HORSE THIEF NO LONGER FLOURISHES

Picturesque Character Has Vanished And In His Place Has Appeared "Flivver" Lifter—

Progress has as much to do with changing the operations and methods of criminals as it has with the doings of honest people.

Just as the stage robbers of bygone days changed from holding up stage coaches to hold up railroad trains and banks, because stage coaches were going out of business and the trains and banks were multiplying and offered them a greater amount of plunder—so the old-time horse-thief since the coming of the automobile has to a large extent given up horse stealing and is confining his operations to automobiles because there is more money in it for him.

But there was a day in Baltimore county when the horse thief was greatly dreaded. A great many horses were stolen and very few of them were ever recovered.

Most of the horses stolen from Baltimore county went the same route. They invariably went to Pennsylvania, and in time it was discovered that they were taken to the mountains of Lancaster county by members of the famous "Buzzard Gang," their leader being Abe Buzzard. It took a long time to find their hiding place in the mountains, but they were finally captured and a number of them served long terms in the Penitentiary.

There was in this county several horse-thief protective associations, one of the strongest held their monthly meetings at Marble Hill, near Cockeysville. The president was the late Samuel M. Rankin, of Long Green. The members paid regular dues based upon the number of horses they kept, and this fund was used to pay detective fees and other expenses required to capture thieves—the members also obligated themselves to ride a certain number of miles upon report of a loss in order to assist in running down the criminal.

A full description of every horse protected by the association was kept and each horse was branded on the hoof in order to make sure of its identification.

This and other such associations in the county was no doubt a great preventive; for fewer losses occurred after their formation.

The only place where one is likely to find a good, old-fashioned horse thief these days is in a movie showing the West as the Easterner thinks it is.

A horse thief cannot be located in real life, even though he shoots his picturesome way through "reel" life. He is in a class with the dodo bird. He was a picturesque character—that is, one was inclined to think of him as picturesque, unless his predatory pranks were played too close to home. In the latter case other and stronger descriptive adjectives were applied to him.

A fe wweeks ago Carroll E. Stansbury, chief of police in Baltimore county found in his mail a card announcing that a horse had been stolen from a barn of one of the citizens in the "upper end." It was the first theft of the sort reported in five years.

The chief was surprised. Why in the world, he reasoned, would anyone steal a horse when there were so many flivvers cluttering up the place? Perhaps an inmate of an insane asylum was loose.

It had been a long time since a certain well-known king got off the line—

"A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse!"

In fact, horses aren't the style any longer.

According to authorities in the sided conversation something like county, a horse could wander around loose for any length of time and no one would say "Giddap." The few surviving horse lovers demonstrate their devotion to the once popular fiery steeds by disappearing into a little booth every once in a while and after calling a certain number, a one-tent that he falls for the tempta-this is wafted to the bystanders:

"Hello—that you, Tom?—

"Say, Tom, this is Jim, y'understand?"

"Say, Tom, I want ten across the board on Yankee Princess, and I think I'll take a flyer for place and show on Our Boots."

At stated times during the year this horse lover, with thousands of others, becomes more enthusiastic and, armed with various "tips," journeys to the track, where he studies the dope sheets and hangs around the fellow who is married to a girl whose third cousin is a jockey and may be expected to know a good thing when the mysterious "they" of whom one hears much at such places are ready to "pull it off."

But, be that as it may, the man who loves horses to such an extent that he falls for the temptation to run off with one, is no more.

This has been proved by diligent search.

"Can you tell me," the searcher asked the man in charge of the office at police headquarters, "when you had the last report of a horse being stolen?"

"What's that?" he asked, apparently puzzled.

"When did the Police Department last hear of a stolen horse?"

The man reflected.

"I don't remember. It's been a pretty long time ago. But you might ask around detective headquarters. They have all the complaints about stolen things sent in to them."

At detective headquarters another man sat and looked pleasant while the query was put:

"Can you tell me when you had the last report of a stolen horse?" again asked the searcher, beginning to feel a bit foolish.

"People don't steal horses any more," was the reply, "but"—that the man wanted to help was manifest—"We have a lot of reports of stolen automoobiles."

"But the stolen horses? Doesn't anyone ever steal a horse?" insisted the searcher, waxing melancholy over the evident decadence of a picturesque American custom.

"No, not for years and years. Fifteen or twenty years ago horses were stolen every day. The thieves would pick them up and take them down to one of the big auction stables to get rid of them. But it's been so long since we had a report of anything of that sort that I really can't remember it.

Ten or fifteen years ago there were gangs who went in for horse stealing. It was a pretty good business and the police department had to keep a sharp eye on the auction rooms.

"But thieves take automobiles now. Many reports of cars being stolen are filed at headquarters every month, but we recover about 90 per cent. of them.

"You see, the majority of cars are taken for joy rides and they are found later abandoned on some country road. Getting away with an automobile isn't the easy thing that people think it is, and only a small percentage of thieves make the attempt. The majority of thefts are perpetrated by wild youngsters who want an evening's fun, but who would be too scared to try to keep the car."

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