

An Imperial Banquet

on it now. 'E's mayor this year. 'E's bin mayor several times before.'

'Let's see,' said Payne, reflectively. 'E married old Grinder's sister, didn't 'e? You know who I mean, Grinder the greengrocer.'

'Yes, I believe 'e did,' said Crass.

'It wasn't Grinder's sister,' chimed in old Jack Linden, 'It was 'is niece. I know, because I remember working in their 'ouse just after they were married, about ten years ago.'

'Oh yes, I remember now,' said Payne, 'she used to manage one of Grinder's branch shops.'

'Yes,' replied Linden. 'I remember it very well because there was a lot of talk about it at the time. No one never thought as ole Sweater'd ever git married at all, although there was always several young women about what would have been glad enough to 'ave him.'

This important matter being disposed of, there followed a brief silence, which was presently broken by Harlow.

'Funny name to call a 'ouse, ain't it?' he said. '"The Cave." I wonder what made 'em give it a name like that?'

'They calls 'em all sorts of outlandish names nowadays,' said old Jack Linden.

'There's generally some sort of meaning to it though,' observed Payne; 'for instance, if a bloke backed a winner and made a pile 'e might call 'is 'ouse "Epsom Lodge" or "Newmarket Villa."'

'Or sometimes there's a hoak tree or a cherry tree in the gardening,' said another man, 'then they calls it "Hoak Lodge" or "Cherry Cottage."'

'Well, there's a cave up at the end of this garden,' said Harlow with a grin, 'you know, the cesspool, what the drains of the 'ouse runs into; praps they called it after that.'

'Talking about the drains,' said old Jack Linden, when the laughter produced by this elegant joke had ceased; 'talking about the drains, I wonder what they're going to do about them.'

'There's going to be a new set of drains altogether,' replied Crass, 'carried right out to the road and connected with the main.'

Crass really knew no more about what was going to be done in this matter than did Linden, but he felt certain that this course would be adopted. He never missed an opportunity