

# TRICKS OF THE SHORT WEIGHT AND SHORT MEASURE MEN

Clem Driscoll, Commissioner of Bureau of Weights and Measures of the City of New York. A Roughly Made Double Bottom in a Measure.

A Peddler's Favorite for Selling Potatoes.

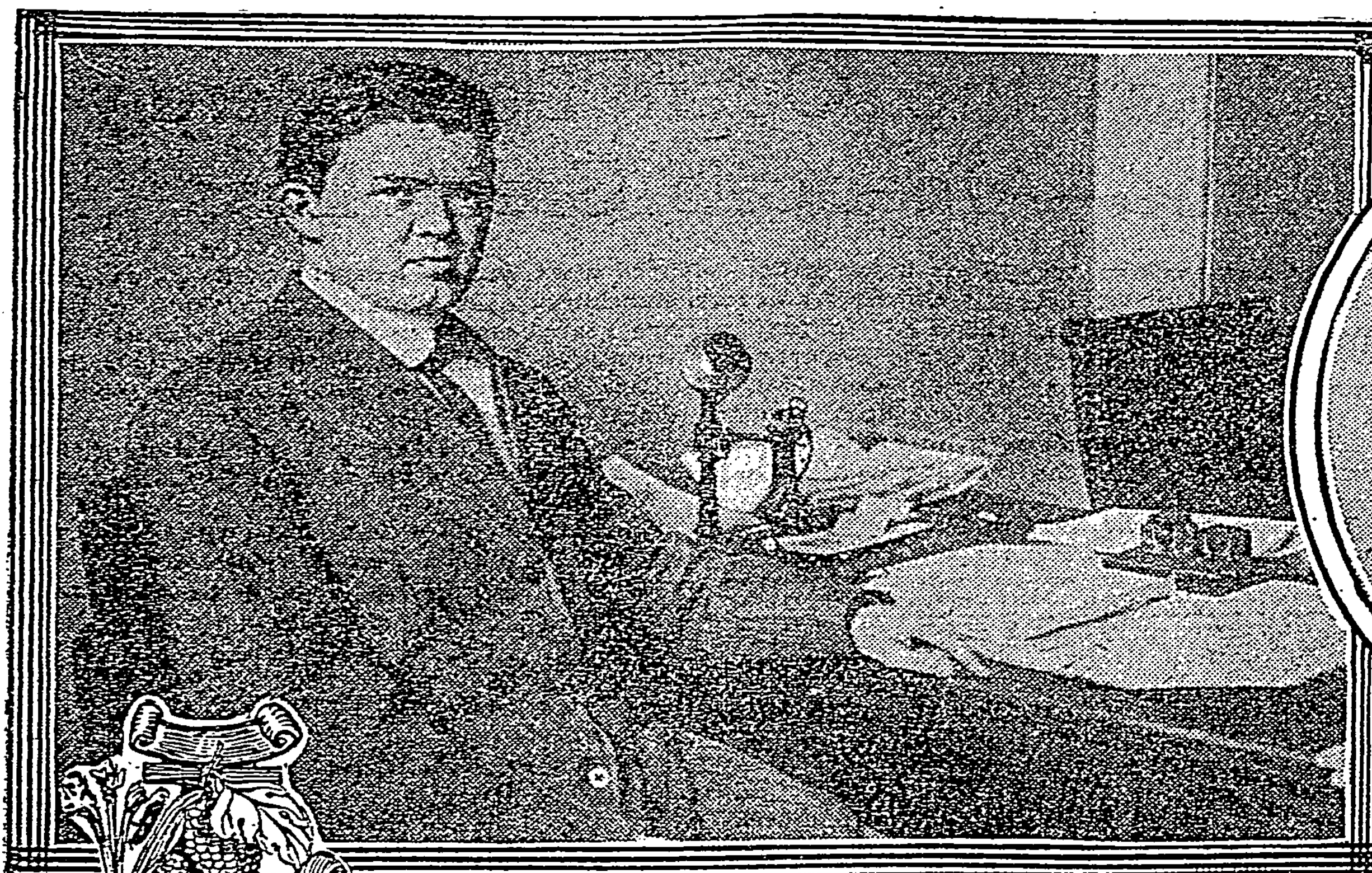


PHOTO BY BROWN BROS.

## Com'r. Driscoll Wages War on Hucksters and Dealers Who Cheat in Their Sale of Foodstuffs.

### SOME CLEM DRISCOLLISMS.

THE man who's Making Mayor Gaynor famous as a reviser of "Trade Customs" and a collector of fraudulent weights and measures was born on the east side, and tackles his job from his own peculiar philosophical viewpoint.

Here are some of the sentences through which he lets it shine forth upon his labors:

"We're after making just one miracle come to pass: A pound must weigh sixteen ounces, one gallon must consist of four quarts, one quart of two pints, and one pint of four gills. That is all there is to my job."

"Trade customs may be all right, but I haven't found one yet that works for the customer instead of the consumer."

To a woman caught with a short-weight scale who wept for mercy on the grounds that she had five children and an invalid husband: "Yes, Madam, I'm sorry for you and I want to weep with you, but it's for those poor children that went hungry because you sold their mother short-weight food. You get right-and stay right, and we'll all be happier."

To a lawyer pleading for mercy for an east side client on the score of poverty: "I've seen a lot of poor people, but none so poor they had to hire a lawyer to tell about it. Full penalty, please."

"Some people beat the case we make against them. But a crook stays crooked, and we're coming around again till he's caught fair."

"They even cheat the poor canary bird. I've found a birdseed measure with a plaster of paris false bottom to it."

"A butcher's hand on the scales or on the leg of mutton he is weighing means somebody's getting trimmed."

"Whenever you see a scale factory being extra careful and putting up a graft-proof product you may rest assured it's for export trade. In Europe inspection is no joke."

"There have been good Commissioners of Weights and Measures before. But they never had a Mayor who dared to let them work."

"My department isn't flossy enough to command a big red automobile. But it has borrowed one on occasion."

"Some people even steal from the new-made widows and orphans. Cheap oak coffins are marked as the finest in the land and furnished as mahogany to weeping widows too grief-struck to question the undertaker's word."

"I hope to see the day when everything on the market is sold by weight or in standardized measures. Every dealer must learn he can't cut under the other, and then they'll all be more willing to play fair."

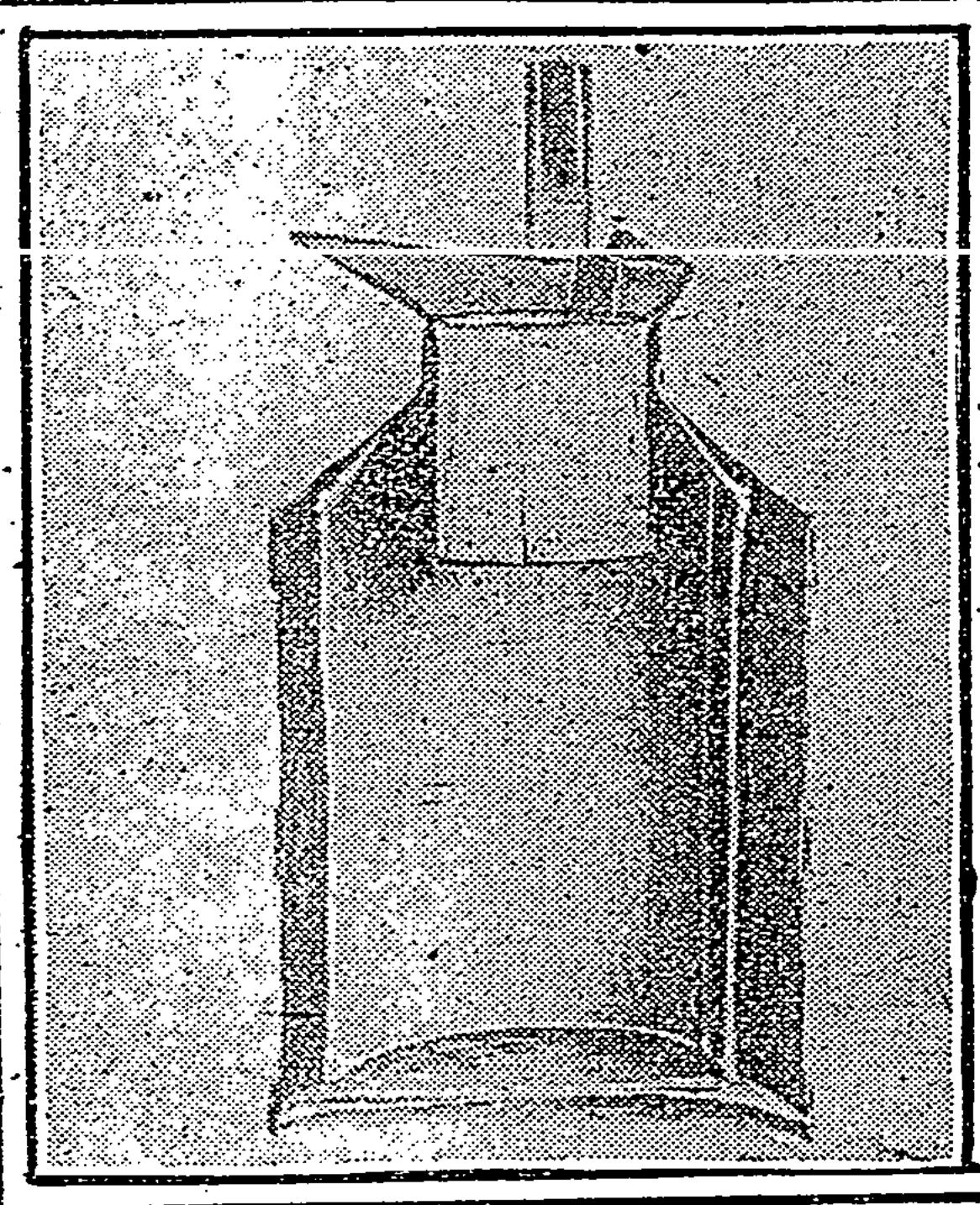
"My work's mighty hard right now, but it'll ease up as soon as the people begin to learn what honest measures really are and begin to expect the full amounts due when they buy."

**K**RIS KOHL, a hardy iceman, was lumbering along an east side avenue, his set of spring scales single-dangling along on the back of his wagon.

An automobile came along, as many another automobile had done, but the iceman thought nothing of that, and when a thin young girl waved to him from the sidewalk he stopped and started to weigh her out a lump of ice. Then suddenly something happened to him. He was seized from behind and his ice and he were quickly taken possession of by three men whose purposes he could only remotely guess.

"Twenty-two pounds," said one of the men, "and she registers thirty. Nothing small about this grafter. And sliding-face scales at that."

"Well, of all the crust!" said one of



This Shows How a Can Inside of an Oil Can Is Used to Deceive the Customer.

the three who were holding the driver. "Bundle him into the nearest police station and dump his scales in the machine. Good thing we had ourselves appointed dead fair cops."

And one little episode in a night's raid by the Commissioner of Weights and Measures was over.

The young man whom the Mayor has picked out to accomplish a revolution in one particular branch of the city's industries has not yet been accused of a desire to shirk his duties. While these words were being written he was on the rag end of a twenty-four-hour tour that carried him through every fish market in Manhattan and Brooklyn and out to the fish docks at dawn to catch the big dealers as he had caught the littler ones earlier in the night.

Commissioner Clem Driscoll, still under 30, was born on the lower east side, and learned his New York from top to bottom without ever really trying. He knows the problem of Mayor Gaynor and has a real enthusiasm to see the Mayor win.

If you try to talk to him about scales you hadn't better let him switch over to the subject of the Mayor or he'll be hard to switch back. He thinks all he has done has been simply because a district leader couldn't step in quietly and advise that a soft pedal be slipped on here, or a blind eye be turned on there, where some one happened to have "influence."

He knows where the district leaders have tried and how they have failed, and that the Commissioner is free for the first time in the history of the bureau to really "do something."

And to "do something" has settled down in Driscoll's mind to a very definite programme that has developed itself within the two months he has been in a position to make headway.

The results so far are: An investigation of falsely marked dry goods resulting in a Government order that no more such goods shall make their way through the Custom House, with a conference with merchants in which they have asked and received five months time to rejuvenate their methods.

Raids upon ice wagons, pushcart men, fish markets, butcher shops, and peddlers, in which three automobile-truck loads of fraudulent weights, scales, and measures have been collected.

Raids into the wholesale grocery district, resulting in the discovery that the "trade custom" size of potato barrels is 140 pounds instead of the required 174 pounds; the dealers granted until July 26 in which to "get right." Visits to the milk shipping centres, where milk in cans measured a quart or more short to each five-gallon can, due to dents in the cans. Promise to abandon the use of the short cans within thirty days.

It was over in Brooklyn that the first oil driver accidentally tipped off the manner in which he operated his "trade custom."

An Inspector was busily at work on the scales of a small grocery store when a Pure Oil Company's wagon drove up in front and the driver made a delivery. The scale Inspector heard a strange rattle inside the oil can as the driver walked out and decided to look into the matter. He found an empty tomato can bumping about in the bottom of the five-gallon measure. At first it did not occur to him that it could amount to much, but he began to experiment and soon discovered the usefulness of the contrivance. Little wires attached to it made it easy to pull it up into the neck of the bigger can.

The rest was easy. Three gallons or

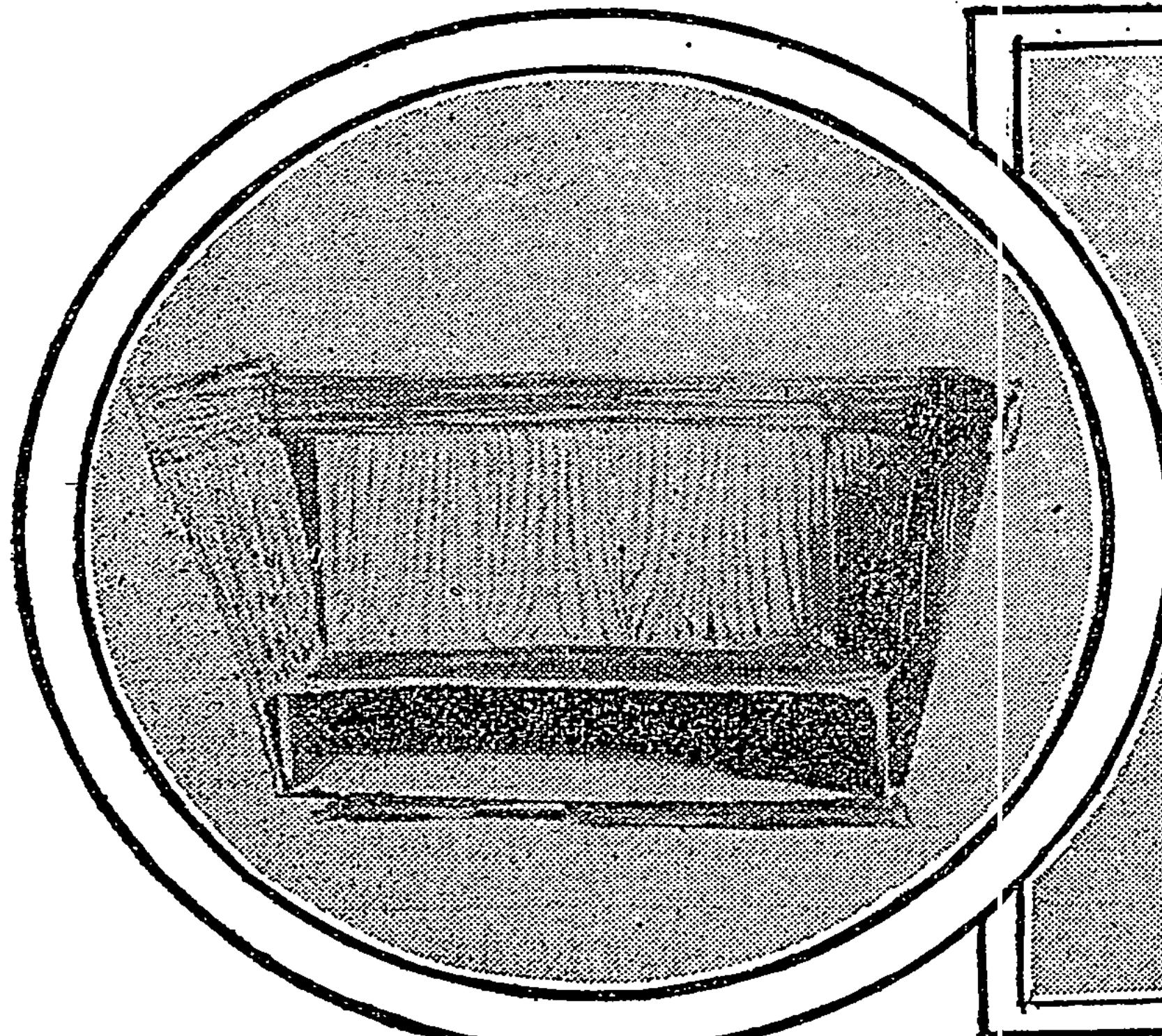
so of oil would be poured into the five-gallon can. The tomato can would be slipped into position in the neck and filled to the brim, so that the storekeeper would see a perfectly good can of oil as the driver carried it toward the store tank. In dumping it the

sneak away with their stuff under their coats when they find our party's working among 'em."

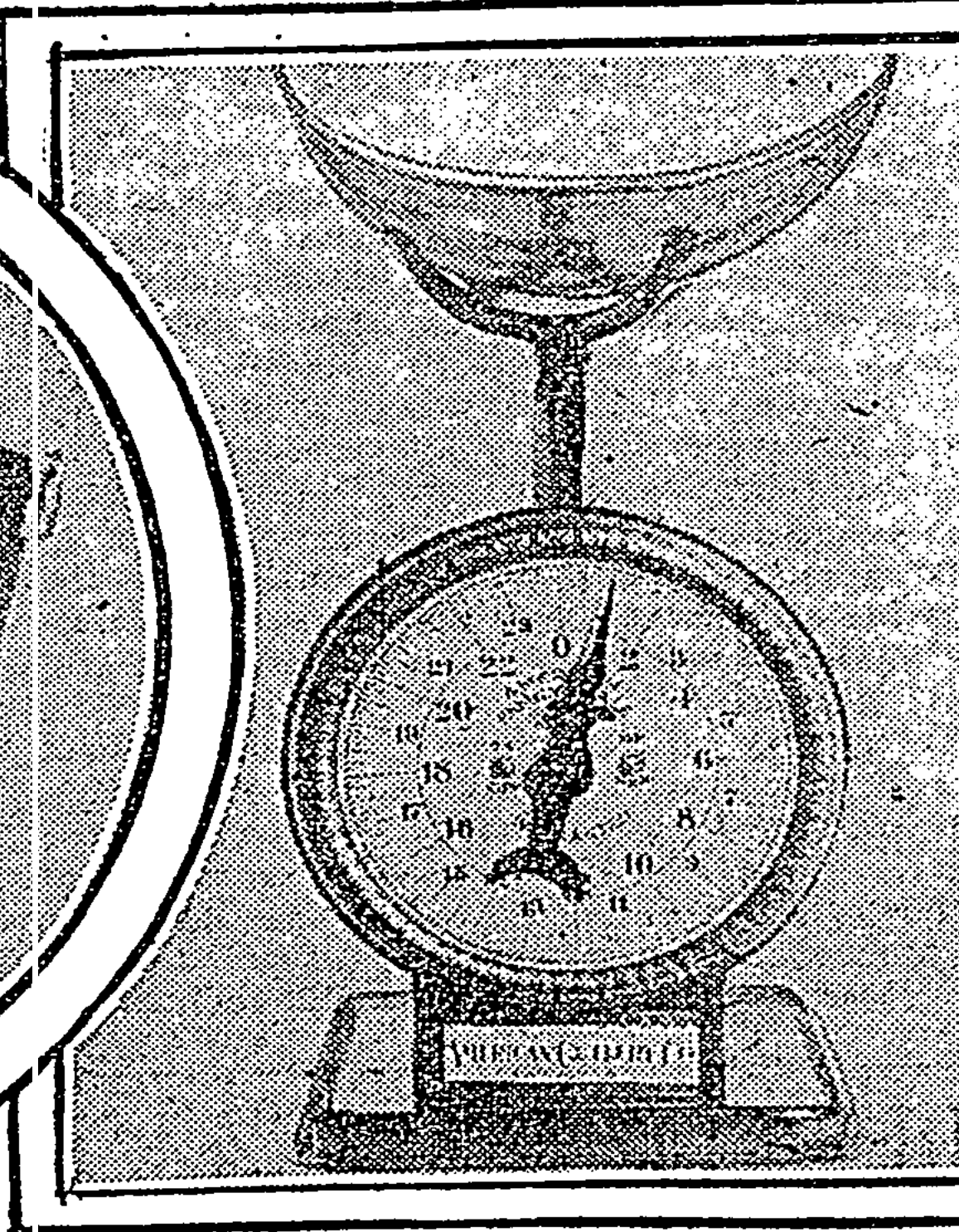
And the party was organized to catch the welters who left their wagons and their push carts to head for the dark alleys and side streets. Under the coats

more than even on the choicest cuts, for the lady will pay him once at choice-cut prices and the restaurant will pay him once at soup-stock prices.

"And watch that scale. It's a perfect scale, as fine as money



Double Bottom in a Berry Box.



These Scales Begin at One Pound.

driver would merely empty the tomato can, push it into the three gallons of oil below, and then pour out the rest.

This particular driver drew a salary of \$15 a week, and he was so opulent that he hired an assistant at \$12 a week out of his salary. It was found that he had started several small grocers up in the oil business, whom he supplied with his savings in oil. The company employing him, it turned out, was not a party to the graft, as it charged him with a full tank of oil in sending him out each day and took no account of his retail sales, which were his own concern.

Not all the companies were so fortunate. In some it was found the driver was in collusion with his employer, and the saving on oil was turned back to the main plant at night.

The extent to which the art of producing optical illusions in measurements was perfected will be evident from an examination of some of the pictures on this page.

How Commissioner Driscoll became expert in detecting the frauds was learned by a Times reporter in a night-riding raid upon peddlers on the upper east side.

"They know they're wrong," said the Commissioner. "Watch 'em try to

of each so captured were found the crooked measures.

One was a bucket for measuring peas and beans in which long nails had been driven at close intervals so that a part of the stuff measured out would remain after the bulk of it had been dumped into a paper bag.

"Most were wooden pails made to imitate peck and half peck measures, but in reality about a third under size."

"That's altogether too liberal a helping of peas; dump it out," said Commissioner Driscoll on passing a pushcart where the measure was heaped up very high. He found a false bottom just an inch or two below the top.

"And yet," he remarked as he confiscated the measure, "this isn't anywhere near the most serious form of cheating, or the kind that offers any problem."

"Come into this butcher shop and I'll show you some of the really fine points of the game."

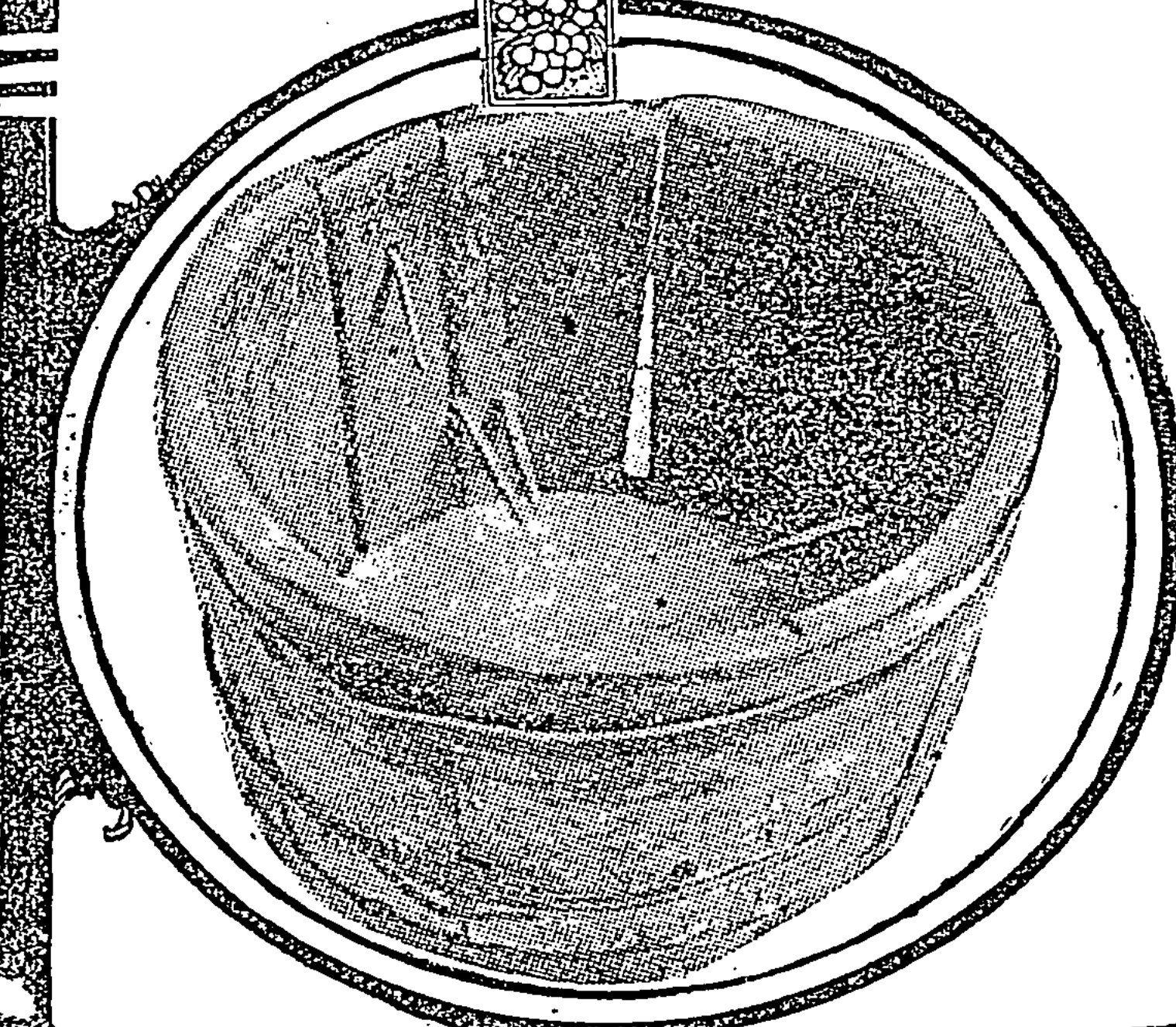
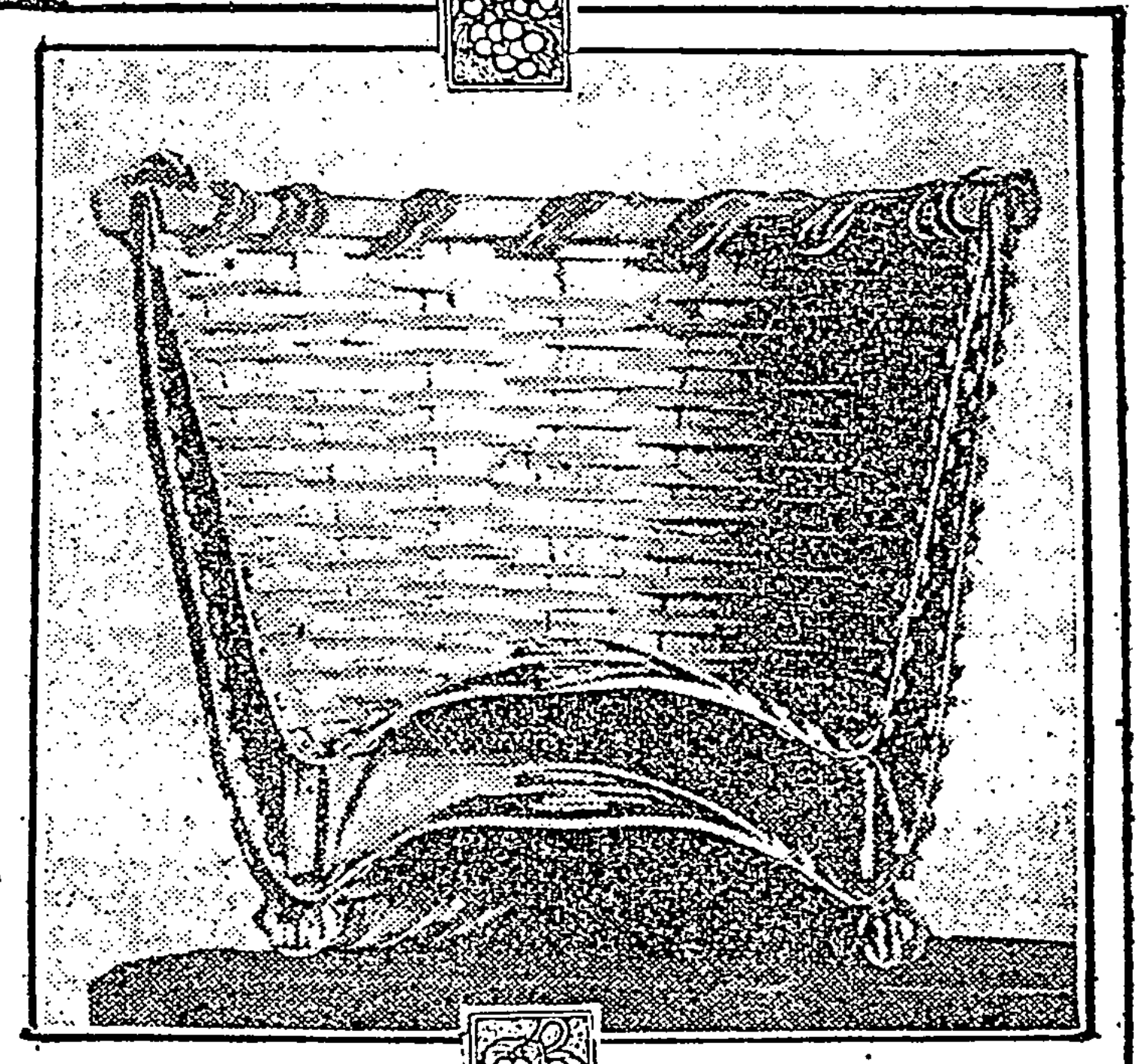
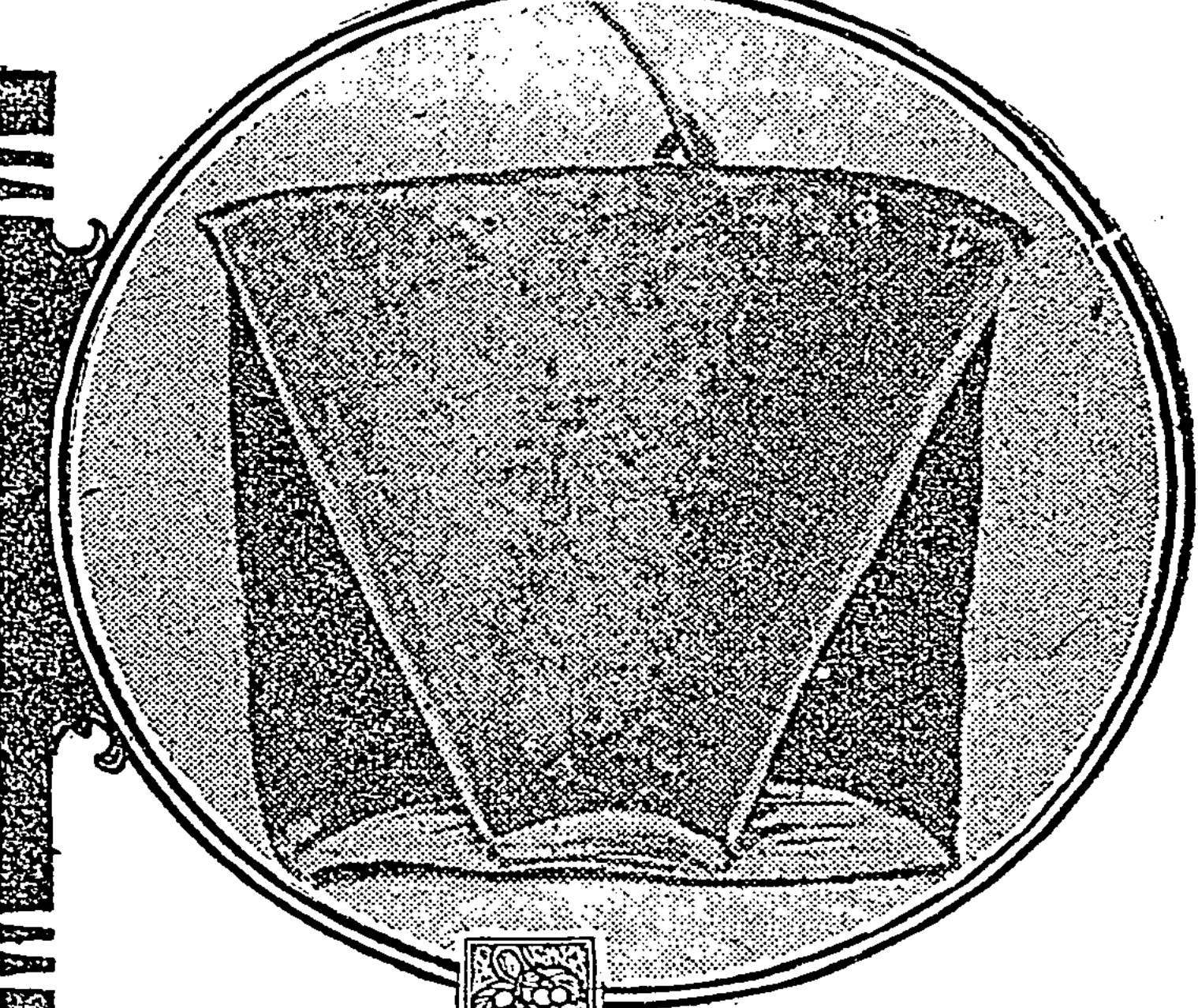
"Watch that butcher trimming the meat," he said. "The lady purchaser loses all he trims, for he has already weighed it. He will throw his cuttings into a special box under the counter and to-morrow he will sell them as soup stock for 6- or 7-cents a pound. Thus on his trimmings he will make

can buy. Upon inspection it will always turn out O. K.

But observe how the butcher throws the meat down upon it. The scale index flips up and down, and the customer is in a hurry. The butcher's hand steadies the scale and it registers 2½ pounds. He could register it at 3 pounds or 2 pounds just as easily, for the very sensitiveness of the scale, due to its high quality, has come into play, and that light touch of his hand, which you saw was very light, was sufficient to win half a pound's profit for the butcher.

"The other is just stupid stealing. We could catch it easily. But his is really high-toned work, and it will go on till the public teach the butchers that they have absolutely no business to touch a scale while goods are being weighed."

"A woman buys a leg of lamb and the butcher keeps his hand on the end of it as he throws it upon the scale. Whenever a butcher does that the customer may know she's getting trimmed. Housewives can keep the hands of their butchers off the scales and keep the trimmings on their steaks. Both practices will pay her abundantly. And it will also pay her to know how

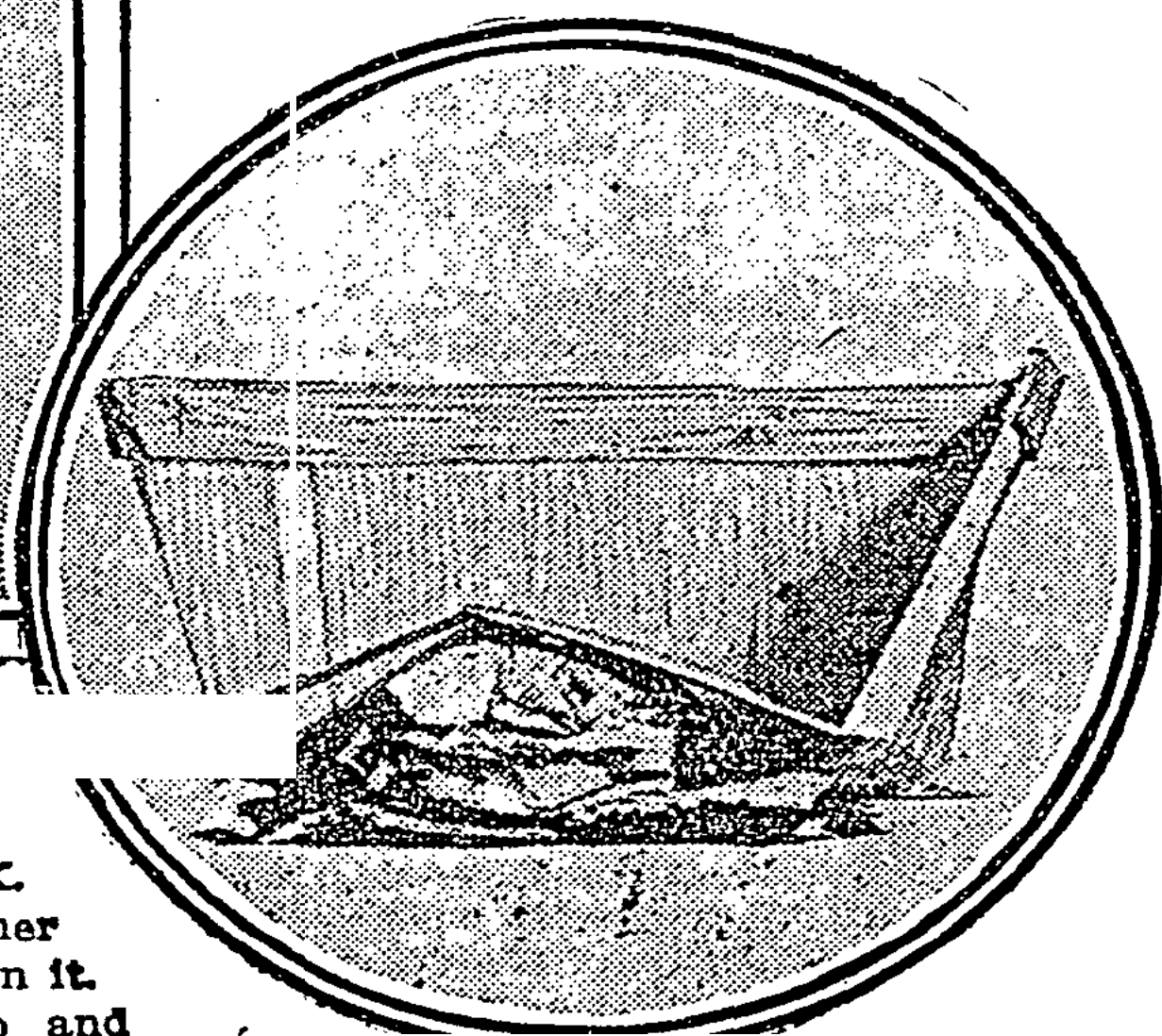


The Dents in These Measures Lessen the Contents.

many chops the butcher's sending her, for butcher delivery boys plan to supply their own homes out of the meat

A Bushel Basket with a False Bottom. (Second Picture Above.)

The Nails in This Measure Materially Lessen the Quantity in it, Especially of Large Vegetables, Which Are Caught Between the Nails, Leaving the Bottom Unfilled. (First Picture Above.)



A Bit of Paper in the Bottom of a Berry Box.

they deliver. Sausage, wursts, and chops are their particular pickings, and many a housewife who has paid for ten chops gets nine when the butcher boy comes round. And it's up to her. All we can do is to let her know the game as we find it being worked."

A letter was sent in to Commissioner Driscoll's office the other day. It warned him that a certain junk dealer was short-weighting sellers of junk. A little later an old breakdown express wagon, in charge of two dirty mechanics, drove down Centre Street and stopped in front of 182. The two dirty mechanics lugged into the junk shop of Henry Levy 325 pounds of lead.

"You're a good guesser, boy," the dealer said to the younger, "it goes just 170 pounds."

And he showed them on the scales. Both were watching closely and one of them detected how the trick was done; there was a 100-pound weight being used that was bored full of holes and the holes filled with cork, which in turn was waxed over till the fraud would have been imperceptible to the unpracticed eye.

The mechanics said they were stealing stuff a bit as a side line, and—well, what kind of stuff would the junk dealer want—did he like milk cans?

No, milk cans were of no use. If they were wise they would operate in brass and copper, they were old, and then they would find Henry Levy always willing to pay them good prices and full weights.

Next day they came back with 255 pounds and got credit for 195, but just as the scales were tipping off the balance Commissioner Driscoll happened along and arrested all three.

Later when the two mechanics were helping him carry the set of false scales into his private office preparatory to washing up and getting into disguises for new raiding work, they remarked: "Levy was a wonder. I guess he thinks we're still in the Tombs in the cell adjoining." Levy's still there. He's doing thirty days, and his scales are outward bound down the bay.

"What I want the people to do," says Driscoll, "is to write me their suspicions. A crook stays crooked and a straight man stays straight as a general rule. We can't envelope the straight and crooked alike in one large spy system. But we can learn who the crooked are and go to work to straighten them out. If you have suspicions let me know. We'll do the rest."