



RODNEY THOMSON

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BUCKEYE BRIDGE AND THE BIG TURKEY

By William H. Hamby



"WHAT we need is to be famous," remarked Windy Jim Davis.

A derisive laugh ran down the string of after sundown resters that sat on the edge of the platform in front of Newton's hardware store.

"That's right," insisted Windy. "I'll bet if a feller was in Kansas City or Saint Louis and said he was from Buckeye Bridge they'd say: 'Huh, where's that?'"

"I suppose," said Judd Thomas, "the way for this town to get famous is to buy that back forty of yours and start a rattlesnake ranch."

Windy ignored the laugh and started to propose a plan. But Judd Thomas interrupted him.

"There comes Billy Houck; let's ask him. If anybody can make this burg famous it's his."

"Say, Billy," called Windy as he was about to pass down the road, which in town was called a street, "we got a job for you."

Billy paused a moment, squinted his left eye and glanced down the line with the merest hint of a tolerant smile.

"I reckon," he said deliberately, "if you fellows have a job of any kind it's for somebody else."

"No, honest, Billy," protested Windy Jim. "We are in earnest; it needs stirring up; it ought to boom. As the book says, it ain't known in the gates. What it needs is to get its name in the papers—to become famous; and we want you to take the contract."

One of Billy's infrequent smiles flickered across his face and he remarked as he started on:

"There's lots harder jobs than that." Directly Andrew Turner, who had started the discussion about the town's needs, got up and went down the street to his little frame office. He sat down in front of the roll-top desk, on top of it were several dusty atlases, some agricultural reports and a stack of old papers. On the walls hung large posters advertising Florida and Texas and Western lands for which he was the local agent and in which he had never sold an acre. In one dim corner stood a bunch of tall, dead cornstalks—skeletons of last year's big crop.

Making Buckeye Bridge famous was not a joking matter with young Turner. He had spent many a sleepless night and many a hard earned dollar to make the little town known to homeseekers in that moving, changing world beyond the hills.

A year before he had come to Buckeye Bridge and opened the only real estate office ever in the town. It was eighteen miles from a railroad, but good farming and grazing land was absurdly cheap, and the water and air delightfully clean and healthful. So young was Turner's faith that he immediately invested every dollar of his savings in the land around the town, making small payments down, the rest to be paid in yearly installments. He felt perfectly sure the price of land would go up so rapidly he could sell at a good profit before the remaining payments fell due.

But immigrants did not come. The town did not boom. Land, instead of being up, did not go at all. He could not sell it—could not even borrow money on it. A few payments would fall due that fall, most of them the next fall. He had spent every dollar he could raise in futile efforts to advertise the country. And now, unless something happened to draw immigrants, he was lost.

He closed the office and stood for a moment on the steps. The light had gone from the west, the stars were out, the south wind smelled of early spring. But the April night brought no thrill to him. He was restless and blue.

But up the street from the window of a large frame house the lights twinkled cheerfully. And when his mind strayed to the Minnis place his feet soon followed.

"She won't be expecting me." He paused at the gate and whiffed the liacs. "But she always seems glad to see me anyway."

A few days later Rose Minnis took dinner at Billy Houck's.

"Uncle Billy," she asked casually, "how do small towns ever become noted?"

"Why, Rose?" Billy asked innocently. "Rose tried to keep from blushing and grew red in the effort."

"Uncle Billy, don't tease," she begged. "I'm in earnest."

"I believe you are, Rose." And he smiled as she blushed more furiously than before.

"I reckon," he said thoughtfully, as he pushed back his chair, "about the only way for a little town to get famous is to have something that nobody else has, or something bigger."

That evening after supper Billy went down the lane and crossed the bridge to the little town.

He passed in front of the hardware store where the usual group of resters sat along the edge of the wooden platform, ridiculing each other, and dabbling their opinions in the slow current of human events which trickled to them through their weekly papers.

"Fellows," said Billy, resting his foot on the edge of the platform, "what is the biggest turkey you ever saw?"

fourths pounds, Sam has offered to give it to the town, and we'll show our little backwoods village neighbor what a real turkey looks like."

"Don't that beat the Sam Patch!" "Of all the galls!" They are so pizen mean strychnine wouldn't hurt 'em no more than tooth powder. "I'll bet that turkey is a year-old right now!" were some of the comments which ran down the line.

In a week or two a few papers mentioned that Buckeye Bridge was not to have the biggest turkey after all—Sarvis Point was ahead. Then the turkey was scarcely referred to again. That one town had adopted a turkey and was trying to beat the record was interesting news. But if all the towns in the Ozarks were to be the mothers of turkeys it was not worth mentioning.

And that was what made Buckeye Bridge so mad. They knew they could beat Sarvis Point raising turkeys or doing anything else. But to have that "miserable, boasting, dishonest little railroad whistling station" jump in and spoil the honor was too much for human endurance.

"How is your turkey now?" queries the Sarvis Point Herald, still trying to attract attention by controversy.

October 15 the sun came up over the Ozark hills in the perfect glory of an autumn day. The place for the picnic was in a grove halfway between the two towns. All night experts had been working over long trenches filled with coals, turning beaves and mutton.

By 9 o'clock the sound of wagons and bugles and galloping horses was heard upon every road. By 10 the woods were full of people. The whole county had

of it he plotted one of his tracts into a small model poultry farm and had five thousand descriptive circulars printed ready to send out.

The end of the contest and the big barbecue was set for October 15.

The rivalry between the towns had grown hotter and hotter as the summer passed. But nothing further had been learned as to the weight of the turkeys. However, a wild rumor—too good to be true—went the rounds at the Bridge that the Sarvis Point turkey had quit growing two months before.

And that the Bridge bird weighed—The weight was always spoken in a whisper, like a lodge password.

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Then with a final effort to gain notoriety Sarvis Point, through the Herald, challenged Buckeye Bridge to weigh turkeys on Thanksgiving, the losing town to pay for a free barbecue for the county.

Now Buckeye Bridge had never refused a challenge in its history. It had met its hated rival in a laughing contest, a hopping match, a whistling match, a dog race—in fact, in almost every conceivable contest of skill or wit, and nearly always, under the guiding genius of Billy Houck, had come out victor.

A council was immediately called to discuss the situation.

"The trouble is," said Judd Thomas, "they ain't honest. They lie like snakes, and try to cheat. That was true."

"That turkey of theirs," said Bud Gouss, "is at least ten months old. My wife's cousin Sarah, that lives two miles this side of Sarvis Point, says she knows positive that Sam Wargo got that turkey from Bill Williams—and it was hatched last fall."

"Yes, that's the trouble," said Windy. "They'd change turkeys a dozen times and feed it on lead—or do anything, and then swear on a stack of Bibles that it was all fair and square. They are so pizen mean they'd steal the false teeth from a paralyzed pauper."

"But suppose?" suggested Billy Houck, squinting his left eye thoughtfully. "We put the contest off long enough for our turkey to get grown. Then I don't believe they could get one big enough to beat us."

That settled the matter. The Bridge promptly accepted the challenge—only the date for the weighing must be October of the following year. The Point had to agree, especially as the taunt was thrown at them that perhaps their turkey would be old enough by that time to do without complaint.

Fortwith it settled down into a fourteen-months race in turkey feeding. The weight of neither turkey was again reported. But in December a rumor crept out that the Bridge bird tipped the scales at twenty-seven pounds. And another rumor from somebody's cousin at the Point credited the enemy's turkey with only twenty-eight pounds.

In February another unofficial report said the turkeys were running neck and neck—thirty-four pounds apiece.

As the months passed the interest quickened. The entire population of the town was interested. The fever of the contest began to madden the blood of the whole county, and the people seriously, jokingly or laughingly lined up as partisans of one town or the other. They could afford to take it lightly, for it meant a free barbecue, whichever town won.

But all this interest and excitement was purely local and availed Andrew Turner nothing. From the land agent's viewpoint the town slumbered as soundly as before. Not a farm had changed owners in six months. No newcomer is arrived. Even letters of inquiry were scarce. Most of the payments on his land came due, that fall, and unless something happened to give the town real advertising he was lost. But if Buckeye Bridge won the contest then there would be a chance for some free advertising. On the strength

of the platform, a paper in his hand. The vast crowd grew instantly still—even the babies quit crying.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he announced sonorously, "the Sarvis Point turkey weighs forty-two pounds and six and one-half ounces."

He paused. The crowd fluttered with excitement, but kept perfectly quiet.

"And, ladies and gentlemen, the Buckeye Bridge turkey weighs fifty-four pounds and five ounces."

A wild yell went up—and hats and handkerchiefs—and pandemonium followed.

There was great rejoicing in Buckeye Bridge that night. Once more the old enemy had been vanquished. And now Buckeye Bridge, the home of the biggest turkey ever raised, had a chance to get its name in the papers.

Andrew Turner saw hope ahead. The story of the big turkey would get in the papers, there would be inquiries, and that would sell land—and then there might be a nice new cottage on those lots up North street—and then— But the rest was too good to put into concrete hopes.

She took it and glanced at the page for a second, then hastily folded it and hastened out of the store and up the street to Andrew Turner's office.

"See that." She held the open paper before him, her face flushed with the eager joy of the bearer of good news.

In the centre of the page was the picture of a peaceful little town nestled by picturesque hills beside a little river. And clear across the top of the page ran the headline: "THE TOWN THAT REFUSED TO GIVE THE PRESIDENT THE BIGGEST TURKEY."

Turner's hands could scarcely hold the paper as he read the opening paragraph:

"Buckeye Bridge in the Ozarks, the quaintest, most whimsical, most picturesque and the best little town imaginable, has raised the biggest turkey in the world and now refuses to give it to the President for his Thanksgiving dinner."

Then followed the story, a gently humorous, touching story, of the offer by Billy Houck, of the adoption of the chick by the town, its care and raising by Andrew Turner. Incidentally it spoke of the delightfully mild climate, the air and water wonderfully pure, and of the ideal opportunity for poultry raising. And how, under these conditions, the turkey had grown.

And then, touchingly, it told of the simple hearted kindness of the people, who, rather than win notoriety by giving the big turkey to the President, had vowed to give it instead to a needy widow and her hungry children.

Turner eagerly read to the last line. He quickly saw how that article would attract attention. There was news in it and human appeal. It would be caught up instantly by a hundred papers from New York to San Francisco.

He laid down the paper, his heart beating excitedly at the vision of coming sales.

"That means that I'll make—" he began, but, looking into her face flushed beautifully with the joy of his renewed hopes, he changed suddenly. Say, Rose, I am going to build a cottage on those north lots. What do you think of this plan?"

Two evenings later they loitered upon the bridge in the moonlight. Turner was exuberantly happy. The last two mails had brought more than fifty inquiries. And one more than an inquiry—it was a letter from a wealthy widow in Kansas City who said Buckeye Bridge was just the sort of country town she had been seeking—a place suited to raising both boys and chickens—and begged him to hold three hundred acres of his best poultry land until she could arrive. And then Rose's hand rested lightly on his arm, and Rose's face was lifted dreamily to the moon as she listened to the musical baying of hounds on the hills and smelled the sweet incense of burning leaves.

Billy Houck came by, returning from town.

"Uncle Billy," said Turner happily, "I thought you had ruined everything in giving that turkey away. But, as it turned out, it was the best thing that ever happened."

What was to be done about it? After considerable discussion it seemed to be almost the unanimous opinion that Buckeye Bridge should hastily offer the President the turkey, together with proof that it was the biggest, and thus head off Sarvis Point.

But before the vote was taken Billy Houck arose, and squinting his left eye thoughtfully, made a very brief speech, and at the close motioned that the big turkey be not given to the President but to the poor widow Cummins and her six children.

They all nodded approval, for dearly as Buckeye Bridge longed for fame its neighborly heart was stronger.

But it was a blow to Andrew Turner. It was the end of his advertising hopes. He sat in his dingy office until twilight. Before him was the stack of 5,000 circulars describing his poultry land; in a pigeonhole was the unpaid bill for the printing.

"Oh, well, it is all over; the mortgage will just have to take the land and I'll hunt a job somewhere."

He locked his door, the bluest man in the State.

But up street the ever cheerful lights shone from the Minnis windows.

He needed comfort and went for you. "I think it was splendid of you men to give that turkey to poor Mrs. Cummins," said Miss Rose warmly. "Won't it be a great Thanksgiving for those hungry children? Uncle Billy Houck came by and told me about it." she explained. "He wanted me to write Johnny Carlow at Chicago about it. Johnny used to live here and in a great friend of his. Uncle Billy says this turkey is just the sort of a thing that amuses him."

"Yes," said Turner doubtfully. "But oh, well—" He changed the subject.

One Tuesday afternoon early in November the usual crowd had gathered in the post office waiting for the mail to be put up. The postmaster had thrown out on the counter a bundle of sample copies of one of Chicago's leading dailies.

Several men and boys picked up copies andilly looked through them.

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Yet a week had not passed before a hurry call went out and the Bridgers gathered that evening in the hall used for town meetings. Definite news had been received that afternoon that Sarvis Point was up to its old tricks. After being beaten fair and square they were trying to steal the glory—they had in fact already written a letter to the President of the United States offering him their turkey for his Thanksgiving dinner.

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Billy squinted his left eye quizzically at the moon and chuckled. "I reckon, Andy, that turkey is going to help the preacher as well as the wicker!"

Rose turned her face quickly from the moon to hide the blush.

"Say," Andrew exclaimed with a sudden idea when Billy had passed on, "you suppose he did the whole thing for a purpose?"

"I wonder." And Rose smiled to herself in the shadow. "Anyway," she said softly, "he's a dear!"

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Advantage of Kiel Canal

The great importance of the Kiel Canal in the present struggle of Germany against the combined forces of the Triple Entente has been largely overlooked, but is a matter that is fast becoming very apparent as any one reads an expert in naval matters' writing in the special war number of the Scientific American brings out some of the vital features of the situation as affected by the canal.

Another and most important strategic advantage in the German situation is the Kaiser Wilhelm Canal, which affords quick passage for the largest battleships from the Baltic to the North Sea. This canal practically cuts the British fighting line in half. It was built for this very purpose.

For if the British should force their way into the Baltic the German fleet could pass to the North Sea through the canal and the Elbe, steam to the English Channel, sink the vast fleet of transports that are carrying men and supplies to the English army in Belgium and harry the whole English and French coasts.

Hence in seeking to bring the German fleet to action it would be necessary for England to have half her fleet at the mouth of the Elbe and send the other half around Denmark into the Baltic. This would mean that, so far as her dreadnought strength is concerned, Germany could elect to fight either fleet under equal conditions.

The only other way to get at the Germans would be to reduce the canal fortifications with an expeditionary army. But the German coast on the North Sea is so shoal that the landing of such a force from transports is out of the question. There remains only one way in which it could be attempted.

If England followed Germany's example by violating the neutrality of Holland, or should Holland enter the Triple Alliance, Amsterdam would form an excellent base for an expedition for the reduction of the Wilhelmshaven and Cuxhaven fortifications. This would open the way for the seizure of the North Sea end of the Kiel Canal. Should Russia continue her successful invasion of Prussia she might in time threaten an enormous sacrifice, capture Danzig, Stettin, and with the aid of the English even Kiel itself. That would seal the doom of the German fleet.

Can it be done? The factors of time and cost are against it.



"Billy Houck with a committee of five solemnly picked out as the likeliest grower."