

**A Piccadilly Picture.**

(By Dion (Layton Callthrop).)

A silvery mist wrapped the Green Park in a veil of most delicate beauty; through the intricate lacework of boughs and twigs the lights of Westminster showed like a town in fairyland; the orange glow of gas and the winking bright eyes of arc lamps peered in irregular dotted patterns through the mist.

On the bench by the Porters' Rest a man huddled, shivering.

At the best the man was but a heap of skin and bone; his clothes, green and faded by the weather, threadbare, but still respectable, hung in grotesque festoons on his emaciated limbs; on his face a dirty stubble of black beard hid a weak chin, over which showed a loose mouth; yet somehow, in spite of his appearance, he had an air about him different from the ordinary outcast's.

A crawling cab passed on the way to the rank, and as it went slowly by the bench the cabman called out:

"There's a job over the way, cocky."

The man on the bench turned round so that the cabman saw his face.

"Hello!" he called. "it's the bloomin' Dook darn on 'is luck."

"What's across the road, George?" asked the man.

"A load of green stuff for decorations got stuck in the entrance; look slippy, 'fore, catch."

The cabman threw a penny to the man on the bench, who caught it deftly.

"Thank yer, George," he said.

Then the cab crawled on, and the man got up to shamble across the road.

**FALLEN ON EVIL DAYS.**

They called him "the Dook" and "Eton an' Noxford" and "the Captain" up at the Junior Turf, which is the shelter higher up the road. He supposed that they guessed some thread of his story. "Dook" was wrong, but the rest was a fair guess. They were very good to him, these cabmen, in their way; a meal now and again, often a penny or two, always a kind word, even when he was drunk—though he couldn't afford that luxury often and he didn't enjoy it—but bars were warm and bright, and drink made him forget for an hour or two.

He reached the other side of the road and saw the cart stuck; a thrill went through him when he saw where it was—in the gateway of his old club.

He generally managed to forget that it had been his club, and he kept to the other side of Piccadilly as a rule so that he might not see it; but to-night—well, to-night there was a job, and he was hungry.

There were not many people about, so that his aid was welcomed, and by dint of pushing they got the cart through the gateway and up to the door.

At the door there was a youngish man, with a fair moustache, giving orders.

"Get some of these fellows who look respectable to help; the other men haven't come, and we are late, you know."

So, for the first time for ten years, "the Dook" stepped over the threshold of his old club and looked about him.

Evidently there was to be a dinner or a supper to see the New Year in; the hall was already decorated with flags and evergreens.

Mechanically dragging in the boughs of holly and mistletoe, "the Dook" looked about him; several men in dress-clothes were superintending the decorations and ordering the servants to do this and that; he could not recognise any of them.

**"NOW WAKES THE BITTER MEMORY."**

At first he was too numb and cold to feel any strong sensations, but as the warmth revived him he began to remember, in a painfully sharp way, the last time he had been there.

He had been standing by the fire in the smoke room talking to Bennett.

A voice interrupted his memories.

"Now then, you clumsy ass, look where you're going!"

He had trodden on a man's foot. Looking up to say "Pardon, sir," he saw that it was a major in the Gunners—Allsopp, whom he had known very, very well. Allsopp had been the first to cut him in the street ten years ago.

"Look here," said Allsopp, "get into the smoke room over there on the right and lend a hand."

He spoke in a quick, sharp note of command. No one would have recognised "the Dook" after ten years.

The smoke room seemed to be crammed with ghosts; memories came crowding to him; the Skipper's favourite chair, the place he had burnt in a projecting piece of woodwork—would it be there now?

He approached the fireplace, dragging a rope of holly with him, and when he had helped to string up the rope over the mantel-piece, he looked above the bell for the burnt mark his cigar had made—it was there. Unreasonable tears filled his eyes quickly.

It was he, indeed, who had left that very room ten years ago with Bennett, gone back to his rooms, and there discovered that he had been found out at last.

"Look sharp there!" Orders came to him, dimly, through the more real life of his memories, and the work he did was done in a semi-conscious state; his brain was quick, but his body sluggish with starvation.

So he was decorating his own club for a New Year's feast—funny, wasn't it? He smiled in a feeble way as he put a branch of holly over a portrait for which he had raised the subscriptions.

**"OLD TIMES, OLD FRIENDS."**

Suddenly he came back to the present with a jar; a man was speaking behind him—the last man who had cut him, Bennett.

"'Poor devil looks ill," he was saying; "we ought to give these chaps something to eat and some beer or something."

He came down the ladder trembling at the sound of the voice—trembling so that he slipped on the bottom step and fell.

There seemed to be a long interval after that, and then he found himself in the Strangers' Dining-room in a chair, and Bennett was standing by the chair. "Let me go," he said feebly; "I'm all right."

So Bennett had recognised him. "Don't worry, old chap," said Bennett; "drink some more of this."

Club whisky—by the stars it was good!—and, at his side, some food. "I'm sorry it's only cold meat, but I couldn't get anything else to-night."

To eat in the club dining-room with Bennett! His brain refused to accept it, but the food was real, thank God.

"Look here," Bennett was saying, "I'm beastly sorry, old chap, but can I do anything?"

One idea came to him—it would complete the dream.

"A cigar," he said, hungry to bring back all the old sensations.

He lit the cigar with shaking fingers, and Bennett, in a very queer voice for Bennett, talked to him.

There was a pause, and then Bennett said he would see him home.

Home!

One decent instinct came to him: he must not saddle Bennett with his woes—he must go when Bennett went to fetch his coat.

A friendly policeman ignored him, as he sat huddled on his bench by the Porters' Rest, and let him stop there for the night.

The twinkling, frosty stars saw a man in threadbare clothes, seated on the bench, smoking a shilling cigar, one hand clutching a five-pound note—his eyes aight with a fierce joy.

J. M. Barrie, in a gossipy mood, once told this story of Lord Rosebery. His lordship had arrived at Waverley railway station in Edinburgh. Opening the door of his carriage he laid down a bundle of papers on the seat, shut the door, and turned away. The coachman, hearing the door close, concluded his master was inside and drove off at a good pace before Lord Rosebery realised what had happened. The fast-travelling horses made pursuit impossible (though folk tried it). After seven miles had been covered, the driver slowed up to permit his lordship to alight and enter his park at a private gate. But no lordship alighted! By-and-by the coachman left his perch and discovered a vacant brougham. The papers were there, but what mysterious fate had overtaken the owner of them? Anxious at heart, he drove back towards Edinburgh, examining the road with the keenness of a Sherlock Holmes. Presently he met an omnibus bearing a load of luggage and Lord Rosebery, looking quite at ease and happy!

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