

## The Story of "Runners"

(In the salad days of public transportation there was a class of people who solicited travel on railroads, steamboats, stagecoaches and canal packets called runners, and hotel patronage. The following article, which appeared in the Syracuse Daily Star on Saturday, May 20, 1847, graphically describes this long-vanished vocation - Dick Palmer).

*Travelers by Rail Road and Packet boats, have abundant reason to remember Syracuse. Surely their greeting is always cordial, whatever else may be said of it. No sooner do the cars or boats fairly "bring up," than a dozen or twenty voices simultaneously break forth - "Syracuse House!" "Empire, select your baggage for the Empire, gentlemen." "Globe Hotel, new House just opened." "Exchange, walk right in." "National Temperance House. " "Take the Omnibus, sir, plenty of time to get your meals," &C., &c. to the end of a long chapter.*

*Many of the passengers take matters very quietly, as though they were accustomed to such sallies; but quite as many are fairly dumfounded at the outset. They are far more perplexed as to 'where to go' than ever Mr. Webster was; and it is sometimes really amusing to see them halting between two opinions.*

*A few evenings since on the arrival of the Eastern cars, a tall, sandy complexioned, muscular man, middle aged, but evidently little acquainted with the ways of the world, emerged from one of the cars with carpet bag in hand, and as he proceeded towards the front doors, was tapped on the shoulder very good naturally by one of the runners, and asked to patronize his house.*

*The stranger proceeded to make inquiries, as to prices, &c. Observing this hesitation, another knight came up and commenced to urge the superiority of his house. Another and still another gathered about the perplexed Vermonter, and as he became anxious yet undecided the porters waxed loud ad earnest. "Will you get with me, sir" finally asked the first assailant. "Wall, I believe I will," he replied gravely, but this was only a signal for a renewed attack by the others.*

*Eloquence, in prose and poetry, argument and illustration, were rallied on all hands. - "What the devil does this mean! exclaimed the stranger suddenly aroused, "where am I" -- and he made a rush for the porter who had proceeded towards the door with his carpet bag. "Let me have that; I believe you're all a set of robbers!" "Why, where are you going?" anxiously inquired the runner. "Going, going? Wy I shall go to the d - l if I don't look out!"*

*No sooner had he regained possession of his property than the terrified man ensconced himself in the cars. he didn't stop in Syracuse that night, though he has doubtless brought up somewhere ere this.*

*The 'runners' are by no means so desperate a set of fellows as he supposed them. It is their calling to secure whatever of patronage they can for their respective establishments; and if they are sometimes boisterous and over zealous it is not a fault altogether peculiar to their trade. It can at least be said of them that they rarely part with good nature, however sharp the competition between them. What is more, they very seldom impugn each other's veracity. When one gets off a "whopper," which, of course is very rarely the case, is competitor instinctively "matches" or says nothing. It takes a "genius" to be a "runner" now-a-days.*