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THE SIN OF SHORT WEIGHT AND SCANT MEASURE



Its suppression a reform that lists the efforts of several States

who find it difficult in any event to meet the high prices of foods and necessaries. And reports from other sections of the country show that this pillaging of pockets by means of light weights and short measures is general throughout the land.

TO REALIZE the meaning of this annual theft of \$200,000,000, just look at a few comparative figures.

It will be admitted that the average family can live comfortably on \$2000 a year. Then this yearly steal would support 100,000 families, or 500,000 individuals—the population of the city of Cleveland.

It would cover almost two-thirds of the loss caused by San Francisco's earthquake; would pay the insurance losses in four Baltimore fires. If invested at 6 per cent. it would yield \$12,000,000 annually, which would support many a worthy philanthropic institution.

The interest alone on this vast amount would give, each summer, vacations in the country to all the slum children in the ten largest cities in the United States. Perhaps, if put to such a use, it would compensate to some extent for robbing those children of milk, bread and meats.

It was Fritz Reichmann, superintendent of weights and measures for New York state—practically every other state has such an official—that made the startling statement that the people of New York are defrauded out of \$20,000,000 by means of short weights and measures annually.

He is not a man given to rash statements. His predominating quality is honesty. His position pays \$300 a year.

This doesn't matter to him. He was so impressed with the fiendish, flesh-grabbing system which has for its principal victims the poor, that he undertook a thorough victim tour of the state.

It was after having fully tested, personally, the weighing and measuring conditions in some of the big cities that he made the startling accusation.

Still stronger were his remarks when seen by a representative of this paper. He declared that the whole nefarious condition is traceable to official incapacity or crookedness.

In the state of New York many of the officers sworn to protect the people in the matter of weights and measures have with amazing boldness utterly declined to perform their duty, he asserts.

"In the domestic commerce law," said Mr. Reichmann, "provisions are made for testing and sealing of the weights and measures used in trade. County, city and town sealers are provided for, and their duties prescribed.

LAW IS DISREGARDED

"In the large majority of cases these provisions have not been carried out.

"In more than one-half of the counties the boards of supervisors have not even appointed a county sealer of weights and measures.

"With the exception of Buffalo, Rochester, and most notably New York city, the cities of the state have paid no attention to a rigorous inspection, and the little work that has been done has been most inefficiently done.

"This is caused by the lack of proper state supervision and because the necessity of having active, energetic and efficient men as sealers of weights and measures has never been called to the attention of the authorities.

"Weights and measures enter into every transaction of trade, and the unscrupulous dealer has taken advantage of lack of inspection.

"A great many honest dealers—and the majority are so—have faulty weights and measures through carelessness and ignorance. A very effective and simple aid in the inspection of weights and measures would be that all licenses for retail merchants, for milk dealers, peddlers, hucksters, etc., be issued only when a certificate of inspection by the local sealer of weights and measures is presented, such inspection, of course, having been made immediately preceding the

issuance of the license and accompanied by a sworn statement that all of the weights and measures in their possession have been thus tested."

If any commentary is needed to fully illustrate the enormity of this fraudulent system of selling, it may be found in sidelights which Mr. Reichmann discovered in his tour.

In one meat shop, for instance, he found that the clerks got no salary at all, but secured an income entirely through giving short weight. The actual weight of every piece of meat was known to the proprietor. What the clerk could add to this in making a sale was his own. Thus was robbing reduced to a fine art.

Is New York state isolated in the commission of this crime?

An investigator in Chicago makes an elucidating report.

In Illinois there is a law which makes it an offense punishable by a very severe penalty for a starving mother or child to steal a loaf of bread or an apple from any merchant. There is no state regulation to punish the merchant who steals hundreds of dollars from the child or mother.

RESTRICTIONS EVADED

True, in the state food law there is a paragraph which states that an article of food shall be deemed misbranded, "if in any package form, and the contents are stated in terms of weight or measure, they are not correctly and plainly stated on the outside of the package."

Interpreted, this means that if the weight or measure of a package is stated at all, it shall be correctly stated. All the merchants have to do is not state the weight or measure at all, and then the law offers no restraint over them in any kind of short-weight theft they see fit to perpetrate.

The result is that in nearly every article of food sold in the state of Illinois some merchants steal something of value from the consumer. Not only in food, but in most articles of household consumption, the purchaser is defrauded of some amount of the product bought.

In the item of coal alone the people of Chicago were robbed of \$3,000,000 in one winter, and in the state of Illinois the theft amounted to at least twice that figure.

Next to coal, ice furnishes the source through which the greatest cheats are perpetrated on the people. In nineteen sales out of every twenty ice dealers of Illinois steal from a penny to a dollar's worth. By this means the people are robbed of several million dollars every year, as ice is not sold in packages, and "the contents" are not "stated on the outside of the package," and hence no law is violated.

Next in order of those who realize the greatest harvest through the short weight and measure frauds are packers, whose cunning devices extend throughout the nation.

Many packers used to put up five-pound buckets of lard which contained only four pounds, but a state law was enacted which prohibited them from calling the bucket a five-pound bucket unless it actually contained five pounds. So those who would cheat simply stopped calling the bucket a "five-pound" bucket, but placed the same four pounds of lard in it and sold it for the same price. Of course, the consumer still thinks he is buying five pounds.

Lard is only mentioned by way of illustration. The same shrewd scheme is practiced in the sale of almost all kinds of tinned products.

Illinois is the greatest food producing state in the Union and manufacturers realize a big extra profit every year by holding out small quantities from the consumer.

Wholesale and retail stores teach their employes to steal from customers by shrewd deceptions. Employes of stores are trained to steal from the public from the time they enter the business on penalty of being discharged if they are so "disloyal" as to give honest weights and measures.

Many oyster dealers sell oysters with 25 per cent. water, when the cans or packages are supposed to contain only 5 per cent.

Boxes and bottles are made with raised bottoms.



Last year the Woman's Full Weight Club was organized in Chicago. These women caused the election of Joseph Grein as city sealer. He put a temporary stop to frauds by seizing thousands of fraudulent scales and short weights and measures and making wholesale arrests.

Great wagon loads of fraudulent measures were heaped in piles on the lake front and destroyed in bonfires to the delight of vast crowds. But recently the old conditions have prevailed, and the protests of the Woman's Full Weight Club have been ignored. Joseph Grein was summarily removed from office.

In Illinois the law is like the spider's web, which only catches the little offenders, while the big, heavy ones fall through.

Hundreds of thousands of dollars are lost annually to the people of the city of Cleveland, according to Official Sealer Owen Kane, who declares that the giving of short weights and measures is very generally practiced by almost every class of retailer who is called upon to weigh or measure out his goods.

"There is not a particle of doubt," said Mr. Kane, "that dealers systematically rob their customers. There is no doubt, either, that they in many instances do it knowingly. The blame is not so much, perhaps, with the humble retailer as with the big concerns which manufacture baskets, milk bottles and other things in which stuff is sold to the public.

"Prior to our putting into force a weights and measures ordinance, several months ago, there was not for a period of nine years a basket maker in or near Cleveland who did not make half-bushel baskets short from two to five quarts.

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