

CHECKING BAGGAGE.

A REVOLUTION TAKING PLACE IN MOVING IMPEDIMENTS.

Why the Pasteboard Check is Displacing the Common Brass Ones—Difficulties of Tracing Lost Baggage Under the Old Method—Baggage Frauds.

The days of the brass baggage check are numbered. For the past two years the pasteboard check has been gradually crowding it out of use, until brass checks are now employed only for local checking, and for that purpose solely because each company has a large stock of them on hand. All but three of the railroads entering this city still use brass checks for local business, but through baggage is checked on the printed and written cards.

Thus an American institution which has long been a source of admiration to European visitors is relegated to an obsolete custom. The old system was objectionable for several reasons. An immigrant who could not speak the English language might come on to this city while his baggage would be checked only to Cincinnati. This involved a tedious delay while the baggage was being traced by mail and telegraph from New York. Again, a busy or absent-minded traveling man might ask for a "check, Vandavia." If a check should happen to be given to Vandavia station, the man might go on to Pittsburg or Chicago before discovering that his baggage was astray. There was nothing whatever on the brass check to denote whence or by which line the baggage had been forwarded. But now as soon as he looks at his check he can see the point to which it was forwarded.

The new "paper checks," as they are called, are designed to do away with these difficulties, which have been a nightmare to baggage agents. Each road has its own system of pasteboard checks, printed in different styles and on different colored cardboards. When travel between certain cities is heavy, name of the destination, as well as the originating point, is printed. In some cases the routing is also printed. But on general checks, which may thus at once be issued for any place on any railroad in the United States, blanks are left for the destination and the names of the connecting roads over which the baggage is to pass. These checks are numbered consecutively and are kept for a limited time after the baggage has been claimed, when they are destroyed. The check issued to the passenger is, therefore, an exact duplicate of the strap check, which contains full and explicit information, and missing baggage can therefore be quickly located by means of the details printed or written in. The difficulty of tracing baggage is lessened in another way. A brass check might be received here in the morning, used to Kansas City at night and sent out from there the next day. But a "paper check" can be used only once.

Baggage agents in large terminal cities have to be eternally on guard against frauds. A baggage room is regarded by many as a desirable object for plunder, and new schemes to "beat" it are being constantly evolved. Some years ago a man applied to have a big sample case checked to Memphis. When one of the employees demurred and said that the applicant did not look like a commercial traveler, the man replied that he was a machinist and that much traveling had broken his chest, compelling him to use a strong sample case. The baggage was accordingly checked to Memphis, but the rightful owner appeared in time to prevent the theft of the sample case, which contained about \$8,000 worth of jewelry.

To prevent similar frauds a system of "claim checks" was devised. If a transfer company calls for a trunk at a hotel or private residence and the owner is not present, but will return, a "claim check" is left for him, which is a duplicate of that attached to the trunk. If he has gone to the depot, the baggage man will not receive the trunk unless the transfer company accepts a "claim check" from them. Then when a passenger directs his baggage to be checked, he is told to call at the office of the transfer company and get his "claim check." This simple means of identification has been found to work effectively.

A favorite method of doing crooked work at baggage rooms was to steal somewhere a number of pairs of checks. Then while the baggageman was looking for the trunk bearing the number corresponding to that on the bogus check tendered, the crook would cleverly remove the strap check from any trunk of which he desired possession and substitute therefor a strap check from his pocket. Hence it is that all outsiders are regarded with suspicion in a baggage room, although this plan of robbery is no longer practicable with the new "paper checks."

When asked if, in view of the developments of the past few days, it was not as easy to counterfeit a pasteboard baggage check as a railroad ticket, Baggage Agent William M. Steele replied that he thought it was not.

"Each road has a different style and different color of check," said he, "and the matter that is written in must be in the same handwriting. Everything on either check must be identical with parallel information on the other, instead of only the number and name of the road being required to correspond as under the workings of the old brass check system. Even though a man had a lot of blank forms correctly printed, he would be compelled to inspect the baggage he desired to steal, memorize the number and written information and then go away and prepare his false check in the identical manner and handwriting indicated on the strap check. Mistakes would very often be made by him, which would instantly expose his game. The plan of substituting a prepared strap check is so old that it is rarely attempted—successfully almost never, for we are continually on the lookout for sharpers and suspicious idlers. We are at times very busy here, but never so busy that we don't keep an eye on every man in the room who is not an employee."

The origin of the "paper check" dates back a few years to the commencement of the era of railway consolidation, when changes in routings were so frequent that the brass checks were found inadequate for the work.—St. Louis Globe-Democrat.

Still Unsettled.
An English traveler in Manitoba met five youths who were discussing the latitude of some town and had found themselves unable to agree whether latitude was reckoned north and south of the equator or east and west of Winnipeg. Those who held the orthodox opinion were in a minority of one.

The Englishman was appealed to, and of course sided with the minority, but he was taken a good deal aback when one of them said:

"Well, now opinion is equally divided, so we can't settle it after all."
The stranger offered to explain, but was told that one man's opinion was as good as another's.—Exchange.

The Thieving Cossacks.
The wild Cossacks, living away down in the southernmost part of the Russian empire, spend most of their time harassing the Turks. They are peculiarly savage in appearance. Their uniform is the Cossack coat, full trousers, scarlet undercoat hooked up to the neck, big boots, and as an overcoat they wear a bourka, a circular cloak made of coarse felt, with long shaggy hair on one side of it. This cloak is big enough to cover the rider and much of the horse. The most distinctive point in their dress, however, is the cylindrical hat of black astrakhan which they wear at all seasons. The top is of cloth or velvet. They form part of the Russian cavalry and live principally on plunder.—St. Louis Republic.

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