

HUNEKER NERVOUSLY EXPLORES NEW YORK'S SUBWAY: AND, NOTHING DAUNTED, ...

By James Huneker.

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And, Nothing Daunted, Learns Much About Gum Chewing, the Laceration of the English Language, and the Beauty of Our Girls.

By James Huneker.

DURING a cool, rainy streak of weather recently I was in the mood statistically. I heartily dislike figures, which are the most elastic and plastic quantity when manipulated by clever folk, and the most depressing of all combinations is the dubious "science" of statistics, even more than the "dismal science," socialism.

Nevertheless, I was "vastly intrigued," as some writers of pretty prose say, by the statement that the Subway as it now stands has a total length of twenty-one miles. Fabulous! And the enterprise is only in its infancy; the entire island will be honeycombed by swiftly running trains, and there is hope that the ugly "L" roads will be removed and certain broad avenues will regain their inalienable but lapsed privileges of light and air—not to mention the cessation of intolerable noise.

When you hear an "L" train starting or stopping—especially in Brooklyn, where the flat wheel is a cult with the B. R. T.—you are reminded of a busy boiler shop when a lot of orders have come in for dreadnoughts. The "L" roads are a standing reproach to Greater New York.

It may sound childish, but it is the truth, when I confess that I feared to travel in the Subway till a short time ago. I was in Paris some ten years ago when a catastrophe, a fire, occurred, and the horrors of that accident made me nervous. The Underground in London is gloomy, the cars not inviting—rather dirty. I should say—but the idea of fire never haunts one en route. The masonry is solid and the dampness would smother any conflagration. The Paris Metropolitan is much more cheerful and better lighted. The service, too, is excellent.

Berlin has only begun experimenting with subways. There is virtually but one. It seems miniature compared to the London or New York subways. The cars are small and light-running. The system is adapted to the shape of the city. You can go from the neighborhood of the Palace—it is only a few blocks away—to Charlottenburg, with several loops

the gale that blew backward through the train, and held on to a strap as a sailor hangs on to the main brace in a storm at sea. (I hope it's the mainbrace.) The roominess of the car, the brilliancy of the lighting, and the absorbed expression of the passengers grew upon my consciousness. Though, so it seemed to me, we were racing with death, no one suggested that such an idea worried his skull. A Subway crowd is typical of the town. Indifference is one prime quality and chewing gum another. Nearly every one chews, the men more volubly—if I may so express myself—than the women.

The lantern-jawed Yankee type is again to the fore. For a generation he had disappeared from our streets, from our illustrations. He is back, shrewd-faced, long upper lip, and salient cheek bones. He is the surviving remnant of the once dominant American Nation—then a compound of Irish, English, Scotch, with an occasional modicum of German; today he is on his last legs fighting, though he hardly realizes it, against the mastery of the Slav and the Italian. But who cares! We are as yet too young a nation, still in too inchoate a state, to worry about the infusion of more foreign blood. If it is healthy, it is welcome. From the giant amalgam something powerful must emerge.

Gum Chewing, National Neurosis.

But the national neurosis of gum chewing is not a promising sign. Are we so nervous, so lacking in self-control, as this St. Vitus dance of the jaws indicates? To watch human beings feed is never an inspiring spectacle; few of the natural processes are; but this artificial, self-induced labial pleasure—why should it be intruded upon the eye of a neighbor? At best it is a Barmecide feast, at worst a disgusting and dehumanizing picture. Animals chew their cud; mankind should not. Aesthetically it disfigures the profiles of pretty girls. If they were only conscious of this! When the Woman Suffrage Party makes a crusade against this minor sin of

the voice of the New York woman. And now I'm in for it!

However, we are not given to such niceties in the whirl of our daily life. We lack the "faculty of attention," and we lack stützelsch; we can't sit still without twiddling our thumbs, twitching our limbs, or working our jaws. We are without repose, and much as we may dislike the idea of military service, it turns out well-behaved young men, not a mob of jumping jacks. As to manners, the Hungarians beat us hollow. I mean street manners, the manners that most matter. Our indifference to the finer shades is the result of our selfishness. It is not a question of men treating women impolitely—though it is exceptional—but of man's impoliteness to man. Perhaps more subways will modify the evil. By that time we shall have lost all our manners.

I know it is the stereotyped thing to say that New York crowds are good-natured. Good-natured is hardly the word—timid, cringing, cowardly are better words. An English or a German crowd wouldn't endure for a minute the slights put upon our crowds by impertinent petty officials. In no country are personal rights so respected as in England, "effete monarchy" as it is. I know the Subway guards are much-suffering, and that as a body they are superior to the "L" road guards, who are dirty as to attire and discourteous to a degree. They tell me that the B. R. T. pays starvation wages, but why should the public suffer? I'll tell you why—a whisper, mind you!—in Greater New York the public is a flock of stupid sheep.

Pretty girls in our city! Lots of them. In the Subway at morn and eve you can count the plain ones. These girls are of many nationalities. They all dress above their station, i. e., wear clothes that are manifestly cheap, in imitation of prevailing fashionable modes. When they cease imitating there is no more hope of social ambition and social ascension. We have no peasant class in America. No self-respecting woman will dress according to her "class"—or her means, either—for she is ever hopeful that her "class" will be a better one, or that



"I entered the first Subway train I was shoved into."

most English." Then electricity must be American. That potentate who, fearing the thunderbolt, built himself a palace underground, and there was slain by the lightning he had tried to evade, would be distrustful if today he could revisit the glimpses of the moon. In the bowels of New York he might find immunity from the lightning stroke, but he would find there lightning, though harnessed. What would the Subway be without the electric "juice"? It wouldn't be at all, for we could never have endured so patiently the choking atmosphere of the Underground, before Theodore Dreiser's hero, the Titan, gave London electricity instead of steam and smoke.

It is American electricity, my friend Heinrich Charles believes, that will revolutionize a bloodless revolution—social life, and bring back a golden age. Still I am old enough and sentimental enough to miss the locomotive, which man built as an image of himself—puffing, hissing, shrill, and stubborn, and fast running. A locomotive is very human, not specifically English, as Emerson said. It breathes, it is alive, whereas the electric motor, while more subtle, is also more treacherous. Less noisy, it is less sociable. It is always thirsty, drinks liquids, never greedily consumes coal lumps as does the hungry locomotive. Ruskin loathed steam. Would he have admired electricity? I doubt it. Overhead the electric motor is as noisy as a launch without a muffler. Even in the air man must chatter.

To "Foreign" New Jersey.

One day I conceived the bold notion of going under the North River by the tubes. I had made the trip to Brooklyn via the tunnel and lived to tell the tale. But New Jersey was a different matter. It was practically foreign soil and further away. I went from Cortlandt Street, and was disappointed when I got to Jersey City so soon. That spot, like Long Island City, is not to be carried in. Oblivious of the fact that I could have taken the elevator to the street surface, I toiled up a twisting staircase, as fine a place for sandbagging, garrotting and highway robbery as I ever saw outside of an engraving, by the fantastic Piranesi. The day was a rainy one. The lights were dim, the steps many. I was both grateful and disheartened when I reached the open. Why Jersey City? "Tu l'avez voulu, Georges Dandin?" as they say in the old Molière comedy. I had disembarked at Jersey City when I wanted to go to Hoboken. The matter was soon readjusted. I asked the advice of the elevator man and he pointed out a ferryhouse. But I didn't care to return to my native land. Then he suggested, go downstairs and take the train to Hoboken. How simple it all sounded. I got into the right car—it goes no further, I was told—and came up near the Hubbard-American docks; further up fluttered the flag of the North German Lloyd, and the surroundings looked pleasantly familiar.

By some psychic process of reasoning, which only Hugo Münsterberg could explain, the thought of Hoboken, the sight of "Hapag," made me aware of Meyer's and Naegell's hotels on another street. Auto-suggestion? Tourists who are unhappy enough to stay over night in Hoboken during the mosquito season, never miss Meyer's hospitable garden where the cool brew flows. Not to stop there, if only for a drink, is to miss one of the delights of foreign travel. I wasn't dreaming of sailing to Europe, yet did I hurry over to Meyer's later and rested my fatigued organs. Also mistook them, as I read "Jugend" and other German publications. I returned, by another tube, this time I came out at Fourteenth Street.

The cars are the most spacious, clean, and comfortable of all the subways. I paid 5 cents from the Terminal Building to Jersey City, paid 5 cents to New York. But why did I have to pay an extra 2 cents at Fourteenth or Twenty-third or Thirty-third Street? Is this one more McAdoo about nothing! What joy to stamp one's native asphalt! I celebrated by riding down to Herrvater Lüchow and bored him with the recital of my adventure. I noted, in the Hudson tunnels, that I did not suffer from the oppression I always experience crossing under the East River. In the Pennsylvania tunnels the pressure at the temples is also severe. The air is closer than in the Subway tubes.

Orgy of Subway Riding.

A mania for movement, a wanderlust seized me after the New Jersey trip. I went to the Bronx via the tunnel, I went to 242d Street and Broadway—I had previously traversed the longest lane in the world in a motor car, and wrote of it in my first article—and enjoyed the wind-swept district about Van Cortlandt Park. It is a pity that the Subway is not altogether an elevated road in those remote parts. The views are wonderful.

It was Ernest Lawson who discovered, artistically speaking, the Harlem River and the unknown reaches of the Bronx. His gorgeously rich palette comes happily into play, for there may be thought pines, capricious, splendid, beautiful trees, blue-cloves, tumbled rocks, and gleaming waterways. His best themes were found near the Harlem River.

For the Bronx I have a weakness, especially the park and the Zoo. When I had ridden in every Subway—also in the new Chambers Street to Myrtle Avenue and Ridgewood branch, which crosses the Williamsburg Bridge—I hunted up the Belmont tubes and the

old Steinway tunnel. Really, the police of New York are obliging men. At the Queensboro Bridge, Fifty-ninth Street, a sandy-haired officer broke the news to me as gently as if I had been a relative. No, the Belmont tubes at East Forty-second Street were not yet visible, nor the Steinway tunnel. I saw that he looked at me curiously. I must have seemed a greenhorn. If you want to go to Long Island City, he added, and I don't see why any one should want to go there—he paused, and I abetted his sly-dog humor with vacant laughter—just cross the ferry. In thanking him I explained that my mistake had arisen because once in the departed old Grand Union Café I had jumped at a severe blast under the hotel. "Oh, that's nothing," said Simeon Ford to me, "that's the way they send passengers to Astoria." And I had believed him, in the innocence of my metropolitan heart. The sandy-haired one smiled. He knew Simeon.

Then I took to the bridges and ferries. I went to Staten Island and wasn't sorry; crossed to Jersey by several routes and was. The old ferries at Wall, Grand, and Forty-second Streets at first proved picturesque, and soon palled. Brooklyn Bridge, after all, the most beautiful of her three sisters, (bridge is feminine, isn't it?) the most graceful suspension bridge in the world, is become too familiar. We cross it, and seldom aloft, thus missing that magnificent panorama of bay, islands, and distant Jersey shore. Besides, its Brooklyn side lacks the dignity and space of the Flatbush Avenue approach to Manhattan Bridge. That, indeed, is most impressive.

A Puzzling View.

I like the Williamsburg Bridge, with its long perspective of Delancey Street, now giving us a European vista, and its big playground atop. The view is puzzling. You look for

the two adjacent bridges and your glance collides with the sugar refinery across the river, which at this part is all askew. You must twist your head to see the other bridges. Returning, you note the Queensboro Bridge, and decide to visit it. It is a strange structure and a cantilever; as it is, I feel safer on Brooklyn Bridge. The best part of the Queensboro is just over Blackwell's Island. There is material for observation that takes days to exhaust. The various bridges spanning the Harlem become more attractive the further one goes westward. Several are excellent for suicidal purposes. They all look like Ernest Lawson's, so strangely does nature pattern after art. As for the possible bridges to cross the lordly Hudson, I hope never to see them. As a spectacle those waters need no bridging. Tunnels are always more expeditious. Doubtless some day both rivers will make of Greater New York greatest New York, for they will be solidly bridged; anyhow, the East River. So mote it be!

In Europe there is room for race prejudice, but in America not. Here it is self-stultifying, self-contradicting and utterly abhorrent to democratic principles. We freed the black race, we must free ourselves of all race prejudice. Nevertheless, at the expense of seeming inconsistent, let me suggest that one of the burdens of life would be lightened if our passenger transportation system were otherwise. The greedy and not too tidy bandits who run the wretched public automobiles are only the servants of their employers. But these miserably kept machines are too high priced for the masses. In Subway and surface, on "L" cars the people you meet are not always clean; some because of ingrained hatred of bathing, others, decent workmen who can't help themselves. I've frequently seen them embarrassed when they crowded against well-dressed ladies. What do you expect for a nickel? But if they did as they so sensibly do in Europe—have two or three classes at a slight increase of fare—we could snap our fingers at the hired automobile tyrants.

Theoretically, we all love our fellow-man; but you like him better if he is clean, don't you? I do. And now, please, Mr. Aristocratic Socialist, don't write to the editor denouncing this suggestion as a covert attack on our immortal principle of equality. It is not. The motor cars might be judged from the same standpoint. I can't afford a motor car, but I could scrape together 10 cents for a seat in a clean, sweet-smelling car where the filthiest sort of humans would not sprawl over me. One man is as good as another—politically; but if a man won't wash, that is the objection to his presence. But what Mayor, what Board of Aldermen, wouldn't veto a bill to have separate cars? Class against mass would be the slogan, when the only issue at question is soap versus dirt.

"Great God Graft" Again.

I know I'm voicing the opinion of a civilized minority. But there, again, come into play the timid tactics of our local sheepfold. At first jeered, these separate cars would become a necessity, like the ten-cent stages on Fifth Avenue. Has anybody denounced as "enemies of the people" these coaches? No, because the "people" ride in them and like them. Until New York follows London, Paris, and Berlin and maintains an efficient and cheap taxicab service we must clamor for the next best thing—ten-cent surface and Subway cars. They would soon pay. But I suppose the great god Graft must be appeased by the usual burnt offerings and what we demand must be deferred to the Greek Kalends. Avoil!



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for other districts. The speed is not breakneck, there are no expresses, and every car has a compartment for smokers—from which an overpowering odor of bad tobacco is always present. Our network is colossal in comparison.

The first day I cautiously went down the steps of the Grand Central Station it would not have been a difficult task to send me flying upstairs again. I wasn't exactly frightened, rather nervous. The hustling crowd on the platform didn't give me much chance for reflection, and I entered the first train that I was shoved into—the magnetism of the mob, as Le Bon would say. As it happened, I found myself skimming downtown and on a local. It went fast enough for me then; now I avoid locals as much as possible. Who doesn't? Every station stopped at robs us of our precious minutes, although when we arrive at our destination we are apt to waste time starting at a steepjack, a street altercation, or at the baseball returns.

No Busier Than Bridgeport.

Many years ago I learned to discount the hurry and flurry of New York. We are no busier than Bridgeport or Jersey City, but we pretend we are. It is necessary for our municipal vanity to squeeze and jam and rush and crush. Another vital lie! The conformation of the island has conditioned the transportation problem. (Ha! I told you I had been reading the jargon of statistics.) Hence the "L" roads and the Subway. The more the merrier, say I. Anything that will relieve us of the shameful huddling of humanity during the busy hours, those hours that are a purgatory to decent men and women. May their necessity vanish with the passing of the "L" roads.

But I am not sticking to my story. To be truthful, there isn't much to tell. For a few minutes I was stunned by the roar, disconcerted by

ill-taste I'll have some hope in its utility; this and the correction of our slurred and vulgar ways of speech, enunciation, and pronunciation are greater evils in the long run than tobacco, alcohol, and racing. They debase the social currency of life, and where there are bad manners, bad morals are not far away.

The correction of these matters is primarily the affair of the women. I really believe that English is spoken nowhere so badly—always excepting Cockney London—as in New York City. Our public schools are the principal poisoners. Ride often in the Subway (on the "L" roads foreigners predominate) and you will hear our noble tongue abominably abused. It's not the general slangness, for slang has its uses, but the disgusting twang, the nasal intonation, and the mispronunciation that offend the ear. I had always fancied that only in Brooklyn you heard "Brooklynese," that unpleasant flattening of the vowels, that depressing drawl. But I did Brooklyn an injustice; today all New York speaks in the same fashion. Not many young men and women you meet are born here, and their provincial accent has clung to them.

I know the usual philistine will bob up after reading this, crying aloud in righteous wrath: Better our dear old American language with our pure hearts than all the fancy speech of Englishmen! But your hearts are no purer, my misguided but patriotic person, than any other nation's, and the most disagreeable English I ever heard was from the lips of English country people. Really, you can't understand some of their dialects. I am complaining that, with our common school education, the best in the world, the chiefest thing, our language is so badly spoken, the art of speech, plain and without frills, the speech that differentiates mankind from the beast world.—Chewing gum is a vile habit; at least it keeps silent the raucous New York voice; above all,

her daughters will marry "above" them. This social hopefulness is nationwide. It is our Bovaryism, our vital lie. The ragpicker's granddaughter marries a Duke; the son of a rat-trap peddler becomes a magnate in the financial world. No other land affords such opportunities in mounting the ladder of life; otherwise the million that annually invade our shore would not be in evidence. When immigration ceases it will mean that the rats are leaving the sinking ship of state.

Very Vital Girls.

Yes, pretty girls, a bit too rouged, too flimsily attired, but clean and self-respecting. The old-time chlorotic American type is vanishing; thanks to open-air exercise and increased physical and mental activities, our girls, native or imported, are very vital. Foreigners, accustomed to a more placid and conventional type at home, find them irresistible, chewing gum and twang included. I find that the brunettes, the brown as well as black, are in the ascendant. But there are blondes enough, and the blonde is for the public the high-water mark of beauty. The stage and the vaudeville prove this. Bigger frames are to be seen; the foreign-born women, however, are mostly understated. On the avenues the shopping women are alike; whether in Brooklyn or the Bronx, the hussies stalk her game like her sister. In the theatre or at home she is more human. They say that only women buy and read books, fill the opera house and the theatre—also the film shows. But does that account for the present condition of American culture? Is the inside of her pretty head not as distinguished as her glossy hair? Perish the thought! Let some man more courageous than I answer that question. Max Nordau did, but the doctor never lived in New York. Emerson says that "steam is al-



"The greedy bandits who run the wretched public automobiles."