

The Pied Piper

of

Hamelin



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THE PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN

I.

Hamelin Town's in Brunswick,
By famous Hanover city;
The river Weser, deep and
wide,
Washes its wall on the
southern side;
A pleasanter spot you never
spied;

But, when begins my ditty,
Almost five hundred years
ago,
To see the townsfolk suffer so
From vermin, was a pity.



Rats!

They fought the dogs
and killed the cats,
And bit the babies in the cradles,
**And ate the cheeses
out of the vats.**

Rats!

And More Rats!



Rats! And More Rats!



**They licked the soup
right off the cook's own ladles,**



Split open the kegs of salted sprats,
Made their nests inside Sunday hats,

Rats!



They even spoiled
the women's chats,
By drowning their speaking
With shrieking and squeaking
In fifty different sharps and flats.

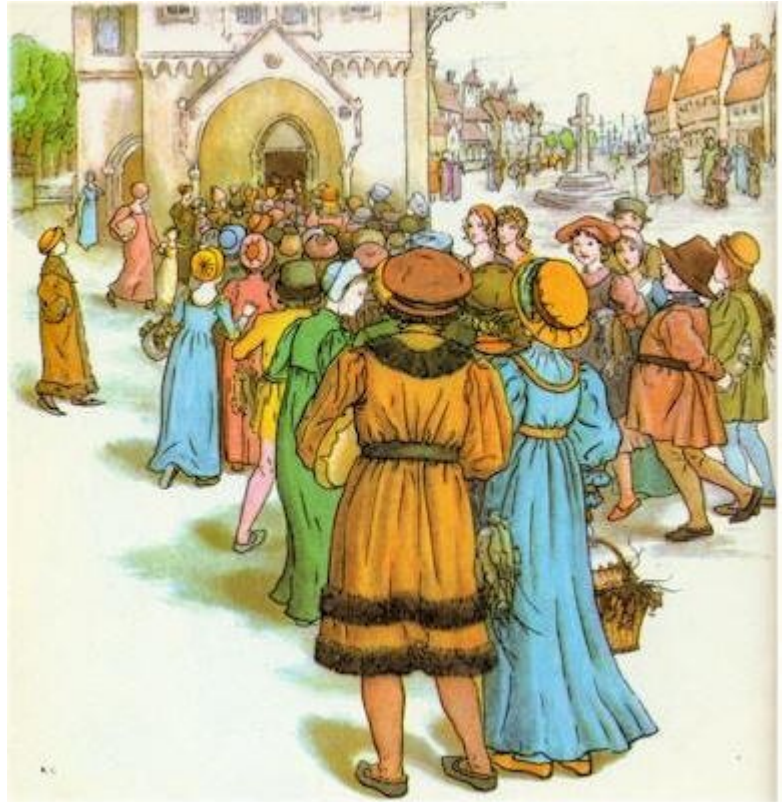
All because of those RATS!

**YES,
All because of those**

Rats!



**Something MUST Be Done
or we will all drown beneath A Ton
of these RATS!**



**At last the people in a body
To the Town Hall came flocking:
"Tis clear," cried they, "our Mayor's a noddy;
And as for our Corporation—shocking
To think we buy gowns lined with ermine
For dolts that can't or won't determine
What's best to rid us of our vermin!
You hope, because you're old and obese,
To find in the furry civic robe ease?
Rouse up, sirs! Give your brains a racking
To find the remedy we're lacking,
Or, sure as fate, we'll send you packing!"
At this the Mayor and Corporation
Quaked with a mighty consternation.**

**"Just Look At
These Rats!"**

**An hour they sate in council,
At length the Mayor broke silence:
"For a guilder I'd my ermine gown sell;
I wish I were a mile hence!
It's easy to bid one rack one's brain—
I'm sure my poor head aches again,**

**I've scratched it so, and all in vain
Oh for a trap, a trap, a big rat trap!"**



**Just as he said this, what should hap
At the chamber door but a gentle tap?
"Bless us," cried the Mayor, "what's that?"
(With the Corporation as he sat,
Looking little though wondrous fat;
Nor brighter was his eye, nor moister
Than a too-long-opened oyster,
Save when at noon his paunch grew mutinous
For a plate of turtle green and glutinous)
"Only a scraping of shoes on the mat?
Anything like the sound of a rat
Makes my heart go pit-a-pat!"
I never again want to see a RAT!**



**"Come in!"—the Mayor cried, looking bigger:
And in did come the strangest figure!
His queer long coat from heel to head
Was half of yellow and half of red,
And he himself was tall and thin,**



With sharp blue eyes, each like a pin,
And light loose hair, yet swarthy skin.
No tuft on cheek nor beard on chin,
But lips where smile went out and in;
There was no guessing his kith and kin:

And nobody could enough
admire The tall thin man and his quaint attire.

Quoth one: "It's as my great-grand-
sire, Starting up at the Trump of Doom's tone,
Had walked this way from his painted
tombstone!"



He advanced to the council-table:
And, "Please your honours," said he, "I'm able,
By means of a secret charm, to draw
All creatures living beneath the sun,
That creep or swim or fly or run,
After me so as you never saw!
And I chiefly use my charm
On creatures that do people harm,
The mole and toad and newt and viper;
And people call me the Pied Piper."
(And here they noticed round his neck
A scarf of red and yellow stripe,
To match with his coat of the self-same cheque;



**And at the scarf's end hung a pipe;
And his fingers they noticed were ever straying
As if impatient to be playing
Upon his pipe, as low it dangled
Over his vesture so old-fangled.)**



**"Yet," said he, "poor Piper as I am,
In Tartary I freed the Cham,
Last June, from his huge swarms of gnats,
I eased in Asia the Nizam
Of a monstrous brood of vampyre-bats:
And as for what your brain bewilders,
If I can rid your town of rats
Will you give me a thousand guilders?"
"One? fifty thousand!"—was the exclamation
Of the astonished Mayor and Corporation.**



The Deal was done and now they stepped aside to see the big rats run. "If we stay right behind him we will get the credit for each one he kills, and if he is but a fool then we can push him right on out of town.

Proudly, into the street the Piper stepped, Smiling first a little smile, As if he knew what magic slept In his quiet pipe the while; Then, like a musical adept, To blow the pipe his lips he wrinkled, And green, then blue, his sharp eyes twinkled, Like a candle-flame when salt is sprinkled;

And ere three shrill notes the pipe uttered, You heard as if an army muttered; And the muttering grew to a grumbling; And the grumbling grew to a mighty rumbling; And out of the houses all the rats came tumbling.

Great rats, small rats, lean rats, brawny rats, Brown rats, black rats, grey rats, tawny rats, Grave old plodders, gay young friskers, Fathers, mothers, uncles, cousins, Cocking tails and pricking whiskers, Families by tens and by dozens, Brothers, sisters, husbands, wives— They followed the Piper for their lives.

From street to street he piped advancing, And step for step the rats followed him dancing, Until they came to the great river Weser Wherein all the rats plunged and perished!

—Save one who, stout as Julius Cæsar, Swam across and lived to carry (As he, the manuscript he cherished) To Rat-land home his commentary:



Which was, "At the first shrill notes of the pipe, I heard a sound as of scraping tripe, And putting apples, wondrous ripe, Into a cider-press's gripe: And a moving away of pickle-tub-boards, And a leaving ajar of conserve-cupboards, And a drawing the corks of train-oil-flasks, And a breaking the hoops of butter-casks: And it seemed as if a voice (Sweeter far than by harp or by psaltery Is breathed) called out, 'Oh rats, rejoice! The world is grown to one vast drysaltery!

So munch on, crunch on, take your bruncheon, Breakfast, supper, dinner, and luncheon!' And just as a bulky sugar-puncheon, All ready staved, like a great sun shone Glorious scarce an inch before me, Just as methought it said, 'Come, bore me!' —I found the Weser rolling o'er me."

The Celebration

You should have heard the Hamelin people -- Ringing the bells till they rocked the steeple. Masters of guilds marched proudly through the streets to see the tide was surely done.

"Go," the Mayor told them sharp and stern. "Get long poles, Poke out the nests and block up the holes!

Consult with carpenters and builders, And leave in our town not even a trace Of the rats!"



— The celebration was running riot hot when suddenly before the joyous faces of mayor and Corporation of guilders, up the face Of the Piper perked, crying,

"Not. First, if you do please, just hand me my thousand guilders!"

Strange how fast their joy was gagged and bound. Solemn as owls, they searched their pockets and remembered how scanty sate their Corporation's pot of taxation bounty. Then the mayor stepped forward with a smile both meager and thin. "Ta Taw! A thousand guilders? Surely you knew we jested with you. To our town's people we could never justify spending a thousand guilders for an hour of work."

The corporation heads nodded in quick agree. "A thousand guilders for just one hour of work? Why that sum is outlandish and it's never done.

"Name a trifled sum and divide it by three if you expect so many guilders to fall from the tree."

With the mayor they stood firm. For council dinners had made rare havoc with Claret, Moselle, Vin-de-Grave, Hock; And half that money would hardly replenish their cellar's biggest butt with Rhenish.

To pay this sum to a wandering fellow with a gipsy coat of red and yellow!

The Piper's face fell, and he cried, "No trifling! I can't wait, beside! I've promised to visit by dinner-time Bagdad, and accept the prime

Of the Head-Cook's pottage, all he's rich in, For having left, in the Caliph's kitchen, of a nest of scorpions no survivor: With him I proved no bargain-driver,

"With you, don't think I'll bate a stiver! Folks who put me in a passion may find me piping after another fashion."

"How?" cried the Mayor, "d' ye think I brook Being worse treated than a Cook?

"Insulted by a lazy ribald With idle pipe and vesture piebald? You? Threaten us?

"My young fellow Do your worst,

"Blow your pipe there till you burst! Besides," quoth the Mayor with a knowing wink, our business was done at the river's brink; We saw with our own eyes the vermin struggle and sink, And what's drownd dead can't come back to life, I think. So, friend, we're not the folks to shrink from the duty of giving you something to drink, And a matter of money to put in your poke; But as for the guilders, what we spoke Of them, as you very well know, was in joke.

Beside, our losses have made us thrifty. A thousand guilders! Come, take just fifty!"

The Corporation chuckled to hear their mayor put the harmless piper in his place. The rats were gone and good sense had returned. Did this young fellow truly believe they could be burned? Let him try. Let him toot on his flute and pipe at them until his face turned blue, their business with him was done and through. They would make an end of this piper's pepper and pay him a single coin, and never think of a thousand or two.





No more words did the piper speak. The happy smile upon his face turned to an angry scowl, for sweet justice he would now go forth to wreak. Once more he stepped into Hamelin's cobbled street. Up to his lips again laid his long pipe of smooth straight cane;

And ere he blew three notes (such sweet soft notes as yet musician's cunning never gave the enraptured air) the air so still there was an immediate rustling, as if the homes of Hamelin were bustling.

Children came together in merry crowds justling at pitching and hustling, The mayor turned with mouth agape to see his two sons racing fast after the shiftless jackanape.

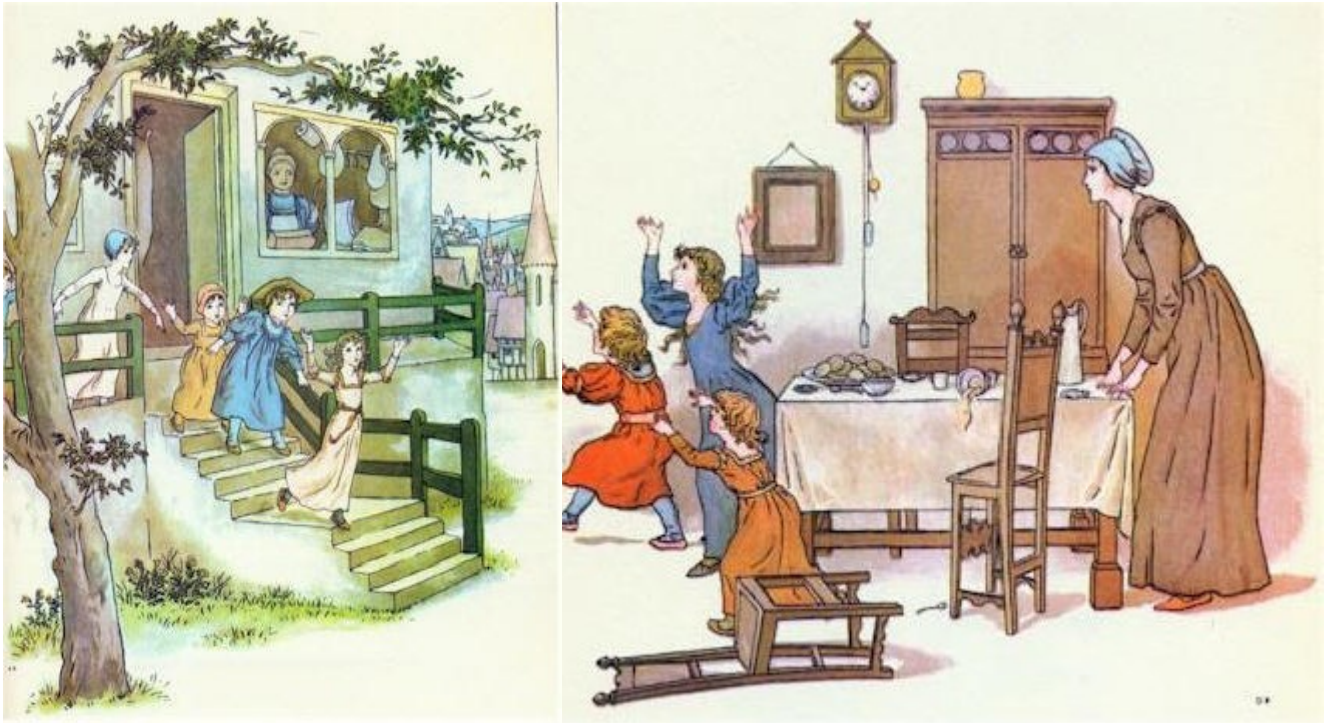


“Hear. Here, you two, come you back to me or I'll beat you black and blue and send you home in agony.”



And the children heard them not.





Small feet were pattering, wooden shoes clattering.



Little hands clapping and little tongues chattering, And, like fowls in a farm-yard when barley is scattering, Out came the children running. All the little boys and girls, With rosy cheeks and flaxen curls, And sparkling eyes and teeth like pearls. Skipping and tripping, they ran merrily after the Pied Piper of Hamelin.



"Hark, Hark, Hark the music! I see it swell."



The children were bound as thick and fast as the rats seen at last at river's edge.



The Mayor was dumb, and the Council stood As if they were changed into blocks of wood,

“What does he think to do with such a young parade?”

The Piper he piped a jaunty tune. It embraced the children enter in and laced the adults to keep their distance out. Unable to move a step; they couldn't moan or cry to the children merrily skipping on their way by.

The parents could only follow with the eye that joyous crowd at the Piper's beck.

But oh, how the Mayor was stretched on the rack, And the wretched Council's bosoms beat,

As the Piper turned from the High Street to where the Weser rolled its waters right in the way of their sons and daughters!

However the Pied Piper turned them from South to West, and it was to Koppelberg Hill that his steps addressed. After him the children pressed;

Great beamed the hope in every breast. “Look, he is ruined now. He never can cross that mighty top! He will be forced to let his piping drop, And then we shall see our children stop!”

Breathless, hopeless, with prayers fervent, but drawn out faithless through and through. In their heart of hearts they already knew that all was lost and gone like summer dew. They moaned in advance When, lo, as their children reached the mountain-side, a wondrous portal opened wide, as if a cavern was suddenly hollowed; and the Piper piped shamelessly forward and the spell-bound children gladly followed,

And when all were in to the very last, The door in the mountain side shut fast. Did I say, all? No; One little boy was lame, And though the piping piped him up, he could not dance the whole of the way.

In later years, if you would blame his sadness, he was used to say,—

"It's dull in our town since my playmates left! I can't forget that I'm bereft of all the pleasant sights they now see, which the Piper also promised me. For he led us, he said, to a joyous land, Joining the town and just at hand,





"He promised me.

"He promised me, then left me without a note. I faltered there on the mountain's side. I was lame again and I cried, to see that promised land erase when the gate swung shut before my face."

"He promised me.

"He promised me, then left me without a note. I faltered there on the mountain's side. I was lame again and I cried, to see that promised land erase when the gate swung shut before my face. But, I remember so well, where bright blue waters gushed out and the sweetest fruit-trees grew, I knew, I knew. It was a golden land where flowers put forth a fairer hue, and everything was strange and new;

Common sparrows wore plumes far brighter than our peacocks strutting here, And their dogs outran our fallow deer. I remember that honey-bees had lost their stings, And horses were born to mount up with eagles' spreading wings.

"And I remember the pain I felt lodged inside my frame that just as I became assured my foot would be speedily cured and I never again be lame. The piping stopped and I still stood outside the hill. And when the vision faded, I found myself left alone outside against my will, to go now limping as before for a lifetime, and never hear of that country more!"

Alas, alas for Hamelin! There came into many a burgher's pate

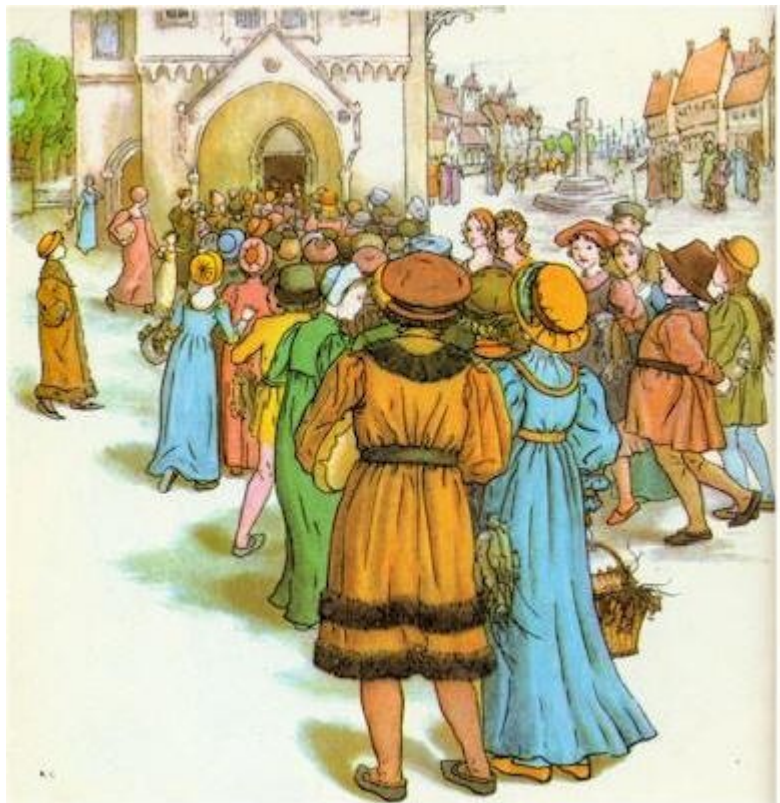
A text which says that Heaven's gate opens to the rich at as easy rate

As the needle's eye takes a camel in! The Mayor sent East, West, North, and South, To offer the Piper, by word of mouth, Wherever it was men's lot to find him, Silver and gold to his heart's content, If he'd only return the way he went, And bring the children behind him.

But when they saw 'twas a lost endeavour, And Piper and dancers were gone for ever, They made a decree that lawyers never Should think their records dated duly If, after the day of the month and year, These words did not as well appear, "And so long after what happened here On the Twenty-second of July, Thirteen hundred and seventy-six:"

And the better in memory to fix the place of the children's last retreat, They called it, the Pied Piper's Street— Where any one playing on pipe or tabor, Was sure for the future to lose his labour. Nor suffered they hostelry or tavern To shock with mirth a street so solemn; But opposite the place of the cavern They wrote the story on a column, And on the great church-window painted The same, to make the world acquainted How their children were stolen away, And there it stands to this very day.

And I must not omit to say that in the mountains of Transylvania there's by word a tribe Of alien people that ascribe The outlandish ways and dress On which their neighbours lay such stress, To their fathers and mothers having risen Out of some subterranean prison Into which they were trepanned Long time ago in a mighty band -- Out of Hamelin town in Brunswick land, But how or why, they don't understand. This song is sung there in words that nobody can know. The pipes that flutter there are lonesome and fluted low. This song is sung there in



words both sad and low. But the people there are not the ones sad; it is sadness remembered there for the ones that could not go. "How they must have wept for us, and wandered slow. Our pipes remember them and that is why our streams of tears do so sadly flow.



So, Willy, let me and you be wipers of scores out with all men — especially the pipers! And, whether they pipe us free from rats or from mice, If we've promised them aught, let us be both stalwart and true; let us keep our promise to God and to Man. In a world long gone awry let us be men of integrity and keep our promises like the angels do.

The End

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