A TALE OF THE PIED PIKER

BY RICHARD S. GRAVES

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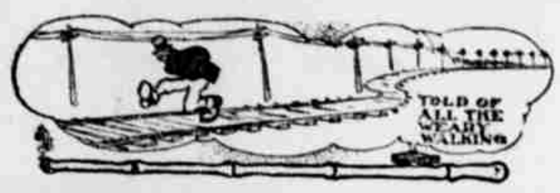
[Being a Christmas story of the biscuit shooter's revenge, which is offered with apologies to the shade of Henry for infringing on his particular style of blank verse and at the same time h'isting one to the memory of the old boy who had everybody else beaten to a pulp and three ways from the jack at this sort of thing.]

WRESTLING with the pots and kettles,
Shooting biscuits like a ranger
With an aim that was unerring,
Swiftly dealing out the ham-and,
Also beefsteak tough as leather,
Labored daily Minnie Harhar,
Sometimes known as Laughing Waiter,
Jerking sinkers from the cuisine
To the grill room for the hungry,
Working for a measly stipend
Of two-fifty, coming weekly.
One day to that cobwebbed kitchen



Came a young man cold and hungry.
He was walking on his uppers
In the storms of wintry weather,
And his garb was built for summer,
Hanging on him loose and flabby,
Like a hide hung on a fencepost.
Any cop he might have met then
Would have run him in and vagged him.

Minnie Harhar saw the stranger;
Saw that he was weak and weary;
Took him in and filled him quickly
With the leavings from the tables.
It was in the time of Christmas—
Time of cheer and time of plenty.
Then she sought the boss and told him
Of the stranger in the kitchen—
Told him of the weary walking
All the way from Kansas City,
Where the stranger had been fired from
Just because he had got jagged and
Could not work at biscuit shooting.

Then the stranger seized a tray and
Went to work with Minnie Harhar,
Dodging cops until she helped him
Get a more befitting raiment,
And the philanthropic movement
Set her back just seven-fifty.
Then he got a shave and hair cut
And a bottle of loud perfume.

Thus equipped to make a conquest,
He threw googoo eyes at Minnie—
Threw them hard and threw them often
Until finally she wilted.
Then he took her, unresisting,
In his arms and hugged and kissed her.
He was hers and she was his'n
For a week or ten days, maybe,
Until he had met another
Out upon the public highway—
Met a gazelle with a light step

And a smile that put him bughouse.
She was working in a chop joint
Farther down toward the river,
And his footsteps turned he often
Joyfully in that direction.
Just as soon as work was over
With the gazelle he would wander.
They were fairly glued together
As they walked and chinned each other,
All unknown to Minnie Harhar,

And they'd take their beer quite often
In the wine room at O'Kelley's.
Christmas days were soon forgotten,
And the loan he'd got from Minnie
From his memory fast was fading.

BONED HIM FOR THE SEVEN-FIFTY.

One day Minnie Harhar saw them
Sauntering along together,
And the air was fairly reeking
With the stickiness of love talk.
Minnie caught on very quickly,
Saw which way the wind was blowing,
But refrained from taking action.

Sure, she could have bawled him out then,
And the gazelle would have shared it,
But would that have helped to get her
Any of the seven-fifty
She'd invested in his raiment?
Minnie Harhar pondered deeply,
Made a sneak and held her temper.

When he came to work
at evening
Minnie Harhar sprung
it on him,
Boned him for the sev-
en-fifty,

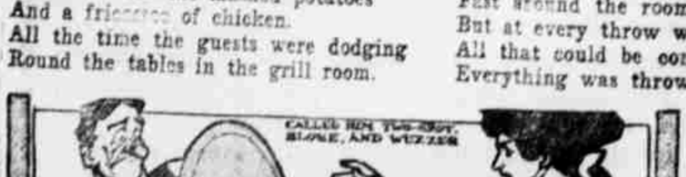
Saying he must dig up quickly
Or she'd put him out of business.
Waiting then for half a minute,

Minnie saw he was not coming
Through with any sum of money.
In the use of the invective
Minnie Harhar was not slouchy.
Into him she threw it swiftly,
Like the hot soup from the ladle.
In the choicest chophouse language
Minnie then addressed the piker—
Said he was a chump and welsher,
Also cheap screw, phony, moocher;
Called him two spot, bloke and wuzzer,
Said he was a yap from Yapville
And a skate from down the river.

Minnie also shied utensils,
Using them for punctuation;
Hurled a plate with such precision
That it spoiled his face forever;
Slammed a stove lid on his stomach,
Pot of beans against his bosom;
Hit him with the mashed potatoes
And a fricassee of chicken.
All the time the guests were dodging
Round the tables in the grill room.

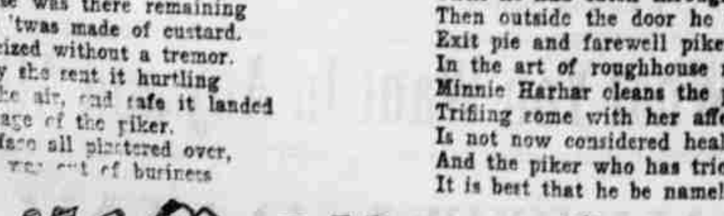
Pans and plates were flying wildly,
Walls were spattered with their contents,
While the boss had taken refuge
In a corner, with a table
Upturned there to shield and hide him.
And the piker, he was hiking
Fast around the room and dodging,
But at every throw was getting
All that could be coming to him.
Everything was thrown by Minnie,

UNTIL HE HAD EATEN THROUGH IT.



All that she could lay her hands on.
Nothing else was there remaining
But a pie; 'twas made of custard.
This she seized without a tremor.
With a cry she sent it hurtling
Through the air, and safe it landed
On the visage of the piker.
With his face all plastered over,
Surely he was out of business

Until he had eaten through it.
Then outside the door he ambled—
Exit pie and farewell piker.
In the art of roughhouse making
Minnie Harhar cleans the platter.
Trifling some with her affections
Is not now considered healthful.
And the piker who has tried it!
It is best that he be nameless.



THE OLD VIRGINIA REEL

A CHRISTMAS REVERIE IN VERSE

BY ROBERTUS LOVE COPYRIGHT 1908 BY ROBERTUS LOVE

IN old Virginia, on the James,
Beside Potomac's placid flow,
Where Royal Shenandoah shames
The rival welkin with its glow
Or Rappahannock runs, you know
(Ere war had flashed its fiery steel),
Some half a hundred years ago
They danced the old Virginia reel.

Where now are they, the stately dames,
The dimpled maidens all a-row,
Who played with hearts the deadliest games
While lightly treading to and fro?
Where now is all the dainty show
Of silken fabric, glance of heel
And gleam of satin slippered toe
That danced the old Virginia reel?

Where now the cavaliers? The names
Of some have fed the bugle blow
Of glory—seared in battle flames
They sleep Virginia's sod below—
And some have quaffed the common woe
Of nameless death, their doom to seal.
And yet, good fellows all, heigho!
They danced the old Virginia reel.

ENVOY

Gallants and girls, I see ye grow
From out the gloom—your ghosts appeal.
Touch hands anew—the music—so!
We'll dance the old Virginia reel.

Mexico's Christmas Eve

Christmas in Mexico lasts for nine days, ending with Christmas eve. They are described as "the nine days' wanderings," being symbolical of the wanderings of the Virgin Mary and Joseph in search of shelter prior to the birth of Jesus.

One custom is to have nine families of friends or relatives take part in this quaint observation. Each family entertains in turn for one evening all the others. Both adults and children participate in the wanderings. Arriving at a house, they apply at the door of each room for shelter, which is refused by those within. Finally all are admitted to the largest room, where refreshments of cold meats, cakes and wine are served. In many instances the children are garbed in fanciful costumes.

The last night of the wanderings, Christmas eve, means to Mexican chil-

EACH BLINDFOLDED CHILD TRIES TO HIT THE PINATA.

dren what the gathering of Christmas tree fruit means to the children of the United States, though there is no Christmas tree. There is instead the pinata, otherwise a human figure made of tough paper, suspended from the ceiling. Sometimes there is an olla or earthenware pot similarly suspended.

One child is blindfolded, turned around a few times and invited to break the pinata with a cane or rod. Three strokes are permitted, and it usually happens that the cane hits only impalpable air. After an hour or so of failures somebody hits the pinata a smart blow, and the legs and trunk of the grotesque figure split open. Down to the floor, in scattering confusion, fall the Christmas presents with which the funny figure was stuffed. Then there is a merry scramble for the "favors." The one who succeeds in breaking the pinata or the olla gets a special present and is placed in the seat of honor for the evening.

Autobiography of A Christmas Gift

I am a Christmas gift. In fact, I have always been one. My age is now nineteen, though I may look older. I was made by the dainty hands of Miss Susanna Sikes, who at that time was just the age I am now. Guess her age at present? She is still Miss Susanna, and she still owns me.

Oh, yes, Miss Susanna gave me away. Perhaps I should explain that I am twins, being a pair of knit slippers. Miss Susanna, it was understood, had benevolent designs upon the young pastor of her church, so she knit me and sent me to the reverend youth.

SHE SENT ME TO HIM.

Next Christmas the preacher, who had received five other pairs, sent me to his sister. You see, knit slippers are guaranteed to fit any feet as well as any other feet. So the preacher's sister was not at all offended.

The next Christmas she sent me to her old college chum, Mrs. De Brown, who was a member of her brother's congregation. Next Christmas Mrs. De B. sent me to her pastor. The pastor grinned when he saw me again and remarked something like "Cast your bread upon the waters and it will return to you after many days."

The next Christmas the pastor sent me to his old college chum, who was sweet on Miss Susanna. There was every prospect of a match, since Miss Susanna had despaired of winning the preacher, who was known to be engaged to another lady. But—the very next Christmas the preacher's college chum sent me to Miss Susanna with a perfumed note praising her dainty little feet. This broke off the match, of course.

Well, next Christmas Miss Susanna mailed me to a friend of hers clear across the continent. Miss Susanna's address on the corner of the box in which I was mailed got rubbed off en route, and her friend didn't know who sent me.

So the very next Christmas I returned to Miss Susanna. Oh, I was hard to lose! I was not made to wear; I was made to circulate. I am a good thing, and so everybody passes me along.

Oh, so you recognize me now? Yes, I spent a year with you. Well, time slips, and I must be going. This is Christmas eve, you know.

T. SAPP, JR.

Santa In Grass Valley

One town in the United States has a practical and apparently perpetual Santa Claus. In Grass Valley, Cal., everybody gets Christmas gifts. There is no child so poor as to be disappointed when Santa passes his bounties around, and, for that matter, no grown person either. Twenty-five years ago Mrs. Hansen of Grass Valley was an invalid, confined to her chair at the window of her cottage. She watched the school children troop by. Some of them were scantily clad and looked ill nourished. The good woman forgot her own misfortune in her compassion for the unfortunate little ones.

She suggested that on the last day of school before the Christmas holidays each child should bring to school something to give away to others. It need not be anything big or costly—just whatever the child could spare. A committee was to distribute the things where they were most needed. So many little ones and their parents were made happy the first Christmas that Grass Valley adopted the idea permanently. Now for a quarter of a century Mrs. Hansen's improved Santa Claus system has been in working order, though long ago the good woman herself was released from her chair of pain and laid to rest in the town cemetery.

When the last day of school in the old year arrives—called donation day in Grass Valley—every child of the more than 1,000 in the schools is seen trudging teacherward with an offering. Later the town's brass band heads the procession, dispensing appropriate music.

HERE AND THERE A BOY BEARS A LIVE CHICKEN.

sic. Some of the children carry sticks of wood as big as themselves; others hold only a fat potato in their chubby fingers. Here and there a boy bears aloft a live chicken, cackling and struggling. At the rear of the walkers follows a line of wagons laden with good things donated by the merchants and other well to do citizens. Suppose it rains? Well, that doesn't matter. The children march, rain or shine. Santa Claus is not deterred by inclement weather—not in Grass Valley.