



(Drawn from life by our Special Artist.)

### THE WAY SOME FOLKS LIVE : LODGERS IN LONDON ARCHES.

**T**HOSE who sleep in beds, and have never through ill-luck had to do otherwise—except when being at sea, perhaps, they have tried hammocks and found them a comfortable substitute—those who have never known what it is to want pillow or blanket, could hardly believe how many men and women there are in London who, when night comes, are bedless. It cannot be said that they do not know where to lay their heads, for most of these people have been making up their minds all day that they will sleep in one of those public dormitories which exist under the arches of river and railway bridges. Some take shelter within unfinished houses, where the rooms have just been boarded, but these are adventurous vagabonds who are ready to run the risk of being startled out of their sleep by the glare of a policeman's lantern turned full on their faces. Those who desire to lie undisturbed prefer the arches. There they may rest, curled up in their rags, alone with their dismal thoughts, or huddling together by twos and threes for more warmth.

The river flowing by with a monotonous murmur, the night trains thundering overhead, may wake them ; but if they can sleep through these noises, they are welcome to do so : nobody will trouble them. The policeman on his beat averts his glance from the poor wretches who have sunk to the very lowest depths of misery, who are more abandoned than workhouse tramps, more to be pitied than homeless dogs. If the policeman looks at them at all, it is with a subdued compassion, though he may suspect that there are great rascals among them—but then rascals are not dangerous while they sleep.

Who are these slumberers under cold arches, where the walls are often green with dripping water, and where the winds sweep so boisterously ? They are not to be numbered by tens, but by hundreds. If a census could be taken of all who will sleep under London arches to-night (the reader may say this to himself any day in the year), there would be men, women, and children enough to equal the population of many a town ; enough to start a colony with, and

a large prison besides, and a city churchyard too. From Hornsey to Brixton, from Hammersmith to Blackwall, London forms a province with a population of millions, which increases at the rate of 250 souls a day, or nearly 8,000 a month.

The flotsam and jetsam of this human ocean must needs be large. Social wrecks take place every day; fortunes founder, homes are broken up, and, like sailors cast on sea-shores, the victims of some of these catastrophes find themselves stranded under the arches of the river. It will surprise no Londoner to hear that these arches have many more night-occupants in winter than in summer; and the colder the weather the more crowded they are, though offering such scanty protection against the cold. During the fine months, a large part of the vagrant hordes of London find their way into the country. This is the season of fairs, race-meetings, and regattas, which attract thousands of the well-to-do, and bring to loafers of every sort the opportunity of earning something. It is also the season of hay-making, harvesting, hop-picking, when wanderers from cities may pretty easily obtain work in the fields, and sleep afterwards under hedges or hay-ricks. Those who remain in London during the summer months can with equal ease shift for themselves without homes. The nights are short, and can be spent in loafing round the markets and railway-stations, till at 6 a.m., when the parks open, the vagabond has only to turn in and stretch himself on a form or on the grass according to his taste, and there sleep till the sun is high in the heavens.

This privilege of lying down in the public parks, like that of sleeping under arches, is one of the little shoots of the great English tree of liberty. It is a privilege not enjoyed by the houseless poor of any other country; for the police of Paris, Berlin, Vienna, and other capitals, are accustomed to make periodical raids upon all the places where vagabonds resort by night. In Paris these *raffes*, as they are called, take place about twice a month, and always result in the netting of habitual

scamps and casual unfortunates. All arrested have to give account of themselves to a magistrate; and while the bad characters are dealt with summarily as vagabonds by being sent to gaol, or to the *dépôt de mendicité* (vagrant-prison), the destitute, who have no criminal antecedents, are often relieved, and put in the way of starting afresh in life. In London the vagrant has no such inquisition to fear. He is at once enviable and pitiable, because, from a magisterial point of view, not a soul cares who he is, or how he is. The causes which brought him to sleep under a public arch instead of in a bed are matters for his reflection alone, and no magistrate will ever pry into them, unless it happen that some winter night being too cold for the outcast, weakened by hunger and long tramping, he may be found stark and lifeless in the morning. Then there will be an inquest, and probably some lamentable story will come out. Ruined gentlemen, not a few, have been numbered among those who dreamed their last earthly dream under a London archway.

Paupers, in the usually understood sense of that term, seldom resort to such dismal dormitories. Workhouses are supported by ratepayers chiefly as hotels for these gentry. The sturdy beggar, whose clothes have such an artificial raggedness about them, spends the early part of a cold winter evening in a public-house, which he leaves at about half-past



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seven, so that he may be among the earliest applicants at the nearest Union when its doors open (at eight), and be sure to get admittance. If it were not for the two or three hours of oakum-picking or stone-breaking which he will have to perform in the morning, in payment of his bed, bath, supper, and breakfast, he would much prefer the cleanliness and warmth of the Union to the squalor of the common lodging-house, where fourpence is charged for a bed. As it is, he will never go to the lodging-house unless he fails to get into the workhouse, which may sometimes happen if he tarries too long at the gin-shop, or staggers out of it in such a condition that he is made to end his night in the lock-up. But this kind of fellow never sleeps under arches. If things come to the worst with him, he generally knows of a pal living in a slum who will let him lie in the corner of a room on some wood-shavings; or else he will go and sham a fit on the doorstep of a respectable house, and if no money be given him when he appears to revive, he will feign a second attack of convulsions and get carried to hospital.

The sleepers under arches are for the most part persons who do not know of these dodges. Through intemperance, or dishonesty, or both, they have dropped out of good positions, and have been totally unable to adapt themselves to their altered circumstances. It does not follow that a man who is penniless will know how to turn beggar, or that one who has disgraced himself by acts of dishonesty will care to take up with a career of crime, or will know how to do so even if he have a mind to it. The French call *déclassés* those men who drop out of one social sphere without being able to establish a footing in another, and they are almost all poor creatures of the same character—weak-willed, unprincipled, helpless against temptation to self-indulgence, but not always vicious or dishonest.

In some, honesty is an effect of mere timidity—the fear of being sent to prison; but in others it is a remnant of character, just as one may see amid the ruins of a temple a single column remain upright. The cashiered officer, the bankrupt tradesman, the discharged servant, will, through drink, roll from one degree of penury to the other, disgusting their friends, wearing out even the patience of parents; and yet they may retain such a sense of shame as will keep them from the lowest haunts and from the vilest expedients for making money. These men, when every door has been shut in their faces, will sink into appalling misery. The very tramps eye them askance; the street-thieves despise them. Ignorant of the purlieus of the great City, shunning the company of those who might teach them to beg, they can only beg clumsily, and look so ashamed, so terrible even, with the stigmas of drink on their faces and clothes, that the hearts of the most charitable are hardened against them. Then, empty-handed, shivering with cold, slinking away at sight of policemen, they will go and hide under the nearest arch for the night. These men make their meals off crusts of bread thrown into the gutter by children who are going

to school; they will grub in dust-heaps for bits of carrot or cabbage-stalk; they will get to know of fried-fish shops where scraps of broken fish, cold, hard, and several days old, are given away, and they will eat this horrible fare voraciously. Women are to be met with in this unutterably sad class of vagabonds—women who have been gently nurtured, who have been the wives of honest men. Happily they never remain in it long. When a woman takes to sleeping under arches, it is that drink has drowned her reason, and the end of her wasted life is not far off.

Yet another category of sleepers under arches has to be introduced. Two or three hours after midnight, when the roar of traffic in the streets has completely ceased, and when the habitual frequenters of the arches have long lain snoring on the driest spots under them, some belated young man, not ill-dressed, but possibly soiled in his attire, and looking jaded as a lost dog, will poke his head under an arch in quest of a night's lodging. London daily sees scores of young men who, having come up from the country or from abroad to get situations, have begun by squandering all the money they brought with them in dissipation. The upshot is that they are turned into the streets penniless by landlords who have seized their luggage for arrears of board and lodging. It is to be noted that the well-behaved youth who has failed to get a situation through mere ill luck always finds friends in time of destitution; but not so the youngster who has only companions in folly to whom he can look for assistance. These will always turn their backs upon him when his pockets are empty. Ashamed and frightened, not daring to write and confess his extravagance to his family (who have perhaps pinched themselves to give him a start in life), the prodigal races about town to try and get employment, is rebuffed everywhere because of his raffish appearance, and at the end of a heart-breaking day betakes himself to an arch, as we have seen. He always waits till midnight is past, hoping that so long as the public-houses remain open something may turn up to help him, even though he may not have a penny left to buy a glass of small beer with; and when at last, foot-sore, head-sore, heart-sore, he trudges off to one of the arches, he fancies that he has hit upon a happy idea that has never occurred to anybody else. He is startled to see so many others already sleeping under the arch; their crouching figures, dimly discernible by the rays of a neighbouring gas-lamp, at first make him recoil and wander off towards another arch. Here there will be other sleepers, and it will be the same if a third arch is tried; but by this time the wretched rover will have accustomed himself to the thought that there can be nothing very degrading after all in sleeping under an arch since so many do so, and he will throw himself down exhausted. A great deal may depend upon that night. For all its misery it may be a blessed one, if it impress upon the sleeper a lesson which he will never forget. But woe to the sleeper who awakes callous, and says to himself that he will return to the arch to-morrow night! Woe to the prodigal who is content to herd with the swine!