcely the heart to go back; but he was always sincerely true to duty. So onward he went. Dodo was, as usual, in the smoky corner of his hut, awaiting the result of the boy's toil.

"How much?" was the surly greeting from the miserable old man.

Pedro shook with fear, but bracing himself, as he always had done, for the fiery ordeal, he put the copper coins upon the table, and was turning to effect a retreat, when Dodo dealt him such a blow across the face that the poor boy staggered and with difficulty retained his consciousness. But that recuperative power of his served him in his need, and, reaching the door, he managed to gain the kindly refreshing evening air. After bathing his aching head and resting awhile, he felt less the smart of the blow than the base ingratitude of the man for whom he had honestly worked in heat and hunger and thirst. Such was Pedro.

There was a cottage not far from the hut in which lived an aged couple—Jean Beaujour and his wife Eugénie. These good people were fond of Pedro, and, knowing the ill-treatment he sometimes received, generally watched for him as he went in the evening to do the "chores." Seeing him leaving the hut evidently in tears, they made ready a parcel of cakes for his pockets as soon as they perceived him at the barn; for they were aware that Dodo was under-feeding him, besides giving the lad still less when he returned with any amount under a dollar; so that on this miserable night the poor boy limped back to the hut comforted by his good friends, and able again to face his enemy.

Dodo bestowed upon him a basin of bread soaked in water, which, after the beautiful hot cakes he had eaten in the barn, hardly served for digestion before lying down to rest upon his straw pallet.

Feeling somewhat stiff in the morning, after he had completed his early work and eaten his frugal breakfast, he set out once more to try his luck in the big city, the streets of which he was beginning to know by heart. After a walk of more than three miles—for Dodo took care to live well out of town—Pedro began his minstrelsy in a busy corner or one of the crowded thoroughfares leading to the city. By some influence, unaccountable to those who never take note of the diplomacy of Providence, his voice was never sweeter than when he commenced his little song, one that he had learned as a child in Italy—"La Perla"—and the passers-by stopped to listen as if spell-bound by such sweet strains coming from the poor beggar-ld. Their pity soon became practical, for one after another the bright silver coins were put into his cap, which was getting quite weighty; then followed a real gold piece from a lady who was passing somewhat hurriedly. Pedro could only see that she was "una bella signora who looked at him with beautiful eyes." As he looked upon the shining coins, the result of only an hour's work, his heart leaped for joy, and the mist was in his eyes in spite of himself. Just as much as he dreaded going home on the previous evening, he was glad to return to-day. His headache—the memento of his master's punishment—was quite gone, and his limbs—poor boy! they seemed to go of themselves.

Arriving at the hut, there was Dodo in the same dusky corner as ever, and with the same surly countenance; but he raised one eye to look at the lad, and lo! what a change. He had seen in an instant, by Pedro's tell-tale face, that something unusually pleasant had occurred, and his adamant heart was melted accordingly. Down went coin after coin upon the table: nickles, dimes, quarters, dollars, and—Pedro held it a moment playfully—a twenty-dollar gold piece! How bright, how beautiful it looked. Dodo's eyes sparkled with delight.

"That's all," said the boy.

"And enough too, my lad; vera good, vera good for one day; you shall have vera fine supper," and Pedro went, considerably lightened, to do his "chores."

Turning off at the back of the barn in order to run to tell the Beaujourns of his good luck, he thought he heard an unusual sound coming, it seemed, from the direction of the hut; but after stopping for some minutes to listen, and not hearing it again, he hurried on and gave the old folks an account of his good luck. This done, he ran back to finish his work, and then returned to the hut. But a terrible sight awaited him! There, beneath a huge rafter that had fallen from the ceiling, lay Dodo. Pedro endeavoured to release him, but could not bring him to consciousness. He ran to the

cottage for Jean, and then to the city for a doctor; and the two returned with all speed, but too late. Dodo had shown but one sign of consciousness, and, Jean said he then murmured something like "Pecca—Pedro—Peccavi!" and fell back dead.

"Ah, yes; poor Dodo!" said Pedro, "he was saying he was sorry. God have mercy on him!"

When the earth had closed over what remained of the man who, for greed of gain, had been so cruel and hard a master to an innocent boy, and they were talking over the incidents of the last few days, it occurred to Jean that a board in the corner of the hut was broken or loosened by the fall.

"Pedro," said the old man, "did you notice how that board in the corner was out of place?" To which Pedro replied in the negative.

"We must look to that," continued Jean. "I wonder what made Dodo stick to that corner in the way he did. Did you ever know what became of all the money you earned? He never spent any, for he never left the hut; and the little he gave to you to bring groceries and things was but a little indeed. What could he have done with it all?"

Pedro was no better informed than he, so that he could only think over what seemed to him a great mystery.

"If you could find something of your earnings, my boy, we should be happy. What *did* he do with it all?"

Jean paced the room and wondered. Suddenly he thought of something that appeared to throw a light upon the subject; and Eugénie simultaneously asked if there was no place in the hut where he kept it? Pedro had never noticed, but Jean said:

"*Enfin!*"—Jean was a Frenchman—and suddenly waking up, as if from a dream, he suggested that they should all take a walk to the solitary hut.

"Here, Pedro," said he, going to the corner—Dodo's favourite place, and where the rafter fell—"this is what I mean; what's the matter *here*?" And they tugged at the plank to put it into its place, when a screw gave way and it came out altogether, revealing at the same time something that resembled an old sack.

"Ah, le bon Dieu!" echoed Jean solemnly. "This was his bank; no wonder the man stuck to this corner; it's pretty weighty;" and he dragged it on to the floor. It was found to be upwards of four hundred dollars, and he proposed that they should take it to a bank at once.

"This will help you along, anyhow, my lad," said Jean thankfully; and Pedro responded with gratitude and joy. The boy had long cherished a scheme which he had not revealed even to them.

The idea was awakened one evening when, having pleased Dodo by bringing home several dollars, the latter talked very freely of Italy, and implied that his—Pedro's—mother and sister were there; while, on a map that the boy had in his atlas, he showed him the place where the family owned an estate. Many other little stories of the boy's babyhood were related which Pedro used to ponder over very often, as he tramped along his weary way. It was still early in the day, so that Jean put the newly-discovered money into a satchel, and they both set off to the nearest bank to deposit it safely.

The same old road to the city, Pedro; but now under what different circumstances! Your worn-out clothes are about to be cast away, and kind old Jean, who is by no means devoid of good taste, will see you in a becoming suit before you leave the city again.

It was touching to see the moist eyes of his good friends when he stood on the threshold of their cottage door the embodiment of all that was good and handsome. He was pale and sad-looking still, but the interior peace that had marked the boy's life kept him strong to bear the reaction attendant upon such a sudden and great change in his eventful life. Then followed those halcyon days of calm after storm, and the old people began to wish that "such as Pedro" could "always bide with them."

But the boy used to study the map of Italy, and he told them of the places where Dodo said his family had lived. "Don't you think Monsieur Jean, that I could find some of them if I were to go back now?" he asked timidly one day when he was specially intent on tracing railway lines on a map in an old time-table that he had become possessed of.

"I don't see *how*, my boy; but I do wish you could, for they're your own, and Dodo told us he ought not to have brought you out here. It wasn't his name they go by, and I don't see how you *could* find them. Of course you can go to Italy easy enough, nowadays, with a ticket straight to the place; but, my poor boy, I'd grieve to have you lose yourself and your money, and get into troubles again," urged the old man.

"I wouldn't take more money than I wanted," rejoined Pedro; and Jean saw that the idea was settled in the boy's mind, and that it must be carried out. To one who had never been tossed on the sea of life this might have been too bold an adventure; but to Pedro it was a pleasant pastime, with bright anticipations.

(To be continued.)

Father Francis Barnum, eminent S.J., the Alaska explorer, who has just been appointed to Washington, has also been appointed librarian at Georgetown College. He has lately come into a fortune of about 25,000 dollars, and his presence in Washington is required for the settlement of the estate. Father Barnum is also engaged in compiling a grammar and dictionary of the E-kimo language, works which he hopes to complete during the coming winter, with the assistance of skillful ethnologists connected with the Smithsonian Institute. He sailed from Sika on July 23, and will reach Georgetown next week. Just at this particular time Father Barnum's coming is of unusual interest. He is one of the best living authorities on the natural resources of Alaska. Before the present gold fever about the Klondike region had broken out, Father Barnum had written many interesting stories in *The A. S. S. of the Sacred Heart* and other Catholic publications, predicting the wondrous wealth of this apparently barren country.