

CHAPTER XII

CONDUCTING TOURIST PARTIES ABROAD

After his first trip to Europe, Grandfather prepared a series of lectures illustrated with lantern slides, which he gave to supplement the work of the history classes. There were forty of these lectures, so that a student who took a two years' course in history each semester attended ten of these lectures.

One day at Northeast Wisconsin Teachers Meeting, Grandfather outlined his system. Prof. Rosebush, of Lawrence University, Appleton, after the talk, asked Grandfather if he would like to conduct a party abroad for the Chautauqua Tours Company which he and Dr. Naylor of Lawrence owned. Grandfather certainly would, Grandmother was willing to care for the children, the School Board would let Grandfather leave the night of Commencement, and soon all was set.

Lest Grandfather forgets to write it later, it should be recorded now that Grandmother during the summer showed her resourcefulness by taking the children to a Chautauqua at Waupaca Lakes and paid for the vacation of the family by giving a lecture on Scientific Temperance Instruction.

One thought bothered Grandfather greatly. Suppose he should draw an ornery person - one such might wear him out and leave him not fit for the strenuous task of next year's school. As a matter of fact, Grandfather found that one grouch was not a total loss. If there was one person who could discover something unpleasant and growl about it before anyone else did, all would be provoked at the grouch and enthusiastic about the management. Grandfather figured out a plan to manage grouches which worked so successfully that he passes the plan on to you should any of you ever conduct a party abroad.

Members of a party crossed on different boats, according to their pocketbooks, and assembled in Naples. The first evening, before anyone had had a chance to make a mistake, Grandfather made a little speech as follows: "In America hotels are purely commercial institutions. You pay for what you hope to get and growl if you do not get it. In Europe the theory is that the hotel proprietor is your host and you his guests. He wishes his guests happy; guests should always be polite. There is nowhere that politeness will get a surer reward than in European hotel relations.

"We are all going to travel together. Let's talk over the problem of the party travel. A conductor has four jobs:

"(1) He is a financial manager - bills must be paid in foreign currency and a new kind of money is drawn every few days. He must also be responsible for your baggage to and from trains. The conductor will appreciate not being interrupted while making settlements or attending to baggage.

"(2) The conductor must be a guide - must know what is best to see - what day each gallery is open, what is the shortest way to each place so that he may conserve your time and your strength and make your trip worth while.

"(3) The conductor must be an interpreter of what you see, for much of what you see will mean much or little to you according to how well you understand the background and significance of that which you see.

"If these three duties are executed well, you will have had a profitable trip to Europe, but you may not have had a pleasant time. Hence, a fourth duty devolves on the conductor.

"(4) The conductor must jolly up the party and see that no one gets a grouch.

"The problem of party travel lies in the fact that these four

duties are more than one man can do well and some one of them gets neglected. I have a practical suggestion to offer. Suppose the party itself take over one of these duties. It is obvious you cannot be expected to be responsible for the first, second or third. How about the fourth? What would you say to taking over the fourth? You may get a stomach ache, one by one, but not all of you at once. If you take the problem over, it will be the duty of all those who do not have a stomach ache to jolly up those who do."

All laughingly agreed. "A bargain is a bargain. If you take this over, it will really be your job." "Oh, we'll take the job," they declared. "All right," says Grandfather, "it's settled. Just one last word. Did you ever stop to think what would most certainly wreck the happiness of the party? I'll tell you. The worst thing that could happen would be for the conductor to get a stomach ache. If he does, this trip is ruined. Whatever else you do on the job you have just taken over, don't let that happen."

As soon as someone got a stomach ache, Grandfather would say to some member of the group: "Blank is getting grouchy, you remember you took over the job of jollyng those who got stomach aches - here's something to do." When it became the party's responsibility to jolly and discipline the grouch, no one dared get grouchy for no one could afford to get "in Dutch" with the crowd.

Conducting was hard work, especially in Italy where it was hot. It was necessary to arise at 6 or 6:30 a.m. in order to look over lecture notes before breakfast, for the conductor must travel without guide book or lecture notes. Breakfast was at 8 and the conductor must see that lagers are especially called and cajoled to be on time. They might be disciplined by leaving them behind, but it would make them grouchy. It was better to "kid" them into keeping on time. Carriage arrangements, made the night before, must be checked to see that there is no slip. If all

the party is ready at 9, the conductor must be ready with his arrangements.

A morning lecturing in an art gallery, back to the hotel for lunch and a siesta. Start again for a drive and outdoor lecture work at 3:30. Return by 6:30 or 7:00 to be ready for dinner at 7:30. After dinner answer individual questions of members of the party. "Where can best coral be bought?" "Where is the insane asylum?" etc. This would take until 10:30. Then arrangements for the next day must be made and the expense account of the day had to be made. If accounts were not balanced each night, they could never be made to balance later. It was usually midnight and sometimes 1 a.m. before the conductor got a chance to retire, and next morning at 6:30 he must be up feeling fit for another strenuous day. Furthermore, he had his party on his hands for seven days a week.

Theoretically, Sunday was a day of rest. Practically a conductor had a party of a dozen or twenty people on his hands and it was better to entertain them than to have them get out of sorts. So in Rome of a Sunday morning the conductor would take his party to St. Peters and in the early afternoon would write post cards (Grandfather before leaving prepared a list of leading citizens and sent each a post card to keep all happy with his annual trip abroad). Some of the party would volunteer to help address the cards. In the late afternoon there was a drive and Sunday evening a trip to the Colosseum by moonlight, if perchance the moon favored with her presence.

At the Colosseum, other parties would be found, and Grandfather would assemble all together, get some other conductor to lead the singing while Grandfather gave a talk on Paganism and Christianity (See Appendix C). The Colosseum by moonlight was a rare place to speak. In the shadows one could fairly see the tigers' eyes and the ghosts of departed martyrs. After the talk you should hear the crowd sing "Nearer My God to Thee."

Such an evening was never forgotten by those who were present.

In Florence on a Sunday morning there would be a trip to San Marco and a talk on Savonarola - in the evening readings from Ruskin or George Elliot. Some relief from labor came when Switzerland was reached, but the job became strenuous again in Germany and in Paris. However, the sea trips were restful, and Grandfather always returned to his school refreshed physically and stimulated mentally by his trips abroad. Grandfather conducted these parties on three successive summers - 1908, 1909, 1910 - and was scheduled to take a party in 1911 when he decided to go with The Curtis Publishing Company.

The Chautauque Tours Company courteously released Grandfather from his contract and suggested that if he could arrange to get off six weeks each summer, they would like to employ him as a special lecturer in Rome and Florence to lecture to all their parties as they passed through these cities. Grandfather wished very much to do this, but he could not leave the research work for so long a time and he did not see Europe again for sixteen years.

Grandfather could write a book of incidents of these trips, but will give only a few.