

# DEEDS OF HORSE THIEVES

## AN EXPERT GANG'S WORK IN WESTERN NEW-YORK.

THE LEADER'S ARREST AND ESCAPE FROM JAIL—AN AMATEUR DETECTIVE OUTWITTED—A REFORMED HORSE-THIEF'S RECOLLECTIONS—EXPLOITS OF THE NOTORIOUS TINKER AND TEMPLE GANGS.

ROCHESTER, N. Y., June 26.—During the past two or three months horse-thieves have carried on extensive operations in this part of the State, and their manner of working, and the uniform success attending it, left no doubt in the minds of detectives and others that the depredations were being committed by persons who were no novices in this branch of crime, and that they were under the leadership of some shrewd and daring expert. As Ambrose Suits, a professional horse-thief and housebreaker, who has long been the terror of Western New-York, was released not long ago from the Monroe County Penitentiary, after a three years' term, (also one at Auburn,) it was believed that he was leading the robberies. This proved to be the case. A daring wholesale theft of horses in Livingston County, about two weeks ago, was traced to him through the treachery of an accomplice, and he was arrested at a low resort in West-avenue and taken to Geneseo Jail.

Suits has been in nearly every jail in this part of the State, and only one of them ever held him long enough for him to appear for trial. His reputation as a jail-breaker is well known. He was in Geneseo Jail only two days. When the jailer went to take Suits's breakfast to him one Wednesday morning the cell was empty. Two of the iron bars across the window were off, and the horse-thief was gone. He left no trace as to the direction he had taken, and none could be found. On the following Friday a young man, the son of a small hotel proprietor in this city, called on the Sheriff of Livingston County and told that officer that he knew where Suits was, and signified his willingness to "give him away" for a consideration. The Sheriff made terms with the informer. Suits, it seems, was in this city, stopping at the hotel owned by the young man's father, the usual resort of the notorious criminal. On Saturday morning the informer began to carry out his plan of capturing the wary Suits. His first move was to ask the fugitive to take a drink with him. That awakened suspicion in the mind of Suits at once, as the young man was not in the habit of asking any one to join him at the bar. He "played off" on the amateur detective, and soon afterward had him very drunk. The young man went out to the barn and fell asleep. When he awoke his boots, his pocket-book, and all his money, his watch and chain, and a valuable horse and buggy were gone. So was the horse-thief Suits. The horse and wagon were found on Sunday afternoon in a field on Charles Rowe's farm, in the Town of Gates. There Suits had taken a fresh horse belonging to Rowe, and continued his journey. He is still at large, and his trail cannot be found.

The prevalence of horse-thieving in this whole western tier of counties, and extending into the border counties of both Pennsylvania and Ohio, some of the exploits of the thieves being the most daring on record, has created the belief among the older detectives and officers of this city that a gang of large proportions, and worked on the same system as the once dreaded Shep Tinker and Bill Temple gangs of robbers, has been organized, and is responsible for the crimes recently committed in the region named. The Temple gang operated for years in New-York, New-Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Northern Maryland, while Shep Tinker and his desperadoes were the terror of Ohio, Virginia, and Indiana. There is an old man now following a humble calling in this city who was a member of both of these gangs, and he gives some interesting reminiscences of each. This man was converted while serving a four years' term in a Pennsylvania penitentiary for horse-stealing. He has lived a respectable life ever since his release, three years ago.

Shep Tinker, he says, organized his gang of thieves as long ago as 1840. He was born of respectable parents in Putnam, Ohio, in 1810, but when he was very young his parents removed to Perry County, and settled about 25 miles from Zanesville. His father opened a tavern, which is still known as Tinker's Tavern. It was the only building between Athens and Louisville, a distance of 50 miles. Shep grew up a wild, reckless sort of boy, but was studious and very intelligent. While known as a dare-devil, and the ring-leader in all sorts of mischief, he was not looked upon as vicious, or inclined to a criminal life. His subsequent career was the result of a story that he invented, through which he was sentenced to State Prison for a crime that he did not commit. In 1830, a farmer named Hiram Flowers had a horse stolen from his barn, near New-Lexington. Shep was thought to be the thief, but no evidence could be found against him. Some time afterward he was drunk in a neighboring village, and while in that condition he regaled a number of boon companions with a sensational story of how he had stolen Flowers's horse and committed several daring deeds in accomplishing his object. The story got abroad, he was arrested, tried at once, convicted on the strength of his own drunken story, and sentenced to six years in the Penitentiary. It subsequently became known, by indubitable evidence, that Shep Tinker was 25 miles away from New-Lexington on the night of the theft, and that he had invented the story of his crime to "cod" the bar-room loungers. When he was released from prison he gave public notice that he had never been a horse-thief, but he had the name of being one, and that he now advised the farmers to keep an eye on their stock, for he intended to follow the life the law had started him in. He was as good as his word. He organized a gang of thieves that in less than four years was the terror of the farmers of Ohio and all the border States. Tinker had accomplices in every county in Ohio. Only the most valuable horses were stolen by his gang. Their expeditions were never made unless the nights were very dark. The horses were taken by nightly drives to Shep's rendezvous in the Perry County wilderness. The region around Tinker's home was admirably adapted to this purpose. It was covered with heavy forest, and abounded in ravines and rocky hiding-places.

For years Tinker confined himself to horse-stealing, but finally added counterfeiting to his other crimes. One day, in 1845, Shep was arrested in Zanesville on a charge of circulating counterfeit coin. In his saddle-bags was found a large amount of bogus coin. He was lodged in jail. Tinker was a handsome man, a fine talker, and possessed of great personal magnetism. The prisoners in the jail were supplied with their meals by a girl who was a servant in the Sheriff's house. Shep Tinker tried his smooth tongue and handsome face on the girl, and she fell in love with him. One night she stole the keys to the jail from the Sheriff and released Tinker. He was not seen for 10 years. His gang, however, continued to be a terror to the farmers. In 1855 Tinker reappeared in Zanesville. He said he had been in the penitentiaries of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, and Wisconsin since he went away, which accounted for his long absence. He offered himself as a candidate for Justice of the Peace, saying that as he knew all about crime he ought to be best able to deal with criminals. As the people rejected his theory, he announced that if he could not be a Justice of the Peace he would be a highwayman. He rejoined his gang, which had been managed during his absence by a man named Henry Rayner. His first crime was to waylay a Judge of the county and rob him of his horse. He next captured a clergyman who was traveling through Perry County, and set him adrift without his horse. These daring crimes led to his capture. He was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment. He was pardoned out after serving five. He at once renewed his efforts to be made a Justice of the Peace. He said that if the people would elect him he would drive all the horse-thieves out of the State. In 1862 he was actually elected to the position, defeating one of the richest men in the county. He was disqualified, however, from holding the office. He kept his promise as to horse-thieves, however. His gang disbanded and he reformed. He still lives near Zanesville, on a modest farm. Upon the breaking up of his gang, he declared that it had stolen over 4,000 horses; but whatever the profits of the thefts might have been, Tinker retained no share, as he is poor, and always has been.

William Temple, who died in 1876, at the age of 65 years, organized the Temple gang of horse-thieves in 1869. He had had a long career of crime in England. He was a full-blooded English gypsy, born in a tent, and given the name of the man on whose grounds his tribe was encamped. He attempted to kill a young gypsy girl when he was 18 years of age, and was sent to Van Diemen's Land for life. He escaped as a stowaway on a vessel, and returned to England, where he became a horse-thief and burglar. To escape punishment for some of his crimes, he fled to America in 1867. He met many men of his character in the wandering tribes of gypsies in this country, and in two years he had organized his gang of horse-thieves. There were 25 members of the gang proper, but they had outside workers throughout the Eastern and Middle States, and in Maryland. They owned farms in Maryland, Pennsylvania, and New-York. For four years their depredations were carried on against the farmers and villagers with a shrewdness that defied detection. The gang was divided into the "prospectors," the actual thieves, or "takers," the "runners," and the "doers." A prospector was one who went into different places to find out where the best horses were kept, how they could be got at, and what chance there was to get away with them. The prospector was generally a very shrewd fellow, who pretended he was around the country buying up stock. In this way he obtained all the information he desired, which he carried back to head-quarters. The "takers" were bold, and quick-witted young men, who were expert in handling horses, and fearless as to consequences. The "runners" were stationed near a point where the "takers" were to operate, and their business was to run the stolen

horses to the nearest farm belonging to the gang, by as many different routes as they could take. The "doers" were men whose duties consisted in altering the appearance of stolen horses as much as possible, by dyeing, clipping, scarring, singeing, and other operations, after the horses had reached the rendezvous. It was a rule that neither wagons nor harness should be stolen, as they incumbered the horses and increased the chances of detection. The Temple gang divided horse-stealing into a number of branches. "Gig-working" and the "livery racket" were profitable sources of venture to the thieves. The "gig-worker" confined his operations entirely to the large cities. He kept watch of physicians with valuable turn-outs, and when one stopped in a favorable place on a visit to a patient, the gig-worker untied the horse, jumped into the carriage, and drove rapidly away. This part of the business was attended with great risk, yet the men assigned to it were so expert and bold that only one of them was arrested in the seven years' existence of the gang. His name was Pole. He attempted to drive a Dr. Pennybaker's horse and buggy from in front of the Doctor's door, near Eleventh and Wallace streets, Philadelphia. The horse was a very valuable one. The thief got away from the house without being discovered, but as he was driving furiously down Eleventh-street the horse was recognized by the Doctor's son, who chanced to be walking up the street. He understood the situation at once and started after the flying carriage, crying "Stop thief!" A policeman caught the horse and stopped it. Pole was taken into custody and sent to the Penitentiary.

The "livery racket" was played by two youthful members of the gang in large towns. Dressed in the height of fashion, they would take apartments at a leading hotel. Their valises were packed with worthless stuff, but made a good show. They spent money for a day or so, and then would ask to be recommended to the best livery-stable, where they could get a stylish turn-out for a ride. This they would return promptly and pay its price without a word. Next day they would call for it again. No livery-stable keeper who ever intrusted his property to a brace of Temple gang workers twice ever saw it again, and no one of the gang that worked the "livery racket" was ever captured.

Temple engaged in active service with his thieves for a year or so, and then was able to retire to quarters in New-York, where he laid the plans for the gang's operations. He soon after became an invalid, and was unable to direct the work of his men as well as he had at first. The consequence was that bungling work was done, and several of the gang were arrested. Temple spent money in defending them, but two or three were convicted and sent to prison. Operations were continued, however, until 1876, when Temple died. "Pete" Milestone, Temple's ablest aid, was killed about the same time by a horse he was riding away falling with him and breaking his neck, in Chester County, Penn., and "Jake" Nole, another leader, went to England. These disasters, and the arrest of several of the thieves in different parts of the country, led to the disbanding of the gang. Its surviving and free members are scattered all over the country, and there is little doubt that some of them are now operating, under some new leader, in this State and the States bordering upon it.