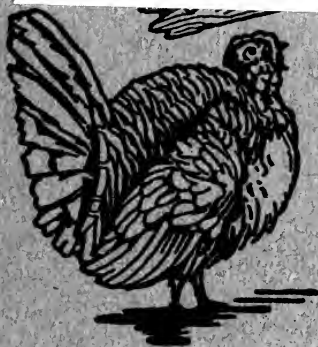


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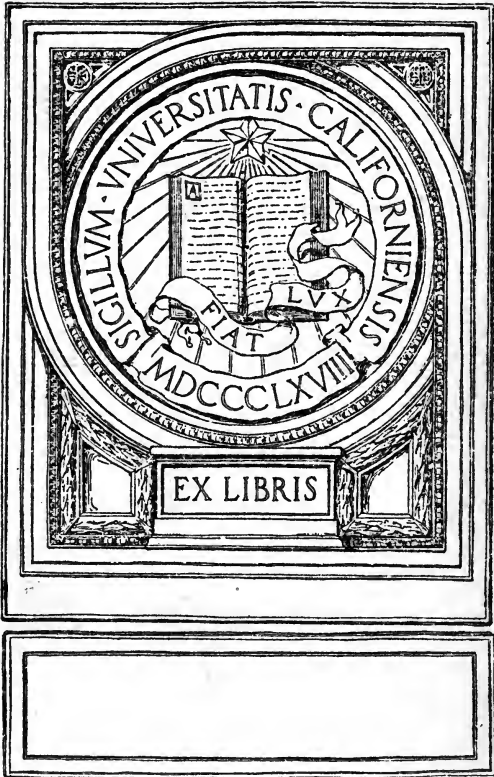
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BY
WARD MACAULEY



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By

WARD MACAULEY



NEW YORK
DUFFIELD & COMPANY
1912

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THE
MIND
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CHEAP TURKEY AND WHAT CAME OF IT

By WARD MACAULEY

There was a smile on John Goodman's face and a feeling of elation in his heart as he approached his home on Thanksgiving eve. Under his arm was a large and benevolent looking bundle, and it is possible that his happiness of spirits was in some way connected with its possession. Such, indeed, was the case, for John Goodman had just been a patron at Blankburg's* first municipal sale, and as an immediate result thereof he was the triumphant owner of a ten-pound turkey. In most years the flesh of the gobbler had been an unknown luxury in the Goodman household. "We'll

*No particular city is intended.

CHEAP TURKEY

have turkey for dinner," Goodman had assured his uncomplaining wife, "when gold dollars grow on elderberry bushes." And, as a matter of truth, elderberry bushes with gold dollars on their branches are quite out of the ken of the average shoe salesman, and in this worthy, but not unduly remunerative occupation, did John Goodman earn that portion of daily bread—not including turkey—that was his due. John had been married three years now, and the holiday had not previously arrived when he conscientiously felt that he could afford turkey. True he had priced it. Yes, he had asked its valuation in the fine stores on the avenue and in the stalls in the market and in the corner butcher shops, only finally to turn away with a sigh and confess to him-

CHEAP TURKEY

self: "Thirty-four cents; too much; guess we'll have to stick to our old favorite, chicken."

At last, however, his opportunity had come. The municipal sale had opened. The good mayor of Blankburg had started a movement to sell certain of the necessities of life at "cost." By a special humanitarian impulse that defied all argument, the necessities were made elastic enough to include turkey. Yes, turkey, the prime essential of a proper observance of Thanksgiving day, was to be graciously included in the list of articles to be disposed of at "cost." Turkey, which hitherto had been considered suitable only for the rich man's table, became the poor man's holiday feast. The food of Dives had become the portion of Lazarus. At "cost," the

CHEAP TURKEY

mayor had graciously announced and at cost it was literally to be, not "cost" plus a certain "expense" for rent and clerk hire. The rent the mayor very kindly agreed to pay from his private exchequer and the clerk hire was taken care of by some of his henchmen, ever willing to labor in a popular cause. Virtue was to be its own and only reward, or virtue plus a few votes, as the case might prove to be. Yes, "cost" meant "cost" and nothing else—just what was paid the farmers for the birds—paid for them "on the hoof," if such an expression can be applied to birds.

The crush at the sale had been furious. The volunteer salesforce was totally inadequate to cope with the great public demand for turkeys at cost, and a wild scramble among

CHEAP TURKEY

the customers had ensued. Two women, becoming involved in a wordy dispute over the possession of an extra fancy bird, had succeeded in dismembering it, whereupon the salesmanager, Solomon-like, had handed down the decision that each should have the half—with the coincident detail that each should likewise pay half. John Goodman, though among the early arrivals, had not attained his desire without difficulty; but in his extremity his early football training had proved his best friend, and a half hour after he entered the municipal salesroom he emerged, somewhat dishevelled, but triumphant and with no torn clothes to offset the gain made by purchasing "turkey at cost." It is no wonder, then, that he should be so happy as he approached his home. It

CHEAP TURKEY

would be such a surprise to Mary. The ten-pound bird, which would have set him back \$3 if purchased through the ordinary channels of trade, had come into his possession with the expenditure of only \$2.30—hardly more than the price of chicken, he told himself triumphantly.

As he entered the house and gave his wife the greeting that was her due, John could hardly keep the good news to himself. Nevertheless with an effort he controlled his elation, leaving the happy surprise until she should open the package and see for herself. With nothing more noticeable about his countenance than his usual smile, John took his precious bundle and deposited it upon the kitchen table, Mary closely following.

CHEAP TURKEY

She cut the strings and unrolled the paper, and then John was rewarded by the start of surprise and jubilation that he had been enjoying in anticipation all during his walk home. Unlike so many similar instances, the reality proved in no wise disappointing.

"Why, John," she said in delight, "it's a turkey."

"None other," said her husband, with no less enthusiasm. "Mrs. Goodman, this is Mr. Turkey. Mr. Turkey, this is Mrs. Goodman. You have never met before, I think."

"Well, if we have, John, dear, I am afraid it was a long time ago. And I need hardly say"—addressing Mr. Turkey—"that I am simply overwhelmed with delight at meeting you."

CHEAP TURKEY

"I got it at the municipal sale, dear," explained John to forestall any possible censure for undue extravagance; "it cost me only \$2.30; think of it—\$2.30 for a ten-pound turkey! Practically the price of a real good round steak, as you might say. They're selling them at cost."

"Who are?"

"Why, the city; the mayor, I guess, is really at the back of it."

"Well, I'll write him a letter and tell him what a real good nice man I think he is. Oh, John, maybe the city will sell silk dresses, and maybe I can get one!"

"Maybe," said John, but just a shade of thoughtfulness crept into his tone.

Probably no Thanksgiving dinner was ever more enjoyed than that one.

CHEAP TURKEY

John could hardly have been prouder if his ten-pound turkey had been a baby of equal weight. Hope deferred may make the heart sick, but turkey deferred but makes the meat the sweeter.

"Maybe," said Mrs. John, in a burst of hopefulness, "maybe, we can have one every Thanksgiving."

"We can, dear," Mr. John assured her, "and on Christmas, too."

"Oh, that dear, good, lovely Mr. Mayor!" said Mrs. John in exuberance of joy.

The municipal sale was an immense success, view it as you like. To the mayor and his henchmen it brought increased prestige, and prestige would come in very handy in the forthcoming campaign for governor, for which honor Mr. Mayor was rec-

CHEAP TURKEY

ognized as a receptive candidate. To the people it had brought the holiday turkey at a price all felt could be afforded—once a year, at any rate. Only the storekeeper emitted a howl. He remarked that, as he must perforce pay rent and hire clerks, he could not consistently sell turkey at the price he paid for it “on the hoof.” His criticisms were greeted with roars of derision. The press printed his views, only to sneer, and the word “robber” was flung at him from many quarters. Big headlines had announced the mayor’s plan. It was “news.” The storekeeper’s complaint was safely and securely secreted in the “City in Brief” column, and a clever turn of phrase had sufficiently revealed the fact that the newspaper was out of sympathy with his “selfish” wail.

CHEAP TURKEY

"The Beagle," an enterprising newspaper, perceiving the favor with which the public had greeted the innovation, suggested that perhaps the experiment could be enlarged somewhat.

IF TURKEY, WHY NOT COAL?

the types had howled to all the world, and John Goodman and a host of others like him—personages whom we may consider typical of the man on the street—when the headlines focussed their attention had repeated the question, "Yes, if turkey, why not coal?" The newspaper went on to argue that while cheap turkey as a means of allowing the great American public to observe Thanksgiving in the good old-fashioned New England way was certainly a highly commendable thing

CHEAP TURKEY

and ought to be encouraged as much as possible, still it could hardly rank in importance with furnishing heat to keep the poor from suffering in this terrible winter. "Seventy-five cents a ton profit to the retail coal dealers. This could be saved by a municipal coal business," the headlines had shouted a day later. The article went on to point out that the Board of Public Works had constantly teamsters who were idle, especially in the winter, and that delivery could be made without cost. "One dollar saved to the consumer," was the enticement held out in bright red on the third day. And Mr. Mayor began to see the light. Having in mind the scriptural reference regarding the man who put his hand to the plow and then turned back, Mr. Mayor deter-

CHEAP TURKEY

mined to pursue his course to the bitter, bitter end. The municipal coal yard became a reality. The public was delighted. A dollar a ton saved! No cold homes in Blankburg this winter, no, indeed. Business boomed—at the municipal coal yard. In vain the retail dealers protested. “How can we sell coal at a profit, when the city sells for cost?” they insistently, asked. The newspaper unfeelingly replied, “You can’t,” with none too well hidden an inference that they didn’t deserve to. Finding it impossible to do business at a profit, the retailer decided not to do business at all. The coal yards began to close. Perfectly respectable young men who had spent good years of their lives in answering ’phone calls and saying, “Yes, one ton to Mr. So-and-so—put

CHEAP TURKEY

in, yes, thank you," were forced to seek other means of employment. They couldn't go into the grocery business, for the municipal markets—not one now, but several—had so occupied the field that no one in that line of trade dreamed of expanding, and all were praying with one accord to be delivered from the ruin that stared them in the face. Still, numerous fields of endeavor remained open. The municipality had left untouched a great many avenues of activity. So the erstwhile coalmen—as opportunity offered—became assistant haberdashers, and bank messengers, and street-car conductors, and extra Saturday help in clothing stores.

"The Evening Beagle" crowed with triumphant delight. Whole columns were devoted to "the people's

CHEAP TURKEY

battle" which had been waged so unerringly by the "Beagle" itself. True, the corner grocers were people, the coal dealers were people, their assistants were people. At least, to all outward appearance, they bore the same semblance as the others whom in totality we style "the people" and of whom the demagogue never tires of talking and to whom he ceaselessly pledges eternal loyalty. Like the butchers and the grocers, the coal dealers emitted remarks distinctly derogatory to the conduct of affairs in Blankburg. Protests anent taking the bread out of deserving mouths were voiced again and again. The complaint had no further effect than to give the "Beagle" still another cue.

"Bread?" the editor shrieked, when he turned over in his mind the phrase-

CHEAP TURKEY

ology of their criticism of the progressive movements of the day. "Bread—why didn't we think of that before? Why, bread is the staff of life, the one thing needful. It stands between a hungry population and starvation. And the base being who forces the public to pay an undue price, ah, who is he? Again, it is the corner grocery and the bakeshop." The editorial vow, strong and inviolable as the law of Mede and Persian, was registered that (not quite literally speaking) the entire staff should neither slumber nor sleep till this foul wrong was undone. "Bread!" shouted the editor; "Bread," echoed the reporters; "Bread," said the editorial writer; "Bread," agreed the foreman. The next issue was a masterpiece.

“BREAD AT COST”

was flung across an entire page, and in eager, breathless sentences the editor took his public into his secret of making the staff of life a little more easily procured. “Man shall not live by bread alone,” he thundered in heavy blackface, “yet man cannot live without bread. Why pray for our daily bread while we tolerate the abominable and iniquitous monster that keeps it far out of our reach?”

The people were delighted—that is, the people minus the grocers and the butchers and the bakeshop men and the coal dealers and their assistants. The coal clerk out of a job would rather still be disputing over the 'phone about what he termed a wholly

CHEAP TURKEY

unavoidable delay in delivery than to have a small loaf of bread at 3 cents instead of 4 cents. The middleman voiced a faint protest—faint because so highly and condescendingly disregarded—and was told—editorially—by the “Beagle” not to be so selfish.

The grocers found their sales greatly decreased by the competition of the Municipal Bread Emporium, where you could buy bread for 3 cents per loaf, and wrap it yourself in paper brought by you for the purpose. The eye of vision in the “Beagle’s” office was by no means dimmed as yet. “We have saved the selling profit,” roared the types; “why not save the manufacturing profit?” So the city bakery became a living, moving fact. True, it was impossible to secure political henchmen who were both will-

CHEAP TURKEY

ing and competent to make bread—without pay—so that a starving public could be saved a cent per loaf, so it was necessary to hire the usual employees, but, as the “Beagle” shrieked, “to market their products without profit.” As strongly did the “Beagle” insist upon bread of the best quality. “The best, the very best,” it blazoned forth, “is none too good to nourish the bodies of the city’s toilers.” Which was all very true, no doubt, but the coal man’s assistant was more interested in having the means to secure sustenance of any kind than he was that it should be “the best” or that he should be able to save a fractional part of its cost. The municipal bakeries, for the one quickly grew to be a dozen, were an immense success; more so even than the bread emporium that

CHEAP TURKEY

had preceded them. The "Beagle" said so, and a great number of "the people" agreed—that is, the people minus the grocers and the bakers and the coal men and the butchers and their assistants, who remembered too well their own sad experience as a result of the municipality's doing business at "cost."

The crowds on the street grew. More than one bakery, failing to find sufficient market for its output abroad, had closed its doors, and while many of the manual laborers—the productive forces, as the "Beagle" said—were able to find employment in the city's bakeries—if they could prove their claim to have voted right—the office men and superintendents were put upon their own resources. Office men weren't needed, for "all the book-

CHEAP TURKEY

keeping that is necessary," as the mayor so aptly put it, "can be done on an adding machine in the Comptroller's office."

Some of the office men and superintendents secured employment in other fields—at less per diem, to be sure, as a result of their lack of experience. Others repaired to other cities, some, as one of their number so sardonically put it, going as far as possible from Blankburg. Others joined the ranks on the street and the throng of industrious students of the "Help Wanted" column; only the "Help Wanted" column had shrunk considerably of late, while the "Situations Wanted" could no longer be classed as a column, but had perforce to be referred to as a page. But it was a great triumph for the people; that is the

CHEAP TURKEY

people with the minuses noted previously.

After its signal victory in the fight for bread—"a second French Revolution," as the "Beagle" so appropriately suggested—the editor of that estimable sheet was willing to rest content with his laurels for some two weeks before taking the next stand in his battle for "the people's rights." Merchants stood in mortal fear that their particular branch of commerce would be the next to be invaded. The public abstained from buying as much as possible in the hope that perhaps the city might be able to effect a saving in the contemplated purchases. Travelling men warned each other to steer clear of Blankburg. "You can't sell a thing in the town unless you sell it to the city—and at cost," as one of

CHEAP TURKEY

the fraternity picturesquely phrased it. Sales forces were reduced to the minimum, as no one could tell where the lightning would strike next.

“IF BREAD, WHY NOT CLOTHING?”

was what the “Beagle” finally offered as the next plan of attack. “Why not?” the article went on in headlines a shade smaller. “Food and clothing go hand in hand,” though exactly how, the learned editor omitted to state. “These are the prime necessities of life. Why pay extra prices for the services of a salesman who invariably sells you a misfit?” And the public—or a portion of it—echoed “Why?” The mayor was called in. He was very complaisant. Why not,

CHEAP TURKEY

The "Beagle" carried a flattering counterfeit presentment of him as a permanent feature of its front page and lauded him with that dearest phrase of his heart—"the people's champion." Already the mayor had visions of himself in the governor's chair; for who could stop the man who had brought the necessities of life to the people at cost? Governor's chair? Why stop at that? The senatorial toga; aye, even the presidency, for should not the people's best gifts go to those who did the most for the people? The mayor had a right to be complaisant. The scheme was a good one, he assured the editor. He had been considering it himself. As a matter of fact, he hadn't, but that is neither here nor there. The details were worked out and the Clothing De-

CHEAP TURKEY

pository was opened for business with an advertising campaign consisting of prodigal amounts of the "Beagle's" most valuable space—space that a mere middleman could not purchase. The question of saving the people as much as possible had been given a great deal of consideration at the hands of the mayor and the editor—and at the "hands" is singularly appropriate. A large expense in connection with the sale of clothing—aside from rent—is in the salesmanship. It takes time to sell a man a suit, and time is money even when it is rated at only \$20.00 per week. After pondering the perplexing problem for some time, the mayor, with his accustomed and inimitable, homely, commonsense way of settling a question, shouted: "Why, man alive, every man knows what

CHEAP TURKEY

size suits he wears; we'll just assort the suits according to size and let each man pick out his own. We'll have a turnstile where he can pay, and just outside he can wrap it up himself. All we'll need is a guard at one end and a cashier at the other. We'll have a regular clothing serve-self."

"And we can sell the clothing at exactly cost."

"Sure," agreed the mayor; "the clerk-hire for the guard and the cashier can go into the regular budget."

"That's all right," said the editor, "but who will open the cases?"

"Cases?" asked the mayor blankly.

"Yes, cases," said the editor, impatiently; "clothing comes in wooden cases."

"Well," said the mayor, philosophically, "the guard can do it when

CHEAP TURKEY

things are quiet. In a pinch the public'll help him out, seeing they get the stuff at cost."

A whole page of the "Beagle" proclaimed the gladsome news to the world—that is, gladsome to all with a few minuses that scarcely need to be mentioned. Bakers and butchers and grocers and coal men and their assistants who had been "eliminated," faced a delightful prospect of using a summer suit through the winter, and the Clothing Serve-self afforded them comfort only in the sense that misery loves company. So the public, with these exceptions—exceptions growing larger with every step in the campaign—was very glad to purchase clothing at cost; and while the clothiers fumed and fretted, the "Beagle," with its golden words of yore, bade

CHEAP TURKEY

them not to be so selfish. The clothiers consoled themselves as much as possible by turning their attention to the haberdashery department, hoping against hope that perhaps that might be overlooked in the mad scramble to sell goods at cost. There was no need, however, for a fraction of as many salesmen as before, and by the usual process of the survival of the fittest, the body of students of the ever-shrinking help-wanted column was alarmingly increased.

It was a case of "Whenever you see a head, hit it," so very wisely the heads remained out of view just as much as possible. The merchants began to cut down on their advertising, for fear that by the process of suggestion the line to which they were giving publicity would be the next to

CHEAP TURKEY

be pounced upon by the backers of the city's selling at cost plan. And hereby hangs a tale. Though the circulation of the "Beagle" was growing very rapidly—despite cancellations by the butchers, bakers, grocers, coal dealers, clothiers and their assistants—the advertising was showing a menacing falling off. Not that it at all disturbed the serene soul of the militant editor—serene in the consciousness of a noble task worthily performed—for he was oblivious to the more sordid things of life. However, the matter was forcibly brought to his attention by the business manager, who kindly but firmly conveyed the idea that "this sort of thing" must stop. The editor was none the less direct with the retort courteous; a few well-turned phrases revealing—in a way

CHEAP TURKEY

not to be misunderstood—that the editorial department did not condescend to argue matters of public policy with those whose ideals rose no higher than lines and inches.

Despite his lofty attitude—or altitude—the editor confessed to himself certain misgivings in regard to the future of the newspaper if the campaign for merchandise at cost should eventually “eliminate” all of his patrons. In quiet, unostentatious ways, he did a few strokes—greatly against his conscience, as he told himself—to stem the tide. The headlines were one size smaller. Other matters occasionally secured a place on the front page, and the mayor’s picture appeared only on alternate days—a proceeding that nearly disrupted a beautiful friendship; for the editor and the mayor

CHEAP TURKEY

were like unto Damon and Pythias. The love of Jonathan for David, said of holy writ to exceed the love of woman, could scarcely have been greater than the sacred feeling that stirred their hearts. It was a fine example for the youth of Blankburg to emulate.

The editor paused in his mad career of suggesting new worlds to conquer. Not so his devoted co-laborer, nor the many "constant readers" of his paper. Suggestions piled in upon him from all sides; suggestions that he dared not turn aside even if he would. Scarcely an article that is used by all mankind was omitted from the list of what the public would buy at cost, the public being represented at least by the man who wrote the letter. The editor was growing more conserva-

CHEAP TURKEY

tive, however, with the decreasing size of his paper, due to lack of paid space. He reluctantly confessed to the mayor that they "must make haste slowly."

The mayor was of quite another mind, however. "We'll clean up this whole town," he asserted, pounding his fist. "Let not a guilty man escape." The editor bowed his acquiescence. Not a prophet of Baal should be spared.

Now, as it chanced, the mayor was an ardent equal-suffrage advocate—one thing to his credit at the least, though his enemies suggested that handsomeness of face and grace of demeanor gave him confidence in winning the support of the gentler sex. It galled the mayor's sensitive soul to have the men get the advantage of buying clothing at cost without giving

CHEAP TURKEY

the ladies something to offset this. He bided his time, as all the master minds have done from the beginning of history, and on the very day when the ordinary channels of trade were announcing their formal openings with the very latest in spring millinery, he blazoned forth across the "Beagle's" front page:

"LADIES' HATS AT COST."

The editor was the more glad that his co-worker had postponed action until that day, since the paid advertisements were already in the paper.

Talk about your sensations! A cyclone could scarcely have made more stir. The telephone service was taxed to its capacity and beyond, while Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Jones and thou-

CHEAP TURKEY

sands of their sisters discussed the novel and highly delightful situation. The mayor had divined that the proper plan was a millinery serve-self—each hat plainly marked, first come, first served. A regiment of starving men contending for a solitary ham sandwich could not have put up a more spectacular exhibition than the mayor's first-day customers. Onlookers would have been justified in believing that not a solitary Blankburg woman went home that night without a new hat. And they had bought them at cost! The few remaining pieces of headgear that had been unanimously dubbed "frights" were surely such in the most literal interpretation of the word when the day was over. The scene showed unmistakable traces of the recent holocaust, and the

CHEAP TURKEY

guard and the cashier vaguely wondered if shattered nerves were included in the items of "the cost."

The mayor was delighted. Whenever he saw a beautiful woman on the street wearing a becoming hat, he whispered complacently to himself, "I did that. Perhaps but for me she could only have afforded an ugly bonnet." The ladies' clubs listened attentively to ringing resolutions in praise of His Honor. Plans for a life-sized statue in Green Park were being favorably considered. More than one other woman echoed Mrs. Goodman's eulogy—"that dear, good Mr. Mayor." Mr. Mayor was wonderfully confident that he could never be defeated if equal suffrage came to be.

One point of difference arose between His Honor and his editorial

CHEAP TURKEY

confrere. It came about in this way:

“Al,” said the mayor, in the burst of enthusiasm that betokens a sudden discovery, “how would it be if we sold them beer at cost?”

“Beer?” said the editor.

“Yes, beer; why not?” replied His Honor, preparing to wax eloquent in defense of his roseate inspiration.

“Well, you know, Joe,” said his bosom chum, deprecatingly, “you can hardly call beer a necessity.”

The mayor waved the objection aside. “That’s largely in the way you look at it,” he said.

Nevertheless, the editorial support was not so easily won over. After debating the matter pro and con for the better part of the afternoon, the two, disagreeing in policy but eternally firm in friendship, had compromised

CHEAP TURKEY

by agreeing to submit the whole matter to a higher power, viz., the people.

“We’ll have a referendum,” shouted the mayor, as though he were addressing a political gathering. “Let the people rule.”

The editor could hardly enter any plausible objection to such a course, so the next day’s “Beagle” had heavy headlines across the front page:

**“BEER AT COST—DO THE
PEOPLE WANT IT?”**

Then followed an elucidation of the plan of campaign. The spring election was but a few weeks away. A few minor officials were to be chosen and the electorate could easily spare additional time to voice its sovereign mandate regarding the complex eco-

CHEAP TURKEY

conomic and social problem as to whether or not the city should provide such of its citizens as made use of the commodity with beer. Such a campaign as was waged over this proposition had never been known in Blankburg before, nor, indeed, in any other municipality of which we have record. It is said that politics makes strange bed-fellows; and in the whirlwind campaign that followed the "Beagle's" announcement, we see the "drys" lined up on the same side with the brewers and the saloon keepers. Both were unalterably opposed to Blankburg's going into the beer business, the former from a matter of principle, the latter as a matter of profit. The mayor vaguely suggested that in the case of beer, selling at cost meant a much more substantial re-

CHEAP TURKEY

duction than with coal, clothing, or bread, or even ladies' hats. As one of his henchmen affirmed, "Why, beer don't cost nothing."

The campaign went merrily on. "It was a case," the mayor said, "of the plain people against 'the interests,' " these consisting apparently of those who drank nothing and believed in spreading their example, and those who believed that he who drinks should pay. When the ballots were counted, however, it was found, as the mayor had predicted, that "the ayes have it."

The result proved to be slightly different from that which was anticipated. Instead of saving money on his liquid refreshment, the average man merely drank more of it. The move was not, therefore, of the great

CHEAP TURKEY

economic importance that the mayor had so confidently predicted. Nevertheless, he felt that he could congratulate himself on his coup. He assured himself that he had made himself more solid than ever with the great unwashed multitude. More than that, he thought that he perceived a very visible saving in campaigns to come when "the boys" would expect him to "set 'em up." "We'll treat 'em," he told himself, "at the municipal refreshment stations. What could be more appropriate?"

This aspect of the campaign by no means passed unnoticed by the ladies, and after a period of whispered conferences—proving that secrets can be maintained by the gentler sex—the mayor found himself facing a most formidable looking petition. Appar-

CHEAP TURKEY

ently every female of whatsoever age in all Blankburg had affixed her signature, for the roll seemed interminable. Force of might and numbers was scarcely necessary, for the mayor had ever an ear open for the popular desire, and particularly so where the ladies were concerned. "It is the part of chivalry," he decided, "to grant the request if it be within my power."

The petition set forth:

"Wherein and inasmuch as by the influence of your Honor, the Honorable Mayor of the city of Blankburg, and by popular vote (howbeit a large number of those who were entitled to the suffrage were denied this) the said city entered into the operation of refreshment stations where beer is sold at cost, we hereby respectfully petition your Honor to a similar course

CHEAP TURKEY

in regard to ice cream sodas, ice cream and sundaes; and we feel confident that the high sense of justice and fitness so eminently conspicuous in your Honor from the beginning of your public life, will at once recognize the righteousness of our request."

The word had first been written "demand," but this had been crossed off, but not entirely obliterated, and "request" substituted.

Would the mayor do it? Well, he had only been awaiting the chance. If the entire fifteen thousand who had signed had only come to him with a petition in boots—the dear creatures—his cup of joy would have been overflowing, indeed. "Petition in boots" sounded a little inapt to His Honor—"in pumps" were better.

The mayor at once instituted the

CHEAP TURKEY

soft-drink refreshment stations. The various delectables were served absolutely at cost. The question of help gave the mayor an opportunity to demonstrate those brilliant attributes of mind that he confidently expected would ultimately land him in the President's chair. He appealed to the ladies. Would they volunteer for duty, just one day a year in the municipal ice cream parlors? Would they do it? They were so delighted to repay even partially the dear mayor for all his kindness. So, being more or less a co-operative proposition, the "ice cream at cost" scheme was a huge success, except that very many an agile slinger of egg phosphates—the experts who can toss the delectable beverage far in the air, cause it to form a complete letter "S" and fall grace-

CHEAP TURKEY

fully into the glass—found himself out of a job. Some went to neighboring towns, some accepted engagements in vaudeville as high-class jugglers, and others waited for something to “turn up.” No use looking for work in Blankburg. The process of “eliminating” middlemen and their assistants had given the town an army of unemployed (as the figure of speech has it) by the side of which the out-of-work crowd in an ordinary panic was a mere corporal’s guard. The situation-wanted department in the liner columns diminished—not because the jobs were not desired, but because of lack of funds to pay for the ads and the uselessness of the appeal, anyway. Of course, “the people” were buying their necessities a whole lot cheaper than ever before, but a

CHEAP TURKEY

very large number had already begun to suffer in the process—and the end was not yet. The mayor seemed insatiate, like the sea monster with a multitude of mouths, all “practicable,” as the stage directions say. Some—aside from the victims—began to counsel moderation. “Let us rest on our honors,” they suggested, well content to have the other man’s business plucked but fearful of their own. The mayor’s ambition, however, lay in the direction of “a clean sweep.” He was a “whole-hogger.” The clothing merchant quickly found that his reliance upon his haberdashery was a house built upon the sands. The mayor’s logical mind had quickly perceived the inevitable conclusion that a man is not properly equipped when he has a coat and vest and trousers. He could not

CHEAP TURKEY

face the world so garbed, without embarrassment. Neckwear, hats, collars, cuffs, shirts and underwear soon became part and parcel of the great "at cost" campaign. More of the men's furnishing shops closed up. More merchants sought greener fields, more wonderfully polite young men attempted to locate the spot where politeness might be considered an asset.

The haberdashery "serve - self" proved a little harder to manipulate than the clothing. The mayor, with his beautiful faith in human nature, a faith difficult to understand in one experienced in politics, received many a rude shock. His fervidly announced opinion that not one citizen of Blankburg would be low enough or base enough to take advantage of the kindly municipality that furnished the neces-

CHEAP TURKEY

sities to him "at cost" proved to be slightly erroneous. The temptation to tuck three neckties in the pocket and to pay for only one at the door proved to be a little too strong for certain of Blankburg's electorate. The operation, therefore, of selling "at cost" gave promise of furnishing a wholly unwelcome deficit that the mayor was somewhat at a loss to see how he could take care of. He thought possibly some funds might be diverted from the school-building fund, if done with sufficient finesse, and, as he assured himself, the necessities were more important than education, anyway.

The mayor's campaign proceeded with unabated fury. Hardly a week went by without some line of merchandise coming under the scope of

CHEAP TURKEY

his selling "at cost" plan. It soon became apparent that before many months had passed there would be practically no commercial fields in which the city did not compete, and as the city invariably sold "at cost," the local merchants were usually put out of business, though some survived, to take care of the trade of those sufficiently affluent to be willing to pay the larger price and not be required to wait on themselves and wrap their own packages.

So universal had been the raid that it was marvellous that boots and shoes should have remained untouched as long as they did. For this, John Goodman and a host of others were profoundly thankful. Their jubilation was destined to be rudely interrupted, however, and it fell to the lot of John

CHEAP TURKEY

Goodman himself to be present when His Honor came to the long expected conclusion that it was within the city's province—nay, duty—to garb the nether extremities of its citizens. The mayor had entered the small establishment in which John Goodman toiled for his daily sustenance.

"Show me a pair of shoes," he said, in the tone of one accustomed to homage. After two or three trials, John Goodman succeeded in satisfying His Honor in style, quality and fit—but not in price, as he was soon to learn to his consternation.

"How much?" asked the mayor.

"Four dollars," replied John Goodman, with a fearsome tremble.

"Four dollars!" shouted His Honor. "How much do they cost you?"

CHEAP TURKEY

Shaking from head to foot, John confessed that he didn't know.

"Don't know?" roared the mayor; "then please tell me what these curious little symbols mean."

John reluctantly admitted that they were the cost mark.

"Well, can't you read it?"

Again the unfortunate salesman was obliged to yield to the mayor. Yes, he could read it, but it was a trade secret; his employer would not allow him to divulge it.

"Do you realize who I am, young man?" shouted His Honor; "I'm the mayor of Blankburg. It's my business to reveal to the public just such 'trade secrets' as this. Four dollars for shoes—something rotten in the state of Denmark. When I was a boy they were sold for \$2.50."

CHEAP TURKEY

The mayor indignantly refused to be "held up," as he termed it, and postponed reshodding himself until the municipal shoe store could be put in operation—which it was, within a week.

That afternoon the common council held a memorable executive session called by the president. A lengthy petition was read, demanding a municipal newspaper. The aldermen were inclined to favor it. In vain did the mayor plead that the matter be placed upon the table. His enemies, seeing a chance to lure newspaper support away from him, insisted that the petition be acted upon. The vote was favorable and a committee was appointed to get the municipal daily in active operation at the earliest possible moment. "None of us fellows'll

CHEAP TURKEY

get roasted any more," said one alderman, sagely.

It was with a heavy heart that the mayor went around to the "Beagle's" office to break the sad news to his old friend. To his surprise, he found the door closed and a sign hung upon the window: "Publication temporarily suspended."

"Yes," confessed the editor, when the mayor succeeded in locating him, "the advertising stopped and so the paper stopped. I'm going to change my name and go to Chicago."

About this time the mayor's supporters started to circulate his petitions for the gubernatorial primary. Strange to say, an ungrateful people were extremely reluctant to come to his aid. The people who had been "eliminated" seemed to be the great

CHEAP TURKEY

predominating majority and they were all looking for somebody else's petition to sign. The mayor was desperate. If his own city—the city which he loved and for which he had sacrificed so much—if Blankburg turned against him, how could he hope to win? The governorship, the presidency, receded rapidly from his vision.

Business—which, after all, is the very foundation of the American city—was at a standstill in Blankburg. The main street was one long procession of "To Rent" signs. The population was rapidly dwindling. Those who stayed were unemployed. The factories had all the help needed and the commercial world had been paralyzed. Taxes were due for a big jump. Rather than not sell at exact cost, the mayor had put into the

CHEAP TURKEY

budget various items for assistance in distributing goods. This had given work to a few—if they were of the right party. “Sell out and get out,” became a favorite motto, but in most cases only the latter proved practicable. Every bank in town was enjoying a continuous “run.”

Thanksgiving eve came around again. John Goodman was on his way home. He was looking the reverse of prosperous. Like most of his trade, he was “on the street.” Even a municipal “at cost” hand-me-down he did not see his way clear to afford. No feeling of elation was in his heart now. He was wondering where he could get enough money to “dig out.” He thought of a year ago to-night with a bitter smile. He remembered his wife’s surprise and joy. Yes, tur-

CHEAP TURKEY

key was still cheap. John had seen the price marks at the municipal market on his way home. Turkey was cheap, all right, but John Goodman had no money to pay for it.

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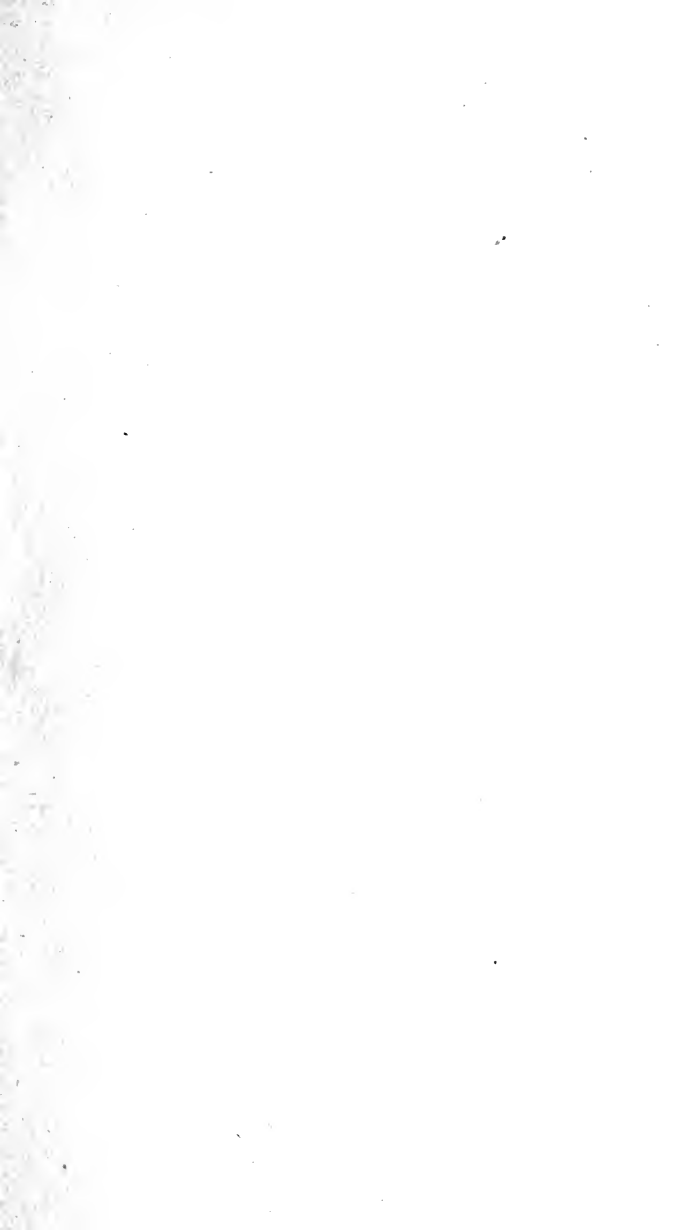
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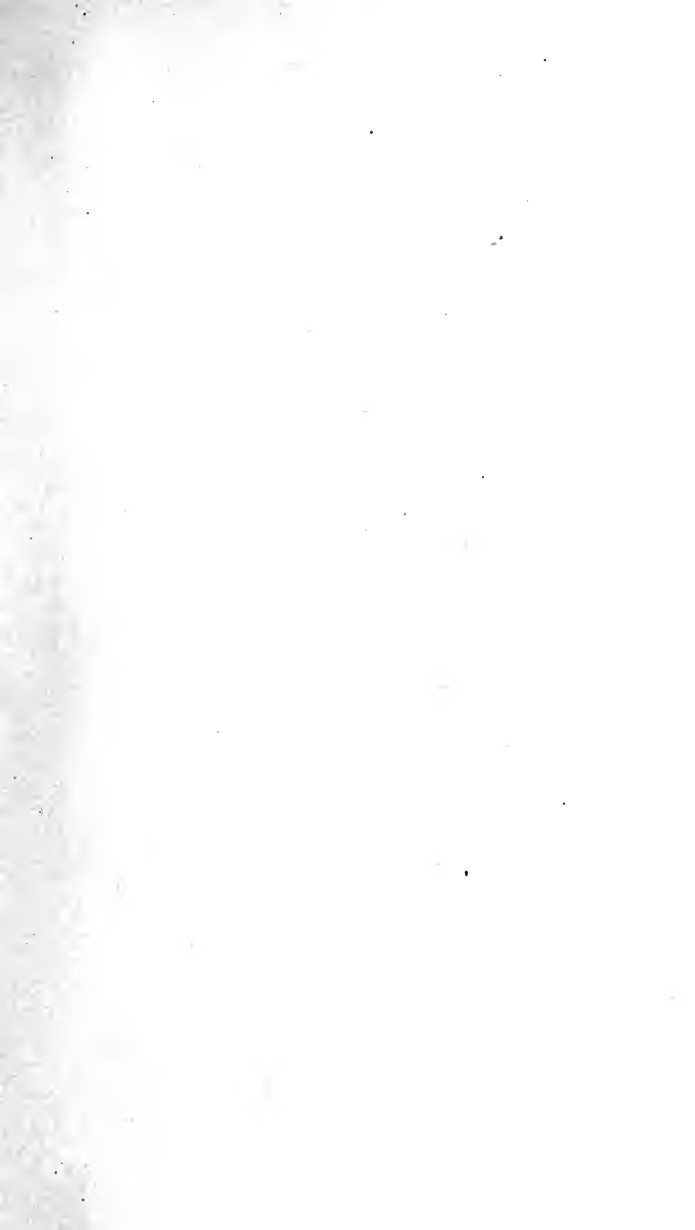
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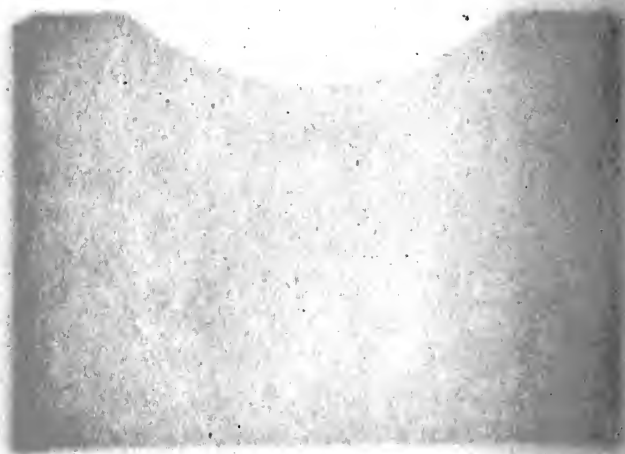
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