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O. Henry (whose real name was William Sydney Porter) was awaiting trial over bank embezzlement charges, and his father in law posted bail to keep him out of jail -- but the day before Porter was due to stand trial he fled, first to New Orleans and later to Honduras. While holed up in a Trujillo, Honduras, hotel for several months, he wrote Cabbages and Kings. This is the book where Henry coined the term "banana republic" to describe the country; the term went on to be used to describe almost any small, unstable tropical nation in Latin America.

And then his wife's long-term illness took a turn for the worse: she was dying of tuberculosis. Porter packed his bags and went back to face trial in Houston.

This volume is the only work of O. Henry's which approaches being a novel. The stories are related and should be read in the sequence in which they occur in the book.