

The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists

formed, each member contributing threepence, for the purpose of backing 'a dead certainty' given by the renowned Captain Kiddem of the 'Obscurer.' One of those who did not join the syndicate was Frank Owen, who as usual seemed absorbed in a newspaper. He was generally regarded as a bit of a crank, for it was felt that there must be something wrong about a man who took no interest in racing or football, and was always talking a lot of rot about religion and politics. If it had not been for the fact that he was generally admitted to be an exceptionally good workman, they would have had but little hesitation in thinking him mad. Owen was about thirty-two years of age, and of medium height, but so slightly built that he appeared taller. His clean shaven face showed a suggestion of refinement, his complexion was ominously clear, and an unnatural colour flushed the thin cheeks.

There was a certain amount of justification for the attitude of his fellow-workmen, for Owen held the most unusual and unorthodox opinions, and it was because he was in the habit of discussing them openly, that his fellow-workmen came to the conclusion that there was probably something wrong with his mind.

When all the members of the syndicate had handed over their contributions, Bundy went out to arrange matters with the bookie, and during his absence Easton annexed the copy of 'The Obscurer' that Bundy had thrown away and proceeded to work laboriously through some carefully cooked statistics relating to Free Trade and Protection. Bert, his eyes starting out of his head and his mouth wide open, was devouring the contents of a paper called 'The Chronicles of Crime.' Ned Dawson—a poor devil who was paid fourpence an hour for acting as mate or labourer to Bundy, or the bricklayers, or anyone else who wanted him—lay down on the dirty floor in a corner of the room, and with his coat rolled up as a pillow, went to sleep. Sawkins with the same intention, stretched himself at full length on the dresser.

Most of the men lit their pipes and a desultory conversation ensued.

'Is the gent what's bought this 'ouse any relation to Sweater the Draper?' asked Payne, the carpenter's foreman.

'It's the same bloke,' replied Crass.

'Didn't he used to be on the Town Council or something?' 'E's bin on the Council for years,' returned Crass.