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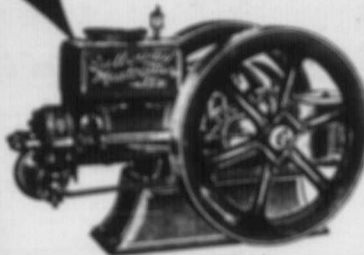
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What Mary meant by "Rats"

How a Kansas Farmer Changed His Mind and Joined the Crowd Who "Voted Darned Near Straight"

(The Woman Did It.—John Sherman)

I was one of them "fool farmers;" yes, I'll own it like a man; There was plenty of us fashioned on the same peculiar plan; And I've lived out here in Kansas more than five and twenty years. A growin' poorer and poorer, as it certainly appears.

I seldom read the newspapers; I work too hard for that; And I never knew why I got lean while other men got fat. I didn't fool with politics; I had too much to do; But I always voted as I shot and as they told me to.

The day before election, just imagine my distress, When I ketched my wife a readin'—now, whatever would you guess? A free trade publication, and, to make it worse, she said She'd read it regular each night before she went to bed.

And, do you know, that wife of mine jest faced me up and down That farmers slave to make a few monopolists in town; I always try to get around these warm domestic spats, But when I praised protection she laughed and answered, "Rats!"

I bristled up; it kindled all the elements of strife That this free trade stuff should be corruptin' of my wife; I quit her then and there before her argument was thru, As every good protectionist makes it a rule to do.

That night we had a camp-fire and our congressman was there; We gave him "John Brown's Body" when he went to take the chair; I wore my old blue uniform to spite the Democrats, But all the time I wondered what my Mary meant by "Rats!"

Our congressman was eloquent, he made a stirrin' speech; I could almost see the battle-smoke and hear the bullets screech; And when he bade us vote as we had shot at Malvern Hill, We rose with one accord and cried with one acclaim, "We will!"

We sang the good old war songs, and we ate a mess o' beans, And we passed the evenin' pleasantly, recallin' bloody scenes; And we took the straight-out tickets and we pinned 'em on our hats, But all the time I wondered what my Mary meant by "Rats!"

When I reached home I noticed that my Mary wore a smile, Which seemed to me as indicatin' storms ahead or bile; To head her off I said: "You'll call me early, mother dear, For to-morrow'll be the liveliest day free trade will have this year."

Next mornin' jest at sun-up, as I woke and rubbed my eyes, A wonderin' what she meant by "Rats," I saw to my surprise My clothes, and hat and boots all ranged in order on the floor, And bearin' each a card I'd swear I never saw before.

My flannel shirt displayed this sign: "Taxed 95 per cent.;" My trousers "Taxed 100"—so this is what "Rats" meant; My vest said "Taxed 100," and my shoes "Taxed 25," My coat and hat "200," with, "Protection makes us thrive."

I went to fill the basin and I noticed as I came, "Taxed 45 per cent.;" Great Scott! the towel said the same! The soap was marked at "20," as I dropped it on the floor, I chanced to see a scuttle full of coals, chalked "24."

I passed into the kitchen and it gave me pain to state That my wife had on a woollen dress stamped "Only 58;" And in shooting out a guinea hen she made a little dive Which showed a pair of stockings with a card marked "35."

The baby in his little bed was lyin' fast asleep; I always held the little chap as most uncommon cheap; But when I saw them cards on blanket, pillow, crib and sheet, I felt a hump rise in my throat; I knew that I was beat.

No matter where I went I struck them pesky little signs, The stove, the plates, the knives, the forks, the window sash and blinds, The scissors, the needles, thread, all bore that terrible per cent. Bigosh, I didn't dare ask what card was on the rent.

That was the soberest meal I ever ate in all my life; And as I left the table in remarkin' to my wife, That I was going to the polls, she helped me with my coat, And said: "I reckon, John, I needn't tell you how to vote."

I walked down to my votin' place, it looked like every yard Was full of farming implements which bore a little card; And seemed to say from plow to spade, from thresher down to ax, "Good mornin', John, and don't forget the tariff is a tax."

I voted straight—Oh, yes, no doubt of that; I voted straight, But not exactly in the way expected of my state. And I showed the boys the little cards provided by my wife; That night our congressman took formal leave of public life.

I was one of them "fool farmers" durin' five and twenty years, But I've learned a little common sense, as doubtless now appears; You can run and tell McKinley, and—say—don't forget to state That we've voted out in Kansas, and we've voted darned near straight!
—From Kansas City Star, 20 years ago.

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