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and brushes the head of some member of the household. The death of the person brushed by the tree usually follows in a short time. Once, when the present mistress sought to move from the traditional mistress's room, the ghost set up such a clamor that she was obliged to move back to the old room. Yes, there can be no doubt that Henderson House is being run exactly the way Aunt Harriet wants it run, even to the present day.

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<sup>1</sup> An address before the annual meeting of the Schenectady County Historical Society, January 12, 1943. #

## PETER PARROTT AND HIS SONGS

BY EDITH CUTTING

**P**ETE'S HOME is in Redford, Clinton County, New York, but I met him and listened to him sing in Au Sable Forks. He is a carpenter—and painter—and cement worker, and he told me to tell you he's "jack of all trades and master of none, and . . . the craziest darn fool that ever lived." Maybe—if being crazy makes a man able to sing one song after another for two hours solid. I listened that long, and Pete declared he could go on singing all night without repeating.

Peter Parrott is American-born, but his father was French-Canadian and passed on to his nine children his love of singing. Pete estimated that three-quarters of the songs he knew he had learned from his father, beginning when about eight years old. He acknowledged that he knows a few square dance calls and can play the "violéén," accordian, and mouth organ. As he had none

of these musical instruments with him, however, he spent the three evenings singing hit-or-miss as the songs occurred to him, repeating patiently for me the ones I wanted to copy down.

Hardly had I been in the house half an hour before he was singing and reciting his favorite, "Paddy's Wedding." This song his father had learned from a schoolteacher, Mary Lancto. The verses and chorus he sang to a catchy little tune; the prose he recited just as fast as he could rattle the words off his tongue. The music is written here with the help of Mrs. Ira Clark and Miss Doris Noyes.

### PADDY'S WEDDING

#### I

Now won't you hear  
 What roarin' cheer  
 Was had at Paddy's wedding-o,  
 And how so gay  
 They spent the day  
 From church unto the bedding-o.  
 First, book in hand,  
 Came Father Gwipes,  
 And the brides of Dadade Bailey-o.  
 Why, all the way  
 From church to pike  
 Squeezed out the tune so gaily-o.

#### CHORUS

Tatheree-ri-rum-tatheree-i  
 Tatheree-i-from-dadee-o  
 Tatheree-ri-rum-tatheree-i  
 Tatheree-i-from-dadee-o.

[SPOKEN VERY FAST]

Now as soon as Michael Raffety hears of the news, over he goes to Dennis Riley, the piper. "Hurrah, hurrah, darlin' Dennison, have you heard of the news?"

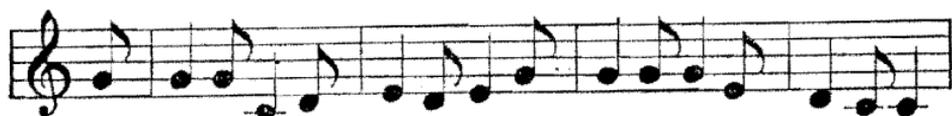
"The devil the news," says he, "and what is it at all, at all?"

"Paddy Donohues is goin' to be married this blessed day."

"Thunder and none, do you tell me that? Just wait till shmorlings of a couple minutes," and Dennis Riley crawled through the rubbish, and out of the corner chimney pulled out a bagpipe and squeezed out a little bit of a — [REPEAT CHORUS]



Now won't you hear What roar-in' cheer Was had at Pad-dy's wed-ding-o,



And how so gay They spent the day From church un-to the bed-ding-o,

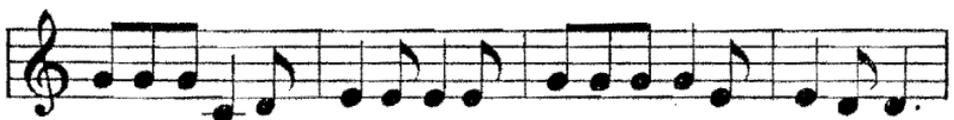


First, book in hand, Came Fa-ther Gwipes, and the brides of Da-da-de Bai-ley-o.



Why, all the way From church to pike Squeezed out the tune so gai-ly-o,

CHORUS:—



Ta-the-ree-ri-rum ta-the-ree-i Ta-the-ree-i-from da-dee o



Ta-the-ree-ri-rum ta-the-ree-i Ta-the-ree-i-from da-dee o.

## II

Now there was met  
 A dirty Pat  
 And Mary Morgan Murphy-o,  
 And Mary Dockskegs,  
 And Skerry Dockskegs,  
 McLaughlin and Dick Verbee-o,  
 And all the girls  
 Dressed up in white  
 Led on by Tiddy Riley-o,  
 Why, all the way  
 From church to pike  
 Squeezed out the tune so gaily-o. [REPEAT CHORUS]  
 [SPOKEN VERY FAST]

Now comes the prettiest congregation of girls in old Ireland, all dressed up in elegant white frocks, and roses about their hair, and about forty-five yards of green ribbon floating about their head like so many brickbat skrimmage, all huddled up in the corner and huggin' poor Pat, the bridegroom, till he was red in the face, and castin' sheep's eyes at Dennis Riley, the piper, and then Dennis Riley crawled back in the corner chimney and pulled out a bagpipe, and squeezed out a little bit of a — [REPEAT CHORUS]

## III

Now when Pat was asked  
 What his love last,  
 The people burst out with laughter-o,  
 "Me soul," says Pat,  
 "You may say that  
 Till the end of the world 'ereafter-o,"  
 And tenderly  
 Her hand he gripes,  
 And he kisses it genteelly-o,  
 Why, all the way  
 From church to pike  
 Squeezed out the tune so gaily-o. [REPEAT CHORUS]

[SPOKEN VERY FAST]

"Now for better or worse, richer or poorer, drunker or sober, do you take this woman to be your wedded wife?" says Father Gwipes to Pat.

"Shure, sir, I do from now till a wake after Christmas."

"None o' your jokes in church," says Father Gwipes to Pat, "or I'll be apt to break your back with me shillalee."

"Give us your list, your reverence; I meant no harm," says he, and grabbed old Father Gwipes by the hand and shook it till the poor old gentleman's arm was nearly deslocated, and Dennis Riley crawled out of the corner chimney and pulled out the bagpipes and squeezed out a little bit of a — [REPEAT CHORUS]

#### IV

Now we roar and set

At dinner met

So frolicsome and frisky-o,

With pritties<sup>1</sup> galore

And skimigig<sup>2</sup> more

And floods of elegant whiskey-o.

To the bride and groom

Round went the sup

That their happiness might be daily-o.

Why all the way

From church to pike

Squeezed out the tune so gaily-o. [REPEAT CHORUS]

[SPOKEN VERY FAST]

Now when Dennis Riley was tryin' to make haste to the bagpipe, the whiskey got to his head so bad he commenced a-puttin' his thumb where his little finger ought to be. At that his wife, Judy, comes up and hits him a belt across the nose and sends him in the corner with the pigs. "Lie there, you bloody thief of the world. Lie there till the cows come home, and whenever you go to a decent man's wake or his weddin' or any such merry makin', you'll not be squazin' out any of your

dirty Protestant tunes, but squazin' out a little bit of  
a — [REPEAT CHORUS]

## V

Oh, then that night,  
Oh, what delight  
To see them all footin' and praucin'-o.  
A fancy ball  
Was nothin' at all  
Compared to the style of their dancing-o.  
And then to see  
Old Father Gwipes  
Beatin' time with his shillalee-o,  
Why, all the way  
From church to pike  
Squeezed out the tune so gaily-o. [REPEAT CHORUS]

## [SPOKEN VERY FAST]

Now comes Barney McLaughlin with a noggin of whiskey in one fist and a shillalee in the other, and goin' around the house like an agent after rent, and steppin' on the toes of the company, and tryin' his prettiest to raise a fight. Then comes the prettiest little scrimmage you ever see. Teeth and eyes were knocked out, noses were broken, bit bits of skulls flyin' here and there like so many pebbles that Old Father Gwipes batin' on the door and shoutin' out, "Fair play, byes, fair play, byes," and Dennis Riley crawled out back of the chimney and squeezed out a bit of a — [REPEAT CHORUS]

The incongruity of a French-Canadian's singing this Irish song was not lost on Pete; in fact, the fun in his gray-blue eyes burst out in laughter at every opportunity, whether it was a pun on his own name ("Who ever hear of a Parrott that didn't talk all the time?") or the little rhyme:

I had a girl;  
Her name was good.  
One of her legs  
Was made of wood.

We went to the beach  
To play in the sand.  
I got slivers  
In my hand.

Tall stories he hardly got started on, though he did tell one about an old mare that a man's wife insisted he should kill and skin. The man hated to do this, but he finally gave in and took the mare out into the woods. After stunning and apparently killing her, he cut off quite a few pieces of skin—he didn't feel as if he ought to take the whole hide after the mare had worked all her life for him—and took these back to his wife, who sold them. The next day they heard a noise outside the house, and when they looked out they saw the poor old mare coming back to the barn. The man felt so sorry for her he went out to the barn and rummaged around till he finally found some sheepskins. He cut them up and put them on her, and every year after that he sheared her and sold the wool for forty dollars.

Most of his stories were shorter, however—like that about the man who swallowed a foot rule and died by inches, or about the one who swallowed a thermometer and died by degrees. Once in a while a riddle popped out, too. Would you know what to do if you were in a hotel that was a little buggy, and you had a nightmare? Hitch the mare to the buggy and drive away.

After such an interlude, Pete would soon begin to sing again, carrying the tune along easily to the last line of a song, where he dropped it almost every time. The last line he recited as if in a hurry to go on to the next song.

Two familiar old English songs were among his repertory: "John Riley" and a seventeen-stanza version of "The Farmer's Curst Wife." Besides these he sang a few sad and sentimental ones such as "Wedding Bells," the chorus of which ends,

Just another fatal wedding—  
Just another broken heart.

That depressing atmosphere never lasted very long, and Pete was soon singing the "P. T. Barnum Song," as he called it, in which the hero would "do the best I could" to take the place of a singer, a baboon, a fighting bulldog, and a corpse. A song he especially enjoyed was the one he sang when I asked him how old he was:

Young folks, come listen to my song;  
I'm old and I won't detain you long.  
I'm eighty-four I'll have you know;  
The young folks call me Uncle Joe.

#### CHORUS

Tiddy-I-um, hopes to do,  
How I love to sing to you;  
How I could sing with joy and glee  
If I was as young as I used to be.

My hair once black is all turned gray,  
But what's the odds, as I feel gay;  
I'm a jolly old sport as you'll all agree,  
And I feel as young as I used to be.

When I was young and in my prime  
I courted the girls most all the time.  
I'd take 'em out each day for a ride,  
And I'd always have one by my side.

I'd hug and kiss them just for fun,  
And I haven't forgotten the way 't was done,  
So if any young girl's in love with me,  
She'll find me as young as I used to be.

Really, though, Pete is a long way from eighty-four. Dressed as he was in red-and-blue plaid shirt, gray work pants, and an old felt hat, he looked to be in his late forties or early fifties, and he insisted that when dressed up he didn't look over thirty-five.

Young or old, Pete enjoyed his audience as much as they did him. He got a good laugh from the little girl who called him "Pete Carrot," and the only French I heard from this French-Canadian was a little rhyme he recited to a baby:

Un et deux et trois et quatre,  
P'tit moulin qui va à pat [pieds]  
Boispouri qui mene les gris [gris?]  
Feuillons d'or qui mene dehors.

(His French and mine make a bad combination. If you want to translate this, it goes something like this:

One and two and three and four,  
A little machine that goes on feet,  
Whippoorwill that makes cries,  
Golden leaves that drive outdoors.)

Pete had the true entertainer's gift of fitting the story or song to his listeners and making them like it, as he did in his closing song, turning to a different person with each stanza:

Good evening, friends, I'm glad to see so many here tonight;  
To make myself agreeable I'll try with all my might.  
I hope you won't get angry if jokes I crack of you,  
But in my song I'll mention what I think of some of you.

I don't wish to be personal or deal in what is wrong,  
But there's a chap that really I must mention in my song.  
I hope you won't get angry, Will, but what I say is true;  
You never pay your wash bill, so I don't think much of you.

O, there's a covey over there who, anyone may tell  
Just by the way he fixes up, he tries to cut a swell;  
His coat he's borrowed from a friend, though friends he has but few;  
He pawned his watch the other night, so I don't think much of you.

Now I'll speak of you, my friend; you look so like a spark;  
You flirt with all the girls in town, and kiss them in the dark.  
Your feelings I don't wish to hurt, but what I say is true;  
The girls say you're a naughty boy, and I don't think much of you.

And now I'll speak of you, my friend; you look so like a dash;  
You think yourself a punkin cuss 'cause you sport a big mustache,  
But a man that wears hair upon his lips, the world he must get  
through,  
He's on the dead beat all the time, so I don't think much of you.

And now I'll end my foolishness for fear you'll angry be,  
And if I've tried to make you laugh, please don't think hot of me,  
And what I've said is but a joke, but upon my word 't is true  
I hope you'll think as much of me as Pete Parrott does of you.

If you have fun listening to a man who has fun singing, there's  
not much question that you would enjoy an evening with Peter  
Parrott.

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<sup>1</sup> Pritties—potatoes

<sup>2</sup> Skimmigig—buttermilk.