



A FEW OF OLD LONDON'S UNASSIMILATED FOLK  
Crowd on Thames Embankment at Midnight, waiting for Distribution of Church Army Work-Tickets.

Photo by Campbell-Gray, Hyde Park W.

## THE HUMAN DERELICTS OF OLD LONDON

By H. LINTON ECCLES

A number as large as one-seventh the population of Canada are receiving public relief in England and Wales. This is an increase of 133 per cent. over last year's pauper list. One out of every 32 people in the world's biggest city gets his bed and board from organised charity. Canada is interested in this problem because Canada has been getting annually a good number of these derelict English people as immigrants. England is interested in this population of unassimilables: for the reasons set forth by the *London Standard*: "What do these things mean? They mean that, economically speaking, the nation has for years been living on its capital, and that it is steering straight upon disaster.

Regarded politically, these facts denote a very remarkable failure of the Government to insure or to maintain the national welfare and prosperity. In what does that failure consist? Broadly speaking, it consists in leaving the labour of the country totally unprotected against the competition, tariff-armed, of every other great manufacturing country." Hence the upheaval over the Lloyd-George budget at present being debated by the House of Lords.

In the article below Mr. H. Linton Eccles vividly describes the drifting derelicts of the great city—because he himself dressed, and ate and worked as one of them.

IT recently came to me in the way of business to become for a time the uninvited guest of one of the most interesting, as well as most despised, classes of London society. Up to that time I had considered myself fairly hardened to the contemplation of most phases of human wretchedness. Therefore, this latest journalistic commission, to spend the best part of twenty-four hours in the company of some of the wreckage to be found in the world's biggest and richest city, was accepted with the minimum of excitement and enthusiasm. It was just one of those nuisances of the daily grind that have to be grinned at and borne!

With some grumbling, I prepared myself as far as possible to throw off the appearance of the ordinarily decent and respectable citizen, and put on—well, that which was not ordinarily decent and respectable.

My instructions were, not to avail myself of the ordinary channels which the average person, supposed to be interested in social problems, takes advantage of. I must actually live with the men and become one of them for the time being. The idea was not without its attraction. I was a little tired of the air of patronage and complacency that seems to be inseparable from the social worker, and was all the more ready to do the thing entirely "off my own bat."

Behold me, then, clad as disreputably as my ingenuity and knowledge of the type could devise—one of a thousand, aye a hundred thousand—outwardly, at any rate, an outcast, a social leper. Even my rags were conventional, for it seemed so easy to be an outcast. The things I wore, which once were garments, fitted me with all the proverbial roominess and amplitude of ventilation. Colour and style, and such considerations, mattered nothing, for these qualifications have been reduced to the dead level of necessity and convenience.

And the outcasts themselves—the creatures that once were men? Well, we all know, or think we know them. They seem so familiar as we catch a glimpse of them—and we take care that it is but a glimpse—shuffling along the streets, hands deep in pockets, coat collar turned up, and nose buried in waistcoat (or the equivalent of waistcoat). They flit across our vision again in the parks, dotting the sward like heaps of rubbish when the day is warm enough, or huddled like bundles of old clothes on the free seats that are best sheltered and most in demand. In fact they appear to dog us everywhere, as if, consciously or unconsciously, they would keep reminding us of the dictum of the Founder of



Splitting Kindling-wood for Board and Lodging.



Bread and Soup after the Wood-splitting.

Christianity: "The poor ye have always with you."

With a two-days' growth upon my chin, and after decorating my hands and face with grime for grease-paint, I set out to join the great army of the Unemployed. Nothing much out of the way happened during the day-time. I spent a couple of hours with my rags in Hyde Park, and during that time saw a number of my acquaintances from behind the protecting wall of my disguise. The men whom I meet almost every day, and who have often shared the same table with me, passed so close to my seat that I could have touched them. Both looked straight towards me with that peculiar unseeing glance we bestow upon things we consider beneath our notice—a look that seemed to be directed right through me and upon that particular part of the seat covered by my wretched form. I have an acute sense of hearing, and the words addressed by one to the other distinctly reached me:

"Lord, what an object!"

It was just the conventional remark anybody might have made, and it struck me as eloquently typical of the average person's attitude towards the outcast.

With the fall of the evening I began to feel something of that genuine hunger which, Heaven knows, is the lot of the greater number of the Wrecks. Dressed as I was I could not go into even a moderately decent eating-house to satisfy my appetite. Besides, I had no great desire to eat under those circumstances. I had never realised before how intimately the enjoyment of eating is bound up with clothes and environment. So I had taken nothing but a mug of dish-water tea and a hunch of bread and butter-substitute at one of the cheapest coffee houses I could find. Nothing else had passed my lips since breakfast that morning.

As "Big Ben" boomed the quarter before eleven at night I made my way to the Victoria Embankment—that magnificent thoroughfare, having the finest view of the biggest hotels and one of the finest of the shipping along the Thames, yet given over principally to the loafers and outcasts of not only Britain, but of some of the farthest quarters of the globe. What is there in the river, with its sluggish waters and its squat and drab encumbrances of barges and other craft, that so irresistibly attracts every type of the unfortunate and ne'er-do-well?

There it is—they are attracted there, and the rescue agencies, chiefly the Salvation Army and the Church Army, are aware of it. Each evening—when the wealth of London is pouring out of the theatres and music halls into the hansoms and taxi-