

CHAPTER XIV

BEATING THE PRUSSIAN RAILROAD

Grandfather is not quite certain of the ethics of this anecdote, but having paid for tickets he was determined to go where the tickets were supposed to take him - even if they did not.

At Naples each conductor received "rund reise" tickets - one for each member of his party and one for himself. These zigzagged across Europe by whatever route had been laid out, to Cherbourg or Havre; the final coupon was steerage from Cherbourg or Havre to Naples. This coupon, of course, was never used but completed the circuit (rund reise) and hence made possible a reduced rate. The parties went on to England and sailed home from a British port.

The "rund reise" tickets were purchased from the Paris office of the American Express Company and the cover of each ticket stated that under no circumstances would a refund on any coupon be made.

So Grandfather always examined every ticket carefully when delivered. One year he noted at Naples that a mistake had been made on the coupons from Eisenach to Heidleberg - nine tickets reading over one railroad, three over another. None would make Heidleberg in time to allow a visit of Castle and University and make the schedule on the Rhein boat. Grandfather wired Paris. Again at Venice he sent a frantic wire to Paris, but at Eisenach had received no reply. Nine tickets obviously were no good and Grandfather bought new ones. The other three started all right, but unfortunately read via some place which took a little longer and for which, as the coupon showed, an extra 50 cents had been paid. Having paid the full price for the short route and the 50 cents besides, Grandfather

thought himself entitled to use these tickets. He pleaded with the station master and wired Berlin, but the answer was a Prussian No!

Grandfather, however, decided to use the three tickets. They were good for the first lap of the journey. The conductor said: "At the junction three must get off and take the other route." "Yah, yah," but when the conductor came to punch the tickets for the second lap, he found no one had gotten off. He exclaimed testily that some three should have gotten off, to which Grandfather blankly answered "Yah, Yah." The conductor then began demanding three more tickets, to which he received the same blank "Yah, Yah." Then he got to gesturing it out on his fingers. He wanted three tickets - big ones like the three he had had before. Oh, billets, "yah, yah", and Grandfather gave him not the three he had had before, but three which contained the coupons of the other railroad, which previously had not been shown.

"Yah, yah," said the conductor. But the coupons struck him dumb - he had not seen them before - they did not bear his punch mark. At each station he got off and came back - at last Grandfather understood - the conductor wanted three more tickets. "Yah, yah," and he gave three more just like the first three. Again the conductor thought he had what he wanted - again he was puzzled. Again he insisted that he must have three more tickets. Finally Grandfather understood and gave him three remaining tickets with coupons he had never seen. Again he ejaculated "Yah, yah." Again he was fooled. He still needed three more tickets. But Grandfather could understand nothing more, but offered a two mark piece by way of compromise, which, rather unexpectedly, the conductor pocketed, and we were okeh to Frankfurt.

Here we were supposed to go through a gate, show our tickets and

be counted, get lunch and return through the gate and be counted again. Grandfather persuaded the crowd to pass up lunch, eat some Frankfurters sold from wagons and embark early on the train to Heidleberg.

Now only nine tickets were good. Twelve people must ride on nine tickets on the Prussian Railroad in the days of pompous officialdom which preceded the War - likely to prove quite an adventure. One of Grandfather's party was born in Germany. He and his wife and daughter spoke German with great fluency. The old man was proud of his accomplishment and with great difficulty held on to himself while Grandfather played dumb.

It seemed best to scatter the party through the train, Grandfather taking with him only Rasmussen, a young man just out of college - of American parents but able to understand and speak German well. He crowded into a compartment already filled, except for two seats, with unmistakable Germans.

The conductor, having checked up, came back to say that he had found twelve people and had been given only nine tickets, to which Grandfather began to explain that the coupons were not to be torn out of the little tickets given him, but certified, and Grandfather was to get his money back. As luck would have it, one of the bewhiskered Germans had lived in the United States and offered to be interpreter, but Grandfather would brook no interpreter and insisted on explaining rapidly in English how the tickets were to be certified and continued until the conductor got off at a station. Then he besought the would-be interpreter to help sell the idea of certification. "But," said the interpreter, "the conductor says you have twelve people and only nine tickets." "Why, I have pockets full of tickets," and Grandfather showed him that he had twenty-one tickets - to be sure, only nine were good, but all looked good enough to the interpreter.

Oh, tickets to burn. Certification is the theme. Grandfather banked on a one-track German mind and banked correctly. When the conductor returned, the German began to explain about certification. Whenever the conductor started to open his mouth, Grandfather started voluble English until finally the conductor was worn down and quit.

We were at Heidleberg. We must pass through a gate, surrender our coupons and be counted. If caught we would have to pay twice the value of tickets we did not buy and perhaps worse might befall us. Grandfather could talk no German. Rasmussen had taught him to say "the coupons are not to be torn out, but are to be certified so that I can get my money back." Rasmussen coralled the party, waiting for a tip from Grandfather when to move. Just as the rush grew thickest Grandfather presented his nine tickets and repeated what Rasmussen had taught him. Doubtless pronunciation was terrible, possibly Rasmussen had not worded the suggestion politely. At any rate, a Prussian officer ordered by an American what to do!! Preposterous. With a haughty fling, he tore the first coupon out.

Grandfather had seen Italians have fits of grief over nothing. He proceeded to imitate, first giving a wink to Rasmussen to rush the party through, and while Grandfather protested the ticket was ruined and the Prussian guard threatened in thunderous German, Rasmussen got the party through without being counted.

As soon as the bus had started Grandfather cooled down. If the coupon were pinned back in it, it would be as good as if it had not been torn out and Grandfather apologized for his impatience. The Prussian cooled down and, having counted the rest of the passengers through the gate, took Grandfather to an officer, certified the tickets - Grandfather passed out some tips and all ended the best of friends.

However, Grandfather decided that that was too hard a way to save \$25.00 for the Chautauqua Tours Company and thereafter never tried to beat the Prussian Railroad.