

# Thubway Tham's Tenth of Honor

by Johnston McCulley

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AT the instant the subway express stopped at the Grand Central Station, Thubway Tham pressed quickly against the prosperous-looking gentleman standing in the doorway, thrust him gently aside, hurried along the platform and up one of the numerous exits to the street—and carried with him the fat wallet of the prosperous-looking gentleman, who had not the faintest idea that he had been "touched" for his "roll." Thubway Tham's work was clever.

But getting possession of the wallet without a hue and cry being raised was only a part of the game, the first step toward the proper culmination of the illegal and somewhat nefarious act known to the underworld and the police as "lifting a leather." Retaining the money and getting rid of the "leather" was just as important. It is difficult to identify currency positively, unless the bills are of large denomination and have been registered somewhere for some purpose; but it is not difficult to identify a wallet. And many a clever dip has found himself in durance vile because he did not get rid of the leather in time, and was searched, to have it found in his possession.

So Thubway Tham, as soon as he reached the street, went along it rapidly like a man on important business. He turned into a side street and maintained his

speed, and finally he passed an alley and saw in the distance, standing at the curb, a trash can placed there by a benevolent street-cleaning department for the assistance of pickpockets and other folk.

Thubway Tham's hand, fumbling in his pocket, took the currency from the wallet. Then, as he passed the trash can, making sure that nobody was watching, he withdrew the wallet from his pocket and tossed it carelessly into the can—and hurried on.

Tham felt safer now; he always felt safer when he had thrown away a leather he had lifted. He slowed down a bit, circled the block, and went to Broadway, and he whistled a gay tune softly to himself. Tham felt that the day was auspicious. He had started out to get himself additional funds. His first trip on the subway had resulted in his spotting the prosperous-looking gentleman, and getting the wallet had not been at all difficult. Tham had not looked at his loot yet, of course, but he felt it in his pocket and imagined that the sum total would be respectable and worth the effort he had made, even though the bills were small ones. The wallet had been in that condition commonly spoken of as "stuffed."

Several blocks down the street Thubway Tham removed the currency from his pocket and glanced at it. The roll

totaled about a hundred and fifty dollars; not bad for an ordinary touch. Tham started to fold the bills and put them into a pocket of his waistcoat—and came upon a newspaper clipping that he had extracted from the wallet with the bills.

Tham decided to glance at the thing before throwing it away. It was a bit of news or sentiment, he judged, in which the owner of the wallet had been interested. Tham read the clipping swiftly.

Every person, no matter what his walk in life, should cultivate and retain a high sense of honor. There is said to be honor even among thieves. Business, friendship, love, the association of man with man—all depend upon honor.

A second time Tham read it, then rolled the clipping into a tiny ball and tossed it nonchalantly into the gutter. But the few words, written possibly by some hack engaged to turn out half a column of such high-sounding stuff every day, remained with Thubway Tham. They had made an impression upon him.

"The thilly ath who wrote that ith right," Tham declared to himself as he journeyed downtown toward Madison Square and a favorite bench there. "There should be honor in all clatheth of folkth. It ith jutht ath eathy to be honorable ath to be crooked. I flatter mythelf that I am an honorable man. Even Craddock, the big thtiff, thayth that I am ath good ath my word!"

He referred to Detective Craddock, of course, that energetic member of the city police department who had sworn to catch Thubway Tham in the act of robbing a purse some fine day, and see him sent to the big prison up the river for a term of many years. Between Craddock and Thubway Tham there was war—as there should have been, since one was a pickpocket and the other an officer of the law. But it was an honorable war, in which

each side observed the rules, used what strategy it could, and played the game. Craddock had been on Thubway Tham's trail for over a year without success, and had learned to like the little dip and admire him for many things. But Craddock stood ready to make a "pinch" at the earliest opportunity.

Reaching Madison Square, Thubway Tham sat down on a bench on a cross walk and observed the antics of the sparrows and pigeons that haunt that little bit of green in the city's midst.

"Even a bird hath honor," Tham grunted to himself. "Them thparrowth fight like blatheth thometimeth, but they are thquare with one another."

Which demonstrates clearly that Thubway Tham may have had a great deal of knowledge of a sort, but knew little or nothing concerning English sparrows.

Tham was resting, "taking it easy," anticipating another trip in the subway when the rush hour came, and the lifting of another fat wallet. His eyes were half closed as he leaned back on the bench. It was a warm afternoon and Thubway Tham felt drowsy. He was susceptible to the spring fever.

A man stopped before him, and Tham opened his eyes wider and looked up. It was as he had expected. Detective Craddock was before him, fists against hips, legs spread apart, a grin on his face.

"Tho I thee your ugly fathe again!" Tham said.

"Even so, Tham, old boy. Behaving yourself these days?" the detective asked.

"I alwayth behave mythelf," Tham remarked. "Have you theen anything lately to lead you to believe the contrary?"

"Regret to report that I have not," Craddock replied. "But the world is yet young, Tham, old-timer. One of these days—"

"I know! One of theth dayth I'll make

thome little thlip, and then you'll thend me up the river. You're wathtin' your prethiouth time, Craddock."

"Yes?"

"Yeth! You'll never get me ath long ath I live."

"No?"

"No!" said Tham with conviction. "What theemth to be botherin' you today? Did you look me up juth to pethter me thome more?"

"I'm just drifting around, Tham."

"Ath uthual," Tham said. "I am goin' to get me a job on the detective forth. It ith a thinth!"

"So?"

"Tho!" said Tham. "If I wath a crook—"

"Oh, I say!"

"If I wath a crook," Tham repeated with determination, "I would athk nothin' better than to work where you wath thuppothed to be prethervin' the peath."

"Indeed?"

"Quite tho!" said Tham. "Your dithtrict would be the crook'th paradithe. I'll bet I could find a dip in thith town that could lift your own watch while you wath lookin' at him."

"Meaning yourself?"

"Did I thay I wath a dip?"

"You did not," Detective Craddock answered. "Such a statement would be entirely unnecessary, Tham, and a great waste of breath. The big book at headquarters says you are a dip, and that—"

"Jutht becauthe I made a mithtake when I wath young," Tham said. "Give a dog a bad name—"

"Let us stop the comedy, Tham, please," Craddock begged. "I'm about fed up on it, you see. Put a new record on the machine. We understand each other, all right."

"Maybe you underthtand me; but I do not underthtand you," Tham declared.

"Thomebody loht the key to the puthle."

"Be that as it may, Tham, I'd like to ask you a question."

"What ith itth nature?"

"Have you any intention of taking a little ride on the subway this glorious day?"

"I f I wanted a ride I motht thertainly would not uthe the elevated or thurfathe carth—and I cannot afford a tathi."

"No?"

"No, thir," said Tham.

"I asked because, if you do take such a ride, I'm going right along, Tham."

"I thuppothe the company can uthe your nickel," Tham said.

"Strange as it may seem, Tham, certain gentlemen object to losing their wallets in the subway."

"There ith no accountin' for thome folk'th taththe," said Tham.

"They have a right to such objection, of course, since many of them pay taxes."

"I thuppothe tho," said Tham.

"And your activities are such, Tham, that they cause annoyance in certain quarters."

"Dear me! Can it be porthible?"

"Tham, just between ourselves, this life of yours is going to bring you sorrow. You can't get away with it forever. Sooner or later—"

"I'll make a little thlip?"

"Precisely. You'll make the little slip. And then the judge will say 'ten years,' or something of that nature. There's a bit of good in you, Tham. Why don't you go straight, get a job, and be honest?"

"My goodneth!" Thubway Tham cried.

"Are you gettin' to be one of the threet oratorth, Craddock? Where ith your thoap both? You ought to play a banjo firtht to draw a crowd. Are you goin' to take up a collection, or are you livin' on your thalary and doin' thith oratory extra jutht for the love of it?"

"Funny, aren't you?" Craddock said.

"Maybe tho, but I'd never get a job ath a comedian if you wath after the thame one. I'll thay I wouldn't have a chanthe, Craddock. All you need ith a falthetto voithe and a both of burnt cork to be a minthtrel thow."

"Yes?"

"Yeth! You'd thell out thith weekth in advance, Craddock, and nobody would kick on the war tath. You'd be a riot—take it from one who knowth. You could open in Augutht and run right through to hot weather again, and then maybe go over to London and thtand them on their headth there. Comedian? I'll thay you are!"

"All right, Tham. I've warned you."

"That wath nithe and friendly of you, Craddock."

"And I'll land you some day, and say that I told you so."

"If that day ever cometh, Craddock, I'll admit that you told me tho. I'll give you all the credit. But you mutht excuthe me now, pleathe. I don't want to be theen talkin' to you too much. Thomebody might think I wath a thtool pigeon."

Thubway Tham stood up, bowed courteously, and continued along the walk. Detective Craddock, his face fiery, followed at his heels, sudden determination gripping him.

## II.

Tham crossed the park, turned up the Avenue, and made his way slowly through the crowds of pedestrians, no particular objective in his mind. He realized that Craddock was following him, and he did not care, for Tham had no intention of working at the present time. Later he would go into the subway, and if Craddock persisted in following him he would not attempt to lift another leather. He had the proceeds of his first robbery of

the day, and could get along very well on that amount, if necessary.

As usual, Tham was dressed in inconspicuous clothing. He did not believe in advertising his presence in a crowd. His suit of dark blue was neat, but worn, and a cap covered his head, instead of a hat. Nine persons out of every ten would have taken him to be a struggling bookkeeper or a clerk in some small establishment.

Before a gigantic mercantile place a doorman in uniform deliberately thrust Thubway Tham and several pedestrians aside to clear the way for the passage of a stately woman bound for her limousine. Tham gulped back his sudden anger.

"Ath!" he growled. "Every perthon thould have a thenth of honor, tho he thould!"

That brought to Tham's remembrance the clipping he had read, and also the fact that he had the loot from the wallet in his waistcoat pocket. He fumbled at the pocket to be sure, and unknowingly he worked up the folded currency until the edge of it showed.

He went merrily on his way, stopping now and then to glance in at a shop window, while Detective Craddock followed close behind and observed Tham's tactics and manner, and believed that Tham was playing a waiting game, waiting until Craddock got tired before entering the subway. Craddock, who was on no special assignment that afternoon, decided that he would follow Tham until he went home, at least causing him a certain measure of annoyance.

At Forty-second Street Thubway Tham turned toward Times Square. Craddock turned after him. Tham walked slowly, taking in the sights like a man not a native of the city. He was thinking of the newspaper clipping again. It rang in his brain like the appeal of a spellbinder, and Thubway Tham did not know why. He

always tried to act in an honorable manner, he told himself. So far as he knew, his sense of honor was fully developed. Of course, he was a dip, and he supposed many persons would say a thief; but that was his line of business. Had it not been said that there was honor even among thieves? Very well, then.

Reaching Broadway, Tham turned north and continued his slow walk, and Detective Craddock, a short distance behind him, held communion with himself.

“If that bird thinks he is going to shake me by walking me to death, he is mistaken,” Craddock mused. “I can walk as long as he can, and as fast.”

Tham had not looked around once, had acted as though Detective Craddock did not exist. Nor did he look around now. After a time he crossed the street and went back down it toward Times Square. He entered a corner cigar store and made a purchase, but did not attempt to dodge out the door on the side street, as Craddock had anticipated.

“Playing the long game,” Craddock growled. “But when he goes into the subway I’ll be right behind him!”

Tham stopped at the curb near one of the subway entrances at the square, lighted a cigarette, and began watching the passing throng. Heaven knew that he looked innocent enough, but Detective Craddock had learned years before not to judge by appearances. Craddock stood before a store window a few feet away and waited, chewing savagely at an unlighted cigar.

Not once did Tham turn and regard him. Tham calmly puffed at his cigarette until it was consumed, and then tossed the butt of it into the street. He thrust his hands into his trousers pockets and surveyed the street. And, from a few feet away, another man surveyed Thubway

Tham, and he was not Craddock.

With his coat thrust back, Tham revealed the pockets of his vest. From the edge of one of them protruded a fold of currency. The individual who stood a few feet away saw the edges of the bills, and a crafty gleam came into his eyes.

Tham, his cigarette finished, whirled around and entered the subway. The stranger followed and so did Detective Craddock. Thubway Tham had no idea of attempting to lift a leather with Craddock watching him. He had decided to journey downtown, to the cheap lodging house operated by a former convict, where Tham had a room he called home. He would rest for a time, meanwhile reading the evening paper. And then he would go to some show, as he did on an average of once a month. It would be a good joke on Craddock after the detective had followed him all afternoon.

Because his intentions for the remainder of the day were absolutely innocent, Thubway Tham was off guard, in a manner of speaking. When the downtown express roared into the station, Tham entered one of the cars, which happened to be jammed, and was obliged to catch hold of a strap. He sensed that Craddock had followed him, but did not turn around to see. He had no idea that he had been followed by another man.

This third man was something of Tham’s ilk. He was small and dressed in modest clothing and wore a cap pulled well down over his eyes. His nose twitched nervously now and then. Had Tham looked at him, at the first glance he would have known the stranger for what he was—a crook of the cheaper class, a dope fiend.

But Tham did not look at him. Tham was glancing through the windows, watching the lights of the intermediate stations past which the express roared, and

thinking of the clipping.

"Honor ith a funny thing thome timeth," Tham told himself. "There are occathionth when a man tharthely knowth whith ith the right thing to do. I hate a crooked crook worth than I hate a fly cop, and that ith goin' thome!"

The train roared around a curve, and Tham lurched to one side. At the same instant the stranger lurched against him. Tham did not notice it, because he had stepped upon the foot of a woman seated before him, and he was in the act of apologizing as gracefully as he could—Tham was no ladies' man.

A harsh voice sounded in his ear, and suddenly Tham found himself the center of a scene. Detective Craddock was creating the disturbance, he discovered. Craddock had the stranger by the arm, and in no gentle manner.

"This is rich!" Craddock said. "He nicked you for your roll, Tham, as we went around the curve. One crook robbing another, eh? That's a good one on you, Tham."

"Thir?" Thubway Tham was bewildered for once.

And then he saw that the stranger held some folded bills in his hand and that guilt was written on his face.

"Lifted your coin easily while you lurched against him, Tham," Craddock went on. "You'll have to appear against him, of course. This will be the joke of the year. New one, I guess. I don't know his mug—and he wouldn't have tried it on you if he had been wise."

It flashed through Thubway Tham's mind that Craddock spoke the truth. Some sixth sense told him not to feel in his vest pocket, but he recognized the folded bills, which the thief had not had a chance to slip in to his own pocket.

His mind worked like a flash. Here was where the honor stuff came in. This

other man had made a mistake. Undoubtedly he was a "dip" new to the city. It was his misfortune that he had tried to rob one of the same profession.

And Craddock was grinning gleefully. Craddock, watching one pickpocket, had caught another. And he would have Tham as a witness, make him give testimony against one of his kind.

Then Tham's flashing mind saw a way out, and he was thankful that he had not felt in his pocket.

"Craddock, you thilly ath, what ith thith all about?" he demanded suddenly.

"He nicked you for your roll, Tham. There it is in his hand. I saw him—just as you lurched."

"Thome mithtake," Tham muttered. He glanced at the other pickpocket and then looked Craddock straight in the eye. "Thome mithtake," he repeated.

"That ith prethithly what I do thay," I didn't have any roll."

"What's that? I tell you that I saw him—"

"Thome mithtake, I thay. I ain't had that much coin for thome month, Craddock."

"You mean to stand there and tell me that he didn't touch you—that it isn't your coin he's holding in his fist this minute?" the detective demanded.

"That ith precithly what I do thay," Tham declared. "Maybe he already had the coin in hith hand when he fell againtht me. That ain't my coin, Craddock. I didn't have that much on me. All I've got ith thome change in my panth pocket."

Again their eyes clashed. Detective Craddock knew very well that the stranger had touched Thubway Tham. But what would it avail him to make the charge if Tham denied that the money was his? Nobody else had seen the stranger's hand make that quick, precise drop and come away from Tham's pocket with the folded

bills.

"Tham—" Craddock began.

"Aw, cut it!" the stranger growled. "This is my own coin. I was just goin' to count it to see how much I'd spent. I didn't touch him. Didn't he say I didn't? Cut it!"

Craddock glared at Tham and stepped back, and the stranger put Tham's money into one of his pockets. "Fresh cops always thinkin' they see things," he muttered.

Tham grinned as he turned away. The excitement had died down as quickly as it had started. The few who had heard what had passed were glaring at Detective Craddock and remarking that fly cops should not accuse men unjustly just to make a showing.

Tham was thinking rapidly. He had acted on his sense of honor. He had saved a fellow worker who had made a little mistake. That was honor as he saw it for the time being. The other man would be grateful, no doubt.

But the point of it was that Tham wanted to regain his money, and Craddock was there. He had denied that the currency was his, and he scarcely could claim it now from the other pickpocket, with Craddock looking on.

He turned around, saw that Craddock was but a few feet away, and moved back to join him. "That certainly wath a mithtake," Tham said. "I—"

"I know what kind of a mistake it was, all right," Craddock interrupted. "He made a mistake in robbing a fellow crook."

"My goodneth, Craddock, why do you perthitht?" Thubway Tham was eager to learn. "Believe me, if that wath my coin I would have made a holler. I would have made a double holler, me bein' touched by a freth dip working in the thubway."

Craddock looked at Tham closely and was almost convinced. He knew that Tham

considered the subway his particular ground and that all the regular crooks in the city so regarded it. He looked at the stranger again and convinced himself that he did not know him, and never seen his photograph in the rogues' gallery.

"Maybe I did make a mistake, Tham," he said.

"I thould thay tho!"

"But it certainly looked—"

"It wath jutht the train lurchin' around that curve," said Tham. "It alwayth throwth a man off hith balanth. They ought to fith that curve."

"I'm sick of following you around, Tham. Give me your word that you will try to lift no leather during the remainder of the day, and I'll get off at the next station."

"It ith not nethethary," Tham declared, "but I give my word."

"Of honor?"

"Yeth, thir—word of honor."

"Very well, Tham. You never break your word; I'll say that much for you."

At the next station Craddock left the train. Thubway Tham thereupon moved toward the stranger, but with difficulty, since the car was so crowded. The train came to the next stop, and the stranger prepared to leave the car. So did Thubway Tham.

He made every effort to attract the other's attention, but with no success. Tham supposed that the stranger was afraid to speak to him now or pretend to see him. So he waited until the train stopped, and followed the other man to the platform and up the steps to the street.

It became evident that the stranger was not going to loiter and give Thubway Tham the chance to pass close by him and receive his money. That caused Tham to worry a bit. He quickened his pace and overtook the other at a corner.

"Thay—" he began.

"Well?"

"Thuppoth you come through now. There ith no cop watchin'."

"I don't getcha," the stranger said.

"I want my roll," Tham explained. "If it hadn't been for me you'd be in the jug thith minute. Lucky for you that you touched a dip with that ath of a Detective Craddock thtandin' right behind you. It juth happened that you got away with it."

"Yes?"

"Yeth," said Tham.

"So you're a dip, are you?"

"You heard Craddock thay tho, didn't you? I am Thubway Tham."

Tham supposed that announcement would be enough, but it was not.

"Tham?" queried the stranger. "Never heard of you."

"Where do you come from?"

"Chicago, where there are real dips," was the reply.

"Ith that tho? If it hadn't been for me you'd be in jail right now. Real diph? My goodneth! Your work wath coarthe."

"Was it? I got your roll, all right, didn't I?"

"Be that ath it may," said Tham. "Thuppoth you hand it back."

"Hand it back? Not any!"

"What ith that?"

"You told that fly cop it wasn't your roll, didn't you? Very well, old-timer!"

Tham looked his scorn. "What thort of man are you?" he demanded. "Ain't you got any thenth of honor? My goodneth! You won't lath long in thith town, boy, if you act like that."

"I guess I can take care of myself with you New York boobs!"

Tham's face flared with sudden anger. He loved the subway, his profession, and New York. And here was a man from Chicago—

"Thay, you have had your merry jeth, tho now come acroth with my currently,"

Thubway Tham demanded. "It would have therved you right if you had been thent up!"

"You told that cop it wasn't your money, didn't you?"

"Yeth—to thave your hide, you ath!"

"I suppose you lifted it yourself?"

"That ith neither here nor there," said Tham. "If you have a thenth of honor—"

"You make me laugh!" the stranger said, lighting a cigarette and flicking the burned match toward the middle of the street. "Sense of honor, huh? In this business?"

"Don't I get the coin?"

"It isn't yours—you said as much," declared the man from Chicago. He laughed again and hurried across the street before Thubway Tham, in his amazement, could make a move.

As soon as he came to himself Tham followed, anger surging within him. He had saved that man from a term in prison, and in return he had lost money that he had risked liberty to get. Was there no longer honor among thieves?

But Tham was determined. He would get that money, all right. He would follow the man from Chicago, see where he went, ascertain his name, either talk him out of the money or call upon certain friends to aid him in getting it. As for the man from Chicago—there was no place in the local underworld for one so uncognizant of honor and self-respect.

Tham had difficult work catching up with him. The man ahead turned into a busy street and plowed his way through the crowd, and Tham went after him as quickly as he could. Tham was angry for the first time in weeks—really angry. He had followed his better instincts, had remembered his sense of honor, and had been stung. He had found the serpent beneath the rose, the cur that bit the hand that fed it.

His quarry turned into a cheap resort that once had been a corner saloon of ill repute and still retained the character, though it was a saloon no longer. Thubway Tham followed. The man from Chicago had met another stranger and they were talking together.

"Gave me a laugh," the man from Chicago was saying. "Saved me from the bull and then expected to get the coin back. I told him to be on his way. Said his name was Thubway Tham."

"And that same bird stands high in these parts," his companion said. "You'd better look him up and hand over that coin right away. He'll pass the word and every crook in town will be down on us."

"I should worry!" the man from Chicago declared. "Afraid of these New York crooks, are you?"

"It's their town and it might pay us to be decent while we're in it."

Tham overheard the conversation and waited. This other fellow seemed to have something like a sense of honor, and perhaps he finally would persuade the man from Chicago to relent.

And then Thubway Tham beheld coming through the door another headquarters detective of his acquaintance, Murphy by name. Murphy was supposed to be a sort of expert on visiting crooks. He made a study of the pictures in the rogues' gallery.

Tham stepped back toward the end of the counter, since he did not want to attract Murphy's attention. But Murphy was not looking for Tham, evidently. He glanced around the place, and he saw the man from Chicago.

"I want to see you a minute, and possibly longer, Slim Gooch," Murphy said.

"Who are you?"

"Headquarters!"

"You ain't got anything on me. I just hit town this morning to get a job."

"You wouldn't hold the best job in the world," Murphy informed him. "I know your face and your record."

"But I just hit town. You haven't anything on me. And they don't want me in Chicago; either."

"Kindly get it through your head that you are a suspect because of your record," Murphy said.

"So this is the regular shake-down, is it? Well, get busy, then."

"Um!" Murphy grunted. "Mere matter of form, Gooch. You see, there was a little job in the subway this afternoon, and you're a dip. We're just looking over the dips we meet."

"Want me to stand a search, do you?" Gooch sneered. "I've got some coin on me, all right, but it's mine—and it's all bills. You must be some bird if you can identify a bill. Here's my roll—and you can go ahead and search."

"I'll look at the roll first," Murphy said.

He opened the folded bills and inspected them closely. "Where did you get this coin?" he asked.

"Brought it with me from Chicago. Expense money."

"Weak tale," Murphy said, grinning. "This is some of the stuff that was nicked in the subway this afternoon. Your first day in our city is going to cost you something, Gooch."

"But I didn't—"

"Rats! This coin was being carried by a man who intended trying to trap a couple of blackmailers. Every bill, Gooch, is marked—a little, peculiar mark in the corner. When his pocket was picked, he reported to us—and we've been rounding up dips the last hour and going through them. This is once, Gooch, when currency

can be identified. Tough for you, all right!"

Thubway Tham had darted behind two men entering from the street and was on his way. He was chuckling. He relished his close escape. If this Gooch had not robbed him he would have had those bills in his pocket. He might have been searched, and then—Or, if this Gooch had been an honest crook and had returned the money—

"No two wayth about it," said Thubway Tham to nobody in particular. "It payth to have a thenth of honor. If that Gooth had had a thenth of honor he would not be on hith way to the hoothgow now. Ath it ith he hath a theady job ahead of him!"

Thubway Tham lighted a cigarette and walked happily toward the cheap lodging house he called home.