

## The Requirements of a Railway Ticket Agent.

By W. E. HARRIS.

Perhaps my long experience in railway work renders me better qualified than a mere casual observer would be, to write a little article on a subject such as the title suggests. I have often felt inclined to write at length on a subject of this kind; but time has not, and will not now, permit me to do so.

I feel that it would be a most difficult task to undertake the finding of a more trying position than that of a railway ticket agent.

However, if a man were desirous of studying human nature under its most unfavourable aspects he could not find a more suitable place than the ticket office of some railway station. Now, as I have said "most unfavourable aspects," I am going to offer you a few words by way of explanation.

In the first place I shall briefly describe the circumstances surrounding the ticket agent's position; and the situation, as I shall describe it, is much the same in this or any other country.

The qualifications required in a man seeking the position I speak of are almost innumerable. In the first place his employers expect him to be a first-class telegraph operator; he must be a good penman and a good accountant; he must be quick at changing money correctly, and in selling the passenger the right kind of a ticket to his destination. In addition to these requirements he must thoroughly understand the working time-table of his road, as well as the time-tables of the many connecting railway and steamship lines over which he is selling tickets; and lastly, he must be bright, intelligent and courteous.

Now these requirements which I have enumerated are most important; but they are facts with which all the travelling public is well acquainted. I often wonder if people who are finding fault with a man for not showing greater alacrity in the discharge of his duties, would be a little more considerate for that man if they were fully conversant with his surrounding circumstances. I shall enumerate some of the cares I have hinted at above which fall to the lot of the ordinary ticket agent. I say *ordinary*, for I refer to the men filling

positions outside of a few of the large city offices, where a man is selling tickets exclusively.

Ordinarily a poor fellow finds himself cooped up in an office probably situated between a ladies' and a gentlemen's waiting-room. If there are two waiting-rooms he must sell tickets at two windows, and must be prepared to remain constantly at both windows and wait on at least six people at once, or someone will be heard to remark that "he (the agent) is a most disobliging fellow," or else he is considered "slow and stupid," and quite unfit for the position he holds. Now as train time approaches he will be obliged to keep a most attentive ear upon the busy telegraph instruments, of which there will be anywhere from one to six separate sets to listen to. These instruments are connected with dozens of different offices, and keep up an incessant clicking, all at the same time, one as loud as the other, all apparently in frantic haste to finish their business without a moment's delay. Amongst this chaos of dots and dashes he must be able to instantaneously recognize his own office call, which so closely resembles another's that there is a difference of only a dot, or a dash perhaps, with a fraction of a second for a space. When that call comes, it is probably the despatcher asking him how long he is likely to detain the on-coming train, for he (the despatcher) must be enabled to arrange a proper crossing for this train (bearing its precious human freight) with an opposing train. When this call comes it is imperative, and the agent must make a hasty apology for leaving an impatient man at the ticket window while he hastens to answer this call. When he is in the midst of receiving a most important order, (the error of a single word of which may mean a horrible death to a hundred people), some old lady is calling lustily for him "to mind his business, or she will report him for neglecting his duty." If he considers it worth while to offer a word of explanation, this irate and injured old body will say, "Well! I don't know; but only I was never used this way at another office." At this very moment a man is requiring the agent's car at the telephone "without a moment's delay," as he wants "to know the correct time," and can't wait.

This is only a trifle, for at the

opposite ticket window some gentleman is beckoning to him, and wants to present him with a "special permit" from the general passenger department, which entitles the holder to a reduced fare; and as the train is nearly due, he must rush to the ticket case and hunt up a "special blank ticket," which must be stamped and filled in and exchanged for the "permit," which in turn must be stamped and certified by the gentleman presenting it, as well as by the agent. The agent must be very careful to select the proper ticket from his stock, or he shall find when accounting for it that he has given the wrong form of ticket to the purchaser, which may mean that he is a considerable sum out of pocket.

Please remember the agent is selling from a stock of tickets comprising probably one or two hundreds of different kinds. There will be in this lot first-class unlimited tickets, first-class limited, second-class limited, return limited and unlimited; there will also be excursion tickets at reduced rates, and third fare or *free* tickets for delegates attending conventions, and commercial tickets as well. Then there will be an endless variety of blank tickets to be filled out and carefully punched, and these will cover a territory embracing the whole continent. Here the agent has to use great care, for should he make an error in writing in a name the destination would be wrong; should he punch out a wrong date the ticket might be altered from a limited to an unlimited ticket, thus altering the price; should he have filled in the wrong mileage his fare will be wrong, and he feels this will cause him a pecuniary loss, which he can ill afford to stand. Then should he make an error in his dating stamp he knows full well that the "passenger department" will take occasion to upbraid him for carelessness. He must be careful not to tear off two tickets instead of one (for they are frequently stuck together). He must consider the above situation fully while he is issuing the ticket, and he must "be quick." Should a man hesitate a moment, he is told that "he does not know his business."

If an agent were selling tickets over his own road alone the situation would be vastly different; as it is, he is selling over a large number of connecting lines, and this