



JUNCTION OF THE KING AND ORD RIVERS, NORTH-WEST AUSTRALIA.

HOW POCKETS ARE PICKED IN A BIG CITY.

A DAY WITH THREE THIEVES.

'It is easy enough to pick pockets when you once know how,' says the professional sneak.

'It is easy enough to tell when your pocket is being picked if you keep your thoughts about you,' says the old-time detective.

And the latter has the best end of the argument. Purses are lost, money is abstracted from vest pockets, the shoppers' bundles are fished, and overcoats are stolen mainly through carelessness.

There is no way of telling a thief by his appearance nowadays. You may suspect the shabbily-dressed, merry-eyed young man sitting next to you in the crowded suburban train. He is only an honest vendor of small

wares. The man sitting on the opposite side of the carriage has 'thief' written all over his face, but he is a very George Washington of probity and honour. The man sitting beside the carriage door, apparently buried in the columns of a newspaper, has a face that is thoroughly honest. Besides, he wears diamonds and his fingers are white and well kept.

A gentleman? Yes, if the cleverest pick-pocket in the city can be a gentleman. Of course, nobody would suspect him. If they did his occupation would be gone.

And so the accomplished thief sits by the door and waits for the scramble that is sure to come when the railway station is reached.

The ways and schemes of thieves are many and varied. Pickpockets generally 'work' a crowd in gangs. It is easier and the risk is less. Let us say there are three celebrated thieves determined to try their hands in the shopping districts for a day.

There are three of them. They

have their signals, consisting of words, motions, and even of coughs. One of these men is an elderly-looking fellow, benevolent in appearance and fatherly in manner. He is the chief of the 'push.' The second young man is slender and muscular. He is the 'stall.' If necessary the purse or watch is passed to him, because he is a human eel at getting out of a crowd. The third is the chief worker, a pickpocket.

The precious trio do not walk along together. They keep some distance apart until some plan of action is agreed upon. Presently they select as their first victim a young woman whose purse projects some two inches from her shallow pocket. In view of the vast number of purses that have been lost through this foolish fad of tiny pockets it is strange that women will persist in using them. The benevolent old gentleman is not used in this emergency. He is not quick enough. He drops behind for a possible pass.

The slender young man, with his companion, steps briskly up to the

unsuspecting young woman, who has paused to look in at a shop window. Number 3, the chief pickpocket, steps up on the opposite side.

'I beg your pardon, madam,' says No. 2; 'did you drop this handkerchief?'

The young woman turns her head for an instant—just long enough to deny that the handkerchief is hers. But it is sufficient. No. 3, on the opposite side, as quick as a flash, has slipped the purse from the woman's pocket to his own and walked away.

An old trick? Yes; but one that is almost always successful. Women are easily victimised, because even when they catch the thief in the act they dread the publicity of a hue and cry.

The three thieves do not lose track of each other. Neither do they stop to gloat over the purse. They step into the nearest public-house, take out the money and valuables, and throw the purse away. This is theft number one.

The trio again repair to the street, and resume their promenade together, and yet apart. There is a great crowd of shoppers around one of the show windows of a large drapery establishment.

Thief No. 3—he who stole the purse—has noticed that one of the women in the crowd wears a gold watch, hung by a chataine at her breast. The help of the other two thieves is not required here, except to stand near for a quiet 'pass.' The crowd surges about the window, dense and curious. The thief has pressed close to the woman's side.

A sudden swaying of the crowd brings them together. In the fraction of a second No. 3 has unfastened the chataine pin. But his time has not yet come. He is not in position. Another movement of the crowd places him almost in front of his victim. He turns suddenly, and apparently rudely, against the woman, as though to force his way out. He gives her a severe jostle. Woman fashion, she straightens her hat and glares at him resentfully.

This does not disturb No. 3 in the least. He has the woman's watch and is satisfied. He got it in that last jostle.

Two or three more purses are secured, some of them from women whose husbands are labouring for a few shillings a day. Another watch or two, and then the thieves retire into private life for the rest of the day.



ON THE BANKS OF THE ORD RIVER, CAMBRIDGE GULF, NORTH-WEST AUSTRALIA.