

The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists

of enhancing his own prestige with the men by insinuating that he was in the confidence of the firm.

'That's goin' to cost a good bit,' said Linden.

'Yes, I suppose it will,' replied Crass, 'but money ain't no object to old Sweater. 'E's got tons of it; you know 'e's got a large wholesale business in London and shops all over the bloody country, besides the one 'e's got 'ere.'

Easton was still reading the 'Obscurer.' He was not able to understand exactly what the compiler of the figures was driving at—probably the latter never intended that anyone should understand—but he was conscious of a growing feeling of indignation and hatred against foreigners of every description, who were ruining this country, and he began to think that it was about time we did something to protect ourselves. Still, it was a very difficult question; to tell the truth he himself could not make head or tale of it. At length he said aloud, addressing himself to Crass:

'Wot do you think of this 'erc fissional policy, Bob?'

'Ain't thought much about it,' replied Crass. 'I don't never worry my 'ed about politics.'

'Much better left alone,' chimed in old Jack Linden, sagely, 'argyfyng about politics generally ends up with a bloody row an' does no good to nobody.'

At this there was a murmur of approval from several of the others. Most of them were averse from arguing or disputing about politics. If two or three men of similar opinions happened to be together they might discuss such things in a friendly and superficial way, but in a mixed company it was better left alone. The 'Fissional Policy' emanated from the Tory Party. That was the reason why some of them were strongly in favour of it, and for the same reason others were opposed to it. Some of them were under the delusion that they were Conservatives; others imagined themselves to be Liberals; as a matter of fact most of them were nothing. They knew as much about the public affairs of their own country as they did of the condition of affairs in the planet Jupiter.

Easton began to regret that he had broached so objectionable a subject, when, looking up from his paper, Owen said:

'Does the fact that you never trouble your heads about politics prevent you from voting at election times?'

No one answered, and there ensued a brief silence, Easton,