

HOW DES MOINES CUT DOWN THE HIGH COST OF LIVING

For a Long Time the People of Des Moines Thought They Knew a Way to Lower the Cost of Living. But One Thing or Another Prevented Their Realizing Their Plan. A Good Many Interests Were Working Against Them. Then Des Moines Elected as Mayor James R. Hanna. Mr. Hanna Believed in the Plan of Reducing Food Prices. Also, He Believed in Fulfilling Pre-election Promises. So Des Moines Got Its Plan. The Following Story Shows How It Got and What It Has Meant to the City, and That Has Been a Lot. Some Food Prices Have Been Reduced by One Half.

(By Arno Doseh, in Pearson's Magazine.)

Des Moines has been cutting down the cost of living. In some instances the people of Des Moines have cut it in half. In most cases they have again made it possible to pay the grocery bill for the whole family out of one moderate salary. That city has taken many steps forward in the past few years, but this is one of the longest. It has added enormously to the material happiness of Des Moines. It is doing away with poverty. It is making better citizens.

Where Des Moines stood, hundreds of American cities still stand. With them, too, economy has reached the stomach. And the worst of it is that, like Des Moines, they are really situated in a horn of plenty. Food is actually spoiling all around them, but they cannot get it. It would be ridiculous if it were not so maddening. Now, Des Moines has solved the problem of getting that food and at the right price. It has another "plan" and when its advantages are understood, it will be even more widely adopted than its first famous "plan" for the commission form of government.

Free Market Place. Des Moines has a free municipal market-place. It has been open since last July and has already saved tens of thousands of dollars to its housewives. It seems so simple now that it is in operation that they cannot help wondering why they were so long about starting it.

But now they are no longer fattening at the expense of the Des Moines dinner table.

Public Opinion Did It. Condition that existed in Des Moines exist in all cities. Perhaps you can bring about an adoption of its plan. The force of public opinion can do it almost anywhere. For a New York or a Chicago it is hardly feasible; but in cities well past a hundred thousand it will prove effective. That means it can be used to cut down the cost of living for almost half the city population.

You hear constant complaint about the price of butter and eggs, potatoes and cabbages. It has been the common complaint everywhere. Possibly you think the farmers who produce these things are rolling in wealth. They are not. The middleman is getting the profits. He is underpaying the farmer and overcharging you. But all you need to do to undermine his greed is to deal directly with the farmer. In a small town you can usually do it. That is why small towns get the reputation of being cheap places in which to live.

Hanna Got It. Des Moines wanted a market-place years before it was able to get one. There were many forces working against it, but, finally, the people won out. James R. Hanna was elected mayor, pledged to see it realized, and Mayor Hanna believes in keeping campaign promises. There was no question as to the need of the market. Des Moines was even in a worse position than other cities. A comparison showed it was paying more for its flour than the twelve largest surrounding cities. It was paying seventy-five cents more for a bushel of potatoes than Chicago. Prices on all other forms of food were proportionately excessive. But more striking yet was the difference in prices between Des Moines and the smaller country towns immediately surrounding it and within driving distance.

Some Prices. When the agitation for a market place was at its height last summer a man who objected to paying 29 Des Moines, and bought eggs that out to Carlisle, fourteen miles from

Des Moines, and bought eggs that had been laid that day for seven cents a dozen. When cherries were selling at ten cents a quart basket they could be had in the surrounding country for the picking. The price paid the farmers was so low that they let them rot on the trees. Meanwhile, Des Moines was chery hungry. The difference in prices in and out of Des Moines was so glaring that commercial travelers were making a habit of buying for their own and their neighbors' tables in smaller places and bringing their purchases back to the city with them.

Had an Example. Des Moines also had an example. The smaller city of Dubuque had succeeded in maintaining a free market for many years. It had been able to do this largely on account of its size. If it had been as big as Des Moines it would probably also have lost it. Nevertheless, it served for purposes of comparison. Food could be brought into Des Moines as cheap-

ly as to Dubuque. The mayor sent his secretary, Edward Lytton, to Dubuque to make a personal investigation. He found that new potatoes were selling for a dollar and a half a bushel; Des Moines was paying three dollars. By the peck this made a difference of between forty and seventy-five cents. Green beans were selling for ten cents a quart. The Des Moines price that day were twenty cents. Blackberries were selling for a dollar and seventy-five cents a crate. Des Moines was paying two dollars and a half. Cucumbers were bringing twenty cents a dozen. Des Moines was paying ten cents a piece. And in addition, the citizens of Dubuque were getting fruits and vegetables as fresh as if they had taken them from their own gardens.

Needed a Market. The investigation left no question but that Des Moines needed a market place. It was also said that there was a food trust in Des Moines maintained by the grocers, commission men, the creameries and butter and egg houses. Whether they worked under an understanding was not established, but the effect was the same. They succeeded in maintaining prices much too high. But their influence was so strong they had always proved themselves able to prevent any action that threatened to interfere with their profits. They numbered upwards of seven hundred in this city of less than one hundred thousand and with the support of other business interests they long had a free hand.

Strong Sentiment Aroused. Mayor Hanna aroused a stronger sentiment to oppose them. He showed the other business interests why they ought to be on the side of the free market. Manufacturers and other employers of labor were quick to see that they were being constantly forced to raise wages to meet the higher cost of living. This, in turn, increased the cost of output and

MYSTERY IN DEATH OF WOMAN DOCTOR FOUND WITH THROAT CUT



Absence of clues and an apparent lack of motive for the deed throw a mystery about the supposed murder of Dr. Helene Knabe, former state bacteriologist, who was found with her throat slashed in her apartments in Indianapolis. Katherine McPherson, an assistant to the dead woman, discovered the body.

MISS KATHERINE MCPHERSON DR. HELENE KNABE

made it difficult for them to compete with concerns in other places where the cost of living was lower. And so he got their support. As soon as the situation was made clear to them they came over to his side and made it possible to get the free market. This argument carries far. I should like to point out to manufacturers and employers of labor in general that they can forestall increases in wages they see staring them in the face by making it possible for their operatives and employes to purchase at free markets.

Like Raise in Wages. For a cheap market has the effect of a raise in wages. It helps both the wage earner and his employer. When the cost of the real necessities of life is low, laborers can afford to work for a comparatively low wage. They cannot afford to work for ordinary wages when the cost of living is extraordinarily high. You see a city market is a sociological institution. It is intimately related to the whole industrial and economic problem of city life. It deeply affects not only the industrial and commercial prosperity of the business and manufacturing interests, but also the economic and social well-being of the people at large. It was not until this was brought home to the business interests affected that Des Moines got its city market. Des Moines proved that it was economic and good business to have a free market, and that is what I hope to show to other cities.

Site Secured. A space in front of the city hall and an adjacent street were set aside for the market by the city council. The ordinance was in effect a proclamation and the publicity given it by the newspapers made it generally known that the market place could be open from five to ten in the morning on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays during the summer, and from six to ten-thirty every week day during the winter. There was little danger of the market place not being well advertised. It was a burning public question.

Two days before the free market

was opened one of the newspapers, the Capital, made a careful investigation of what the farmer was being paid and what the consumer was paying. It found young radishes and onions being sold by the farmers at fifteen cents a dozen bunches, and retailers were charging five cents a bunch or three bunches for a dime. Cabbages were bringing the farmers forty cents a dozen, but the consumer was paying ten cents a pound. Some of these cabbages weighed as high as two pounds. Pie-plant was bringing the grower twenty cents a dozen bunches, but the retailer was getting five cents a bunch. The profit in the mere handling of these vegetables was, in each case, from 350 to 400 per cent.

More Prices. Growers were paid nine cents a dozen for ears of corn. Housewives were paying twenty cents. Eggs were being sold by poultry raisers at eight, ten and twelve cents a dozen. In the shops they were selling for twenty cents. Tomatoes were sold by growers at seven cents a pound and retailed at fifteen. The best country butter, bought at fifteen cents a pound, was selling for twenty-eight. The profit in these articles was 90 to more than 100 per cent.

Two days later the free market was opened. The farmers knew of it and twenty-four wagons were backed up in front of the city hall at five o'clock in the morning. By seven they were overwhelmed with buyers. The prices tell the story. New potatoes sold at the market-place for a dollar and a half. Grocery stores were asking two dollars and forty to two dollars and seventy-five cents. Cooking apples were to be had at from forty to sixty cents a bushel. In the stores the price was one dollar. Eating apples brought a dollar. The stores charged two dollars and up. Two pounds of tomatoes were to be had for fifteen cents instead of one pound, as in the stores. Cucumbers could be had at twenty-five cents a dozen. The stores still wanted ten cents apiece. The highest price for the very best eggs was sixteen cents. At the stores you

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"Alias Jimmy Valentine", Being the Story by O. Henry on Which Play is Based

This story, on which the play "Alias Jimmy Valentine" is based, is taken from "Roads of Destiny," a volume of O. Henry's short stories, by permission of the publishers, Doubleday, Page & Co., Garden City, New York.

BY O. HENRY. A guard came to the prison shoe shop, where Jimmy Valentine was assiduously stitching uppers, and escorted him to the front office. There the warden handed Jimmy his pardon, which had been signed that morning by the governor. Jimmy took it in a tired kind of way. He had served nearly ten months of a four-year sentence. He had expected to stay only about three months, at the longest. When a man with as many friends on the outside as Jimmy Valentine had is received in the "str" it is hardly worth while to cut his hair.

next morning Jimmy stood in the warden's outer office. He had on a suit of the villainously fitting ready-made clothes and a pair of the stiff, squeaky shoes that the state furnishes to its discharged compulsory guests.

The clerk handed him a railroad ticket and the five-dollar bill with which the law expected him to rehabilitate himself into good citizenship and prosperity. The warden gave him a cigar, and shook hands. Valentine, 2762, was chronicled on the books, "Pardoned by Governor," and Mr. James Valentine walked out into the sunshine.

Disregarding the song of the birds, the waving green trees and the smell of the flowers, Jimmy headed straight for a restaurant. There he tasted the first sweet joys of liberty in the shape of a broiled chicken and a bottle of white wine—followed by a cigar a grade better than the one the warden had given him. From there he proceeded leisurely to the depot. He tossed a quarter into the hat of a blind man by the door, and boarded his train. Three hours set him down in a little town near the state line. He went to the cafe of one Mike Dolan and shook hands with Mike, who was alone behind the bar.

"Sorry we couldn't make it sooner, Jimmy, me boy," said Mike. "But we had that protest from Springfield to buck against, and the governor nearly balked. Feeling all right?" "Fine," said Jimmy. "Got my key?" He got his key and went upstairs, unlocking the door of a room at the rear. Everything was just as he had left it. There on the floor was still Ben Price's collar button that had been torn from that eminent detective's shirt band when they had overpowered Jimmy to arrest him. Pulling out from the wall a folding bed, Jimmy slid back a panel in the wall and dragged out a dust-covered suitcase. He opened this and gazed fondly at the finest set of



burglar's tools in the east. It was a complete set, made of specially tempered steel, the latest designs in drills, punches, braces and bits, jimmies, clamps and augers, with two or three novelties, invented by Jimmy himself, in which he took pride. Over nine hundred dollars they had cost him to have made at a place where they make such things for the profession.

In half an hour Jimmy went down stairs and through the cafe. He was now dressed in tasteful and well fitting clothes, and carried his dusted and cleaned suitcase in his hand. "Got anything on?" asked Mike Dolan, genially. "Me?" said Jimmy. In a puzzled tone. "I don't understand. I'm representing the New York Amalgamated Short Snap Biscuit Cracker and Frazzled Wheat Company."

This statement delighted Mike to such an extent that Jimmy had to take a salt-and-milk on the spot. He never touched "hard" drinks. A week after the release of Valentine, 2762, there was a neat job of safe burglary done in Richmond, Indiana, with no clue to the author. A scant eight hundred dollars was all that was secured. Two weeks after that a patented, improved, burglar-proof safe in Logansport was opened like a cheese to the tune of fifteen hundred dollars, currency; securities and silver untouched. That began to interest the rogue catchers. Then an old-fashioned bank safe in Jefferson City became active and threw out of its crater an eruption of bank notes amounting to five thousand dollars. The losses were now high enough to bring the matter up into Ben Price's class of work. By comparing notes, a remarkable similarity in the methods of the burglaries was noticed. Ben Price investigated the scenes of the robberies and was heard to remark:

Ben Price knew Jimmy's habits. He had learned them while working up the Springfield case. Long Jumps, quick get-aways, no confederates and a taste for good society—these ways had helped Mr. Valentine to become noted as a successful dodger of retribution. It was given out that Ben Price had taken up the trail of the elusive crackman, and other people with burglar-proof safes felt more at ease.

One afternoon Jimmy Valentine and his suitcase climbed out of the mill-back in Elmore, a little town five miles off the railroad down in the black-jack country of Arkansas. Jimmy, looking like an athletic young senior just home from college, went down the board sidewalk toward the hotel.

A young lady crossed the street, passed him at the corner and entered a door over which was the sign "The Elmore Bank." Jimmy Valentine looked into her eyes, forgot what he was, and became another man. She lowered her eyes and colored slightly. Young men of Jimmy's style and looks were scarce in Elmore. Jimmy collared a boy that was loafing on the steps of the bank, as if he were one of the stockholders, and began to ask him questions about the town, feeding him dimes at intervals. By and by the young lady came out, looking royally unconscious of the young man with the suitcase, and went her way.

"Isn't that young lady Miss Polly Simpson?" asked Jimmy, with speculative gulf. "Naw," said the boy. "She's Annabel Adams. Her pa owns this bank. What'd you come to Elmore for? Is that a gold watch chain? I'm going to get a bulldog. Got any more dimes?" Jimmy went to the Planters' hotel, registered as Ralph D. Spencer, and engaged a room. He leaned on the desk and declared his platform to the clerk. He said he had come to Elmore to look for a location to go into business. How was the shoe busi-

ness, now, in the town? He had thought of the shoe business. Was there an opening?

The clerk was impressed by the clothes and manner of Jimmy. He, himself, was something of a pattern of fashion to the thinly glided youth of Elmore, but he now perceived his shortcomings. While trying to figure out Jimmy's manner of tying his four-in-hand he cordially gave information.

Yes, there ought to be a good opening in the shoe line. There wasn't an exclusive shoe store in the place. The dry goods and general stores handled them. Business in all lines was fairly good. Hoped Mr. Spencer would decide to locate in Elmore. He would find it a pleasant town to live in and the people very sociable.

Mr. Spencer thought he would stop over in the town for a few days, and look over the situation. No, the clerk needn't call the boy. He would carry up his suitcase himself; it was rather heavy. Mr. Ralph Spencer, the phoenix that arose from Jimmy Valentine's ashes—ashes left by the flame of a sudden and alternative attack of love—remained in Elmore and prospered. He opened a shoe store and secured a good run of trade.

Socially he was also a success, and made many friends. And he accomplished the wish of his heart. He met Miss Annabel Adams, and became more and more captivated by her charms. At the end of a year the situation of Mr. Ralph Spencer was this; he had won the respect of the community, his shoe store was flourishing and he and Annabel were engaged to be married in two weeks. Mr. Adams, the typical, plodding country banker, approved of Spencer. Annabel's pride in him almost equalled her affection. He was as much at home in the family of Mr. Adams and that of Annabel's married sister as if he were already a member. One day Jimmy sat down in his

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