

# SHORTAGE—BUSTING

## New Angle on the Law of Supply and Demand

"I WONDER how meat-rationing will take Maisie," said Mrs. Brown rather unexpectedly to me one day as we sat sipping our morning tea.

"Personally I should think it would take her and leave her much as it finds her—with distinctly ample proportions," I replied.

"That wasn't quite what I meant," said Mrs. Brown. "I was thinking of the effect on her behaviour—and Algernon's. Actually, I may gain quite materially if she behaves according to form."

"You mean, I suppose, that Maisie is so full of the milk and beef and butter of human kindness that she will just make you a nice little present of her coupons. Well, I don't know Maisie except by sight, but I should think it highly improbable. Anyway, you know, that's illegal."



"No, I didn't mean that, either. I was just thinking of the effect. You see, I've seen Maisie through all sorts of shortages, and I know a shortage is something that she just can't resist. Her morale is the kind that stiffens at the first hint of a shortage. You may not remember her garden on the Ridge when she first got married. It was so steep you'd have had to tether a goat to stop it from falling off. Was Maisie planning to grow vegetables there? Not on your life. Not at first. Not until someone took her to a meeting of the 'Vitamin and Vigour' Society—you know, the one that advocates raw carrots and cabbage and lettuce and parsley and the rest—and there she was, out with a spade before breakfast the next morning to level a garden."

"And Algernon?"

"Oh, Algernon helped in his way. He bought little booklets. You know the sort, *New Zealand Rocks and How to Move Them*, and *The Amateur Vegetable Gardener*. Looking for these books made him pretty late home in the evening, so he couldn't help in the garden, but he made up for that by reading them aloud when it was too dark for her to go on working outdoors. In less than no time there was the garden, in neat terraces all over the section, with ladders to reach the more inaccessible spots, and belts of trees to break the wind and belts of shelter to shelter the trees. Well, Algernon's books progressed from planting to sowing, and from sowing to compost. They must have been pioneer composters. The whole Ridge came out to see Maisie turning the compost and Algernon explaining that it wasn't really 'done' until the last worm had trekked off to new pastures. Then Algernon read somewhere that there is nothing like fowl manure for a compost heap, and Maisie read somewhere that eggs would be short in the winter, and so they both decided on fowls immediately."

"And then?"

"Then last year came the honey shortage, and by this time both Maisie and Algernon were beginning to fancy themselves as shortage-busters. Algernon, who still stuck firmly to his principle of theory before practice, rummaged round the shops and wrote to the Agriculture Department for handbooks on beekeeping, and Maisie got busy buying hives and trying to make the bees feel at home. And she must have succeeded, because the outcome of this particular burst of shortage-busting was that they had 25 pounds of honey when nobody else for miles around could get a pound, not even through the black market."

"But I still don't see what all this has to do with meat-rationing. Do you suggest that Maisie, having coped successfully with vegetables, eggs and bees, will now be inspired to raise her own sheep and cattle? She may have worked wonders already with her garden—but that would be a bit beyond her, surely?"

"That's just it," said Mrs. Brown. "Don't you see? We've been thinking of moving for some time now, and Maisie's place would just suit us now that she's improved it so much. That would be the ideal solution for us: just to move across to her place if we can get it into her head that she should go down on the flat to rear a cow and a sheep and a pig. So every evening we make a point of dropping in just in time to turn on to the pig production talks, and Wilfred has left them a couple of pamphlets on the rearing of calves and the food value of sheep. Believe me, it's just a matter of time. I'm beginning to look on that garden as ours already."



It was some weeks before I met Mrs. Brown again. She was sipping a cup of coffee in our favourite corner and looking rather downcast, I thought. "Well, have you moved into Maisie's yet?" I asked.

She sighed and shook her head.

"So the lure of shortages failed! Well, I'm not surprised. Though with Maisie's enterprise..."

"It didn't exactly fail," said Mrs. Brown. "It got deflected. My fault, too. It never occurred to me when I asked her round to a lecture on population problems in the Pacific that it would go to her head like that. But she did seem a bit thoughtful all the way home."

"So what?"

"They'll never move now. I've just met Algernon coming out of the book store. He had just bought *The Expectant Mother and Baby's First Year*!"

—S.S.

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