

The Free Press' Short Story

SNEEFUS

By C. A. STEPHENS

SNEEFUS founded a monarchy of his own, far up in the Maine woods. He had seen all the ever wanted to see of the human race—much more, indeed. What Sneefus desired was a lodge in some vast wilderness where sight and sound of mankind might never reach him more; and he achieved it for six years.

Truth to say, he had pretty good reason for his misanthropy. His intercourse with humanity began under very trying circumstances, when he was but eleven months old. At that time he was fully half grown and tipped the scales at a hundred and forty-three pounds—facts which make it advisable for me to explain that Sneefus was not of the genus Homo but of a genus shamefully oppressed by our own, never in fact given a fair chance to develop and enjoy its inalienable rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. To put it a little more plainly, Sneefus was a pig, an individual of the despised genus Sus.

Any good naturalist will tell you, however, that nature originally intended the genus Sus for great things—for high evolution and very possibly for the mastery of this prerogative planet. Neither the dog, the horse, the elephant, nor yet any of the carnivora was endowed with so keen wits or a finer brain, if given opportunity to develop.

But somehow, in the mad scramble of primeval races for supremacy, the poor pig lost his chance, sank to a condition of abject slavery and settled to durance vile in filthy sties, to be fed on refuse and inevitably have his throat cut.

Worse than slavery, however, worse than bad food and a joyless life in dirty dungeons, worse than death even, were the indignities that drove Sneefus to battle and to flight. For they made a greased pig of him at the county fair, shaved off his bristly white coat with sheep shears and dull razors, covered him with slush, even to his ears, and in spite of his shrieks cut off his beautiful curly tail.

What pig wouldn't have run away? We young folks from the Old Squire's place were much interested in the pig chase, for it was our pig! The committee had begged him of us.

During the previous spring, Sneefus was easily the finest pig in our litter, the longest-legged, largest and most vigorous; and he was named Sneefus from the pert manner in which he turned his head and wrinkled up his nose.

After a hot scuffle, the committee had captured him under a tarpaulin, hustled him into a crate and then wheeled him to the barn and shut fast all the doors. Sneefus meanwhile was emphasizing his protest to the proceedings, viva voce. Five active young men had been required to hold him down on the barn floor, while two others essayed the task of shearing and shaving him. They had been two hours about it; four of them were bitten; and they were obliged finally to muzzle him. All the time, too, Sneefus had made the barn resound with his yells.

Throughout the following night he had languished in a covered cart. Evidently he missed his bristles. Next day, looking very red all over, he had ridden in state to the fair grounds; and, as the appointed hour for the chase drew near, two members of the committee, using long-handled awls, anointed him profusely with warm lard from a bucket—a procedure which seemed greatly to astonish Sneefus. He was visibly amazed, too, when, the event having been loudly heralded and all the gates to the race track closed, he found himself suddenly precipitated from the cart to the ground and surrounded on all sides by eager dogs and bare-headed, grinning young fellows. For an instant he stared bewildered, then scooted with a wild "woof" of terror—and the fun, if fun it could be called, began.

Sneefus came round the course fairly ahead of every pursuer. Then, spying the cart from which he had been ejected and no doubt feeling the need of refuge, he dived under it; and there among the wheels the first mix-up occurred, boys, dogs and pig tumbling over one another amid a roar of howls, barks, yelps, and now and again a piercing squeal from Sneefus as he struggled free from grabbing hands and snapping jaws. Dirt and gravel flew. The cart was upset, pinning two or three of the pursuers beneath it. But Sneefus had broken clean away and started to run again, the bystanders yelling delightedly and shouting, "Good pig! Bully for the pig!"

Off along the track they all followed at speed in a thick cloud of dust. But at length some of the craftier of his human pursuers started to run the other way, in an attempt to intercept him in his flight. Discovering these enemies coming to meet him, Sneefus at first stopped short in fresh terror, then turned back, but, finding himself surrounded and spying a chink in the fence about the track, where a board was off near the ground, he dived for it.

It often has been said that a pig will go through any opening through which he can push his nose. Sneefus, under full headway with his hundred and forty pounds, carried away two more of the boards and issued among the wagons parked outside.

Distanced for the moment, his pursuers had to scale the fence; and before they could again close in on him Sneefus, going like a streak amidst or under the obstructing vehicles, gained that quarter of the grounds occupied by the side-shows and fakir booths which was called the "Midway," always a feature of our county fairs.

Then active pursuers, coming up, nearly captured him there—had him by one leg for several struggling, squealing instants. But Sneefus slipped greatly away from them and, seeing the open flap of the Fat Lady's tent, rushed in—without paying admission. Sad things are alleged to have happened therein. The Fat Lady screamed repeatedly. The tent yawned, shook perilously and nearly collapsed. In fact, the Fat Lady subsequently sued the Agricultural Society and eventually, I believe, recovered damages for greasy spots on her yellow satin gown and the loss of a whole stack of her printed, descriptive pamphlets.

Here Sneefus escaped by the back side of the tent and, being set upon by indignant fakirs with beer bottles and tent poles, tumbled headlong into the booth of Madame Homer, the Blind Fortune-Teller, who also sued the society later, her complaint stating that a mad hog, followed by a motley mob of crazy, dirty fellows, had pushed through her place, upsetting her table and causing the loss of her precious crystal ball from which she read the future.

Sneefus somehow got out of there and blundered directly into the Anaconda's Chamber's tent, which abutted on that of Madame Homer, at the back. But perhaps he smelled the big serpent, for he rubbed forth shrieking and with a wild burst of speed took refuge behind the crates of turkeys, geese and other poultry ranged against the high fence of the fair grounds. Here his panting followers believed they had him cornered and closed round him en masse. The wildest mix-up of all then followed. Every crate was overturned, for Sneefus dived behind the entire row of them. Twice he was caught by the legs, his desperate squeals rising above the cackle of the disturbed fowls. Here, too, he lost nearly all of his right ear to a bloody-minded mastiff. Yet once again that valiant pig slipped through them all and, emerging unexpectedly from the melee, dashed clean across the grounds.

So far, everything had gone against the poor Sneefus. As he now neared the front of the fair grounds, however, his luck turned; the entrance gate opened to admit a gala party arriving in a barge drawn by six horses. Past prancing animals and rattling barge wheels scooted Sneefus to liberty outside the gate before it could be closed against him.

Accounts vary as to where he went next, but apparently he crossed the lawn of a dwelling on the opposite side of the highway and tracks were seen in a vegetable garden in the rear. Beyond was a pine woodland, and a straggling squad of pursuers trailed him there. But among the pines all trace of him was lost; neither boys nor dogs were able to find him. That was the last seen of Sneefus in this part of the country.

We thought that he would return home, after his first fright wore away, since it is well known that every pig carries a little compass in his head—or what answers for one—that will unerringly direct him to the place of his birth, even when transported to a distance of miles, in a sack or basket.

But Sneefus did not come back. Evidently his fear or his hate for mankind ran deeper than the homing instinct. He seems to have taken to the depths of the forest and as time passed fled farther and farther away.

A railway extends from Montreal through the northern portions of Vermont and New Hampshire and down through Maine to Portland. It was on this line, nearly a year ago, that a stock train, transporting eight or nine carloads of live hogs, was derailed in a wooded region near the Maine boundary. Several of the cars were overturned, and the frightened hogs strayed off into the woods. Exasperated trainmen and others, were said to have chased hogs there for days afterwards; but numbers escaped to long distances and were never retaken.

There is pretty good evidence that Sneefus found and joined himself to certain of these fugitives, of which he became leader. From being occasionally shot at, they grew so terrified at the report of firearms—and perchance from having been wounded—that as time passed they ranged farther and farther north into that then unbroken wilderness along the Canadian border.

Eventually they appear to have found sanctuary in the never fully explored tract known to lumbermen and timber cruisers as the Great Bog: a district as large as two or three townships, situated at the headwaters of the West Branch of the Penobscot and the Upper St. John River, to the northwest of Moosehead Lake.

Although conversant with the northern portions of Maine, the writer never

visited the Great Bog, and my knowledge of it is derived wholly from what has been told me by my boyhood friend, Willis March.

One winter Willis had made his camp on the eastern border of the Bog to trap beaver; and so far as he knew there was then no settler's clearing within a hundred miles. He was therefore much astonished one morning—the 21st of November—to hear hogs squealing at no great distance. He had traps to look after that day, for a snowstorm was evidently pending; but later on he became so curious about those hogs that he took his gun and set off in the direction of the sounds he had heard. Soon he stumbled upon something queer; nothing less than an immense heap of dry swamp grass. There was, Willis affirmed, enough of this to make a big load of hay. It lay in a circular pile on the ground, higher than his head and thirty or forty feet in diameter. At first he supposed it to be a stack of hay cut by some person; but while he stood viewing it, wondering who could have done it, he heard rustling noises within. He drew back a little and remained watching for some moments. He now fancied that he could perceive movements inside the heap and thought he heard the heavy breathing of some animal concealed there. He cocked his gun, then, gleaning about, found a chink, threw it into the pile and gave a yell.

The effect was magical. The entire mass stirred at once and an instant later disgorged a drove of hogs that streamed away into the swamp, giving vent to wild "woofs" of surprise and terror, while close in their rear scurried a shrieking mob of little pigs.

There were ten or twelve of the old hogs, one, apparently their leader, being of greater size than the others. This one faced about several times, as if guarding the rear, grunting savagely and lasting foam clots from its tusks. Willis noted that it had but one ear and a mere stump of tail, not more than two inches long, that stood straight up from its rump. Could this wild boar be Sneefus?

Willis's account of that big heap of dry swamp grass in which the hogs were lying up in shelter from the storm at first appeared to border too much on the marvelous. That the hogs had collected themselves, seemed unlikely; but an acquaintance who made a business of raising hogs in western Kansas informs me that just before a blizzard he had seen a whole drove of hogs working busily for two or three hours, fetching mouthfuls of dry grass, corn butts and Jimson weed and making a pile of sufficient size for forty hogs to nestle in, completely out of sight!

It was no part of Willis's plan to remain there after deep snows came. He left a week later without seeing anything further of the hogs; and probably he never would have heard more of them but for a French Canadian who subsequently worked at one of the Old Squire's logging camps. This woodsman, whom his mates called Giam Mercier, hailed from the parish of Grandes Coudes, on the Chaudiere River, in the Province of Quebec. Two winters previous he had been—so he told us—of a party of six hunters who had gone from his parish on a hog hunt over the boundary into Maine. They had heard of a band of wild hogs in the Great Bog and went there during the month of December; taking six long, narrow hand-sleds for drawing the pork from the woods, to a point where they had learned to smuggle it.

They finally surprised the hogs rooting heavily lily from the bed of one of the muddy ponds. Ice nearly a foot thick had already formed there; but, owing to the water beneath having been drawn away by beaver hunters, there were wide, open spaces here the ice had not settled down. The hogs had worked their way beneath the ice sheet and were evidently subsisting on the succulent tuber, wrenched up from the now shallow water and mud.

Where the ice had broken down there were cracks and crevasses, and through these the hog hunters were able to fire upon the terrified animals as they attempted to escape still farther under the ice. But the ice ere long broke up about them, and the beleaguered hogs were at last brought to bay; they defended themselves valiantly.

The fiercest battle of all, Giam said, was waged with the leader of the band, a very large hog with one ear and a bobbed tail—the last to succumb. This hog had "tusches" at least two inches long on each side of its jaws and would have weighed, he thought, five hundred pounds.

We had little doubt that this was our lost Sneefus. He had perished like a patriot hero, defending his clan, but not till he had enjoyed six years of glorious freedom from the ruthless enslavers of his species.

The pork hunters reported that they had caught glimpses of a number of little pigs that escaped too far beneath the sheltering roof of ice to be captured. I have always cherished the hope—whimsical perhaps—that this was so, and that somewhere in the far depths of that northern wilderness, a drove of gallant free-descendants of old Sneefus still survives.

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THE MAPLE LEAF

Canadian are maple leaf minded. Magnificent autumn leaves, tinted with all the flaming colors of early fall are being received in ever increasing numbers, for judging in the nation-wide competition being conducted by the Canadian National and Canadian Pacific Railways. This year's competition for the most beautiful maple leaf, and for the largest leaf, is going to be exceptionally keen, according to reports from the railway officials in charge. Hundreds of beautiful leaves have already been received from appreciative nature lovers in the Provinces of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec and Ontario, while leaves from the Prairie Provinces and British Columbia are beginning to put in an appearance. More than 10,000 leaves were received in first competition held last fall, and this year present indications lead those concerned to the opinion that the total will be far more than twice that number.

With the sweeping ridges of maple trees already showing splendid vistas of color, and with an ever-increasing number of people making it a point of enjoying fall outings in the country side, those in charge are making preparations for a deluge of specimens from now on until the competition closes on October 15th, when judges from the Royal Canadian Academy will commence their exciting task. The first prize for the most beautiful leaf in all Canada will be \$50; the second prize \$20; and the third prize, \$10. The first prize for the largest leaf is \$16; and the second prize, \$5.

Ten distinct types of maple trees are found in Canada including the red, sugar, silver, mountain, striped, black, Manitoba, broad-leaved, vine and dwarf. It is not difficult to distinguish between them. The seed wings of the silver maple are more widespread and the leaf more sharply indented than the sugar maple, although both have a high sugar content in the sap. The broad-leaved maple leaf is generally the type drawn by every school boy, with five prominent lobes and is more deeply notched than the leaf of the sugar maple. The leaf of the striped maple is entirely without the lower lobes, that of the red maple with faint evidence of them and the mountain maple with slightly more pronounced lobes. In these leaves there are three main veins running to the upper lobes with no lower lobe veining in the striped maple, and slight indication in the red and mountain species. The leaves of the red and dwarf maples are often hard to distinguish. The lateral lobes of the latter are generally more prominent with a greater tendency to broadening. The leaf of the vine maple is much rounder with seven main veins in the leaf. Many consider the silver maple leaf the finest in outline of all the maples in Canada, but the red maple in autumn the finest in coloring.

The habitat of the mountain maple is that area from the northern part of Lake Winnipeg to the southern part of the open. The striped maple likewise a small tree, similar in habits to the mountain maple, is found from Nova Scotia to Lake Superior. The broad-leaved maple makes its home on the British Columbia coast and on Vancouver Island. Its leaves are the largest in Canada. The vine maple also makes its home along the lower British Columbia coast and on Vancouver Island and rarely grows erect. The dwarf maple is found from Alaska down the British Columbia coast and in the southern parts of the province.

The sugar maple is found in Ontario,

WESTERN LAMBS COME EAST

Feeder lambs from the ranges of Western Canada will be fattened in the Eastern provinces under arrangements which are being worked out by the Canadian Department of Agriculture. Members of the Ranchers' Association have agreed to consign lambs for fattening under an arrangement whereby the valuation of three cents a pound is placed on the lambs at the Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, stockyards, where official weights are to be established.

Eastern farmers who apply for feeder lambs will not be required to lay out any cash, but must have suitable equipment in the form of feedstuffs and plenty of hay and good water. They will also be required to feed and market in accordance with procedure prescribed by officials of the Department of Agriculture. Ranchers retain their ownership of the lambs until marketed. In 1933 about three thousand lambs were fattened in Ontario under a similar agreement and larger numbers are expected this year.

Quebec and the Maritimes and the silver maple south of a line running from Georgian Bay to about Quebec City with many in Western New Brunswick. The red maple ranges from Nova Scotia to Lake of the Woods but cannot be said to be very plentiful. The home of the Manitoba maple is in the prairie provinces in the area absorbing almost half of Manitoba and Saskatchewan, slightly intruding into Alberta. While all these trees are to be found in other parts of Canada, they do not grow there naturally and are often transported for decorative purposes to later spread throughout the community.

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Drawings at Finance, Ottawa, September 11, 1934.