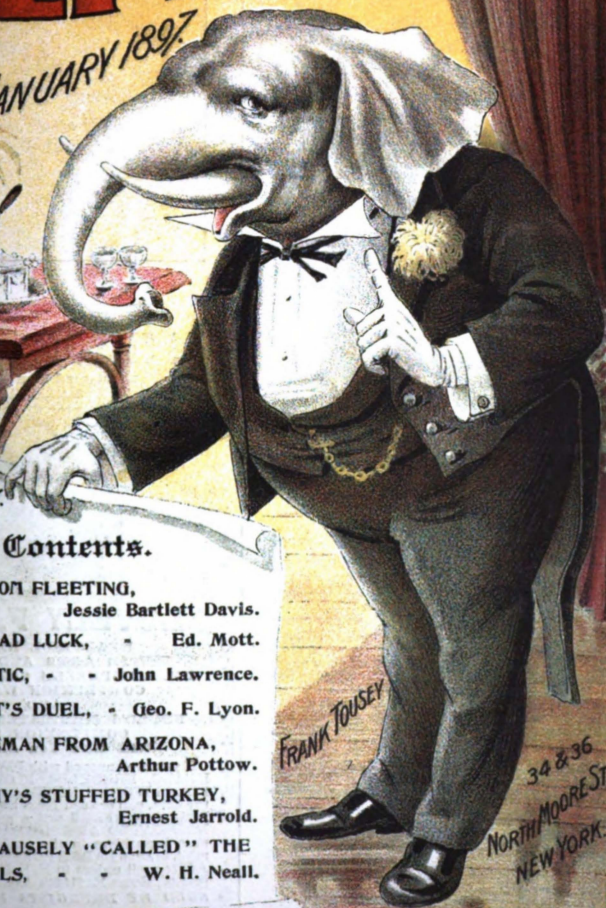


THE

WHITE ELEPHANT

5 Cents.

JANUARY 1897



A Happy
New Year.

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FRANK TOUSEY

34 & 36
NORTH MOORE ST.,
NEW YORK.

MRS. MURPHY'S STUFFED TURKEY.

BY ERNEST JARROLD.



It had been the custom for many years of the managers of the cement quarries on Cooney Island, where Michael Finn was employed, to give the men each a turkey on New Year's day. But owing to a depression in business the turkeys were not distributed on the day before New Year's, 1896. There were two practical jokers in the quarries, however, who determined that Mr. Finn should have a turkey. So they procured the legs of an old gobbler, and with the help of a piece of sacking, stuffed with straw and rags, and properly weighted, they managed to make a very fine imitation of a turkey, weighing eighteen pounds. To the imitation turkey was attached a card bearing the legend, written in a neat hand :

The Hon. James Lindsley desires to express his appreciation of Michael Finn's services during the year by a small token. Happy New Year!

The turkey was placed in a conspicuous place in the quarry, and when Mike's gaze fell upon it he smiled broadly. The workmen gathered around as he carefully weighed the alleged turkey in his horny hand, and to the hearty congratulations replied :

"Well, lads, I'm sorry for ye, but it's aisy seein' that Mr. Lindsley knows well who airns his money!"

Throwing the turkey over his shoulder he trudged homeward up the Old Point road whistling "The Washerwoman's Lament," while the stars winked mischievously at him and the moon withdrew behind a cloud to hide her smiles. When he arrived at his shanty his wife relieved him of his burden with cries of delight, and when little Mike, his son, who had "edication," read the card, Mrs. Finn threw her arms around her husband's

neck and kissed him, so keen was her appreciation of his worth as indicated by the card.

"It's only natural that you should have a turkey, Mike," said she heartily, "shure there's niver another like you in the quarry."

Mike, like most other men, accepted this encomium as his due, yet still he felt called upon to rebuke the partner of his joys by saying:

"Now thin, Biddy, I'm twinty-wan; don't be givin' me any of yer blather, but go and get the turkey ready for the pot."

"Faix I'll not, thin," replied Biddy.

"And why won't ye?" asked Mike in a surprised tone.

"Bekase I have the blue hin and a goose already kilt for the dinner to-morrow."

"Begorra, but that's too bad," replied Mike, "but I suppose the turkey'll keep, won't it?"

"Faith, it will not thin, Mike," said Mrs. Finn, "it's too fat and plump to keep long."

Her reply made Mike thoughtful for a few moments. He blew rings of smoke toward the ceiling and at last, taking his pipe from his mouth, exclaimed:

"Biddy, how many childer has Mrs. Murphy?"

"Three, Mike," was the reply.

"And her husband's dead three months, eh?"

"Yis, three months lasht Tuesday, they buried him, God pity him!"

"Biddy?"

"Yis, Mike."

"We'll give the turkey to Mrs. Murphy."

"Oh, Mike, ye darlin' man, may the saints sthand bechune you and harrum! av coorse we will, acushla. The dear woman! won't she be crazy wid deloight!"

After supper the whole family started out to present the turkey to Mrs. Murphy. Little Mike went ahead with the turkey over his shoulder, his father and mother walking arm in arm behind. The man in the moon had smiled when Mike went home with the turkey, but as he looked down upon the trio carrying the bird already stuffed, to the starving widow, he burst into a "ha! ha!" which reverberated through the aisles of space like the booming of artillery. When the turkey was laid upon the table, Mrs. Murphy burst into tears of gratitude and the fatherless children gathered wonderingly around and critically ex-

amined the remarkable New Year present. Mike sent his son down to the grocery for a pint of the stuff which both cheers and inebriates, and Mrs. Murphy made some smoking hot punch which the elders drank to the health of everybody and to themselves in particular. Mrs. Murphy called down the blessings of all the saints in the calendar upon the heads of her kindly neighbors. Then she tucked up her skirts and danced a reel upon the hearthstone just as she had done in Ballyscuttry hundreds of times in her youth. All the cares of life dropped away from the little group under the genial influence of the "crater" and the New Year time. Laughter and song kept the little Murphys awake until long after midnight, while the stuffed turkey hung by the legs from the eaves to keep it fresh and cool for the pot on the following day. When the chimes in St. Mary's steeple told the hour of one, the Finn family returned to their home, their hearts glowing with kindness and filled with the consciousness of genuine philanthropy.

New Year's day broke clear and bright over Cooney Island. The sun shone through the windows upon Mrs. Murphy as she laid the turkey upon the dissecting table and began the operation necessary to prepare the fowl for dinner. She had made a small incision in the south-west end of the sacking covering the fictitious bird, when a piece of rag fell upon the table, followed quickly by nearly a quart of small stones containing a large percentage of cement. These stones were really valuable in a lime kiln, but of no particular use inside a turkey—at least, this was the view Mrs. Murphy took of their presence. An angry scowl overspread her face as she exclaimed :

"By the hair on Moll Kelly's cat, I never thought much of them Finns anyway. They are a dirty lot to play so mane a trick on a widdy wid three starvin' childer. But I'll give Mike Finn back his turkey, so I will, wid me two hands, and may the curse of Kisogue rest upon him and Biddy and the lad, bad luck to them !"

Mrs. Murphy was a large and muscular woman. There was a stern look on her strong face, and a fierce setting of the jaws together, as she started up the Old Point road, carrying the turkey by the legs, and leaving a trail of fine cement stone behind her. Mr. Finn was awakened from his morning nap by a tremendous knock on the door. Turning over, half awake, he said :

"Mickey, go and open the door, that's a good lad."

Little Mike, partially dressed, went to the door, and standing upon the stoop was Mrs. Murphy. She stepped aside, and swinging the turkey around her head, she brought the bird into violent contact with the boy's head, knocking him over the stove. Then rushing into the bedroom before either Mr. Finn or his wife could arise, she began to lambaste them with the remains of the imitation fowl. And to the rattle of cement stones against the wall and ceiling she kept up a running accompaniment such as :

“Hide yer head, ye spalpeen, Mike Finn! Get under the quilt, ye omadhoun! Chate the widdy and her childer, will ye! Make me a New Year's present of rags and stones, will ye! Oh, ye scut ye, Biddy! May hell fire roast ye and the divvil fly away wid ye. My heavy hand on both of ye, that ye may ate burnt feathers and drink vinegar when the thirst is on ye! Show yer dirty face, Mike, and I'll ram the legs down yer red neck!”

When the door banged behind the angry woman, Mr. Finn got out of bed and picked the cement stones out of his ears and whiskers. Then he comforted his wife, who, with hair streaming down her back and uplifted hands, exclaimed :

“Holy murther! 'Tis a cruel man that stuffed that turkey! Usha, but Mrs. Murphy must be crazy!”

Mr. Finn went into the kitchen, and found Mickey in the corner nursing a bruised shin.

“She threw me over the stove, father,” said the boy, with a grimace of pain. “I wonder what ailed her?”

“Faith, I dunno, me boy. I'm afeared she's gone crazy wid joy bekase she got the turkey. Begorra, 'tis the lasht time I'll make a fool o' mesilf wid me generosity. The nixt time I have a turkey to give away, I'll kape it myself. Go to bed, boy; you'll freeze yourself.”

Thus the New Year dawned on Cooney Island.