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"The ETHICS of PIG"

By O. HENRY

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ON an eastbound train I went into the smoker and found Jefferson Peters, the only man with a brain west of the Wabash river who can use his cerebrum, cerebellum and medulla oblongata at the same time.

Jeff is in the line of unillegal graft. He is not to be dreaded by widows and orphans; he is a reducer of surplusage. His favorite disguise is that of the target bird at which the spendthrift or the reckless investor may shy a few inconsequential dollars. He is readily vocalized by tobacco; so, with the aid of two thick and easy burning brevas, I got the story of his latest Autolycean adventure.

"In my line of business," said Jeff, "the hardest thing is to find an upright, trustworthy, strictly honorable partner to work a graft with. Some of the best men I ever worked with in a swindle would resort to trickery at times.

"So last summer I think I will go over into this section of country where I hear the serpent has not yet entered and see if I can find a partner naturally gifted with a talent for crime, but not yet contaminated by success.

"I found a village that seemed to

show the right kind of a layout. The inhabitants hadn't found out that Adam had been dispossessed and were going right along naming the animals and killing snakes just as if they were in the garden of Eden. They call this town Mount Nebo, and it's up near the spot where Kentucky and West Virginia and North Carolina corner together. Them states don't meet? Well, it was in that neighborhood, anyway.

"After putting in a week proving I wasn't a revenue officer I went over to the store where the rude fourflushers of the hamlet lied, to see if I could get a line on the kind of man I wanted.

"Gentlemen," says I after we rubbed noses and gathered 'round the dried apple barrel. 'I don't suppose there's another community in the whole world into which sin and chicanery has less extensively permeated than this. Life here, where all the women are brave and propitious and all the men honest and expedient, must, indeed, be an idol. It reminds me,' says I, 'of Goldstein's beautiful ballad entitled "The Deserted Village," which says:

"'Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey;

What art can drive its charms away?
The judge rode slowly down the lane,
mother,

For I'm to be queen of the May.'"

"Why, yes, Mr. Peters," says the storekeeper. 'I reckon we air about as moral and torpid a community as there be on the mounting, according to cen-

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"Worse," says the storekeeper. "He steals hogs."

"Shucks, now," says I in the mountain idiom, 'don't tell me there's a man in Mount Nebo as bad as that.'

"Worse," says the storekeeper. 'He steals hogs.'

"I think I will look up this Mr. Tatum. So a day or two after the constable turned him out I got acquainted with him and invited him out on the edge of town to sit on a log and talk business.

"What I wanted was a partner with a natural rural makeup to play a part in some little one act outrages that I was going to book with the Pittfall & Gin circuit in some of the western towns, and this R. Tatum was born for the role as sure as nature cast Fairbanks from the stuff that kept Eliza from sinking into the river.

"He was about the size of a first baseman, and he had ambiguous blue eyes like the china dog on the mantelpiece that Aunt Harriet used to play with when she was a child. His hair waved a little bit, like the statue of the dinkus thrower in the Vacation at Rome, but the color of it reminded you of the 'Sunset in the Grand Canyon,' by an American artist, that they hang over the stovepipe holes in the salongs. He was the Reub, without needing a touch. You'd have known him for one,

suses of opinion, but I reckon you ain't ever met Rufe Tatum.'

"Why, no," says the town constable, 'he can't hardly have ever. That air Rufe is shore the monstrousest scalawag that has escaped hangin' on the galluses. And that puts me in mind that I ought to have turned Rufe out of the lockup day before yesterday. The thirty days he got for killin' Yance Goodloe was up then. A day or two more won't hurt Rufe any, though.'

even if you'd seen him on the vaudeville stage with one cotton suspender and a straw over his ear.

"I told him what I wanted and found him ready to jump at the job.

"Overlooking such a trivial little peccadillo as the habit of manslaughter,' says I, 'what have you accomplished in the way of indirect brigandage or nonactionable thriftiness that you could point to, with or without pride, as an evidence of your qualifications for the position?'

"Why,' says he in his kind of southern system of procrastinated accents, 'hain't you heard tell? There ain't any man, black or white, in the Blue Ridge that can tote off a shoat as easy as I can without bein' heard, seen or cotched. I can lift a shoat,' he goes on, 'out of a pen, from under a piazza, at the trough, in the woods, day or night, anywhere or anyhow, and I guarantee nobody won't hear a squeal. It's all in the way you grab hold of 'em and carry 'em afterward. Some day,' goes on this gentle despoiler of pigpens, 'I hope to become reckernized as the champion shoat stealer of the world.'

"It's proper to be ambitious,' says I, 'and hog stealing will do very well for Mount Nebo, but in the outside world, Mr. Tatum, it would be considered as crude a piece of business as a bear raid on Bay State Gas. However, it will do as a guarantee of good faith. We'll go into partnership. I've got \$1,000 cash capital, and with that homeward plods atmosphere of yours we ought to be able to win out a few shares of Soon Parted preferred in the money market.'

"So I attaches Rufe, and we go away from Mount Nebo down into the lowlands. And all the way I coach him for his part in the grafts I had in mind. I had idled away two months on the Florida coast and was feeling all to the Ponce de Leon, besides having so many new schemes up my sleeve that I had to wear kimonos to hold 'em.

"I intended to assume a funnel shape and mow a path nine miles wide through the farming belt of the middle west, so we headed in that direction. But when we got as far as Lexington we found Binkley Bros.' circus there and the blue grass peasantry

(Concluded on last page.)

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