

PREFACE

A few months ago a friend asked me to look at the manuscript of a novel, 'The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists,' the work of a socialistic house-painter, who wrote his book and died. I consented without enthusiasm, expecting to be neither interested nor amused—and found I had chanced upon a remarkable human document.

With grim humour and pitiless realism the working man has revealed the lives and hearts of his mates, their opinion of their betters, their political views, the attitude towards Socialism. Through the busy din of the hammer and the scraping knife, the clang of the pail, the swish of the white-wash, the yell of the foreman, comes the talk of the men, their jokes and curses, their hopes and terrors, the whimpering of their old people, the cry of their children.

In reducing a large mass of manuscript to the limitations of book form, it has been my task to cut away superfluous matter and repetition only. The rest remains as it came from the pen of Robert Tressall, house-painter and sign-writer, who recorded his criticism of the present scheme of things, until, weary of the struggle, he slipped out of it.

JESSIE POPE.