

## PH. D. CARRIES YOUR BAGS



*Among Red Caps, one of three has had college training.*

**TOTING LUGGAGE ISN'T MUCH OF A JOB FOR A WHITE MAN, BUT A NEGRO RED CAP MOVES IN UPPER MIDDLE CLASS COLORED SOCIETY. ONE OUT OF THREE RED CAPS IS COLLEGE TRAINED. HE DIDN'T GO TO COLLEGE TO LEARN HOW TO RUSTLE LUGGAGE; RACIAL DISCRIMINATION PUSHES HIM DOWN. MOST RED CAPS BELONG TO THE BROTHERHOOD AND ARE ASKING TO BE RECOGNIZED AS EMPLOYEES OF THE RAILROADS IN WHOS STATIONS THEY WORK FOR TIPS ALONE.**

**T**HE Twentieth Century Limited glides to a stop in the vaults of Grand Central Station. Bags and people pour out.

"That black one and the set of golf clubs."

"The three at this end, please."

Red Caps pounce on the luggage and are off. Their clients follow, eager for the strange and interesting sights of New York, or glad to be "home at last," or worrying about that contract. And if the crowd comes between them and their porters, seldom do they remember whether he was a tall fellow or a short one. He was—a Red Cap.

Who are these bag carriers? To you—just porters. But among them are doctors, dentists, lawyers, preachers, social service workers, musicians, artists, chemists.

**EVERY THIRD MAN WHO CARRIES YOUR BAG HAS HAD COLLEGE TRAINING.**

M.A.'s are common; men studying for doctors' degrees are no rarity.

When a foreigner innocent of English arrives at the North Western Station in Chicago, officials call frantically for Red Cap Frank Tignor. He guides the bewildered traveler through the intricacies of the ticket office, and the time table, and may even plan for him a short sight-seeing tour between trains. In every station of any size in the country there are Red Caps who speak two or three languages.

Forty per cent of the porters at the North Western Station are college men. Peter Jordan, Red Cap who meets the cabs at the front door, has received his M.A. in physics from the University of Chicago. Willard Townsend is a graduate of the Royal College of Science in Toronto. His job as a laboratory technician in Chicago vanished with the 1929 crash. George Nesbitt practices law at night and works nine hours a day at the Illinois Central Station in Chicago. Wilbur Winchester graduated from Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, then studied bacteriology at the University of Chicago. Now he takes time off to wrestle with labor problems under Paul H. Douglas at the University.



## RED CAPS

At the Pennsylvania Station in New York City Sylvester Corrothers, a Dartmouth man, asks, "Carry your bags, sir?" John A. Bowers works there, too, now that he has been forced to close his music studio for lack of money. Sidney Porter in Portland, Oregon, is a part-time chiropodist and a part-time Red Cap. A few years ago a Red Cap who was a graduate of a medical school delivered a baby for a passenger in a New York City terminal.

EVERY THIRD RED CAP WHO CARRIES YOUR BAG HAS HAD COLLEGE TRAINING.

Red Caps did not go to college to learn how to become Red Caps. Their problem is a racial one. To the white, a job toting luggage is a poor way to eke out an existence. To the black, red capping is one of the "big" fields open. The white man who works as porter can do nothing else, as a rule; the Negro almost invariably can do something else but can't get it to do.

Negro society recognizes that though the economic level of the Red Cap may not be high, his intellectual level is. He moves in the high middle class colored circles.

The vast majority of Red Caps work for tips only. The railroads hire and fire them, dictate duties, but do not consider them employees. Tips average between \$2.00 and \$2.50 a day which makes \$14.00 to \$17.50 a week, providing, of course, that the Red Cap works seven days. For the last ten years there have been sporadic attempts at unionism, but all failed until the International Brotherhood of Red Caps entered the field late last year.

On January 14 delegates representing porters from 24 of the nation's largest cities convened in Chicago to see what could be done about getting salaries and recognition as employees of the roads. This conference gave birth to the Brotherhood. The union's growth has been phenomenal. The Brotherhood claims that 70-75 per cent of the 12,000 Red Caps in the United States have been organized. Today before the Interstate Commerce Commission is their petition for legal recognition as employees of the railroads. The National Mediation Board has ruled three times in their favor in the last few years, and each time the companies have refused to abide by the decisions. The Interstate Commerce Commission decides in June.

The union publishes monthly a tabloid-size, eight page paper called *Bags and Baggage*—devoted to the "economic and social security of the Red Cap craft."

Before Labor Day, 1892, the Red Cap did not exist. Negro porters who worked in the station often laid aside their brooms to rush to the aid of some bustling grande-dame. But on that Labor Day New York's Grand Central Terminal was thronged. Porters were unable to find those needing



## RED CAPS

some bustling grande-dame. But on that Labor Day New York's Grand Central Terminal was thronged. Porters were unable to find those needing help; those needing help were unable to find the porters. James Williams hunted up a red flannel rag and tied it around his cap. It worked—he had a big day—and the Red Cap came into being.

Today both the passenger and the railroad take the Red Cap for granted. Too much for granted, says the Red Cap. He has grievances. He believes that he exists to carry bags. He doesn't like being valet, maid, clown or stooge.

Often he's in a tough spot between station rules and passengers' whims. The chief usher orders that no luggage goes into a certain train before 9:45 p.m. At 9:30 a woman insists in dictatorial tones that she sees no reason why her bags may not be placed in her compartment. She does not intend to check them for 15 minutes. If the lady is a nobody and the Red Cap does as she wishes things go hard with him. If the lady is the wife of one of the officials and he has not complied, it's even worse.

A Red Cap rushes through the train, peering frantically under seats, up in the steel racks. It can mean only one thing—a lost bag. For proof, look at the man's face. A lost bag means a lost job—or, at any rate, a lengthy suspension if it is found later. It does not matter whose fault it was. Perhaps the passenger was careless. The blame rests with the Red Cap. Results of hasty accusations are not easily rectified. The bag was misplaced; the Red Cap is suspended.

“Thank you, suh. I'll put your bags right here.”

The Twentieth Century Limited gains speed as it moves out away from the station—away from New York City. At the other end, there will be more Red Caps waiting to serve—they will serve, the traveller will not notice, and if he loses sight of his Red Cap in the crowd, he will not remember whether the fellow was short or tall. ●



**KEN**

August 11, 1938