

THE

By Peter R. Lund

The Trials of the Man the Railroads Put On to Look for Tickets Which Hadn't Been Paid For in the Usual Way—and How He Was Expected to Tell Good From Bad

It was late Sunday evening. The "Stove Committee" had concluded its regular order of business, and the meeting was open for general discussion.

A "Stove Committee" is an unorganized gathering of railroad men employed in the operating department—conductors, brakemen, switchmen, coopers, "roughnecks," "snakes," "dynamiters" (the last term being a figure of speech local to railroading), etc., who meet at least once a week at each railroad terminal to criticize the orders and doings of the general manager during the preceding week and to formulate plans for improvement in the management of the road and to announce changes in the official roster for the coming week.

A general discussion in such a committee usually amounts to each one present telling the story of his life, or so much of it as he thinks it would be to his advantage to tell.

This evening there was present one whose appearance might have voted him an astray in such a bunch. Tall, stout, immaculate of clothes, shoes and linen, he would have seemed more at home in a bank than in a switchmen's hut. But he had a right to be there. He had railroaded.

When it came to his turn to tell his story, his exordium covered pretty nearly everything from smashing baggage to "running trains." "But," said he, "the longest railroad job I ever held was as a train agent. There are no

more of them now, and not likely to be. I understand that it is the sort of circumstances that make history worth while, so I will tell you a little about it.

"It was just after the close of the Spanish-American war, when General Funston was doing things in our insular possessions. I was out of a job and I had some idea of going out with Funston and be as like him as I could. Then I heard that there was a possibility of getting a job as train agent.

"The more I thought of it the better that train agent's job looked to me. Funston's career showed me that there was no reason why it should not lead to greater things. I applied for a job and got it. I was put to work extra. There was a big convention to come off at a point on the line and about 50 special trains, besides the regular regular trains, were about to be dumped into the lap of the road for which I was to work. I was given a few rudimentary instructions as to what was expected of me, a valise full of paraphernalia and an admonition to 'keep going.' I kept going. Just as soon as I had finished working one train I dropped off and caught another. You see I had to do this because the special trains were in charge of freight conductors. A freight conductor can tell one kind of ticket from another, providing the colors are different. If they are all the same they look alike to him. In this way the handling of the tickets was all up to me, and maybe you don't think it was a job I worked a whole week, never got back home and never took my uniform off; ate when I could get something to eat, and when I couldn't I went without it. I slept very seldom, sometimes on waiting room benches, sometimes for an hour or so in a baggage car, until I was 'trousered' out to get another train.

"The experience was hardly what I had expected, but it was good for me because it taught me not to expect anything in that job—that I would get all that was coming to me without overworking on anticipation. "I had heard much of scalping. My first week's work left me as ignorant of it as when I took my first train. The trains were then coming through solid. The transportation was all going portions of special excursion tickets—you know what they are, but you don't know, perhaps, the reason why they are so long. It's this: When you buy one of these tickets at home you measure it and make a note; then while en route, if you want to know how far you have traveled, measure your ticket again; the difference between the original length of the ticket and its present length is the exact number of miles so far traveled. Why fuss around over time tables? These tickets are hard to handle until you get the knack of winding them around your forearm. This trick once mastered, it is not hard. One genial soul, to make the trainmen's lives more worth the living, hit on the idea of separating the coupons and attaching one batch to the bottom and the other to the top of the contract. This compels you to look at both ends of the ticket. Instead of only one, as is ordinarily the case; but what does that matter, so long as the string of coupons, which—way you take it, has been cut in half?

"The style most affected of late years is a blanket coupon ticket designed to cover in one form all of the routes, roads and destinations that are looked for in an interline ticket. I don't know that any of them have quite accomplished this, but I do know that most of them cover a multitude of sins. They not only cover them, but are steeped in them. This style of ticket looks like the Rosetta stone and is just as intelligible, except to the inventor—and sometimes he forgets a lot of things about it over night—and has to read back on what he has said. It is a shame that some of the people who invent new tickets don't get on the train with their chief clerk, secretary, ticket stock clerk, and others, and show the man who is working the train how the thing should be done.

"All that, though, is neither here nor there. What I started out to tell you was about my experience when I was put on a regular run. That was when I came up against scalping.

"I got a list of return portions of round trip tickets, described by form and number and name signed on them, with the information that they would likely be presented in second hands. I wondered how it was possible for any human being to know so much, and I kept wondering for a long time. When I found out I also found out that it was as easy as the 'trunk trick.' You see, whenever a scalper or his customer bought a round trip ticket at a railroad ticket office the road sort of took it for granted that the scalper was not taking interest in the transaction for his

health. If there was anything in it for him the return portion would have to be transferred. Headquarters had the description of all of these tickets, and that is how we got them, but with the admonition not to allow any one to put one over on us.

"I took a 'five' one once. It was the first week that I was on a regular run. There was a supernumerary attached to the office whose duties seemed to be to tell us the things that we did not know. He greatly impressed me. His talk to me how he climbed on to the roofs of buildings and by looking down through the skylight got the forms and numbers of tickets in the possession of scalpers. It was not until I had had mine that I learned that he could not read print when it was ten inches away from his nose, and that the office on which he said he had been spying was on the ground floor of a three story building which had no skylight. It all came out right in the long run. The fellow got a verdict for \$2,000, but the company got a new trial and in the meantime the man died.

"We were paid a reward for every scalp we got, and naturally we worked overtime, not only on the train, but off. I had an exceptionally good run, and while my salary was liberal, I got in rewards two or three times the amount of it.

"Greed for rewards led me to take chances which were against instructions, and to this day I don't know how I ever got away with it. There was a general passenger agent of a certain road—I am not locating him by name, south, east or west—who was standing in with the scalpers of our city. He was sending them what purported to be the unused portion of one way tickets, unsigned. They were presented on my train in this shape. By cross examining the persons who presented them I was in almost every case able to learn whether or not they had ever been at the place where the tickets were supposed to have been sold. Knocking about the country does a train agent no harm.

"I took a couple of hundred of those tickets and in no instance did they 'sting' me. Think what might have been!

"All things have an end. I guess the boss got jealous of my income. What ever started him, he stopped the unsigned tickets and also quite a part of my income.

"I had to look for fields anew. I got on to the fact that scalpers were buying round trip tickets for their customers with the idea, naturally, of scalping the return portion. If that I had enough money to pay the tariff rate for the ticket, it was all easy, but most people who go bargain hunting for anything do not do it so much as a matter of show as a matter of economy. Many persons did not have the money to put up the 'rebate' that would be returned to them at the end of their trip—they did not have the money to pay for a round trip ticket and get back an amount at the end of their journey which would make the ride less than the regular one way fare. To help out in this difficulty the scalper would check their baggage, take the duplicate checks and forward them to his representative at the passenger's destination. No delivery of unused portions of tickets to this representative—no baggage.

"I needed money, so I studied a while. As the result of study I got three of my friends to approach a scalper about tickets to Denver. The scalper suggested a 'rebate,' but my friends, acting under instructions, did not have enough money. The scalper asked if they had any baggage. Of course they had. Where was it? My friends blushingly admitted that it was in 'hock'—it was in a pawnshop. Before the deal was closed my friends had given the scalper what he wanted for a one way fare to Denver and also enough to redeem the trunks from the pawnshop. The pawnbroker's receipt was also surrendered. In exchange they received round trip tickets to Chicago and sleeping car tickets to Denver. You know, the pawnshop ticket did the trick. Who ever heard of a three ball man lending money on anything unless he knew it was ten fold security? In this case the pawnbroker was a friend of mine.

"The scalper got the baggage and checked it. I went to the baggage room and got the trunks and had an expressman take them home where they belonged. I sent an explanatory telegram to the baggage agent at Denver. Then I redeemed the tickets, and found that I was in just \$185, and that the scalper was out just that amount by the transaction. Oh, such a time! The scalper was on my trail morning, noon and night. It was the fault of his clerk; the clerk had disobeyed instructions, etc. No harm had been done; the scalper had injured no one; it was a good joke on him, but let it be a joke, why should he suffer? When there was nothing doing by this method the scalper sent his clerk. The clerk's job was in the balance. If I threw those one eighty-five bones one way he held on, if they went in the other direction he was a goner. It was not until I passed that the clerk was rigging up his wife and two children in cast off clothing and so arrayed to come down and see me. I got wind of it. It was too much a proposition for me to face, so I took a lay off and went fishing.

"What happened to the \$185? I spent it on the trip, and the cause of strife was removed.

"No, I was not ashamed of myself. We had been taking up about 100 of this scalper's tickets every month for a long time. He had string about 40 other offices and I understood that they were all getting about the same medicine. These tickets cost the scalpers anywhere from \$5 to \$25 apiece, and I didn't understand how he could keep it up, until one day when I asked the 'old man' about it. He told me that this scalper was a very rich man. I have always believed since then that that was the reason he could stand it.

"Our mills were grinding so exceedingly fine that if one out of 50 scalpers' tickets got by us some one of us was not feeling well. Instead of trying the old trick of running tickets around us the scalpers resorted to violence. By 'running around' I mean this: Some one has a ticket that he wants to transfer. The scalper has a customer for it, but he is a 'rummie.' A 'rummie' is a person who knows nothing, least of all about handwriting. No scalper, worthy of the name, would put \$20 worth of transportation in such hands when there is a train agent to go up against. The way the matter was arranged was this: The rummie bought a local ticket to a point beyond where the train agent would in all probability leave the train. The owner of the ticket took the same train and presented his ticket. Of course he could make his signature and identify himself, and the ticket was passed. After that he turned the ticket over to the 'rummie,' dropped off the train and went back.

"About violence. There was all kinds. I remember the first night I worked a train after I got back from my fishing trip. I took a ticket away from a man in the tourist car. It did not take me long to do it—just long enough to put the ticket in my pocket and tell the man to pay his fare to the conductor or get off at the next stop. It was one of those 'take on sight' tickets.

"It was a miserable night. A strong wind was blowing, it was cold and it was raining. I put out the head light. In the seat next to the fellow I had just operated on was an old woman. When she handed me her ticket she said, 'Son, may be my ticket ain't no more good than his, but you won't put me off in such weather as this, will you?' You guess I said, 'No,' but you guess wrong. I said, 'Indeed I will, and at the next stop, I get off there myself and you and I will sit by a nice, warm fire and chat until the next train back, and I will pass you into the next car.' The old woman, who I learned from her that she had been sent out by a scalper for the purpose of laying the foundation for a damage suit against the company. Naturally, there was no damage suit. Luck favors a fool.

"Pursuant to this militant policy, the scalpers sent out a mob of strong arm men. One of them broke a valuable camera tripod over the head of one of our boys. He got away because the detective who had been trailing him for a week got hungry when we pointed out his quarry to him, and while the sleuth ate, his man 'beat it.'

"Another one of our boys had a gun shoved against his chest and was told that was the passenger's identification. The man was arrested. He was charged with assault with a deadly weapon, and escaped conviction. It seemed that some years before seven of the most learned men of the law, sitting in banc, had decided that if a person pokes a gun in your face, you must look carefully down the barrel and see if it is loaded. If it is loaded, you have a right to charge the offensive person with assault with a deadly weapon. If the weapon is not loaded (condition of holder not considered), it amounts to nothing but simple assault. I can't see much sense in it, but who am I to judge? In this case our poor fellow was so confused that he forgot to flash his lantern down the barrel and see if there was a projectile at the hinder end. The case was dismissed.

"I was one of the elect, also. One night I took a passenger's signature. It was a very poor imitation of that on the ticket. I said, 'Have you anything besides your signature to identify you?' He said, 'You bet I have,' and pulled a cannon from his hip pocket and shoved it in my face. It might not have been a cannon, but the rule of optics will prevail. The closer you get to one of those things the bigger it looks. You have heard about the 10 cent piece being held so close to the eye that it obscured the sun. I am not a brave man when it comes to physical conflict, and the experience of my brethren certainly did not help to steady my nerves, but whatever it was—I don't know—I just smiled down that barrel and said, 'My friend, the children used to play with those things where I come from.' I put the ticket in my pocket and told my man to settle in cash with the 'captain' when he came along, and went on about my business.

"As I was not dead yet and had some time to waste on that train, I went back to the artillery corps. It was a very poor imitation of that on the ticket. I said, 'Have you anything besides your signature to identify you?' He said, 'You bet I have,' and pulled a cannon from his hip pocket and shoved it in my face. It might not have been a cannon, but the rule of optics will prevail. The closer you get to one of those things the bigger it looks. You have heard about the 10 cent piece being held so close to the eye that it obscured the sun. I am not a brave man when it comes to physical conflict, and the experience of my brethren certainly did not help to steady my nerves, but whatever it was—I don't know—I just smiled down that barrel and said, 'My friend, the children used to play with those things where I come from.' I put the ticket in my pocket and told my man to settle in cash with the 'captain' when he came along, and went on about my business.

He Had to Have a Keen Eye, a Quick Wit and a Stout Punch—and the More Earnestly He Attended to Business the More Likely He Was to Make a Bad Mistake

I got his story, took him back to town with me and the inside information I got from that fellow was such that the physical forces of the scalpers became hard to catch. We were on to their game and their methods; they stood very little chance of putting a ticket through on bluff, and what was more, the law says something about conspiracy, and on that point I had plenty of dope on the scalpers before my friend of the artillery corps and I parted company.

"Right after this they got theoretical at headquarters. They started injunction proceedings; the 'old man' went daft on state laws and other things. Of course the scalper was getting his, but we were not getting the rewards of other years either.

"For a while I did very well on mileage books. It was hardly a day that I didn't get one—sometimes I caught two or three. You know, the old fashioned mileage book had the signature of the purchaser on the cover. That was a standard to go by. No duplication of signature, no return of book, no ride unless the 'captain' got the cash.

"This was taken away from us. Some one came along with a different idea. This was the stunt: Instead of having the passenger's signature on the cover of the book it was taken on a contract which was detached and secreted. I should have said that the books under the new plan were not called mileage, but scrip. One of the reasons for not allowing the signature to remain with the rest of the purchase was that the genius who first figured out this form of passenger scrip had a notion that no one could write his name exactly alike twice in a lifetime, and if the roads could only get one on record once they could have a lot of fun with him.

"When you have signed one of these contracts it is forwarded to a bureau and there it is held against you. Every time you ride you sign a tag, the same as you would your meal check at the hotel, and that tag is sent to the bureau. The signature is compared with that on the contract which is on file by child labor experts.

"If the 'experts' put the chalkmark of approval on you, you get your scrip—nasty word—but if they don't, you go in and see the 'man of troubles.' He is not called that because he has any troubles of his own, but because he has a stock on hand for the other fellow.

"Until the fellow who invented this scrip system happened along, I had always thought that watching a person write might get you something. For instance, if a signature were copied plingly from the pen, even though it won't exactly superimpose another, the trippingly part of it counts for a whole lot. I used to think more of such a signature, even if it was a little off, than I did of others that were almost fac similes, but brought forth with great labor. If you are to form your judgment of the genuineness of a signature in such a way, you must, of course, see the person write. That was always my idea, and it was also the idea of every bank official that I talked with on the subject, but the scrip man decided that we were all back numbers. Now, don't you get the idea that they all put them over on the kids. I know that they do not. I certainly know of one case. There is a wholesale house in this town composed of four partners. None of the partners has ever had occasion to travel much. To buy a scrip book for each would tie up a considerable amount of money unnecessarily, and maybe, too, the \$30 worth would not be used by each one within the year, and then the rebate is gone. Consequently they used to buy just one book. Whoever bought it, signed the contract that went to the bureau. Whoever used the book signed that name on the train. One day one of the members of the firm had the common scrip book out for a joy ride and he forgot who had signed the contract—he who hesitates is damned. He signed his own name, because he was pretty sure that he was the one who had purchased the book and signed the contract. Such was not the case. The contract bore another name. The little girl who made the comparison—a bright little thing—got an idea that everything was not right and took the deal to the 'man of troubles.' He said, 'Leave it with me. I will give it consideration.' After a few days' careful study of the matter from all its angles, he decided that, under the circumstances, a rebate might properly be denied the firm.

"Rotten system, you say. No, far be it from me to criticize any one or anything. These things involve principles too deep and fundamental for us to grasp. It even got by the executive officers once. Some one who jumped at a conclusion, even as you have, brought it up. He made a fool of himself and dug out his plug. The system was vindicated by the fact that the entire expense of the

bureau was paid by the excess amount collected from the purchasers of scrip books. If the executive officers had thought of it they would perhaps have reasoned that if there had been no bureau there would have been no expense for it, but executive officers are high priced, and they have no time to think.

"This system was adopted with a view of taking mileage books out of the hands of the scalper. It did, all right, but the scalper laughed—the scrip book was so much easier. At the time of the 1906 fire one San Francisco scalper lost more than \$2,000 worth of these scrip books. These were only what he had in stock—no one knows what he had out along the road or what the other scalpers had.

"But even this folly was not enough to keep the scalper alive. He died and when he did our excuse for living was gone. We were the mourners.

"As I said at the beginning, it was the longest railroad job I ever held, and during the time I held it I learned a lot of things—chief among them that no man is indispensable in any vocation and that most vocations are transitory. Working along this line of thought, when I got out of this job I didn't grab the first thing that came along. I waited for something that had lasting qualities to it—something dependable—and I got a job as salesman for an article that has been well known and peddled since the dawn of history—in fact, most of the persons whose names are recorded in 'upper case' in history have succeeded by its use. It has made orators, poets and artists without number. It lights the lanterns that guide the footsteps of our statesmen. Without it your meetings here would be dull. Without it the Congressional Record would not be printed in inviting form—congress likes the parliaments of the world, and extra sessions as well as national conventions, would fall on you!

"What is it I am selling? GAST"

