

THE COP AND THE ANTHEM

A Humorous Reading

by
O. Henry



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From "The Four Million."

On his bench in Madison Square, Soapy moved uneasily. When wild geese honk high of nights, and when Soapy moves uneasily on his bench in the park, you may know that winter is near at hand.

A dead leaf fell in Soapy's lap. That was Jack Frost's card. Jack is kind to the regular denizens of Madison Square, and gives fair warning of his annual call.

Soapy's mind became cognizant of the fact that the time had come for him to provide against the coming rigor. And therefore he moved uneasily on his bench.

In his mind were no considerations of Mediterranean cruises, or Southern skies. Three months on the Island was what his soul craved. Three months of assured board and bed and congenial company, safe from bluecoats, seemed to Soapy the essence of things desirable.

For years the island had been his winter quarters. Just as his more fortunate fellow New Yorkers had bought their tickets to Palm Beach and the Riviera each winter, so Soapy had made his humble arrangements for his annual hegira to the Island. And now the time was come. On the previous night three Sabbath newspapers, distributed beneath his coat, about his ankles and over his lap, had failed to repulse the cold as he slept on his bench. So the Island loomed big and timely in Soapy's mind. He scorned the provisions made in the name of charity for the city's dependents. In Soapy's opinion, the Law was more benign than Philanthropy. To one of Soapy's proud spirit, the gifts of charity are encumbered. If not in coin you must pay in humiliation of spirit for every benefit. As Caesar had his Brutus, every bed of charity must have its toll of a bath, every loaf of bread its compensation of a private and personal inquisition. wherefore it is better to be a guest of the law which does not meddle unduly with a gentleman's private affairs.

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