



by James H. Winchester

THIS SUMMER more than a million tourists will troop through the front doors of a half-century old six-story building at 11 Rue Scribe in Paris, across the street from the Opera. There they will greet friends, pick up mail from home, scan the visitor's book to see if they know anyone else in town, and harry the clerks for everything from a ticket on the next plane to Rome to help in locating a misplaced passport.

The oldest and most important of the 344 offices in 35 countries of the 100-year-old American Express Company, this building has long been regarded by travelers—sophisticates and innocents alike—as their Parisian home away from home. Grimy faced, flatiron-shaped, it has been a familiar oasis to traveling Americans, and others—more than 25,000,000 of them—since it first opened its doors in 1900.

Visitors to this tourist's landmark this year will find a lot of changes,

though. Because city officials refuse even to let American Express sandblast the exterior lest this make the nearby Opera look even grimmer, the traditional facade will be the same. But inside the long-familiar wrought-iron balustrades, the elaborately decorated ceilings, the clutter of ancient desks on the ground floor and the buckety old elevators will be missing. Taking their places are modern counters, ultra-modern electronic business machines, air conditioners, electronically controlled elevators and an escalator of the latest design—one of the few in all Paris.

"Travel has become big business and we can serve the American public today only by adopting the most modern advances of business technology," reports Ralph T. Reed, American Express' president.

American Express makes its own big business in part through taking the headaches out of travel for

tourists. It will arrange anything from a one-family grand tour to organized cruises for hundreds of people.

The biggest of all United States travel agencies, the company, riding the crest of the unprecedented post-war travel boom, has grown more in the last 10 years than in all its previous 95 years of corporate life. The number of employees which shrank to about 1,000 during World War II, now totals more than 8,000. In the same period total assets have risen more than 400 percent, to a whopping \$620,000,000.

Although world-wide American Express has other diversified interests outside the travel field — it is one of the world's largest freight forwarders, operates an armored car service through a subsidiary and is increasingly active in field warehousing, which permits a borrower to finance inventories on his own property rather than in bonded warehouses elsewhere — it is best known for its traveler's cheques and its beyond-the-call-of-duty services to Americans abroad.

As guardian angel to travelers in trouble American Express is daily called upon to solve seemingly insoluble difficulties.

"We have to be great salesmen," Mr. Reed is continually impressing upon his employees, "because all we have to sell is service."

TO KEEP their traveling customers happy, American Express some-

times goes to fantastic lengths. Like the time a sick man on one of their round-the-world cruises asked if he could see Mt. Fujiyama from his cabin window. The only way he could see it was if the ship was turned around — so the ship was turned around!

Americans, unfortunately, continually are dying abroad and it's usually American Express which has the job of getting the bodies home. Their well-organized shipping department does everything, from witnessing the funeral service, obtaining the undertaker's and doctor's certificates, to seeing that the American Embassy seals the coffin.

Then, because it is a superstitious tradition of the sea that bodies aboard a vessel are bad luck, the steamship line, in accordance with general practice, lists the coffin on the ship's papers under a different label, usually as a "physiological specimen."

But it is with live travelers, rather than dead ones, that American Express deals mostly. Each year, in their Paris office alone, they handle some three-quarters of a million pieces of mail — free of charge — for the approximately 10,000 Americans a day who drop by at the height of the travel season.

An oft-repeated story, about the lengths to which this global travel agency goes to please, concerns the American businessman who cabled the American Express office in London that his daughter was being

married that very morning at St. Martin's Church in the English capital.

"Please have American Express witness the ceremony," his wire ended.

Two men were assigned to this unusual request. Arriving at St. Martin's Church they found no such wedding was scheduled there. They called every other church in London. Finally, the Dean of Westminster Abbey himself told them they were probably looking for St. Martin's Registry, not the church of that name.

Grabbing their hats and a bouquet of roses the two wedding envoys rushed to the registry office. There, sure enough, was the young couple, just about to say, "I do." The American Express men, slightly winded, witnessed the ceremony, presented the roses and then cabled the worried father that everything was legal.

A typical week will see other American Express employees lending a helping hand in various ways. In Rome, they persuaded a woman traveler, returning to the United States alone, to care for an orphaned baby on the flight to New York.

In Calcutta a malaria victim had to be sent home at once. American Express' local manager arranged for a freighter to leave half its cargo on the pier to rush the man to Penang, where he could make connections with a trans-Pacific liner. In Peru an elderly man had a heart attack

while crossing the Andes. American Express pulled him off the regular train, hired a special locomotive and car, engaged a nurse to care for him and rushed him down to a sea level hospital.

BUT MOST of the company's free services to travelers, for which they are best known to those on the move, are less spectacular. In every major city of Europe and Asia, a navy-blue-uniformed American Express attendant, a linguist in four or more tongues, meets every important train, plane and boat, ready to help anyone — from speeding them through customs to getting them a hotel room.

American Express sums up this helping hand policy this way:

"When you sell tickets to a prospective traveler, you can't just go down to the boat with a bunch of roses and say good-bye. He has to be serviced all the way."

This principal of service-all-the-way has been largely responsible, too, for the overwhelming success of American Express traveler's cheques, which are now used as currency in every corner of the globe, including Moscow.

These cheques — that's the way American Express still spells it, rather than "checks" — bear the company's guarantee that no one who cashes them when they are properly countersigned will suffer loss.

The company likes to repeat two

stories about the acceptability of these cheques, which are often referred to as the world's "Number One Money."

A traveler once tried to buy a blanket from an Arab offering to pay for it with a gold coin. The Arab refused. However, when the man presented an American Express traveler's cheque the desert chieftan accepted it without hesitation or question.

Again, there were two American travelers who had ventured far up China's Yangtze River. Dubiously, one day they offered a \$20 cheque to an ancient Chinese merchant. He accepted it willingly. Later he explained that years previously an explorer had given him a traveler's check, which he'd found good. So he was glad to accept another one.

There are many authenticated tales of prisoners-of-war who used American Express traveler's cheques to bribe their guards for extra food.

THE TRAVELER's cheque — it now has many imitators — was invented in 1891 after American Express' then president, J. C. Fargo, discovered on a trip abroad that even the prestige of his organization and a duly certified letter-of-credit was little help to him in obtaining cash in a hurry in a foreign country.

The trick that Fargo and his advisers came up with was the double signature — one made when it is purchased, the other when it is spent.

In the first year after they were introduced the company sold only 248 cheques with a total value of \$9,120. Today the volume of sales — with the purchaser paying a modest 75 cents for each \$100 worth of cheques purchased — runs into the tens of millions.

One great advantage of traveler's cheques is that they are good indefinitely. Some have been cashed twenty-five or even 30 years after they were issued.

When such traveler's cheques are lost, the company will replace them almost immediately, if the customer can tell when and where he purchased them. Then the company has its own special agents — one of the world's most efficient private detective forces — to track down or trace the lost or stolen cheques.

Throughout the years there have been many attempts to pass phony American Express Traveler's Cheques and several large rings — notably a seven-nation gang in Europe immediately following the end of World War II — have learned to their sorrow that this is one of the hardest ways in the world to earn a dishonest dollar.

Every American Express Traveler's Cheque, upon its return to the company's clearinghouse, a block-long room in the financial district of New York City, automatically goes through a chemical test to verify its authenticity.

If cheques are stolen, either from an office or from an individual the

company's detectives are relentless in tracking down the thieves. In fact some of the underworld's most notable members have found themselves behind bars because they made the mistake of trying to cash stolen American Express Traveler's Cheques. Among them was Gerald Chapman, who pulled off this century's biggest mail robbery, a \$1,346,350 job. He went to jail — not for that criminal feat — but because he was caught trying to forge signatures to traveler's cheques that weren't his.

American Express was founded in Buffalo, N. Y., in 1850. The seven original founders of the company were competitors in the business of carrying goods and valuables. The company's first service was between Albany, N. Y., and Buffalo and between New York City and Boston. Gradually, as the railroads themselves expanded, the company pushed its services westward. Within a few years, too, it began to add diversified activities to its freight business. For example, it provided both the horses and carriages for the parade up Broadway in 1860 of the then Prince of Wales. During the Civil War the company distributed absentee ballots to soldiers at the front. And it was American Express which developed the C.O.D. system of delivery and its money order was the first of its kind developed by a private firm.

The company established its first overseas office in 1895 but it wasn't

until early in the 20th century that it really entered the travel field — for which it is now best known.

One of its first ventures was helping bring home the thousands of Americans stranded all over Europe when World War I began.

During the 1933 Bank Holiday the company sought and won special permission from Treasury Secretary-to-be, William H. Woodin, to keep its doors open, thus becoming in effect the only banking medium in many U.S. cities.

THE START of World War II saw the company again returning many thousands of stranded Americans to the United States. At the same time it had to close 100 of its 150 offices and slash its personnel to fewer than 1,000 persons.

However, when Allied troops re-entered Paris they found loyal French employees waiting to reopen the office. The same was true in Rome, and Manila. The American Express office in London, though often bombed, and partially destroyed by fire, stayed open throughout the war.

When the Paris office was finally reopened in 1944 — at the specific request of General Eisenhower — the company records in the building at 11 Rue Scribe were still intact. The French concierge, who had remained on the premises all through the German occupation, had hidden them in a sealed room and guarded them night and day for four years.

The classic story of company loyalty told by American Express officials everywhere and repeated by Alden Hatch in his book "American Express," concerns the trials and tribulations of a company cruise director taking a group of American Express-booked travelers on a journey around the world just before World War II. Before he returned home to New York he'd had to cope with a civil war in Shanghai; a millionairess who refused to go ashore except at night for fear she might be recognized; and an animal trainer who filled the ship's hold with a weird aggregation of birds, boas, monkeys and panthers. On the same cruise a hotel in the wild mountains of Japan, to which some of the cruise passengers had gone on a visit, burned down and the tourists had to spend several days with the hairy mountaineers.

This unfortunate director also had to rescue a susceptible young play-

boy from the wiles of a cruising adventuress; play Cupid to a British baronet and an American actress; guard the widow of an Australian pearl magnate who carried tin cans full of matched pearls loose in her baggage; quietly settle an attempted murder in Calcutta; protect his charges during a pitched battle in which Hindus and Mohammedans celebrated the Harvest Festival at Agra; reason with a passenger who demanded a refund because he lost a day when the ship crossed the international date line; and hold the hand of a lonely old lady as she lay dying in a hotel room in Rome.

"Why did you put up with all of that?" he was asked by a friend when his voyage was completed. "Surely there must be easier ways to make a living."

"What else could I do," he explained. "After all, they were booked by American Express. They expected it."



The streets were crowded with shoppers when a sudden storm came up. Some scurried for shelter, but one middle-aged woman decided to cross the street. The gutter was awash with swirling water. As she tried to summon courage she felt herself lifted slightly and propelled across by a strong masculine arm. Safely on the other side and in a doorway, she looked up at her rescuer, then fumbled in her purse.

"I'm so grateful to you," she said, fishing out a quarter and offering it to him.

Her rescuer drew himself up and in a dignified tone edged with sarcasm, replied: "Madam, my father is a high-ranking official at the United Nations."

"Well, I can't help that," she snapped. "This is all the change I have."

FRATERNALISM

FIGHTS

COMMUNISM

By George E. Stringfellow

Imperial Assistant Rabban, Ancient Arabic Order, Nobles of the Mystic Shrine

THE voluntary cooperation of a free people is one of the invaluable spiritual resources of a free society. Personal, voluntary cooperation in the United States has become so widespread and has developed to such an extent that it can be described as an established influence in our Our Land of the Free. "When the history of our times is written," says Clarence B. Randall in his *Creed for Free Enterprise*, "this characteristic will stand out as our most revolutionary contribution to the advancement of human welfare by democratic processes."

Of the countless voluntary organizations in America, the 700 fraternal organizations, composed of both men and women, stand as one of our most valuable resources. Faced with the challenge of atheistic Communism to our way of life, the members of these fraternal orders have not only taken their stand for God, but in opposition to Communism and

all its works. Moreover, many of the leaders in our fraternal orders have been on the front line in the fight to preserve our American way of life against the infiltration of Communism.

Civilization rests ultimately on an act of faith. For those of us who have grown up in the Christian ethic, faith in God is the very foundation of the social order. This is God's world: He is the Creator of the Universe, which is under His dominion.

In this faith and abiding conviction, Freemasonry — the oldest form of fraternalism — was founded and has developed through the centuries. Its symbolism, its ritual, and its rule of life are derived from a belief in God. No atheist can qualify for membership in the Masons, nor in other fraternal orders.

While the vows and rituals of Freemasonry are not publicized, the symbolism and philanthropic acts of