

The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists

to talk like this. It sounded almost like something out of a book, and most of them could not understand one half of it.

'Why is it,' continued Owen, 'that we are not only deprived of our inheritance—we are not only deprived of nearly all the benefits of civilisation, but we and our children are also often unable to obtain even the bare necessities of existence?'

No one answered.

'All these things,' Owen proceeded, 'are produced by those who work. We do our full share of the work, therefore we should have a full share of the things that are made by work.'

The others continued silent. Harlow thought of the over-population theory, but decided not to mention it. Crass, who could not have given an intelligent answer to save his life, for once had sufficient sense to remain silent. He did think of calling out the patent paint pumping machine and bringing the hose pipe to bear on the subject, but abandoned the idea; after all, he thought, what was the use of arguing with such a fool as Owen?

Sawkins pretended to be asleep.

Philpot, however, had suddenly grown very serious.

'As things are now,' went on Owen, 'instead of enjoying the advantages of civilisation we are really worse off than slaves, for if we were slaves our owners, in their own interest, would see to it that we always had food and—'

'Oh, I don't see that,' roughly interrupted old Linden, who had been listening with evident anger and impatience, 'you can speak for yourself, but I can tell yer I don't put *myself* down as a slave.'

'Nor me neither,' said Crass, sturdily, 'let them call themselves slaves as wants to.'

At this moment a footstep was heard in the passage leading to the kitchen.

Old Misery, or perhaps the Bloke himself!

Crass hurriedly pulled out his watch.

'Jesus Christ!' he gasped, 'it's four minutes past one!'

Linden frantically seized hold of a pair of steps and began wandering about the room with them.

Sawkins scrambled hastily to his feet and snatching a piece of sandpaper from the pocket of his apron started furiously rubbing down the cullery door.