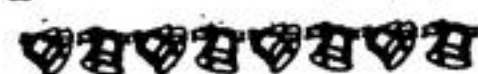


THURSDAY, DECEMBER 21st, 1939

The Free Press' Christmas Story



"GOOD-WILL TOWARD MEN"

HARRY HARRISON KROLL



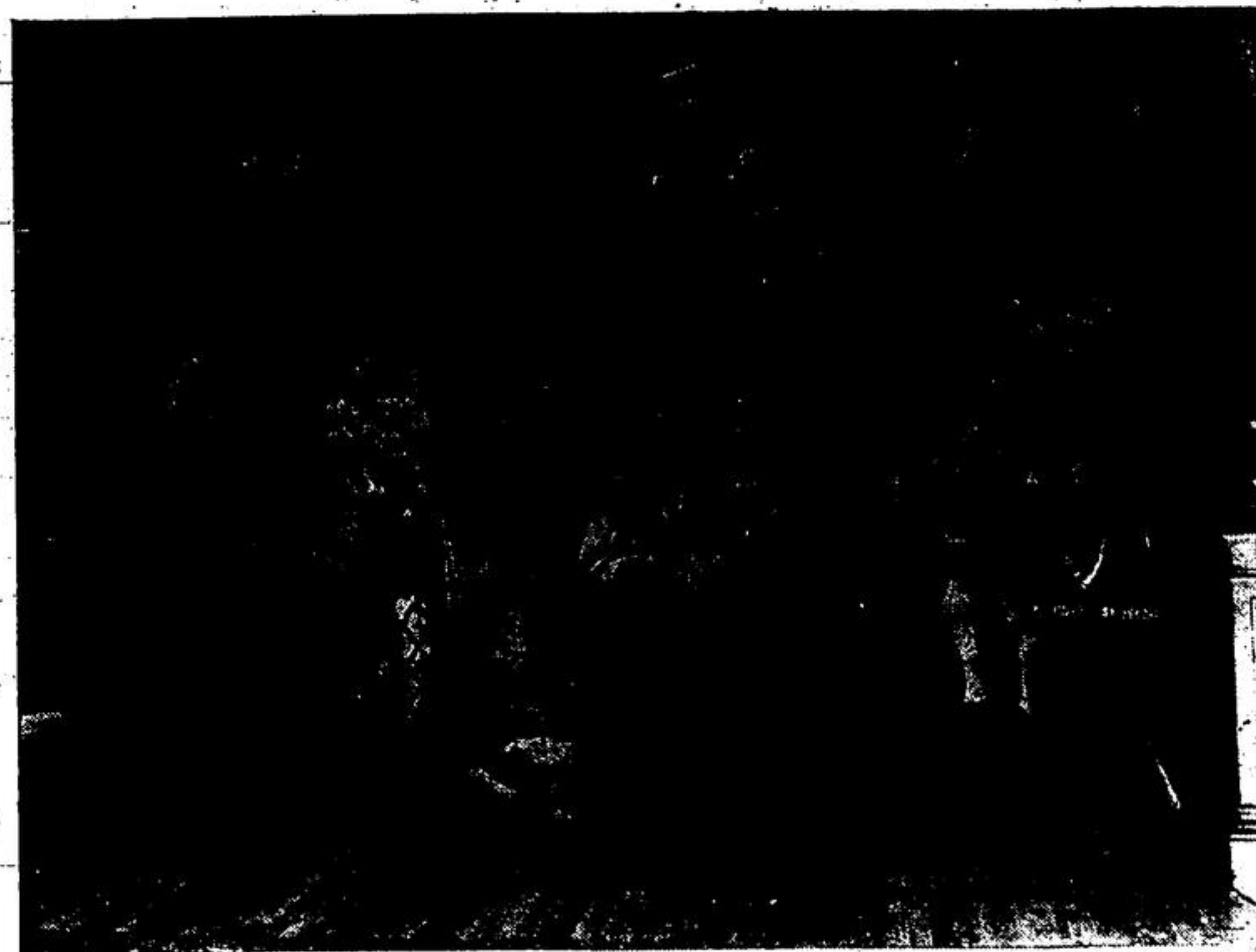
HE WESTBROOKS were a disagreeable, grasping lot, Dave Conley was thinking, as he crunched through the snow toward the tree. He was a tall, well-knit young man, with a chin turned with resolution, mixed with tenderness. He was garbed in old hunting clothes, with high-laced boots. Reaching the holly tree, he examined it from every angle.

I cut the tree. Besides, it's not from their land. I looked carefully for the lines. "I'm skeered," said Jones, doubtfully, "that you made some kind of a mistake, 'fessor, for the tree shore did come off the Westbrook land. I rode by the place showed me just where it happened, and everything. He was standing behind another tree, no place at all off, and he seen you cutting it, him and another feller. I know you didn't mean no harm, 'fessor, but that's the way it is, and I'm sort of skeered that it may mess you up right smart, if they keep pushing it. You know what sort of folks they are—stubborn, hard-headed, and once they've put their mean hands to the plow, they bust out the middle or bust up the plow."

It to you! You're an artist at it in fact, small, that's what, Sim Westbrooke! If you had an inch of real man in you, you'd go straight to Grandpap Westbrook and have that case thrown out of court, and you'd go to that Christmas tree and apologize in public for what you've done!" "I'm a mind to 'wing your neck!" He did nothing of the kind; instead, he hurried out, saddled his mule, and rode furiously away to interview the other members of the school board. He came back, after an hour, looking glum and browbeaten. He had talked with Mr. Walker, and Luke Sardis, the other members; they said it was Judge Jesse Leverage's job to look after that. If Judge Jesse had empowered Mr. Dave to get his Santa, then Mr. Dave should get him, and that was all there was of it. To anyone not familiar with the single-track mountaineer, mind it would be difficult to understand how desperately upset Simon Westbrook was by the turn of events. Few honors were to be had in the simplicity of life in Poverty Run and Chittling Meat Mountain. The adults divided the honors of magistrate's office, constable and school board among them. Little was left for an arrogant, powerful, hungry young fellow like Simon Westbrook. Moreover, he was the best Santa that could be had in that locality. The honest truth was, he was a genuine artist at it.

He had lost the single great honor that he wanted, above all others available to him. He could not humble himself to Dave Conley, however. He beat his hands together, and moaned, walking up and down the big puncher-floored room of the mountain dwelling. "I wish I'd never have started this mess! I wish that idiot Dave Conley had a left that tree alone then I would not have done this! I'm of a mind to go hunt him up and beat his head for him. It was all his fault!" "It's your fault!" accused his sister. "Look here! You going back on your own blood and kin on account of that tree feller?" "I aim to be fair. All the pupils are crazy about 'Fessor Dave. He's nice and he's smart and he's good. He wouldn't ever have sworn out a warrant for you, Sim! If he'd been back of that tree, watching you cut a tree on his land, he'd have yelled out to you, 'Don't do that, Sim! Or, more apt, he'd have come on down and said, 'Take it. It's a nice tree. I'm glad I can give it to you and to the school. Here, let me help you cut it and load it.' That's what he'd have said, I think!" Simon glowered at Minnie, in baffled rage. "You done fell in love with the teacher! Think of that!" "No!" she denied swiftly. "But I've got a right to like somebody that I ought to like."

VICTORIA PREPARES FOR OLD FASHIONED CHRISTMAS



Preparations for the same kind of Christmas festivities which enlivened England in the days of Good Queen Bess are now under way at the Empress Hotel at Victoria, B.C., where an unusual number of Canadians will join approximately 400 Americans in an old-fashioned Yuletide celebration. The programme, seen here in rehearsal has such picturesque features as a boar's head, Yule log, wassail bowl and Christmas carols. Retainers in old time costume haul the log to the massive fireplace where it is lighted by the Mayor of Victoria with a fragrant, from last year's log, which has been "put under a bed to secure the house from fire," according to an ancient superstition. Christmas dinner in the three great banqueting halls with the chef bearing the boar's head, tasks fierce, mounted on a silver platter, are other picturesque notes in this most colorful festival.

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Meanwhile, of course, the Westbrook camp was a good amount of gratification. Simon Westbrook, throwing out his barrel chest, would smit himself heroically, and laugh in that vast manner he had. "I kitched the 'fessor on his blind side, that time and socked him one that'll hold him a spell!" Then his face hardened. His eyes glinted. "He thinks he's some pumpkins—go off and take on a jag of book-learning, then come back and gooly over us pore folks! He ain't such-a-much, nohow."