Mr. Hughes was downcast. In fact, Mr. Hughes was pessimistic. It was not the fact that it was Sunday—Mr. Hughes was not a church-going man—but simply that the view from the big front window of his newspaper office was neither scenically inspiring nor financially hopeful.

To be specific, the view was the "village square." Its being circular and having no imposing buildings did not alter the fact that it was "the square." Deacon Bierkemper, that pillar of Dunville society, had always called it "the square," so it came quite naturally by that name.

Mr. Hughes meditated on the all-powerful Deacon, and on his own financial difficulties—for they were bound in an inseparable tie. Not that Mr. Hughes disliked the Deacon. The Deacon was a fine upstanding citizen; he was a devout church-goer, and a village power. Indeed, he had a finger in every pie, and was viewed by all with respect and awe.

He controlled the village's purse strings too. And this was the thorn in Mr. Hughes' side—the Deacon controlled the advertising of the town's various trade concerns. Moreover, he had refused to give the printing of their advertisements to Mr. Hughes. Indeed he had sent them to the next town—and all because the Deacon's opinions did not agree with Mr. Hughes' editorials.

It was an outrage, Mr. Hughes was asserting vigorously to himself in vari-colored language. He again glanced out of his window with a slightly venomous look in his eyes. The buildings on the "square" stood sleepily in the morning sunshine. The Emporium, Dry Goods and Other Merchandise, stood arrogantly at one end, dissolving all Mr. Hughes' hopes of a lucrative income. At the other end was the Farmer's National in all the glitter of its brass name plate; it had refused Mr. Hughes a loan. Nearby, detracting from its glory, stood Skrobian's Pool Hall, with a motley collection of drugstores, ice-cream parlors, places of business hovering near, and, in solitary grandeur, on the corner, the New Zealand Hotel.

Mr. Hughes surveyed this scene with a jaded eye which woke to startled interest as he saw the horse and buggy of Deacon Bierkemper approaching. The horse and buggy was moving in an unmistakable hurry. Mr. Hughes looked at his clock. It was five minutes past church time. Mr. Hughes again glanced out of the window. Mr. Hughes' curiosity got the better of his natural pride. He went to the screen door.

The Deacon appeared to be in difficulty. His horse refused to move. The Deacon did his best. Still the horse refused to move. The Deacon surveyed the situation. He frowned—a frown which always terrified the Sunday School—but the horse stood firm. The Deacon now began to speak, but not in the genteel, restrained way one would expect of the Deacon. His discourse to the horse was distinctly punctuated by dots, dashes, interjections, and whirligigs.

Mr. Hughes, from the screen door, could scarcely believe his ears. Could it be the worthy Deacon Bierkemper? He hastily stepped out of his door to further investigate the matter.

The Deacon, pausing in his tirade to draw breath, saw Mr. Hughes. He glared—a most vicious glare—at Mr. Hughes.

Mr. Hughes smiled affably and said, "Havin' some trouble, Deacon?" "Nothin' to speak of," snapped Deacon Bierkemper.

"Well, well," observed Mr. Hughes.
in honeyed tones, “didn’t think you’d speak to a horse that way, Deacon!”

Smarting under the whiplash of Mr. Hughes’ wit, the Deacon looked wrathfully at his watch. He was fifteen minutes late.

The voice of Mr. Hughes broke in upon his anger, “I had a horse like that, ’bout ten years ago. Never would start unless you ‘tickled’ his ears. Of course, you had to ‘tickle’ his ears in a special way, but he’d always start when I’d ‘tickled’ ’em. I never did start at that horse. Or were you swearin’, Deacon?”

The Deacon glared—too angry to speak.

“My, my,” continued Mr. Hughes, “what would the congregation think if they knew you swore—and most especially on Sunday?”

A dull red suffused the Deacon’s rather high cheek-bones. In stony silence he renewed his futile attempts to start the horse. The horse, however, remained adamant.

“Well, why don’t you ‘tickle’ its ears, Deacon?” suggested Mr. Hughes.

The Deacon glared again. He looked at his watch. Twenty minutes late, now! Laboriously he clambered out of the buggy, and, in all the dignity of his Sunday suit, he approached the horse’s head. Reaching out a bony finger, he hesitatingly scratched the horse’s ear.

The horse shook his head resentfully. The Deacon tried again. The results were decidedly negative.

Mr. Hughes’ voice broke in again upon him, “Right nice sale you’re goin’ to have down to your store, eh, Deacon? Who’s doin’ your advertising?”

The Deacon scratched even more furiously, but said nothing. The horse stood placidly still. The Deacon was now scratching desperately.

Said Mr. Hughes, “I reckon you’re not much good at ticklin’ a horse’s ears, Deacon. You got to be an artist to do it.”

The Deacon despairingly looked at his watch. He was twenty-five minutes late now! They’d be taking the collection in a few minutes.

Mr. Hughes’ voice went rambling on cheerfully, “Besides you don’t even swear at that kind of a horse. They’re sensitive. You started off wrong. But I don’t know what your congregation would think if they’d heard you.”

The Deacon began hesitatingly, a new thing in this man of decisive action—“About that sale, Brother Hughes—”

“Oh, yes,” interrupted Mr. Hughes wickedly, “your congregation would be shocked for sure. Besides, you’re almost a half hour late now. Maybe I ought to try my hand at ticklin’.”

The Deacon’s cold blue eyes began to look hopeful. He began again, “Well, now, Brother Hughes, as I was sayin’—about that sale—”

Mr. Hughes, with malice aforethought, again interrupted, “You better get in and I’ll try.”

The Deacon managed a frosty smile and climbed into the buggy—“I trust you’ll not say anythin’ about my little temper awhile back,” he said ingratiatingly.

Mr. Hughes smiled thoughtfully, “Well, now, Deacon, I reckon we can sort of keep it to ourselves—if you’d like. I don’t mind doin’ folks a favor now and then.”

So, smiling inwardly and outwardly, Mr. Hughes approached the horse’s head. He tickled with a will, muttering to the horse mysteriously in the meantime. The Deacon watched hopefully. Then with a jerk the horse started. The Deacon managed another wintry smile of thanks and went on his way. A faint chuckle escaped Mr. Hughes as he watched the worthy Deacon drive down the dusty road to the church thirty-five minutes late.