

## *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*

wall just above. Nimrod looked at him suspiciously wondering why the door had been closed. He looked all round the room but could see nothing to complain of. He snuffed the air to try if he could detect the odour of tobacco, and if he had not been suffering from a cold in the head there is no doubt that he would have perceived it. However, as it was he could smell nothing, but all the same he was not quite satisfied, although he remembered that Crass always gave Philpot a good character.

'I don't like to have men working on a job like this with the door shut,' he said at length. 'It always gives me the idear that the man's 'avin' a mike. You can do what you're doin' just as well with the door open.'

Philpot, muttering something about it being all the same to him—shut or open—got down from the steps and opened the door. Hunter went out again without making any further remark and once more began crawling over the house.

Owen was working by himself in a room on the same floor as Philpot. He was at the window, burning off with a paraffin torch-lamp those parts of the old paintwork that were blistered or cracked.

In this work the flame of the lamp is directed against the old paint, which becomes soft and is removed with a chisel knife, or a scraper called a shavehook. The door was ajar and he had opened the top sash of the window for the purpose of letting in some fresh air, because the atmosphere of the room was foul with the fumes of the lamp and the burning paint, besides being heavy with moisture. The ceiling had only just been water-washed and the walls stripped, and the old paper, saturated with water, was piled up in a heap in the middle of the floor.

Presently, as he was working, he began to feel conscious of some other presence in the room. He looked round. The door was open about six inches and in the opening appeared a long pale face with a huge chin, surmounted by a bowler hat and ornamented with a large red nose, a drooping moustache, and two small glittering eyes set very close together. For some seconds this apparition regarded Owen intently, then it was silently withdrawn, and he was again alone. He had been so surprised and startled that he had nearly dropped the lamp, and now that the ghastly countenance was gone, Owen felt the blood surge into his own cheeks. He trembled with sup-