

THE MAYOR OF BELLTOWN

(By William H. Osborne.)

William McClenahan had the white man's burden on his shoulders. He had been elected mayor of Belltown. And Belltown was a bankrupt town; financially and materially, Belltown was sunk into the Slough of Despond.

William McClenahan was something more than the mere mayor of Belltown. He was the sole proprietor of the white store in New York. He had good stuff to sell, and he knew how to talk about it; and people listened, and came and bought. His white store, a store built upon a mammoth scale, was the result. None but McClenahan knew that the receipts of the store barely balanced expenses; that the store hung quivering on the brink of a precipice.

McClenahan was a bachelor, a tall, broad-shouldered young man of 38 or thereabouts. He enjoyed the luxuries of life; he wanted comfort. He had looked about him for a home, and his eye had rested upon Belltown. He thought he saw in Belltown a place of possibilities. But he had not lived there six months before there settled down upon him the pall of discouragement that all the other Belltowners felt. The place was dead.

"What Belltown needed, first, was money; and, later, people. The outside world must take an interest in Belltown, or it was doomed. But it needed money to put it into shape."

"I've got to get that money," whispered McClenahan to himself, "and I've got to get it one the outside. I can't spend a cent of my own. I can't afford it; and these chaps in Belltown won't hand out a dollar. I've got to get it somewhere, on the outside."

Two days after his election as mayor of Belltown, he swung into the private office of the president of "Food," a corporation on Broadway. "Food," the corporation, knew how to advertise Food, the product. It had been the advertisement that had attracted McClenahan, and now he was master in the art of advertisement.

"I'm William McClenahan of the white store, and mayor of Belltown," announced McClenahan to Barker, the head of the Food corporation. "I used to advertise for the Manhattan, and I want to make a deal."

McClenahan didn't stop there. He told him many things. And when he had finished the president rose and tapped McClenahan on the shoulder.

"By George, Mr. McClenahan!" he said, "the very thing, the very thing, by George!"

Two days later all Belltown and all New York were electrified by a Food corporation advertisement that was spread thickly and liberally upon the sheets of dailies, upon the outside of weeklies, and over all the available stumps and posts and fences.

It announced in substance that for a period of two weeks before Christmas William McClenahan, proprietor of the white store and mayor of Belltown, would walk daily in Belltown in his train in the morning and from his train in the afternoon clad, as a sandwich man, between boards plastered with the gaudy advertisements of Food itself. The advertisement stated further that the mayor would receive for this service the sum of \$25,000, to be paid by Food into the coffers of the town of Belltown, a beautiful but bankrupt town. The whole thing was to be done in the interests of Belltown; for that town McClenahan was raising money in the only way it could be raised.

One thing was certain—people read this preliminary announcement; the crowd sat up and began to take notice; so far, so good.

The newspaper reporters, brought McClenahan for a statement, but he refused to be interviewed. He maintained a silence that was discreet, if not significant.

The performance was to commence on the morning of Monday, the 12th.

"Now," he said, finally, "what are you fellows talking about? What advertisement?" They produced the announcement which he had already looked upon a hundred times. He read it through again.

"It's a lie," he said, "from the beginning to the end. What? Catch me as a sandwich man, for any half-baked food concern? Not much!"

*This terse sentence spread like wild-

fire. The mayor of Belltown had refused to carry out the conditions of the contract—at least so he had said.

The public waited until Monday morning. New York waited Belltown waited. When the 7.49 train pulled into the little town that morning, its passengers from up the road pushed up refractory windows and leaned far out to see the fun. The station crowd at Belltown had trebled in numbers. Excitement was rampant.

"But, where's the mayor?" queried the crowd. No one knew. But suddenly, as the train once more started up, a neat little trap darted around the corner, a man jumped out, sprinted across the platform and caught the last car of the train.

It was McClenahan, clad only in customary garments, and without the sign of a poster or a sandwich board about him. The people held their breath.

Again was he brought before as many of the press crowd as had climbed aboard.

It is a living fact that there is nothing a newspaper so detests as to find in its reading matter a name, word, phrase or sentence that, by any means, could be turned into an advertisement. But McClenahan, to this point, had been close-mouthed, and the reporters had rushed upon him with an ardor born of his previous silence.

"Now, look here," said McClenahan, "you take me down word for word, or at it out. I'll tell you everything there is to tell; but, no monkey business, see?"

They saw, and said as much, holding their pencils poised in the air. And then he started in.

When he had finished, the reporters went away with the biggest two column advertisement scandal they had ever had. And day after day from that time on, McClenahan was waylaid by gentlemen of the press to each of whom he talked for publication.

McClenahan now began a suit for libel. But Food rose in its indignation and told a tale it had to tell. It did more. It exhibited the written contract of the Belltown mayor. And Food commenced a suit for breach of contract.

The libel suit was the first to be reached for trial. It was short enough, and by noon McClenahan's case was in. It consisted merely of published announcements and these published announcements, in themselves, were sufficient, in the eye of the community and of the law, to hold McClenahan to the ridicule of the public, of his friends, to injure him in his social standing, if not his business. Food attempted to put in evidence that written contract of McClenahan. McClenahan smiled.

"I didn't sign it," he swore. He was right. The whole world knows McClenahan's signature. It's on the white store hoistery—it is on many white store things. And the signature on the written contract was not even a weak imitation.

"Thirty thousand dollars," said the jury after being out for 60 seconds, "\$30,000 damage for the plaintiff."

This ought to have smashed Food. But Food was not through. It insisted upon proceeding with its own damage suit, based upon the breach of that unprovable written contract—the contract of the poster and the sandwich board.

Old Terwilliger, the local counsel for Food, told the reporter that he had a surprise to spring, and that Food had hustled its stumps overnight and had overwhelming evidence. Peters and Bond, local counsel for McClenahan, merely laughed. But they did not laugh later, as will be seen.

For old Terwilliger had barely sunk into his seat after opening the case to the jury, than he called out in a loud clear voice for "Thomas J. Hackett."

Hackett stepped to the stand. "What," asked Terwilliger, "was your business in November of last year?"

"Confidential clerk," returned the witness, "to Mr. McClenahan of the white store."

"Ever see this?" asked Terwilliger, waving the contract before the witness. The witness had. He had done more than see it. He had presented it at the instance of Mr. McClenahan, and he had a draft of it, O. K'd by McClenahan, and bearing McClenahan's initials, this time in the unmistakable handwriting of the proprietor of a white store.

"Who signed the contract?" asked Terwilliger.

"I did," answered Hackett, "in the presence of Mr. McClenahan and the bookkeeper. He asked me to sign it with

his name, and said there was a reason for it."

And McClenahan's defence, "I didn't sign it," didn't go. And this jury found against McClenahan in the sum of \$30,000. It was all over. But, even then, the public didn't know just where it stood. Each seemed to be vindicated.

But the newspapers did the best they could. They took the testimony down, and printed it—and it was all fit to print; and then there were interviews galore and mutual recriminations between Food and McClenahan.

"Swindler!" exclaimed Food to the mayor of Belltown.

"You—swindler!" answered he.

The next day found McClenahan sitting in the private office of the president of Food. McClenahan held out his hand.

"Mr. Barker," he said, "congratulations, mine."

Barker swung about easily in his chair. "How," he asked, "is the white store?"

"Booming," answered McClenahan.

"How is Food?"

"Booming," replied Barker. "How—how is Belltown?"

"In each detail," asserted Barker. He picked up his ruler and smote the table with his hand.

"Booming!" he cried, with happy emphasis, "everybody's coming out there to reside."

He sat back in his chair and looked at the president. Suddenly the two broke into a wild guffaw.

"Great," he said, "it," said McClenahan. Barker nodded.

"Great," he answered, "and just because, at minimum cost, the whole world knows about Food, and about the white store."

"And," added McClenahan, "about Belltown."

Barker swung once more to his desk. "Mr. McClenahan," he said, drawing out his check book and opening it, "here is a check for \$25,000 to the order of Belltown."

McClenahan rose. "Then," he said, "you recognize the fact that our understanding was carried out in each detail?"

"In each detail," assented Barker. He picked up his ruler and with two hasty strokes tore off the check.

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WILL TALK SUBSIDIES

Premiers of Quebec and P. E. Island to Confer on Provincial Subsidies Tonight.

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