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There's Nothing People Won't Steal

A STORY tells of a couple driving along a highway who saw a man gathering apples in a well-kept orchard. They stopped and asked: "Can we buy some apples?"

"Nope," the man replied as he continued filling his baskets, "but you can pick all you want."

After filling their sack, the couple thanked the man and inquired: "Are you sure we can't pay you for these fine apples?"

"Nope," the generous one replied. "I'm stealing them, too!"

Whether this actually happened is unknown, but it typifies the attitude of our permissive, amoral society. We now have a problem called "geriatric delinquency" to match juvenile misdeeds.

The FBI has reported that nationally twice as many people past 60 years old have been caught stealing as was the case 10 years ago. "They're not stealing to eat," a spokesman said, listing cosmetics, cigars and luxury items as targets of the elderly.

Obviously, multitudes of people do not think the Eighth Command-

ment of God, "Thou shalt not steal," applies to them, or else they assume certain properties are exempt from its meaning.

Cash probably is the most frequently stolen property, because it often is unidentifiable after thieves get their hands on it. "Organized crime" reportedly invests in bank ownership where the crooks will have a handy place to "launder dirty money" so it cannot be traced.

Masked bandits have sometimes made big reputations and provided themes for stories and movies as they made getaways on fast horses or in speedy cars. However, the really big robberies have been accomplished by clever thieves using pen and ink or computers to forge checks, falsify records, borrow money they didn't intend to repay or abscond with funds belonging to others.

Cattle rustling used to be done on horseback, too, but now it is carried on as a regular business by crews with fast pickups or semi-trailers who have systems for locating unbranded livestock.

Scores of county commissioners have confessed to stealing public money in a widespread kickback system but they might be outnumbered by public employees who carry home tools and other property from federal or state workplaces. Private employees do likewise.

Recent reports tell of thefts of oil field equipment and crude oil, hives of bees, milk crates from dairies, shopping carts from supermarkets, American flags from public buildings, catfish from commercial breeding farms and programs from cable TV systems.

Adults have been caught stealing to support gambling and liquor habits. Youngsters are stealing to play electronic games.

It has gotten so bad that Uncle Sam is trying to set up a system to collect billions of dollars which officials say citizens are stealing from government by various tax-dodging methods.

Honestly, it looks like there is absolutely nothing people won't purloin if they can. It is stealing, just the same.