

They filled their own ticks with oats straw, killed and cooked rabbits for winter chicken feed, sifted the garden hills for marble-sized potatoes, gathered wild plums and blackberries and persimmons and paw paws for winter fruit, made their own pitchfork handles and wagon tongues out of sycamore trees, and cured the beef hides to mend their shoes. But there were no "poor" there. There was only the widow Meister who took in washing, and they planned ~~all~~ ways and means of helping her without hurting her pride. They took her back bones and pig liver at butchering time, as they did each other, and slabs of comb honey when they smoked out a hive or cut a bee tree. Where were the "poor?" They were in Armenia. Joel saw pictures of them on the missionary page of the Christian Herald. And John reminded him tartly of them if he left a spoonfull of oatmeal in his dish.

Prices fluctuated upward a little in '22, but never actually recovered in time to keep pace with rising taxes and labor and with the cost of "overalls and pitchforks and rock salt." The report of the Secretary of Agriculture to the President of the United States said that thousands of farmers were being wiped out. Taxes became delinquent. Land was mortgaged and lost. Men worked on the section during the slack season in order to buy clothing for their families. But they had all done that before in hard times, or their fathers had. They complained, to be sure. "Nobody belly-aches as much as a farmer." If it isn't the lack of balance between the cost of flour and the price of wheat it's the rains or the drough.

But these men didn't actually know they were "sucking the hind tit" until Uncle Sam started telling them so. The plight of the poor farmer became a political football. When Henry Brett applied for a government "drouth relief" loan on his neglected acres, giving a mortgage on his prospective corn crop, his neighbors slapped their thighs and wanted to know what the government would do with the 160 acres of cockleburrs on which they held a lien. When some wit remarked that Uncle Sam might "strow them around where the drouth-struck farmers were sitting on the town curb and putting in their time," Henry Brett laughed louder than the rest.

