

# UNDERGROUND LONDON:

A CHAT ABOUT ITS RAILWAYS.

By G. E. MITTON AND WILFRID KLICKMANN.

*Illustrated by A. J. FINBERG.*



HEAVY sulphurous smell, an atmosphere like a yellow fog in London, an orderly succession of carsplitting bangs, and the wave of a green flag.

This sounds like a description of a battle where artillery has been brought into play, but it is merely the scene of an underground station on the District Railway.

London is being still further riddled with railways: the electric, cutting right through

the heart of the City and West-End, and the Brompton and Piccadilly—a diagonal line for the convenience of Clubland—are in immediate prospect. Whether these will affect the dividends of the existing companies remains to be seen. If the atmosphere is freer and the motion quicker, probably they will. Man will give up much to save his precious time; he will consent to be half suffocated for ten minutes, and temporarily deafened for the sake of half an hour. Yet

the most ardent admirer of the present railways cannot say it is joy to travel on them. They are convenient, they save time, but that anyone should choose to live down in these stygian regions must ever pass comprehension. There are worse lots. Perhaps the men who go round with the scavenging carts have as much dirt added to their daily allowance as a driver on the Underground; but that men can be found to undertake this task is another mystery.

I went on a tour of inspection in the underground regions to ascertain the views of the men themselves on the question, and was agreeably surprised to find that instead of a mournful round of endurance, they seem quite satisfied and enjoy their work.

I commenced my raid in search of a man off duty. A friendly porter, impressed into the service, unearched an engine-driver from a coaling shed at the end of the platform and brought him to me. He was an honest



"HE WAS AN HONEST LOOKING FELLOW, DELIGHTFULLY GRIMY."

looking fellow, delightfully grimy; one felt one had got hold of the real article. I should not have liked him half so well if he had been cleaned up for the occasion. We sat

few minutes ran banging into the platform before us.

My man needed very little pumping; the porter had evidently given him a tip that



THE THEATRE TRAIN.

and chatted together on one of the ample seats of the platform, and had the satisfaction of feeling that we were affording a gratis entertainment for the passengers in the constant succession of trains which every

he was expected to talk, for it came out spontaneously.

"I've been on duty now five-and-twenty years. Ye begin by being a fireman, ye know, and that's at about eighteen or nineteen,

and ye get on to be a driver. We get eight shillings a day. That's not bad pay, but then there's no pension; ever such a little would be a help. Ye see we're on the same footing as policemen and other public servants, the responsibility is on us; we've got to stand our own ground same as the captain of a ship, and it's wearing that is. We ought to have a bit to look forward to. I'm not an old man yet"—and I smiled as I met his cheery glance and vowed him in the prime of life.

"But tell me," I continued, "something

boilers and such like; there's only one day in the week we go round and round the circle."

"And how many times round then?"

"It varies; maybe five or six or seven."

Seven times round the Underground, swallowing an atmosphere too thick to breathe! the grinding of the brakes re-echoing 182 times at the stations! The slow dropping of water on the brain would be an infinitely preferable madness. I hastened to inquire if there was any break or dinner-hour off.

"Oh no; we get it when we can," he



A CROWDED COMPARTMENT.

about your everyday life. We above ground think it bad enough to run along these dismal tunnels from one station to another, but to be all day on duty —"

"Well, now, 'tisin't half as bad as ye make out," he said confidentially. "Ye get used to it, and think naught of it. And then it's arranged so's we aren't all day and every day on the Inner Circle; one day maybe we're off to Putney or Richmond, and another to Ealing. Then one day a fortnight we have a day off, and then there's sheds; that takes up four hours, cleaning your

answered, without deeming it any hardship that part of his daily diet should be augmented by smuts!

"On days you run round the circle you come back to where you started from at the end, I suppose?"

"Ay; sign off where we signed on, that's it. Difficult to arrange where we're to go? Ay, I suppose it is, but we have naught to do with that. We goes by the time-table. Hours? 4.30 in the morning to 2.15 in the afternoon. No, it's not the work I mind; ye soon gets used to that. I'd as soon do it as

anything. You've to keep awake, of course. I haven't ever had a collision, but I've saved three, and that's something! You'd like to hear of that?"

I assented.

"Well, the first was near Baker Street, where I nearly ran into a ballast train, and the next was some Great Western coal trucks near Earl's Court, only the third was a tunnel accident—I overtook a train."

"I thought that wasn't possible."

"They say it ain't," he remarked smiling. "But I'm speaking of a long while back, and I suppose it ain't possible nowadays. It was in a tunnel, and I saw the tail-lights ahead, so I clapped on the brakes, showed a red light and blew my whistle. No harm done; but if I hadn't a-been looking out I'd have crashed up against it and had them trucks a-top of my engine, and then it would have been marked up against me same as if it had been my fault. I've been a teetotaler the last twelve years," he remarked with sudden and startling irrelevance; perhaps he thought I suspected him of only seeing red lights which had no material existence.

"Find that answer?" I asked.

"Ay; and that's my train coming into the station now, or I'd have told you more."

I let him go, but doubted his ability to tell me more. To an imaginative mind the dark tunnels of the Underground seem full of weird horrors, but to the prosaic man, whose aim is daily bread, they dwindle into everyday facts devoid of fear.

The next link in the chain was again my friendly porter, who gave me some intermediate notions of his own position. The porters' hours vary from 5 a.m. to 3 p.m. one day, and 3 p.m. to 1 a.m. the next. The work consists chiefly of odd jobs, lamp cleaning—at which each takes his turn—coupling engines and shutting train doors; not much luggage about to bother a man. He is liable to be shifted about from station to station, but may remain stationary (no pun intended) for a considerable time. His wages come to one pound one week and twenty-two shillings the next, the larger amount including a Sunday's work.

Not many tips are there on the Underground or chances of increasing his income by secondary methods. But then there is always the glorious prospect of the dizzy height of a guard's position looming before the humble porter. The man to whom I talked seemed impatient of dallying, and the reason was apparent when a strongly built official drew near to us.

"Yon's the inspector," said the porter with indicative motion. "He'll tell you a deal more than I can. I've only been on this job a short while, and he's been here this long while."

I took the hint, and sauntered up to the man. He was a fine specimen of the product of discipline, combined with a habit of authority—a man on whose probity and respectability one would not be greatly disinclined to stake one's reputation.

At first he seemed a little chary of my questions, but finding that I was not devoid of a sense of humour, he broke the ice by a good laugh, and we were on the best of



"MY FRIENDLY PORTER."

terms. He had been inspector for some seven-and-twenty years, of which the last nineteen had been spent on the boards where he now stood. He had a fund of information and anecdote, and asserted readily that he could write a book of his reminiscences.

The inspector himself has hours similar to those of the porters, varying from the earlier time ending at three one week, to the later beginning at that hour the next. He began his career in one of the railway signal-boxes, and is now responsible for the whole conduct of the station, exclusive of the booking-office.

"Complaints?" he echoed, in answer to a

suggestion of mine. "I should think there were. They'll complain of anything. But it's best to take it all in good part."

"Chiefly?" I asked.

"Chiefly? Why, missing trains, and so on; and then they'll lay the blame on us, or the board man will have put up the wrong train in the indicator. He can't always tell, you know, which one is coming, though he knows which one ought to come, and if another runs in before it—why, the general public will never think of looking on the train to see for themselves, but will get in, and when they find they're wrong I'll hear about it. But as for questions—you'd think they had nothing else to do! Old ladies are the worst"—with a smile; and he proceeded to mimic an imaginary conversation.

"Which is the train for King's Cross?"

"It'll come to this platform, ma'am."

"When will it come?"

"It'll be the next one in, in five minutes."

"Which way will it come?"

"This way."

"And how many stations are there between here and King's Cross?"

He looked at me and laughed. "That's it," he said—"over and over again. I generally tell them—it's best in the end. Then," he continued after a minute, "there are the people who will get out before the train stops. They'll pick themselves up and run, for fear of us summoning them."

"You don't mind if they don't fall, I suppose?"

"Oh no; but we are down on them if they do. We have to keep some check on them or they'd be bringing an action against us for damages, saying that the engine moved on with a jerk, or some other excuse."

"Have you ever had to give evidence in a case of that sort?"

"No, but I've often enough had police-court cases arising from the railway, and they're bad enough! I'll tell you one of pickpocketing. A lady got out here in a great state and came to tell me she'd had her purse stolen. I asked her if she'd had anyone pushing up against her in a suspicious manner, and she said yes, an ill-looking fellow a few stations back. Well, as it happened, we were standing up near the steps, and could look the whole length of the platform, and I saw at the far end a fellow dodging about suspiciously on the very platform we were on, and I called her attention to him, and asked if he was anything like the one she had noticed, and she said he was the very man. Well, there stood then—it's done

away with now—a sort of collecting-box for the booking-office, with a slit in it like a letter-box, and I saw this fellow brush up against it and drop something in the slit—I could almost fancy I saw something shine as he did it—anyway there wasn't much doubt but he'd hit on what he thought an original plan for getting rid of the purse, which might incriminate him. We marched down to him, and I told him what the lady said. Of course he said she'd made a mistake, and a lot more. I asked her if she would give him in charge. Oh yes, she would, rather; so I collared my man, and went up for a policeman. There wasn't one about, so I walked him off to the office. On the way he kept asking me to let loose of him, and he'd go quietly. 'Yes,' says I, 'that's likely; but though my muscles are as good as yours, my legs aren't, and once I let you go I'd see you round the next corner.' Well, a detective came around to the station and opened the box, and there sure enough was that very lady's purse. That was an odd thing, wasn't it?"

I remarked that the man must have been a fool to get out and stand about.

"But he wouldn't think the lady would have got out at that same station, likely. And he was a good thief too, one that was wanted for other jobs of the same sort—a good one to catch. He got twelve months' hard."

I inquired if the lady had remembered the inspector's services for good.

"No," he answered, "but the Company did. I got half-a-sovereign and my expenses when I went to give evidence. I was very well satisfied. Oh, they treat us well enough over a matter like that."

At that moment a shrill short whistle sounded. "That's for me," said my companion. "I'm keeper of the cloak-room, and I have to go and attend to it; but I'll come back."

I sat down on one of the seats meanwhile, and jotted down a few notes of what he had said. It was not a bad place this station—wide and airy enough, and dry. A man might live comfortably at such a job. Life on the Underground is not all dirt and sulphurous atmosphere. In a station of the pattern of Blackfriars or Baker Street one's conceptions of the infernal regions might be greatly enlarged, but here there was nothing offensive. I remembered how, one dark winter's evening, I had seen a little newsboy hopping about in the draughty dimness of one of these mentioned above, and had pitied him from the bottom of my heart. Yet on inquiry it turned out that he was not unhappy. It was

his eagerness to sell that first attracted my attention—he was so evidently a new hand.

“But you don’t make anything by the sale do you?” I asked.

“Oh no,” he answered. “It’s all the same to us; but if we got a commission I could make —” He paused.

“You sell a great many papers?”

“Why, a heap!”

“How long are you here?”

“From six in the morning to half-past six at night.”

completed his duties upstairs and returned to me again.

“What do you think I’ve been for now?” he asked as he approached. “A lady has lost her umbrella, a valuable one—ivory handle with a gold head. She says she left it at the booking-office, and the clerk says he’s never seen it, and I told her if one of our men had come across it he’d have brought it to me. She’s going to the lost property office.”

“And where is that?”



WATCHING THE PATENT INDICATOR.

“That’s a long time. What do you think of it all? Rather gloomy sometimes?”

“I don’t know. It’s cold at whites.”

“Better than being at school?”

“Better than being in the streets”—with warmth.

“And what do you get for it?”

“Six shillings a week.”

I added to his income for that week and received the grateful thanks of his bright little face, from which the baby roundness had not altogether departed.

But this is a digression. The inspector

“Moorgate Street for the Metropolitan, and Victoria for the District, then the Hammersmith and City have one at Notting Hill. She’ll make inquiries. What else would you like to know?”

“Collisions,” I suggested, by way of giving him a fresh impetus.

“Well, there aren’t many of them. It’s worked on the absolute block system. In some parts they have electric interlocking, so that it’s impossible for a train to catch up another. We haven’t that yet, but it’s absolutely safe. I do remember a collision,

but that was four-and-twenty years ago, when things weren't so perfect as they are now. I was in the cabin then, and it was by Hammersmith Junction. There's a decline there, and a Great Western engine was dragging a District train—they're not very powerful engines—and the train began to drag back down the decline. The junction had been signalled clear, but the train got across it again, and another ran into it; no lives were lost, but there was a lot of breakage."

For about the fifth time during our conversation an Inner Circle train ground slowly to a stop at the platform before us and suggested a fresh line of inquiry.

"These guards haven't so much to do as on the bigger lines," I said. "No luggage."

"No, but it's a worrying sort of business stopping every two or three minutes—it keeps them occupied; they've got packages to sort too, and they'll be continually stopped. Now on an express a man'll get maybe a clear hour to get through in."

Then I remembered suddenly the comparatively new indicators fixed in some of the District trains, which show the name of the station before arrival. I had always thought it part of the guard's duty to work these, for sometimes the indicator may pass over several flaps before it stops at the right one, and it seemed to me this must be done by human agency. The inspector put me right.

"No, it's much simpler than that," said he. "There's a flap of wood sticking up between the lines, soon after the train leaves any station, and this strikes a spring on the bottom of each carriage as they pass over, and this sends the indicator round. When some stations belonging to a branch line have to be missed out, there are three or four of these, as many as are wanted, in a row."

"But it must be exceedingly difficult to arrange."

"Yes, I suppose so. If they answer we're going to have them on all the District lines."

"Soon?"

"Yes, soon; but they won't be all round the circle, you know, because the Metropolitan haven't taken to them."

"And how can you tell if they answer?"

"It is part of the guard's duty to report. There have been very few failures so far—hardly any. They come expensive at first, of course, but the advertisements have helped to pay."

## II.—THE UNDERGROUND RAILWAY SYSTEM.

BY WILFRID KLICKMANN.

THE terror of the tunnel is a thing of the past. When London's vast underground organisations are considered, it seems incredible that England's great railways, at the time of their projection, had to face substantial opposition because tunnels were an essential feature. The passage through a tunnel of only a few minutes, it was urged, would be fraught with alarms, discomfitures, and liability to various diseases.

Events appear to move more quickly and in an increased ratio as the world grows older. To-day the passengers by the Metropolitan Railway are said to number nearly a hundred millions per annum, the majority of whom accept the idea of tunnel travelling with as much equanimity as they buy a newspaper.

Notwithstanding anathemas variously expressed, the Underground railway of London pursues the dark and noisy tenor of its way with an increased knowledge of its own importance, and a consciousness that it cannot be done without.

Sometimes it is referred to as "*that* Underground!" with terrible emphasis, but to the constant traveller it is technically known as the Inner Circle. Not all of these, however, know that the circle is formed by the union of two railways, the same lines or "*metals*" being used by both companies. Practically the southern half of the circle is part of the Metropolitan District Railway Company's system, the northern semicircle being owned by the Metropolitan Railway. To be exact:

SECTION.	OWNED BY.
Aldgate to Kensington High Street ( <i>via</i> King's Cross) . . . . .	} Metropolitan Railway.
Kensington High Street to South Kensington . . . . .	} Metropolitan Ry. and
South Kensington . . . . .	} Metropol. District Ry.
South Kensington to Mansion House . . . . .	} Metropolitan District Railway.
Mansion House to Aldgate . . . . .	} Metropolitan Ry. and
	} Metropol. District Ry.

The joint-ownership sections are known as the West and East Joint Connections, the lines for these portions having been duplicated.

To have built this circle other than underground would have involved such an enormous initial outlay in the purchase (only for demolition) of expensive buildings on a succession of sites amongst the most valuable in the world, that not for a single moment could the idea be entertained. As it is, if all the spaces now represented by ventilating shafts were utilised for buildings, no small

income would be assured. Not that such an alteration is desirable; on the contrary, were the companies able to add more ventilation, either by additions to the number of existent shafts, or by mechanical fans to create continuous currents of air in the tunnels where the traffic is most congested, the comfort of passengers would be increased.

The directors are always endeavouring to improve the ventilation, and a cordial relationship subsisted between the Metropolitan Railway and a committee of the Board of Trade appointed early this year to report on this particular subject.

The day after the Metropolitan Railway Company opened their first section, in 1863, no less than thirty thousand people travelled on the line. The accommodation has materially improved since then, for a picture published in 1862 in, I think, the *Illustrated London News* disclosed an interesting sight. A goodly contingent of passengers were seated in the old-fashioned *open* carriages, similar in design to the modern goods truck. These formed part of the trial train, and the view was taken near Portland Road station.

The first section of the District Railway (South Kensington to Westminster) was opened in 1868. By adding here a little and there a little, way was made in 1884 for the first two trains to journey round the completed circle. A District train travelled on the inner rail while a Metropolitan train ran on the outer rail.

The fact that there are now twenty-seven stations, distributed over a short distance of thirteen miles, testifies to the great utility, if not absolute need, of the system. Each station is daily the scene of surging crowds of people who are "something in the City," and people who are not, but would like to be—people with parcels, children, burdens and grievances. All have one purpose in common—a desire to leave that particular station at the very earliest opportunity, either by train or by staircase exit.

No other railway in the world has so many stations proportionate to its short length as the Circle, and for promptitude and regularity in running, the service would be hard to excel. The secret is found principally in the smartness of the guards and platform executive. You must decide before the train comes in whether you travel by it. The man who hesitates is not lost, he merely waits for the next train. Snow, fog and inclement weather offer no hindrance to the

Underground, for it simply revels in a fog. If necessary, it could supply one or two of its own on the shortest notice, with no diminution in strength if you take a quantity.

Much has been done to lessen the evils consequent on the use of steam motive power, such as numerous outlets for the escape of fumes and the employment of engines designed to consume most of their own smoke. Of late years there has been



A PLEASANT WEIGHT.

very great improvement; yet the friendliest of critics would reluctantly admit that a genuine appreciation of the flavour from the Inner Circle tunnel is an acquired taste in more senses than one.

In spite of conditions which are decidedly an inconvenience to some, though others by habit disregard them, there is an enormous daily traffic on the Inner Circle, and to meet the demand the companies offer a magnificent leading line in penny fares. In fact



the work of the directors is beyond praise. They have reduced all their fares to such a low tariff that, were it not for unreasonable and extortionate shareholders, the day surely would not be far distant when the public would be asked to travel for nothing.

Prior to the advent of the penny-in-the-slot machine there could be seen at every Underground railway station weighing-machines of the old original shape—veritable balances, in which one could be weighed and sometimes found wanting. It was a queer race of boys who manipulated the weights—the sort of pigmy you would naturally expect to find underground, and in looks not unlike a deformed undersized brother to Smith's



“RIGHT AWAY!”

bookstall boy. The species is now extinct, and the delicately-poised, red velvet cushions no longer tempt old gentlemen to weigh themselves in order to secure a comfortable seat while waiting for the train.

It will be noticed that many of the carriages have large figures, 1, 2 or 3, on the doors to specify the class. For the sake of the younger generation, who may not have heard the legend, I crave permission from the seniors for mentioning the incident of the Irishman who repudiated the charge of travelling in a class superior to that for which he had taken a ticket. Said he, “I paid twopence for my ticket, and naturally got into a carriage with a 2 on it!”

Visitors to London usually make early acquaintance with the Circle, for it is so planned that it unites nearly all the London termini of the great railways, and is a connecting link with every suburb of London. The old lady from the country, who begged the guard not to forget to put her out at London, did not realise that there are four hundred railway stations in our capital, and that it is about an hour's journey to cross London by train.

Every railway has a distinguishing characteristic, be it a particular tint for its posters or a special colour for its engines. The Inner Circle, however, makes a special feature of advertisements, and a favourite amusement with passengers is to find the name of the station amidst the multifarious appeals to one's pocket and credulity which cover the walls. The advertising contractor before long will have entirely obscured the stations' names; but provided they are known beforehand they can sometimes still be detected with a sharp eye. Who knows? Some day we may see the porters' uniforms embroidered with artistic suggestions of favourite brands, with medicinal remedies labelled over the parts affected. By paying a slight premium, advertisers' wares could be announced by the porters simultaneously with the destination of the train.

At some of the Underground stations there are movable signals on the platforms giving a complete list of the stations at which the incoming train will call. An excellent contrivance, and one which other companies might follow with advantage. It saves numberless questions, and has appreciably improved the tempers of the porters. Another most useful device adopted by the District Railway is the marking of every ticket with either I or O and the erection of large signboards—

ALL TICKETS MARKED

I (OR O)

THIS WAY 

Notwithstanding these notices some people prefer to make assurance doubly sure by asking the long-suffering men at the barriers.

As is well-known, the platforms are reached by steep flights of stairs, at the bottom of which is the inevitable gate. By horrible ingenuity every gate is so hung

that when shut it is out of sight of the would-be passenger hurrying down the steps. Londoners are used to having gates shut in their faces; but to be at the wrong end of a long descending vista, and see the gate

a neat little pile like Portland Road station, but the majority are to be found discreetly retiring behind houses and shops, with an apologetic expression for their existence. No doubt there are people who eagerly



AT THE BOOKSTALL.

closed by an invisible porter, is an exasperation. Some victims assume a stoical indifference, until a fellow-sufferer expresses himself in manner more emphatic than polite, when they may look towards him feelingly, with a "Thank you, sir; I am obliged to you." Some discuss with the porter the ethics of the situation. Others again vent their wrath by impotently shaking the bars of the gate, and are all the calmer for the exercise, such ebullition of feeling causing a wicked joy in the breasts of the onlookers!

It cannot be said that architecturally the stations are attractive. Occasionally you see

devour the long lists of names forming the external adornment of stations, but so far as the writer's personal observation goes, most folks show a remarkable haste in departing as well as in arriving.