

XVII

I, Fred Kohler . . .

ONE of the stars of the Ziegfeld Follies in 1922 was Will Rogers, who was beginning to learn that the larynx can be mightier than the lariat. At any rate, he combined the two talents by roping some notable in the audience and then making his captive the subject of a humorous dissertation that sometimes was devastating.

The loop of his lariat one night sailed out over the audience and fell over the shoulders of the mayor of Cleveland, one Fred Kohler. The crowd applauded and craned for a look, hoping to recognize the celebrity. But this was not a familiar face to New Yorkers. They saw only a stiff-necked man, aging but still handsome, with an orderly profile and blond, wavy hair.

"Here's a fellow from Cleveland who used to be the chief of police out there," said Rogers, shifting his wad of gum. "He was the best chief in the United States, I heard. Then he got into a political squabble and lost his job and a while ago he started to come back, and now they've gone and elected him mayor of Cleveland."

The theater audience applauded.

"I'll say this for him," declared Rogers, "he was better off when he was chief. But you can take off your hats to a fellow who came right back and made 'em like him."

The political pot bubbled and boiled furiously in Cleveland during the early decades of the century, and much of the time Fred Kohler was up to his neck in the hot water; sometimes because of what he had done and sometimes because of what he was. The Prussian characteristics that had enabled him to take a disorganized, disheveled mob of comic cops and expertly whip it into a smartly dressed, highly disciplined, efficient police department were the same characteristics that won Kohler powerful enemies and kept him continually at odds with the leaders of both political parties.

Fred Kohler, in brief, was a hard-nosed, egotistic, arrogant man with all the prototypical traits of Kaiser Wilhelm's favorite field marshals. He sometimes yielded ground to superior force simply as a matter of

tactical maneuvering, but he never surrendered and he was always planning the counterattack even as he was retreating.

Not many men would have had the persistence or the ego to stay with the battle as Kohler did, despite a long series of reversals that included his dismissal from the police department following a scandal that engaged the sometimes delighted attention of the entire city, a terrible physical beating by hoodlums, and a series of political defeats that would have discouraged the most insensitive ward heeler.

Kohler lowered his handsome Teutonic head and kept repeating his bull-like rushes into the political arena until finally, to the surprise of everybody but himself, he finally prevailed and won revenge on his numerous enemies on both sides of the party fence. And instead of being conciliatory in defeat; instead of calling on his opponents to close their ranks and bandage their wounds, Kohler slashed away at them even harder, going after the complete rout.

That's the way it was with Fred Kohler. He was a crowd pleaser.

His troubles began after the death of Tom Johnson, who had lifted him from the obscurity of captain to the authority of chief in 1903. Policemen, until then, served whatever political party was in power more than they served the law. They were the bag men of their day; collectors of political graft who were used frequently to harass those who did not contribute to the party coffers and otherwise promote the weal of the incumbent administration. They were conspicuous for their baggy pants, unbuttoned, gravy-stained jackets, and protruding, overhanging bellies. They were slack of jaw and slumped in posture.

They were everything that Fred Kohler was not, as Tom L. Johnson surely must have noted, for the young handsome officer was a stickler for neatness. He gleamed, from the visor of his cap through the buttons on his coat to the tips of his highly polished shoes. Walking or standing, his shoulders were squared and his chin was held high.

Kohler was given a free hand to whip the force into his own image, and he did it with an unemotional, undiplomatic directness of action that won him many lasting enemies on the force—especially among the many Irish policemen whom he seemed to single out as the particular and special target of his dislike. But there is no question that his overall accomplishment in remaking the force into a spit-and-polish military type of organization was outstanding. And timely.

No sooner had he effected this remarkable overhaul of men and machinery than President Theodore Roosevelt arrived in Cleveland to attend the prize social event of the 1903 season—the marriage of Mark Hanna's daughter, Ruth, to Medill McCormick, the scion of the Chicago McCormicks. The way Kohler rose to the great moment made it appear as if he had been pointing to just such an opportunity to show off himself and his men.

Condon, George E.. Cleveland : the best kept secret.

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The chief, in full uniform, and twenty-four of his men, all mounted, met the President as he stepped off his private car in the Union Station. The policemen saluted smartly and simultaneously—just as Kohler had drilled them to do in more than a month of tedious practice—while the chief doffed his white cap and with a graceful sweep of the arm invited the Chief Executive into the waiting carriage.

The President's itinerary took him all over the city; to the Hanna residence on the far West Side, to St. Paul's Episcopal Church for the marriage ceremony, to the reception at the Union Club, to the hotel, and, finally, to the Union Station. But everywhere Teddy went, he found that Fred Kohler had gotten there just ahead of him. Being something of an actor himself, Roosevelt probably wondered if he weren't being upstaged a bit, especially as frequent changes of costume heightened the effect of the Kohler performance. Along with his other talents, the chief was a quick-change artist. At the Union Station, he was dressed in the full regalia of his police office, but when the presidential party arrived at St. Paul's, Kohler appeared in a masterfully tailored morning coat with wing collar. With his height and bulk, his handsome face and his bright blond hair that looked as if it had been newly marceled, Kohler stood out like a white polar bear at a convention of penguins.

President Roosevelt was impressed by the omnipresent chief, to be sure, and put his thoughts into words as he prepared to entrain back to Washington.

"I believe," he told reporters, "you have the best chief of police in America in Kohler."

The pronouncement undoubtedly pleased Fred Kohler, but it could not have surprised him. He had known all along that he was the best.

One of his most effective devices for the reduction of vice in the city's flourishing tenderloin district was to station a policeman outside gambling joints, saloons, and houses of prostitution. Customers patronizing such places were called on to give their names to the policeman before entering. Some complied, of course, but most people, sensitive to exposure of their private peccadilloes, turned away and sought distraction in more legitimate channels. Kohler took credit unabashedly for the severe curtailment of vice establishments that followed, ignoring the fact that the "Halt! Who goes there?" system had been proposed to him by Mayor Johnson, who, in turn, had borrowed it from his father, the onetime police chief of Louisville, Kentucky.

It was said by some Clevelanders—and accepted by most others—that Kohler had carried the idea past the Johnson concept of discouraging vice by saving the little black books and using them for some quiet political blackmail in later years. He was a tough in-fighter.

Among the people who did not approve wholly, or even partially, of

the Kohler police techniques were the tramps and hobos who found themselves in Cleveland. The chief had a way of dealing summarily with any such wanderers who chanced to linger within the city limits. He had what was called his "sunrise court," which was nothing more than an early morning roundup of all vagrants and undesirables available to the police dragnet. They were thrown into paddy wagons, carted to the city limits, and there unceremoniously dumped out with a loud warning not to return. The big flaw in this neat routine was that the people and officials of the suburbs selected to receive Cleveland's human refuse felt that Kohler was imposing on their hospitality. After their protests went unheeded, they began to fight back, especially in Lakewood and in East Cleveland.

Police Chief James Stanberger of East Cleveland would have his men ready and waiting at the Cleveland line each morning. When a new Kohler shipment came their way, they picked up the bums on the first bounce, tossed them into their paddy wagons, and trundled them all the way back to Cleveland's Public Square where, once again, it would be Kohler's turn to pounce on the hapless hobos.

This shuttle service reached a ludicrous peak one day when the same fourteen tramps were transported back and forth between Cleveland and East Cleveland in four separate round trips, at the end of which the bewildered vagrants were staggering around, dizzied by the furious whirl from city to city. All of them presumably got off the merry-go-round eventually and escaped to some saner community, there to reflect on their unusual ordeal. Kohler actually suffered a minor defeat in this episode when the East Cleveland chief obtained a court injunction that forbade tramp-dumping, peremptorily spoiling all the fun.

Kohler's lofty disregard for any laws which might tend to bind him in the pursuit of his duty came in handy to the Johnson administration on at least one occasion. It was at the time of the bitter fight between Mayor Johnson and the Cleveland Electric Illuminating Company over the mayor's plan to create a municipally owned electric plant that would serve to regulate the private company's rate structure. Unable to get voter approval of a bond issue to build a municipal plant, Johnson tried the back-door approach of annexing a suburb called South Brooklyn which owned a small electric plant. The South Brooklyn council voted in favor of the annexation proposal, but Johnson's aide, City Clerk Peter Witt, knew that the action would not be official until the suburb mailed the necessary documents to Columbus. Witt also knew that the utility interest was determined to get the South Brooklyn council to rescind its action. He called on Chief Kohler for help, and what ensued was recalled as follows by Nathaniel R. Howard, then a *Plain Dealer* reporter and later the editor of the *Cleveland News*:

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"Do you ever use a man to go grab something that you ought to have whether you have any right or not?" Witt asked Kohler.

"Sure," said Kohler. "All depends on how fast you move."

Witt explained his idea and Kohler called up a policeman.

"You go with Witt's man to the South Brooklyn Town Hall," said the chief, "and do just what you're told. Take your gun along and if anyone wants to get tough draw your revolver and tell 'em to come ahead."

With the aid of one of his deputies and the policeman, Witt raided the South Brooklyn Town Hall, confiscated the necessary books and papers, and started in to fill out the annexation forms pronto. The raid was entirely successful, and the village light plant was the city's first blow for municipal ownership. The policeman called the chief at sundown for further instructions.

"Anybody get tough?" Kohler asked.

"No," said the patrolman. "I heard a lot of talk about their getting their special council meeting tonight in a hurry."

"Stay on the job," said Kohler, "and keep your gun out. If anyone comes, tell 'em there ain't going to be any council meeting tonight. Let me know if you need help, but I don't see why you should."

"There was no council meeting."

Tom Johnson's administration annexed South Brooklyn and got its municipal light plant.

Big trouble plainly was building up for Fred Kohler as the list of his enemies grew longer, and the defeat of Tom Johnson seemed to be the signal for the attack. The new mayor, Herman Baehr, had made it clear where he stood on the subject of the controversial chief by using as one of his campaign slogans: "If you don't want more of Kohler, vote for Baehr!"

The new administration had hardly settled in City Hall before Kohler was suspended from office and called before the Civil Service Commission on twenty-five counts of drunkenness, immorality, and conduct unbecoming an officer and gentleman. The trial lasted six weeks, but Kohler, cool and aloof throughout all the sensation-filled sessions, was vindicated. He was exonerated and restored to rank, leaving the city shortly thereafter for a triumphal tour of Europe, where he was feted as an international hero. President Roosevelt's encomium had received worldwide attention.

In 1911, the old organization of Tom Johnson was restored to power in City Hall, with Newton D. Baker as the new mayor. But it wasn't the same, and Kohler brusquely went about making as many enemies in the new administration as he had in the old. The patience of his old political comrades snapped finally in the summer of 1912 when

Kohler horrified the Baker organization at a party picnic with "some unpardonable acts."

A short while later, a traveling salesman filed suit for divorce, and in support of his charges filed an affidavit of several witnesses charging that on a night in June 1912 they and the plaintiff had trapped Cleveland's police chief in the salesman's home on Daisy Avenue S.W. They said they had found Chief Kohler and the salesman's wife under compromising circumstances.

Kohler's enemies danced with joy in the streets, and the entire city giggled at the thought of the dignified police chief being trapped in such an embarrassing situation. On Daisy Avenue, yet. Mayor Baker suspended Kohler on charges of immorality and conduct unbecoming a police officer, and in March 1913 there was another sensational public hearing, held in the City Council chamber, at which the cuckolded husband and a strong supporting cast of witnesses, including many reputable citizens, told how the chief had been caught in *flagrante delicto*.

The chief's defense was weak. He intimated frameup. He said the woman, an old friend, had called him and asked for protection, which he was assiduously trying to provide when the husband and his friends rudely came crashing through the front window.

Fred Kohler was fired as police chief, and almost everybody in the community agreed he was through in public life. Typically, though, he did not cower or ask for sympathy. When the news of his dismissal came, he made his way to his favorite place in the lobby of the Hollenden Hotel and stood there, chin high and his eyes challenging anybody to make a critical remark, until late in the evening.

The Kohler fortunes dropped even lower one night a month later when the deposed chief was set upon by some politically oriented hoodlums as he left the Hollenden shortly before midnight. His path took him into the shadows of Short Vincent Street, behind the hotel, where three assailants fell on him with brass knuckles, blackjacks, fists, and feet. They left him in the street, bleeding and moaning. Somehow he got to his feet with the help of some passersby and he made it home, but he refused to call the police. He was in bed for a week, and it may be that in that week he made up his mind to get revenge on all his old friends and all his old enemies. The only way he could do that was to get back on top somehow; to get power once again.

Kohler became the busiest politician and the most eligible office-seeker in town for the next few years. He ran for City Council in 1913 and lost. He ran for county clerk in 1914 and lost. He ran for clerk of city courts in 1915 and lost. He ran for sheriff in 1916 and lost.

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He didn't run for anything in 1917. The chance of a person of his obvious German descent winning an election in that year was not very good. In 1918, though, Kohler returned to the political wars, running for county commissioner. By that time, he had become that political joke, a perennial candidate, and few took his race seriously. That may explain why he won office, at long last. He proceeded immediately to upset the fine balance of two-party politics.

"He turned the office of the county commissioners into a bear pit," wrote Nat Howard. "He was a Republican and the other two men were Democrats. He continually accused them of graft, politics, favoritism on every piece of business that arose; he hurled charges at the clerk of the board, the county engineer, or any county official he could use as a target. He was the sensation of 1919. Wednesday and Saturday mornings when the board met were red-letter days for the newspapers. The Press sent two reporters and a cartoonist to every meeting. One reporter for facts, the other to write color and side-bars. The public impression grew, as Kohler knew it must, that here was one honest man in a courthouse full of shirkers and rascals."

In 1921, inevitably, Fred Kohler ran for mayor, scornfully brushing aside the fact that women were to be allowed to vote in a municipal election that year for the first time. Somebody recalled the scandal that had driven him out of the Police Department and asked him how he thought the women voters of Cleveland would cast their ballots.

"For me," said Kohler.

". . . The women will remember two things about me. That I was a good police chief and kept the town clean, and that when I got into that mess I protected the woman's name right from the start."

Kohler's campaign was a model of simplicity. He walked from door to door in every neighborhood in the city and asked people to vote for him. He mailed bushels of letters seeking voter support. He ran as an independent Republican. He had no use for the organization, and the organization had no use for him.

Just before the election, Kohler brought in a New York public opinion expert to take a poll of voter sentiment—a common enough practice today, but unheard of in 1921. The surveyor posed as a magazine writer and sent out ten thousand cards to registered voters asking their opinion of the proposed city manager plan and asking them to name their choice for mayor. Some 75 per cent of the people polled answered that they favored Fred Kohler.

This finding would have astonished the political experts, who were almost in unanimous agreement that the disgraced ex-chief didn't have a chance. The odds against Kohler's election were running 2-to-1 in

the gambling parlors, a fact of which Kohler was keenly aware. Kohler, his friend, Sammy Haas, and an acquaintance of theirs from Toledo, a man named Hayes, quietly covered all bets.

The extent of their operation is revealed in a statement later made by Kohler's nephew, a theatrical advance man also named Fred Kohler.

"Sammy Haas called me over to the Hollenden Hotel in the closing days of the campaign," said the nephew. "He told me he had bet nearly all the money he had in the world on Uncle Fred. He asked me what I thought of the outcome of the election. I told him not to bet another cent, but I did tell him we were going to win. Sammy told me he had bet several hundred thousand dollars on the election; that he had a few thousand dollars left and he wanted to shoot the works, and I told him we were going to win so he shot the works and won.

"When Uncle Fred was elected they collected big money . . ."

Upon the news of Kohler's victory, reporters immediately recalled that when he was booted out of his job as police chief eight years before, he had told the press:

"All right, boys! I'll be leading the Police Department down Euclid Avenue again some day."

Kohler remembered the promise, too. On the day of his inaugural, January 1, 1922, he mounted a horse and led a parade of policemen down Euclid Avenue. He also named one of his old friends on the force, Jacob Gaul, as chief, but in reality he was his own chief and the Police Department knew it.

Kohler had based his campaign on a pledge to give the city an economical administration, and he fulfilled that pledge. His first act in office was to fire 850 Republican ward workers employed by City Hall and to replace them with fewer than two hundred persons of his own choosing. The city's finances were in poor condition. The municipal deficit in 1920 had been \$926,000; in 1921, \$892,000.

Under Kohler's frugal administration, the existing deficit of nearly one million dollars was wiped out the first year and the city had a balance of \$558,000. At the end of the second year of his administration, the city had a cash balance of \$1,800,000. It was a commendable performance for a beginner in the field of municipal election, even if it was gained at the expense of certain city house-keeping chores, like paving the streets and keeping the parks in trim.

Many of Cleveland's citizens may not even have noticed what a splendid job Kohler was doing to restore the city to solvency; their attention must have been distracted by what he was doing with the paint brush.

Apparently the new mayor was determined that Cleveland never would forget him. He must have known that political fame is fleeting,

and that balanced books have never made the best-seller list. But he did do something that has kept his memory fresh to this very day. He painted Cleveland orange and black.

Whenever he was asked where he got the color combination, Kohler always passed it off as one of his personal inspirations, but the truth is that he went to some General Electric Company experts at Nela Park and asked them to recommend to him, confidentially, the most memorable color combination they knew. The experts suggested orange and black.

No city ever has been splashed with paint the way Cleveland was under Fred Kohler. His painters sloshed the brilliant orange and black colors on everything the city owned, including municipal buildings, voting booths, tool sheds, swings, teeter-totters, park benches, outhouses, the lifeguard's boat at Edgewater Beach and even, climactically, the trim on the Christmas tree that the city set up in Public Square during the holiday season.

Splashed in this early Halloween motif, the people of Cleveland looked about them in bewilderment and asked the sensible question: "Why?"

"Well," said Fred Kohler, more mellow and reasonable than usual on the day a reporter repeated the question, "everybody can see all the buildings now that belong to the city—to the people. They can see 'em a long ways off, too. There'll never be any doubt whether people have got a right to go in the buildings—they'll know they're at a place they help own and maintain.

"The looks of 'em? You can see 'em, can't you? Well, that's the big idea. I picked out the colors myself because orange and black are the most visible colors there are, day and night.

"If a fellow is walking through a park and wants to know in a hurry where a certain park building is, he can find it now. Nobody's hiding it from him."

Kohler further assured the permanence of his own fame with a series of billboards which he had erected around on city-owned property so as to convey his most important messages to the people directly. They were sterling messages; simple, uncomplicated and meaningful, like the message that went up on the billboard at the east end of the Detroit-Superior High Level Bridge in August 1923, near the end of his administration.

The message (in orange-and-black combination, naturally) was:

"I Kept the Wolf From the Door."
FRED KOHLER, Mayor.

The aging Teuton felt that even the *dummkopf* voters ought to be able to understand that simple message, and most of them probably

did. But lest anybody get the idea that he had gone soft and was trying to soft-soap the electorate, Kohler put up the following message on another big billboard:

Good or Bad,
Right or Wrong,
I Alone Have Been Your
Mayor.
FRED KOHLER, Mayor

He proved that he alone was mayor time after time by employing the authority of his office in such an arbitrary, dictatorial manner as to enrage half the population of the city. But while that half was fuming, the other half was laughing. He fought with the Irish policemen, with the public utilities, with City Council, with newspaper reporters, with sports fans, and even with the Bohemian crowd that belonged to the raciest organization in town, the Kokoon Arts Club. It was the practice of the club to stage every year a public *bal masqué* in which the merrymakers tried to outdo each other in costumes that fell just short in many instances of complete nudity. Strangely enough, this conservative city with the broad streak of puritanism not only tolerated the Kokoon Club's scandalous affair, but actually seemed to find it amusing. Not Fred Kohler. The onetime star of the Daisy Avenue Follies showed his moralistic side in the spring of 1923 and banned the *bal masqué* on the ground that the previous year's affair had been "too naked!"

Joining the naked ones in the denunciation of the mayor were thousands of sports fans whom he had angered, that same month, by outlawing prize fights in Cleveland. This edict grew out of a fight in Public Hall on April 18, between two 135-pound amateurs named Terry McManus and Morris Kleinman. It was obvious to most of the five thousand fans in attendance (including Mayor Kohler) that the fighters were unevenly matched. McManus was far superior and racked up a big lead on points. Kleinman didn't attract the crowd's affection with the numerous low blows he threw at McManus to slow him down, but it didn't matter. The decision clearly had been won by McManus—except that the judges named Kleinman the winner. Their decision was the signal for one of the best fight crowd riots in Cleveland history. Mayor Kohler stood on his chair and demanded that everybody come to order, but nobody paid any attention to him. That probably angered him more than the raw decision because he announced immediately thereafter that there would be no more fights in Cleveland during his administration.

Morris Kleinman, the crowd displeaser, went on from amateur fighter

to professional gambler of national notoriety. He was accused of throwing many low blows at society during his adult career, including rum running on the Great Lakes and shorting Uncle Sam on the income tax returns. He served a three-year term for tax fraud. He was one of the charter members of the notorious "Cleveland gang" that still exerts so much influence in gambling circles in Kentucky and Las Vegas.

These moves by Mayor Kohler make him sound, in retrospect, like a reformer, which he was not. Neither, on the other hand, was he a reckless rake—a rake, perhaps, but reckless, never. A good illustration of his careful approach to illicit pleasure is to be found in his solution of a dilemma which faced him early in his term as mayor. Prohibition had been adopted and it wasn't long before Clevelanders were falling by the wayside as if poleaxed from the effects of the bootleg booze they suddenly found themselves drinking. This perturbed the new mayor deeply and caused him obvious anxiety. It made him wonder about the hooch he himself was buying. One day it came to him, as in a blinding revelation, that as the city's chief executive he had access to the services of one of the city's chemists. He made his arrangements quietly and henceforth it became a part of the chemist's regular duties to analyze Mayor Kohler's bootleg booze to determine if it were safely drinkable. The mayor would drop the stuff off when he got to work in the morning and the chemist, a likely young lad by the name of Julius Kovachy, would return the analyzed spirits to him at quitting time. The system was a big improvement over the royalty's old method of having a taster underfoot all the time to nibble at the king's frappés and pancakes as a precaution against poisoning.

Mayor Kohler one time expressed his views on reformers in a manner which definitely removed him from good standing in any society of do-gooders. His remarks were inspired by a controversy over the acoustical qualities of the vast new Public Hall which was dedicated and opened during the Kohler administration. Just before the opening, a committee of civic experts headed by Professor Dayton C. Miller of Case School of Applied Science had issued a report severely criticizing the acoustics of the great hall.

Kohler rejected the report and its recommendations, and on the opening program, immediately after performances by the police band, the firemen's band, and the German singing societies, Kohler spoke his mind in the following statesmanlike address:

"Ladies and gentlemen of the most wonderful audience ever gathered under one roof in Cuyahoga County, I thank you greatly for your applause. I had hoped that every imbecile that hammered this hall would be here tonight.

"I would like any lady or gentleman who finds anything wrong with the acoustics of this hall to stand up. I have never found it to fail that when a practical man tackles a job, he goes about his business just in the opposite way that a theoretical fool would . . ."

The following night, Kohler warmed up to his subject before another full house in the new hall:

"Because of what they called acoustics, they wanted to fill up all those beautiful panels up there with felt to soften our voices, they said. That would have cost the city about \$200,000. We would have been the soft ones to have spent that money.

"There is no place in this community for uplifters and reformers. They go around and find out what a practical man is doing and then take the opposite side. That's the way they get their living. I tell you people I'm always going to be against the imbeciles and bookbugs. Whenever I meet one of them I'm going to walk right away from him and leave him standing in the middle of the street."

One advantage that Kohler had over most Cleveland mayors of the past was that he did not have to worry about re-election. The city already had voted to adopt the city manager plan of government. It was to replace the old mayor-council form of city administration upon the conclusion of Kohler's term of office, taking effect in January 1924. Kohler's flamboyant administration, nevertheless, continued to give the impression that he was running for something, especially in its emphasis on his record of economy.

At the end of his first year in office, the orange-and-black billboards shouted: "The City Now Lives Within Its Income! [signed] FRED KOHLER, Mayor."

When his reign finally was at an end, Kohler put up his last message to the city on a sign that was hung on the revolving orange-and-black Christmas tree on Public Square. It announced that, thanks to Fred Kohler, the city had a surplus of \$1,400,000.

The concluding paragraph of his last annual report was a shining example of pure Kohleriana:

"For two years I have kept the wolf from Cleveland's door. Cleveland is again on the map RIGHT. And good or bad, right or wrong, I alone have been your mayor. I gave you the best I had; all of my time, energy, and experience. If my administration has been a failure, it is my fault; if it has been a success, it is also my fault."

The big guessing game in Cleveland was over which direction Kohler would jump after leaving the mayor's chair. He was noncommittal, but at the last minute he went to the Board of Elections and took out two petitions for governor, one for county treasurer, one for coroner, and one for county recorder. Even as the experts were trying to guess which one of these posts he would seek in this political version of Russian

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roulette, Kohler filed his petition and announced his candidacy for sheriff.

He won the post easily, but promptly aroused a civic controversy over his treatment of prisoners. He was allowed to spend forty-five cents a day on food for each prisoner. It was charged that he spent, on an average, only seven cents per prisoner, and there were unkind critics who claimed that the sheriff pocketed anywhere from fifteen thousand to fifty thousand dollars during his two-year term of office. He was defeated for re-election in 1926.

Kohler ran for governor in 1928, but he was roundly defeated. It was a strange performance, even for Kohler. He not only failed to put on a campaign for the office, but he didn't even bother to stay in the country during the contest. While his opponents were ranging the Ohio countryside, drumming up support, Herr Fred was lolling in the beer gardens of Germany and touring the cities of Europe. It was either a supreme display of confidence, or the most magnificent show of indifference ever exhibited by a candidate for a major political office.

It was his last hurrah. While he gave the impression that he was prepared to run again for mayor of Cleveland as the city showed signs of abandoning the city manager form of government in the beginning of the 1930s, he never did. He suffered a paralytic stroke on board an ocean liner in the harbor of Plymouth, England, in June 1932, and the man who came back to Cleveland to die was not the big, burly, rough-talking Fred Kohler that everybody knew; just a feeble old man who wanted to sit in the sun and reminisce in a quiet voice.

After he died on January 30, 1934, it was discovered that he had left a fortune of nearly half a million dollars in a bank safety deposit box. It was an eyebrow-lifting sum for a poorly paid public servant to accumulate and, inevitably, it inspired all kinds of speculation. But however the fortune had been amassed, the people of Cleveland were not inclined to be indignant. They knew that Fred Kohler had given them a fair run for the money. He alone had been their mayor.