

The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists

there is, would inevitably cause a reduction of wages and a greater scarcity of employment. The theories that drunkenness, laziness or inefficiency are the causes of poverty are so many devices invented and fostered by those who are selfishly interested in maintaining the present state of affairs, for the purpose of preventing us from discovering the real causes of our present condition.'

'Well, if we're all wrong,' said Crass with a sneer, 'praps you can tell us what the real cause is?'

'An' praps you think you know how it's to be altered,' remarked Harlow, winking at the others.

'Yes, I do think I know the cause,' declared Owen, 'and I do think I know how it could be altered—'

'It can't never be haltered,' interrupted old Linden. 'I don't see no sense in all this 'ere talk. There's always been rich and poor in the world, and there always will be.'

'Wot I always say is this 'ere,' remarked Philpot, whose principal characteristic—apart from thirst—was a desire to see everyone comfortable, and who hated rows of any kind, 'there aint no use in the likes of us trubblin' our 'eds or quarrelling about politics. It don't make a dam bit of difference who you votes for or who gets in. They're hall the same: workin' the horicle for their own benefit. You can talk till you're black in the face, but you won't never be able to alter it. It's no use worrying. The sensible thing is to try and make the best of things as we find 'em: enjoy ourselves, and do the best we can for each other. Life's too short to quarrel and we'll hall soon be dead!'

At the end of this lengthy speech, the philosophic Philpot abstractedly grasped a jam jar and raised it to his lips; but suddenly remembering that it contained stewed tea and not beer, set it down again without drinking.

'Let us begin at the beginning,' continued Owen, taking no notice of these interruptions. 'First of all, what do you mean by Poverty?'

'Why if you've got no money, of course,' said Crass impatiently.

The others laughed disdainfully. It seemed to them such a foolish question.

'Well, that's true enough as far as it goes,' returned Owen, 'that is, as things are arranged in the world at present. But money in itself is not wealth; it's of no use whatever.'