Chapter 25

The Oblong

During the following week the work at 'The Cave' progressed rapidly towards completion, although, the hours of daylight being so few, the men worked only from 8 A.M. till 4 P.M. and they had their breakfasts before they came. This made 40 hours a week, so that those who were paid sevenpence an hour earned £1.3.4. Those who got sixpence-halfpenny drew £1.1.8. Those whose wages were fivepence an hour were paid the princely sum of 16/8d. for their week's hard labour, and those whose rate was fourpence-halfpenny 'picked up' 15/-.

And yet there are people who have the insolence to say that Drink is the cause of poverty.

And many of the persons who say this, spend more money than that on drink themselves--every day of their useless lives.

By Tuesday night all the inside was finished with the exception of the kitchen and scullery. The painting of the kitchen had been delayed owing to the non-arrival of the new cooking range, and the scullery was still used as the paint shop. The outside work was also nearly finished: all the first coating was done and the second coating was being proceeded with. According to the specification, all the outside woodwork was supposed to have three coats, and the guttering,

rain-pipes and other ironwork two coats, but Crass and Hunter had arranged to make two coats do for most of the windows and woodwork, and all the ironwork was to be made to do with one coat only. The windows were painted in two colours: the sashes dark green and the frames white. All the rest--gables, doors, railings, guttering, etc.--was dark green; and all the dark green paint was made with boiled linseed oil and varnish; no turpentine being allowed to be used on this part of the work.

'This is some bloody fine stuff to 'ave to use, ain't it?' remarked Harlow to Philpot on Wednesday morning. 'It's more like a lot of treacle than anything else.'

'Yes: and it won't arf blister next summer when it gets a bit of sun on it,' replied Philpot with a grin.

'I suppose they're afraid that if they was to put a little turps in, it wouldn't bear out, and they'd 'ave to give it another coat.'

'You can bet yer life that's the reason,' said Philpot. 'But all the same I mean to pinch a drop to put in mine as soon as Crass is gorn.'

'Gorn where?'

'Why, didn't you know? there's another funeral on today? Didn't you see that corfin plate what Owen was writing in the drorin'-room last Saturday morning?'

'No, I wasn't 'ere. Don't you remember I was sent away to do a ceilin' and a bit of painting over at Windley?'

'Oh, of course; I forgot,' exclaimed Philpot.

'I reckon Crass and Slyme must be making a small fortune out of all these funerals,' said Harlow. 'This makes the fourth in the last fortnight. What is it they gets for 'em?'

'A shillin' for taking' 'ome the corfin and liftin' in the corpse, and four bob for the funeral--five bob altogether.'

'That's a bit of all right, ain't it?' said Harlow. 'A couple of them in a week besides your week's wages, eh? Five bob for two or three hours work!'

'Yes, the money's all right, mate, but they're welcome to it for my part. I don't want to go messin' about with no corpses,' replied Philpot with a shudder.

'Who is this last party what's dead?' asked Harlow after a pause.

'It's a parson what used to belong to the "Shining Light" Chapel. He'd been abroad for 'is 'ollerdays--to Monte Carlo. It seems 'e was ill before 'e went away, but the change did 'im a lot of good; in fact, 'e was quite recovered, and 'e was coming back again. But while 'e was

standin' on the platform at Monte Carlo Station waitin' for the train, a porter runned into 'im with a barrer load o' luggage, and 'e blowed up.'

'Blowed up?'

'Yes,' repeated Philpot. 'Blowed up! Busted! Exploded! All into pieces. But they swep' 'em all up and put it in a corfin and it's to be planted this afternoon.'

Harlow maintained an awestruck silence, and Philpot continued:

'I had a drink the other night with a butcher bloke what used to serve this parson with meat, and we was talkin' about what a strange sort of death it was, but 'e said 'e wasn't at all surprised to 'ear of it; the only thing as 'e wondered at was that the man didn't blow up long ago, considerin' the amount of grub as 'e used to make away with. He ses the quantities of stuff as 'e's took there and seen other tradesmen take was something chronic. Tons of it!'

'What was the parson's name?' asked Harlow.

'Belcher. You must 'ave noticed 'im about the town. A very fat chap,' replied Philpot. 'I'm sorry you wasn't 'ere on Saturday to see the corfin plate. Frank called me in to see the wordin' when 'e'd finished it. It had on: "Jonydab Belcher. Born January 1st, 1849. Ascended, December 8th, 19--"'

'Oh, I know the bloke now!' cried Harlow. 'I remember my youngsters bringin' 'ome a subscription list what they'd got up at the Sunday School to send 'im away for a 'ollerday because 'e was ill, and I gave 'em a penny each to put on their cards because I didn't want 'em to feel mean before the other young 'uns.'

'Yes, it's the same party. Two or three young 'uns asked me to give 'em something to put on at the time. And I see they've got another subscription list on now. I met one of Newman's children yesterday and she showed it to me. It's for an entertainment and a Christmas Tree for all the children what goes to the Sunday School, so I didn't mind giving just a trifle for anything like that.'...

'Seems to be gettin' colder, don't it?'

'It's enough to freeze the ears orf a brass monkey!' remarked Easton as he descended from a ladder close by and, placing his pot of paint on the pound, began to try to warm his hands by rubbing and beating them together.

He was trembling, and his teeth were chattering with cold.

'I could just do with a nice pint of beer, now,' he said as he stamped his feet on the pound.

'That's just what I was thinkin',' said Philpot, wistfully, 'and what's

more, I mean to 'ave one, too, at dinner-time. I shall nip down to the "Cricketers". Even if I don't get back till a few minutes after one, it won't matter, because Crass and Nimrod will be gorn to the funeral.'

'Will you bring me a pint back with you, in a bottle?' asked Easton.

'Yes, certainly,' said Philpot.

Harlow said nothing. He also would have liked a pint of beer, but, as was usual with him, he had not the necessary cash. Having restored the circulation to a certain extent, they now resumed their work, and only just in time, for a few minutes afterwards they observed Misery peeping round the corner of the house at them and they wondered how long he had been there, and whether he had overheard their conversation.

At twelve o'clock Crass and Slyme cleared off in a great hurry, and a little while afterwards, Philpot took off his apron and put on his coat to go to the 'Cricketers'. When the others found out where he was going, several of them asked him to bring back a drink for them, and then someone suggested that all those who wanted some beer should give twopence each. This was done: one shilling and fourpence was collected and given to Philpot, who was to bring back a gallon of beer in a jar. He promised to get back as soon as ever he could, and some of the shareholders decided not to drink any tea with their dinners, but to wait for the beer, although they knew that it would be nearly time to resume work before he could get back. It would be a quarter to one at the very earliest.

The minutes dragged slowly by, and after a while the only man on the job who had a watch began to lose his temper and refused to answer any more inquiries concerning the time. So presently Bert was sent up to the top of the house to look at a church clock which was visible therefrom, and when he came down he reported that it was ten minutes to one.

Symptoms of anxiety now began to manifest themselves amongst the shareholders, several of whom went down to the main road to see if Philpot was yet in sight, but each returned with the same report--they could see nothing of him.

No one was formally 'in charge' of the job during Crass's absence, but they all returned to their work promptly at one because they feared that Sawkins or some other sneak might report any irregularity to Crass or Misery.

At a quarter-past one, Philpot was still missing and the uneasiness of the shareholders began to develop into a panic. Some of them plainly expressed the opinion that he had gone on the razzle with the money. As the time wore on, this became the general opinion. At two o'clock, all hope of his return having been abandoned, two or three of the shareholders went and drank some of the cold tea.

Their fears were only too well founded, for they saw no more of Philpot till the next morning, when he arrived looking very sheepish and

repentant and promised to refund all the money on Saturday. He also made a long, rambling statement from which it appeared that on his way to the 'Cricketers' he met a couple of chaps whom he knew who were out of work, and he invited them to come and have a drink. When they got to the pub, they found there the Semi-drunk and the Besotted Wretch. One drink led to another, and then they started arguing, and he had forgotten all about the gallon of beer until he woke up this morning.

Whilst Philpot was making this explanation they were putting on their aprons and blouses, and Crass was serving out the lots of colour. Slyme took no part in the conversation, but got ready as quickly as possible and went outside to make a start. The reason for this haste soon became apparent to some of the others, for they noticed that he had selected and commenced painting a large window that was so situated as to be sheltered from the keen wind that was blowing.

The basement of the house was slightly below the level of the ground and there was a sort of a trench or area about three feet deep in front of the basement windows. The banks of this trench were covered with rose trees and evergreens, and the bottom was a mass of slimy, evil-smelling, rain-sodden earth, foul with the excrement of nocturnal animals. To second-coat these basement windows, Philpot and Harlow had to get down into and stand in all this filth, which soaked through the worn and broken soles of their boots. As they worked, the thorns of the rose trees caught and tore their clothing and lacerated the flesh of their half-frozen hands.

Owen and Easton were working on ladders doing the windows immediately above Philpot and Harlow, Sawkins, on another ladder, was painting one of the gables, and the other men were working at different parts of the outside of the house. The boy Bert was painting the iron railings of the front fence. The weather was bitterly cold, the sun was concealed by the dreary expanse of grey cloud that covered the wintry sky.

As they stood there working most of the time they were almost perfectly motionless, the only part of their bodies that were exercised being their right arms. The work they were now doing required to be done very carefully and deliberately, otherwise the glass would be 'messed up' or the white paint of the frames would 'run into' the dark green of the sashes, both colours being wet at the same time, each man having two pots of paint and two sets of brushes. The wind was not blowing in sudden gusts, but swept by in a strong, persistent current that penetrated their clothing and left them trembling and numb with cold. It blew from the right; and it was all the worse on that account, because the right arm, being in use, left that side of the body fully exposed. They were able to keep their left hands in their trousers pockets and the left arm close to the side most of the time. This made a lot of difference.

Another reason why it is worse when the wind strikes upon one from the right side is that the buttons on a man's coat are always on the right side, and consequently the wind gets underneath. Philpot realized this all the more because some of the buttons on his coat and waistcoat were missing.

As they worked on, trembling with cold, and with their teeth chattering, their faces and hands became of that pale violet colour generally seen on the lips of a corpse. Their eyes became full of water and the lids were red and inflamed. Philpot's and Harlow's boots were soon wet through, with the water they absorbed from the damp ground, and their feet were sore and intensely painful with cold.

Their hands, of course, suffered the most, becoming so numbed that they were unable to feel the brushes they held; in fact, presently, as Philpot was taking a dip of colour, the brush fell from his hand into the pot; and then, finding that he was unable to move his fingers, he put his hand into his trousers pocket to thaw, and began to walk about, stamping his feet upon the ground. His example was quickly followed by Owen, Easton and Harlow, and they all went round the corner to the sheltered side of the house where Slyme was working, and began walking up and down, rubbing their hands, stamping their feet and swinging their arms to warm themselves.

'If I thought Nimrod wasn't comin', I'd put my overcoat on and work in it,' remarked Philpot, 'but you never knows when to expect the b--r, and if 'e saw me in it, it would mean the bloody push.'

'It wouldn't interfere with our workin' if we did wear 'em,' said Easton; 'in fact, we'd be able to work all the quicker if we wasn't so cold.'

'Even if Misery didn't come, I suppose Crass would 'ave something to say if we did put 'em on,' continued Philpot.

'Well, yer couldn't blame 'im if 'e did say something, could yer?' said Slyme, offensively. 'Crass would get into a row 'imself if 'Unter came and saw us workin' in overcoats. It would look ridiclus.'

Slyme suffered less from the cold than any of them, not only because he had secured the most sheltered window, but also because he was better clothed than most of the rest.

'What's Crass supposed to be doin' inside?' asked Easton as he tramped up and down, with his shoulders hunched up and his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his trousers.

'Blowed if I know,' replied Philpot. 'Messin' about touchin' up or makin' colour. He never does 'is share of a job like this; 'e knows 'ow to work things all right for 'isself.'

'What if 'e does? We'd be the same if we was in 'is place, and so would anybody else,' said Slyme, and added sarcastically: 'Or p'haps you'd give all the soft jobs to other people and do all the rough yerself!'

Slyme knew that, although they were speaking of Crass, they were also alluding to himself, and as he replied to Philpot he looked slyly at Owen, who had so far taken no part in the conversation.

'It's not a question of what we would do,' chimed in Harlow. 'It's a question of what's fair. If it's not fair for Crass to pick all the soft jobs for 'imself and leave all the rough for others, the fact that we might do the same if we 'ad the chance don't make it right.'

'No one can be blamed for doing the best he can for himself under existing circumstances,' said Owen in reply to Slyme's questioning look. That is the principle of the present system--every man for himself and the devil take the rest. For my own part I don't pretend to practise unselfishness. I don't pretend to guide my actions by the rules laid down in the Sermon on the Mount. But it's certainly surprising to hear you who profess to be a follower of Christ--advocating selfishness. Or, rather, it would be surprising if it were not that the name of "Christian" has ceased to signify one who follows Christ, and has come to mean only liar and hypocrite.'

Slyme made no answer. Possibly the fact that he was a true believer enabled him to bear this insult with meekness and humility.

'I wonder what time it is?' interposed Philpot.

Slyme looked at his watch. It was nearly ten o'clock.

'Jesus Christ! Is that all?' growled Easton as they returned to work. 'Two hours more before dinner!'

Only two more hours, but to these miserable, half-starved, ill-clad wretches, standing here in the bitter wind that pierced their clothing and seemed to be tearing at their very hearts and lungs with icy fingers, it appeared like an eternity. To judge by the eagerness with which they longed for dinner-time, one might have thought they had some glorious banquet to look forward to instead of bread and cheese and onions, or bloaters--and stewed tea.

Two more hours of torture before dinner; and three more hours after that. And then, thank God, it would be too dark to see to work any longer.

It would have been much better for them if, instead of being 'Freemen', they had been slaves, and the property, instead of the hirelings, of Mr Rushton. As it was, HE would not have cared if one or all of them had become ill or died from the effects of exposure. It would have made no difference to him. There were plenty of others out of work and on the verge of starvation who would be very glad to take their places. But if they had been Rushton's property, such work as this would have been deferred until it could be done without danger to the health and lives of the slaves; or at any rate, even if it were proceeded with during such weather, their owner would have seen to it that they were properly clothed and fed; he would have taken as much care of them as he would of his horse.

People always take great care of their horses. If they were to overwork a horse and make it ill, it would cost something for medicine

and the veterinary surgeon, to say nothing of the animal's board and lodging. If they were to work their horses to death, they would have to buy others. But none of these considerations applies to workmen. If they work a man to death they can get another for nothing at the corner of the next street. They don't have to buy him; all they have to do is to give him enough money to provide him with food and clothing--of a kind--while he is working for them. If they only make him ill, they will not have to feed him or provide him with medical care while he is laid up. He will either go without these things or pay for them himself. At the same time it must be admitted that the workman scores over both the horse and the slave, inasmuch as he enjoys the priceless blessing of Freedom. If he does not like the hirer's conditions he need not accept them. He can refuse to work, and he can go and starve. There are no ropes on him. He is a Free man. He is the Heir of all the Ages. He enjoys perfect Liberty. He has the right to choose freely which he will do--Submit or Starve. Eat dirt or eat nothing.

The wind blew colder and colder. The sky, which at first had shown small patches of blue through rifts in the masses of clouds, had now become uniformly grey. There was every indication of an impending fall of snow.

The men perceived this with conflicting feelings. If it did commence to snow, they would not be able to continue this work, and therefore they found themselves involuntarily wishing that it would snow, or rain, or hail, or anything that would stop the work. But on the other hand, if the weather prevented them getting on with the outside, some

of them would have to 'stand off', because the inside was practically finished. None of them wished to lose any time if they could possibly help it, because there were only ten days more before Christmas.

The morning slowly wore away and the snow did not fall. The hands worked on in silence, for they were in no mood for talking, and not only that, but they were afraid that Hunter or Rushton or Crass might be watching them from behind some bush or tree, or through some of the windows. This dread possessed them to such an extent that most of them were almost afraid even to look round, and kept steadily on at work. None of them wished to spoil his chance of being kept on to help to do the other house that it was reported Rushton & Co. were going to 'do up' for Mr Sweater.

Twelve o'clock came at last, and Crass's whistle had scarcely ceased to sound before they all assembled in the kitchen before the roaring fire. Sweater had sent in two tons of coal and had given orders that fires were to be lit every day in nearly every room to make the house habitable by Christmas.

'I wonder if it's true as the firm's got another job to do for old Sweater?' remarked Harlow as he was toasting a bloater on the end of the pointed stick.

'True? No!' said the man on the pail scornfully. 'It's all bogy. You know that empty 'ouse as they said Sweater 'ad bought--the one that Rushton and Nimrod was seen lookin' at?'

'Yes,' replied Harlow. The other men listened with evident interest. 'Well, they wasn't pricing it up after all! T he landlord of that 'ouse is abroad, and there was some plants in the garden as Rushton thought 'e'd like, and 'e was tellin' Misery which ones 'e wanted. And afterwards old Pontius Pilate came up with Ned Dawson and a truck. They made two or three journeys and took bloody near everything in the garden as was worth takin'. What didn't go to Rushton's place went to 'Unter's.'

The disappointment of their hopes for another job was almost forgotten in their interest in this story.

'Who told you about it?' said Harlow.

'Ned Dawson 'imself. It's right enough what I say. Ask 'im.'

Ned Dawson, usually called 'Bundy's mate', had been away from the house for a few days down at the yard doing odd jobs, and had only come back to the 'Cave' that morning. On being appealed to, he corroborated Dick Wantley's statement.

'They'll be gettin' theirselves into trouble if they ain't careful,' remarked Easton.

'Oh, no they won't, Rushton's too artful for that. It seems the agent is a pal of 'is, and they worked it between 'em.'

'Wot a bloody cheek, though!' exclaimed Harlow.

'Oh, that's nothing to some of the things I've known 'em do before now,' said the man on the pail. 'Why, don't you remember, back in the summer, that carved hoak hall table as Rushton pinched out of that 'ouse on Grand Parade?'

'Yes; that was a bit of all right too, wasn't it?' cried Philpot, and several of the others laughed.

'You know, that big 'ouse we did up last summer--No. 596,' Wantley continued, for the benefit of those not 'in the know'. 'Well, it 'ad bin empty for a long time and we found this 'ere table in a cupboard under the stairs. A bloody fine table it was too. One of them bracket tables what you fix to the wall, without no legs. It 'ad a 'arf-round marble top to it, and underneath was a carved hoak figger, a mermaid, with 'er arms up over 'er 'ead 'oldin' up the table top--something splendid!' The man on the pail waxed enthusiastic as he thought of it. 'Must 'ave been worth at least five quid. Well, just as we pulled this 'ere table out, who should come in but Rushton, and when 'e seen it, 'e tells Crass to cover it over with a sack and not to let nobody see it. And then 'e clears orf to the shop and sends the boy down with the truck and 'as it took up to 'is own 'ouse, and it's there now, fixed in the front 'all. I was sent up there a couple of months ago to paint and varnish the lobby doors and I seen it meself. There's a pitcher called "The Day of Judgement" 'angin' on the wall just over it--thunder

and lightning and earthquakes and corpses gettin' up out o' their graves--something bloody 'orrible! And underneath the picture is a card with a tex out of the Bible--"Christ is the 'ead of this 'ouse: the unknown guest at every meal. The silent listener to every conversation." I was workin' there for three or four days and I got to know it orf by 'eart.'

'Well, that takes the biskit, don't it?' said Philpot.

'Yes: but the best of it was,' the man on the pail proceeded, 'the best of it was, when ole Misery 'eard about the table, 'e was so bloody wild because 'e didn't get it 'imself that 'e went upstairs and pinched one of the venetian blinds and 'ad it took up to 'is own 'ouse by the boy, and a few days arterwards one of the carpenters 'ad to go and fix it up in 'is bedroom.'

'And wasn't it never found out?' inquired Easton.

'Well, there was a bit of talk about it. The agent wanted to know where it was, but Pontius Pilate swore black and white as there 'adn't been no blind in that room, and the end of it was that the firm got the order to supply a new one.'

'What I can't understand is, who did the table belong to?' said Harlow.

'It was a fixture belongin' to the 'ouse,' replied Wantley. 'But I suppose the former tenants had some piece of furniture of their own

that they wanted to put in the 'all where this table was fixed, so they took it down and stored it away in this 'ere cupboard, and when they left the 'ouse I suppose they didn't trouble to put it back again. Anyway, there was the mark on the wall where it used to be fixed, but when we did the staircase down, the place was papered over, and I suppose the landlord or the agent never give the table a thought. Anyhow, Rushton got away with it all right.'

A number of similar stories were related by several others concerning the doings of different employers they had worked for, but after a time the conversation reverted to the subject that was uppermost in their thoughts--the impending slaughter, and the improbability of being able to obtain another job, considering the large number of men who were already out of employment.

'I can't make it out, myself,' remarked Easton. 'Things seems to get worse every year. There don't seem to be 'arf the work about that there used to be, and even what there is is messed up anyhow, as if the people who 'as it done can't afford to pay for it.'

'Yes,' said Harlow; 'that's true enough. Why, just look at the work that's in one o' them 'ouses on the Grand Parade. People must 'ave 'ad more money to spend in those days, you know; all those massive curtain cornishes over the drawing- and dining-room winders--gilded solid! Why, nowadays they'd want all the bloody 'ouse done down right through--inside and out, for the money it cost to gild one of them.'

'It seems that nearly everybody is more or less 'ard up nowadays,' said Philpot. 'I'm jiggered if I can understand it, but there it is.'

'You should ast Owen to explain it to yer,' remarked Crass with a jeering laugh. ''E knows all about wot's the cause of poverty, but 'e won't tell nobody. 'E's been GOIN' to tell us wot it is for a long time past, but it don't seem to come orf.'

Crass had not yet had an opportunity of producing the Obscurer cutting, and he made this remark in the hope of turning the conversation into a channel that would enable him to do so. But Owen did not respond, and went on reading his newspaper.

'We ain't 'ad no lectures at all lately, 'ave we?' said Harlow in an injured tone. 'I think it's about time Owen explained what the real cause of poverty is. I'm beginning to get anxious about it.'

The others laughed.

When Philpot had finished eating his dinner he went out of the kitchen and presently returned with a small pair of steps, which he opened and placed in a corner of the room, with the back of the steps facing the audience.

'There you are, me son!' he exclaimed to Owen. 'There's a pulpit for

yer.'

'Yes! come on 'ere!' cried Crass, feeling in his waistcoat pocket for the cutting. 'Tell us wot's the real cause of poverty.'

''Ear, 'ear,' shouted the man on the pail. 'Git up into the bloody pulpit and give us a sermon.'

As Owen made no response to the invitations, the crowd began to hoot and groan.

'Come on, man,' whispered Philpot, winking his goggle eye persuasively at Owen. 'Come on, just for a bit of turn, to pass the time away.'

Owen accordingly ascended the steps--much to the secret delight of Crass--and was immediately greeted with a round of enthusiastic applause.

'There you are, you see,' said Philpot, addressing the meeting. 'It's no use booin' and threatenin', because 'e's one of them lecturers wot can honly be managed with kindness. If it 'adn't a bin for me, 'e wouldn't 'ave agreed to speak at all.'

Philpot having been unanimously elected chairman, proposed by Harlow and seconded by the man on the pail, Owen commenced:

'Mr Chairman and gentlemen:

'Unaccustomed as I am to public speaking, it is with some degree of hesitation that I venture to address myself to such a large, distinguished, fashionable, and intelligent looking audience as that which I have the honour of seeing before me on the present occasion.' (Applause.)

'One of the finest speakers I've ever 'eard!' remarked the man on the pail in a loud whisper to the chairman, who motioned him to be silent.

Owen continued:

'In some of my previous lectures I have endeavoured to convince you that money is in itself of no value and of no real use whatever. In this I am afraid I have been rather unsuccessful.'

'Not a bit of it, mate,' cried Crass, sarcastically. 'We all agrees with it.'

''Ear, 'ear,' shouted Easton. 'If a bloke was to come in 'ere now and orfer to give me a quid--I'd refuse it!'

'So would I,' said Philpot.

'Well, whether you agree or not, the fact remains. A man might possess so much money that, in England, he would be comparatively rich, and yet if he went to some country where the cost of living is very high he

would find himself in a condition of poverty. Or one might conceivably be in a place where the necessaries of life could not be bought for money at all. Therefore it is more conducive to an intelligent understanding of the subject if we say that to be rich consists not necessarily in having much money, but in being able to enjoy an abundance of the things that are made by work; and that poverty consists not merely in being without money, but in being short of the necessaries and comforts of life--or in other words in being short of the Benefits of Civilization, the things that are all, without exception, produced by work. Whether you agree or not with anything else that I say, you will all admit that that is our condition at the present time. We do not enjoy a full share of the benefits of civilization--we are all in a state of more or less abject poverty.'

'Question!' cried Crass, and there were loud murmurs of indignant dissent from several quarters as Owen proceeded:

'How does it happen that we are so short of the things that are made by work?'

'The reason why we're short of the things that's made by work,' interrupted Crass, mimicking Owen's manner, 'is that we ain't got the bloody money to buy 'em.'

'Yes,' said the man on the pail; 'and as I said before, if all the money in the country was shared out equal today according to Owen's ideas--in six months' time it would be all back again in the same 'ands

as it is now, and what are you goin' to do then?'

'Share again, of course.'

This answer came derisively from several places at the same instant, and then they all began speaking at once, vying with each other in ridiculing the foolishness of 'them there Socialists', whom they called 'The Sharers Out'.

Barrington was almost the only one who took no part in the conversation. He was seated in his customary place and, as usual, silently smoking, apparently oblivious to his surroundings.

'I never said anything about "sharing out all the money",' said Owen during a lull in the storm, 'and I don't know of any Socialist who advocates anything of the kind. Can any of you tell me the name of someone who proposes to do so?'

No one answered, as Owen repeated his inquiry, this time addressing himself directly to Crass, who had been one of the loudest in denouncing and ridiculing the 'Sharers Out'. Thus cornered, Crass--who knew absolutely nothing about the subject--for a few moments looked rather foolish. Then he began to talk in a very loud voice:

'Why, it's a well-known fact. Everybody knows that's what they wants. But they take bloody good care they don't act up to it theirselves, though. Look at them there Labour members of Parliament--a lot of

b--rs what's too bloody lazy to work for their livin'! What the bloody 'ell was they before they got there? Only workin' men, the same as you and me! But they've got the gift o' the gab and--'

'Yes, we know all about that,' said Owen, 'but what I'm asking you is to tell us who advocates taking all the money in the country and sharing it out equally?'

'And I say that everybody knows that's what they're after!' shouted Crass. 'And you know it as well as I do. A fine thing!' he added indignantly. 'Accordin' to that idear, a bloody scavenger or a farm labourer ought to get as much wages as you or me!'

'We can talk about that some other time. What I want to know at present is--what authority have you for saying that Socialists believe in sharing out all the money equally amongst all the people?'

'Well, that's what I've always understood they believed in doing,' said Crass rather lamely.

'It's a well-known fact,' said several others.

'Come to think of it,' continued Crass as he drew the Obscurer cutting from his waistcoat pocket, 'I've got a little thing 'ere that I've been goin' to read to yer. It's out of the Obscurer. I'd forgotten all about it.'

Remarking that the print was too small for his own eyes, he passed the slip of paper to Harlow, who read aloud as follows:

PROVE YOUR PRINCIPLES: OR, LOOK AT BOTH SIDES

'I wish I could open your eyes to the true misery of our condition: injustice, tyranny and oppression!' said a discontented hack to a weary-looking cob as they stood side by side in unhired cabs.

'I'd rather have them opened to something pleasant, thank you,' replied the cob.

'I am sorry for you. If you could enter into the noble aspirations--' the hack began.

'Talk plain. What would you have?' said the cob, interrupting him.

'What would I have? Why, equality, and share and share alike all over the world,' said the hack.

'You MEAN that?' said the cob.

'Of course I do. What right have those sleek, pampered hunters and racers to their warm stables and high feed, their grooms and jockeys? It is really heart-sickening to think of it,' replied

the hack.

'I don't know but you may be right,' said the cob, 'and to show I'm in earnest, as no doubt you are, let me have half the good beans you have in your bag, and you shall have half the musty oats and chaff I have in mine. There's nothing like proving one's principles.'

Original Parables. By Mrs Prosier.

'There you are!' cried several voices.

'What does that mean?' cried Crass, triumphantly. 'Why don't you go and share your wages with the chaps what's out of work?'

'What does it mean?' replied Owen contemptuously. 'It means that if the Editor of the Obscurer put that in his paper as an argument against Socialism, either he is of feeble intellect himself or else he thinks that the majority of his readers are. That isn't an argument against Socialism--it's an argument against the hypocrites who pretend to be Christians--the people who profess to "Love their neighbours as themselves"--who pretend to believe in Universal Brotherhood, and that they do not love the world or the things of the world and say that they are merely "Pilgrims on their way to a better land". As for why I don't do it--why should I? I don't pretend to be a Christian. But you're all "Christians"--why don't you do it?'

'We're not talkin' about religion,' exclaimed Crass, impatiently.

'Then what are you talking about? I never said anything about "Sharing Out" or "Bearing one another's burdens". I don't profess to "Give to everyone who asks of me" or to "Give my cloak to the man who take away my coat". I have read that Christ taught that His followers must do all these things, but as I do not pretend to be one of His followers I don't do them. But you believe in Christianity: why don't you do the things that He said?'

As nobody seemed to know the answer to this question, the lecturer proceeded:

'In this matter the difference between so-called "Christians" and Socialists is this: Christ taught the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Men. Those who today pretend to be Christ's followers hypocritically profess to carry out those teachings now. But they don't. They have arranged "The Battle of Life" system instead!

'The Socialist--very much against his will--finds himself in the midst of this horrible battle, and he appeals to the other combatants to cease from fighting and to establish a system of Brotherly Love and Mutual Helpfulness, but he does not hypocritically pretend to practise brotherly love towards those who will not agree to his appeal, and who compel him to fight with them for his very life. He knows that in this battle he must either fight or go under. Therefore, in self-defiance, he fights; but all the time he continues his appeal for the cessation of the slaughter. He pleads for the changing system. He advocates

Co-operation instead of Competition: but how can he co-operate with people who insist on competing with him? No individual can practise co-operation by himself! Socialism can only be practised by the Community--that is the meaning of the word. At present, the other members of the community--the "Christians"--deride and oppose the Socialist's appeal.

'It is these pretended Christians who do not practise what they preach, because, all the time they are singing their songs of Brotherhood and Love, they are fighting with each other, and strangling each other and trampling each other underfoot in their horrible "Battle of Life"!

'No Socialist suggests "Sharing out" money or anything else in the manner you say. And another thing: if you only had a little more sense you might be able to perceive that this stock "argument" of yours is really an argument against the present system, inasmuch as it proves that Money is in itself of no use whatever. Supposing all the money was shared out equally; and suppose there was enough of it for everyone to have ten thousand pounds; and suppose they then all thought they were rich and none of them would work. What would they live on? Their money? Could they eat it or drink it or wear it? It wouldn't take them very long to find out that this wonderful money--which under the present system is the most powerful thing in existence--is really of no more use than so much dirt. They would speedily perish, not from lack of money, but from lack of wealth--that is, from lack of things that are made by work. And further, it is quite true that if all the money were distributed equally amongst all the people tomorrow, it would all

be up in heaps again in a very short time. But that only proves that while the present Money System remains, it will be impossible to do away with poverty, for heaps in some places mean little or nothing in other places. Therefore while the money system lasts we are bound to have poverty and all the evils it brings in its train.'

'Oh, of course everybody's an idjit except you,' sneered Crass, who was beginning to feel rather fogged.

'I rise to a pint of order,' said Easton.

'And I rise to order a pint,' cried Philpot.

'Order what the bloody 'ell you like,' remarked Harlow, 'so long as I 'aven't got to pay for it.'

'Mine's a pint of porter,' observed the man on the pail.

'The pint is,' proceeded Easton, 'when does the lecturer intend to explain to us what is the real cause of poverty.'

''Ear, 'ear,' cried Harlow. 'That's what I want to know, too.'

'And what I should like to know is, who is supposed to be givin' this 'ere lecture?' inquired the man on the pail.

'Why, Owen, of course,' replied Harlow.

'Well, why don't you try to keep quiet for a few minutes and let 'im get on with it?'

'The next B--r wot interrupts,' cried Philpot, rolling up his shirt-sleeves and glaring threateningly round upon the meeting. 'The next b--r wot interrupts goes out through the bloody winder!'

At this, everybody pretended to be very frightened, and edged away as far as possible from Philpot. Easton, who was sitting next to him, got up and crossed over to Owen's vacant seat. The man on the pail was the only one who did not seem nervous; perhaps he felt safer because he was, as usual, surrounded by a moat.

'Poverty,' resumed the lecturer, consists in a shortage of the necessaries of life--or rather, of the benefits of civilization.'

'You've said that about a 'undred times before,' snarled Crass.

'I know I have; and I have no doubt I shall have to say it about five hundred times more before you understand what it means.'

'Get on with the bloody lecture,' shouted the man on the pail. 'Never mind arguin' the point.'

'Well, keep horder, can't you?' cried Philpot, fiercely, 'and give the man a chance.'

'All these things are produced in the same way,' proceeded Owen. 'They are made from the Raw materials by those who work--aided by machinery. When we inquire into the cause of the present shortage of these things, the first question we should ask is--Are there not sufficient of the raw materials in existence to enable us to produce enough to satisfy the needs of all?

'The answer to this question is--There are undoubtedly more than sufficient of all the raw materials.

'Insufficiency of raw material is therefore not the cause. We must look in another direction.

'The next question is--Are we short of labour? Is there not a sufficient number of people able and willing to work? Or is there not enough machinery?

'The answers to these questions are--There are plenty of people able and willing to work, and there is plenty of machinery!

'These things being so, how comes this extraordinary result? How is it that the benefits of civilization are not produced in sufficient quantity to satisfy the needs of all? How is it that the majority of the people always have to go without most of the refinements, comforts, and pleasures of life, and very often without even the bare necessaries of existence?

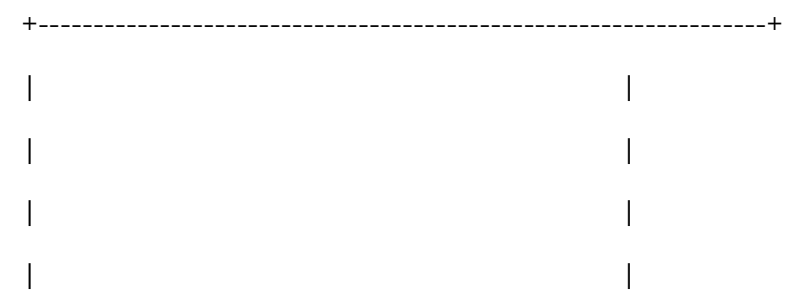
'Plenty of materials--Plenty of Labour--Plenty of Machinery--and, nearly everybody going short of nearly everything!

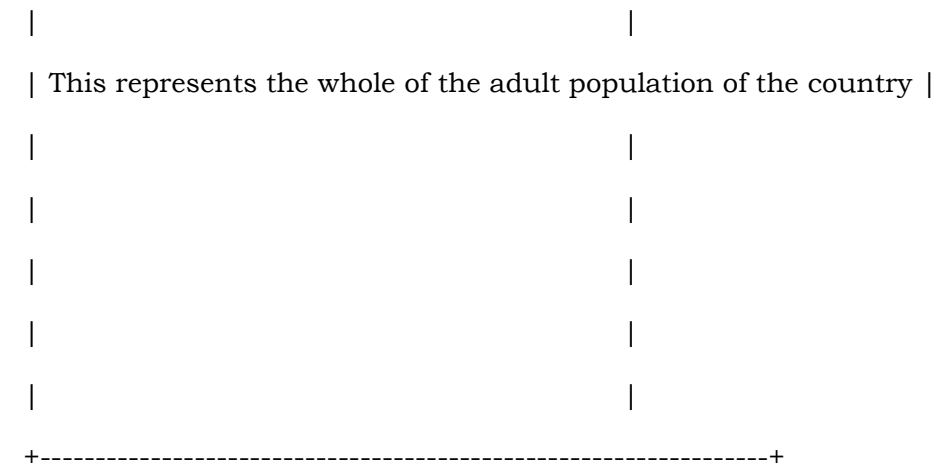
'The cause of this extraordinary state of affairs is that although we possess the means of producing more than abundance for all, we also have an imbecile system of managing our affairs.

'The present Money System prevents us from doing the necessary work, and consequently causes the majority of the population to go short of the things that can be made by work. They suffer want in the midst of the means of producing abundance. They remain idle because they are bound and fettered with a chain of gold.

'Let us examine the details of this insane, idiotic, imbecile system.'

Owen now asked Philpot to pass him a piece of charred wood from under the grate, and having obtained what he wanted, he drew upon the wall a quadrangular figure about four feet in length and one foot deep. The walls of the kitchen had not yet been cleaned off, so it did not matter about disfiguring them.





'To find out the cause of the shortage in this country of the things that can be made by work it is first of all necessary to find out how people spend their time. Now this square represents the whole of the adult population of this country. There are many different classes of people, engaged in a great number of different occupations. Some of them are helping to produce the benefits of civilization, and some are not. All these people help to consume these things, but when we inquire into their occupations we shall find that although the majority are workers, only a comparatively small number are engaged in actually producing either the benefits of civilization or the necessaries of life.'...

Order being once more restored, the lecturer turned again to the drawing on the wall and stretched out his hand, evidently with the intention of making some addition to it, but instead of doing so lie paused irresolutely, and faltering, let his arm drop down again by his side.

An absolute, disconcerting silence reigned. His embarrassment and nervousness increased. He knew that they were unwilling to hear or talk or think about such subjects as the cause of poverty at all. They preferred to make fun of and ridicule them. He knew they would refuse to try to see the meaning of what he wished to say if it were at all difficult or obscure. How was he to put it to them so that they would HAVE to understand it whether they wished to or not. It was almost impossible.

It would be easy enough to convince them if they would only take a LITTLE trouble and try to understand, but he knew that they certainly would not 'worry' themselves about such a subject as this; it was not as if it were some really important matter, such as a smutty story, a game of hooks and rings or shove-ha'penny, something concerning football or cricket, horse-racing or the doings of some Royal personage or aristocrat.

The problem of the cause of poverty was only something that concerned their own and their children's future welfare. Such an unimportant matter, being undeserving of any earnest attention, must be put before them so clearly and plainly that they would be compelled to understand it at a glance; and it was almost impossible to do it.

Observing his hesitation, some of the men began to snigger. ''E seems to 'ave got 'isself into a bit of a fog,' remarked Crass in a loud whisper to Slyme, who laughed.

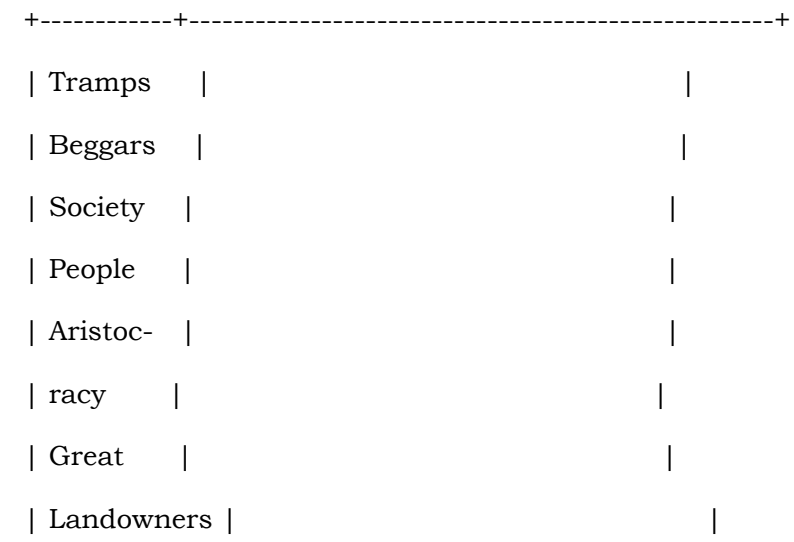
The sound roused Owen, who resumed:

'All these people help to consume the things produced by labour. We will now divide them into separate classes. Those who help to produce; those who do nothing, those who do harm, and those who are engaged in unnecessary work.'

'And,' sneered Crass, 'those who are engaged in unnecessary talk.'

'First we will separate those who not only do nothing, but do not even pretend to be of any use; people who would consider themselves disgraced if they by any chance did any useful work. This class includes tramps, beggars, the "Aristocracy", "Society" people, great landowners, and generally all those possessed of hereditary wealth.'

As he spoke he drew a vertical line across one end of the oblong.

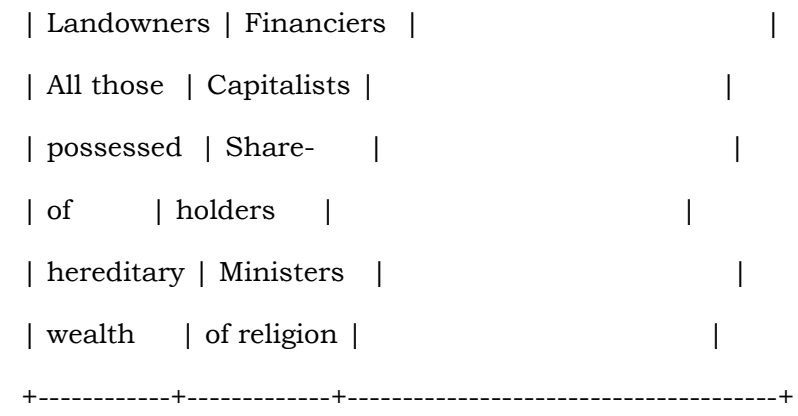


All those	
possessed	
of	
hereditary	
wealth	

'These people do absolutely nothing except devour or enjoy the things produced by the labours of others.

'Our next division represents those who do work of a kind--"mental" work if you like to call it so--work that benefits themselves and harms other people. Employers--or rather Exploiters of Labour; Thieves, Swindlers, Pickpockets; profit seeking share-holders; burglars; Bishops; Financiers; Capitalists, and those persons humorously called "Ministers" of religion. If you remember that the word "minister" means "servant" you will be able to see the joke.

1	2	
Tramps	Exploiters	
Beggars	of Labour	
Society	Thieves	
People	Swindlers	
Aristoc-	Pickpockets	
racy	Burglars	
Great	Bishops	



'None of these people produce anything themselves, but by means of cunning and scheming they contrive between them to obtain possession of a very large portion of the things produced by the labour of others.

'Number three stands for those who work for wages or salaries, doing unnecessary work. That is, producing things or doing things which--though useful and necessary to the Imbecile System--cannot be described as the necessaries of life or the benefits of civilization. This is the largest section of all. It comprises Commercial Travellers, Canvassers, Insurance agents, commission agents, the great number of Shop Assistants, the majority of clerks, workmen employed in the construction and adornment of business premises, people occupied with what they call "Business", which means being very busy without producing anything. Then there is a vast army of people engaged in designing, composing, painting or printing advertisements, things which are for the most part of no utility whatever, the object of most advertisements is merely to persuade people to buy from one firm rather than from another. If you want some butter it doesn't matter whether you buy it from Brown or Jones or Robinson.'

1	2	3	
Tramps Beggars Society People Aristoc- racy Great Landowners All those possessed of hereditary wealth	Exploiters of Labour Thieves Swindlers Pickpockets Burglars Bishops Financiers Capitalists Share- holders Ministers of religion	All those engaged in unnecessary work	

During the delivery of this pert of the lecture, the audience began to manifest symptoms of impatience and dissent. Perceiving this, Owen, speaking very rapidly, continued:

'If you go down town, you will see half a dozen drapers' shops within a stone's-throw of each other--often even next door to each other--all selling the same things. You can't possibly think that all those shops are really necessary? You know that one of them would serve the purpose for which they are all intended--to store and serve as a centre

for the distribution of the things that are made by work. If you will admit that five out of the six shops are not really necessary, you must also admit that the men who built them, and the salesmen and women or other assistants engaged in them, and the men who design and write and print their advertisements are all doing unnecessary work; all really wasting their time and labour, time and labour that might be employed in helping to produce these things that we are at present short of. You must admit that none of these people are engaged in producing either the necessaries of life or the benefits of civilization. They buy them, and sell them, and handle them, and haggle over, them, and display them, in the plate glass windows of "Stores" and "Emporiums" and make profit out of them, and use them, but these people themselves produce nothing that is necessary to life or happiness, and the things that some of them do produce are only necessary to the present imbecile system.'

'What the 'ell sort of a bloody system do you think we ought to 'ave, then?' interrupted the man on the pail.

'Yes: you're very good at finding fault,' sneered Slyme, 'but why don't you tell us 'ow it's all going to be put right?'

'Well, that's not what we're talking about now, is it?' replied Owen. 'At present we're only trying to find out how it is that there is not sufficient produced for everyone to have enough of the things that are made by work. Although most of the people in number three work very hard, they produce Nothing.'

'This is a lot of bloody rot!' exclaimed Crass, impatiently.

'Even if there is more shops than what's actually necessary,' cried Harlow, 'it all helps people to get a livin'! If half of 'em was shut up, it would just mean that all them what works there would be out of a job. Live and let live, I say: all these things makes work.'

''Ear, 'ear,' shouted the man behind the moat.

'Yes, I know it makes "work",' replied Owen, 'but we can't live on mere "work", you know. To live in comfort we need a sufficiency of the things that can be made by work. A man might work very hard and yet be wasting his time if he were not producing something necessary or useful.

'Why are there so many shops and stores and emporiums? Do you imagine they exist for the purpose of giving those who build them, or work in them, a chance to earn a living? Nothing of the sort. They are carried on, and exorbitant prices are charged for the articles they sell, to enable the proprietors to amass fortunes, and to pay extortionate rents to the landlords. That is why the wages and salaries of nearly all those who do the work created by these businesses are cut down to the lowest possible point.'

'We knows all about that,' said Crass, 'but you can't get away from it that all these things makes Work; and that's what we wants--Plenty of Work.'

Cries of ''Ear, 'ear,' and expressions of dissent from the views expressed by the lecturer resounded through the room, nearly everyone speaking at the same time. After a while, when the row had in some measure subsided, Owen resumed:

'Nature has not provided ready-made all the things necessary for the life and happiness of mankind. In order to obtain these things we have to Work. The only rational labour is that which is directed to the creation of those things. Any kind of work which does not help us to attain this object is a ridiculous, idiotic, criminal, imbecile, waste of time.

'That is what the great army of people represented by division number three are doing at present: they are all very busy--working very hard--but to all useful intents and purposes they are doing Nothing.'

'Well, all right,' said Harlow. ''Ave it yer own way, but there's no need to keep on repeating the same thing over an' over again.'

'The next division,' resumed Owen, 'stands for those who are engaged in really useful work--the production of the benefits of civilization--the necessaries, refinements and comforts of life.'

1	2	3	4		
Tramps	Exploiters	All those	All those		

Beggars	of Labour	engaged in	engaged in	
Society	Thieves	unnecessary	necessary	U
People	Swindlers	work	work--the	N
Aristoc-	Pickpockets		production	E
racy	Burglars		of the	M
Great	Bishops		benefits	P
Landowners	Financiers		of	L
All those	Capitalists		civiliz-	O
possessed	Share-		ation	Y
of	holders			E
hereditary	Ministers			D
wealth	of religion			

'Hooray!' shouted Philpot, leading off a cheer which was taken up enthusiastically by the crowd, 'Hooray! This is where WE comes in,' he added, nodding his head and winking his goggle eyes at the meeting.

'I wish to call the chairman to horder,' said the man on the pail.

When Owen had finished writing in the list of occupations several members of the audience rose to point out that those engaged in the production of beer had been omitted. Owen rectified this serious oversight and proceeded:

'As most of the people in number four are out of work at least one quarter of their time, we must reduce the size of this division by one

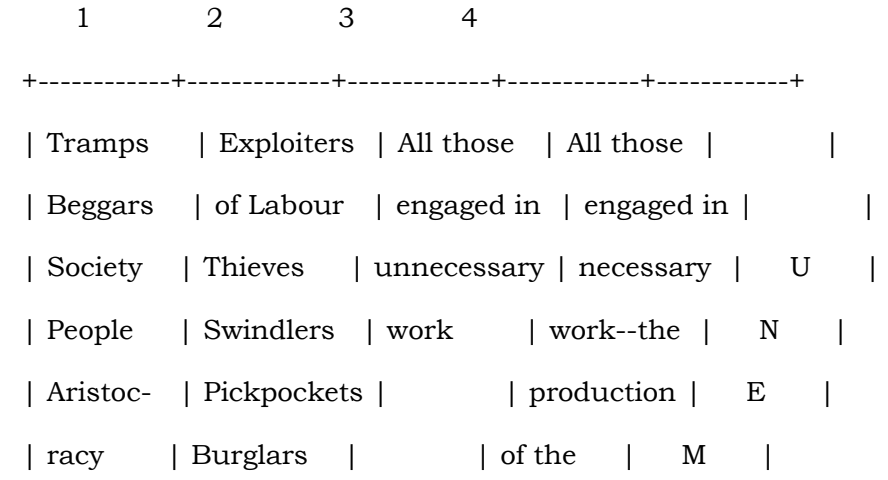
fourth--so. The grey part represents the unemployed.'

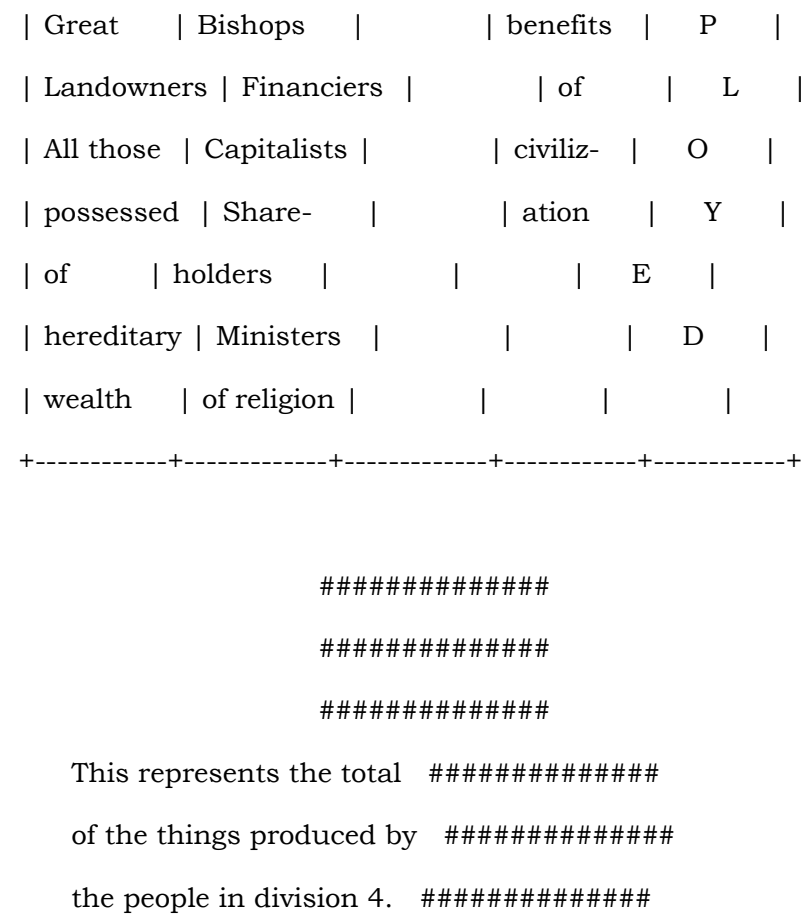
'But some of those in number three are often unemployed as well,' said Harlow.

Yes: but as THEY produce nothing even when they are at work we need not trouble to classify them unemployed, because our present purpose is only to discover the reason why there is not enough produced for everyone to enjoy abundance; and this--the Present System of conducting our affairs--is the reason of the shortage--the cause of poverty. When you reflect that all the other people are devouring the things produced by those in number four--can you wonder that there is not plenty for all?'

'"Devouring" is a good word,' said Philpot, and the others laughed.

The lecturer now drew a small square upon the wall below the other drawing. This square he filled in solid black.

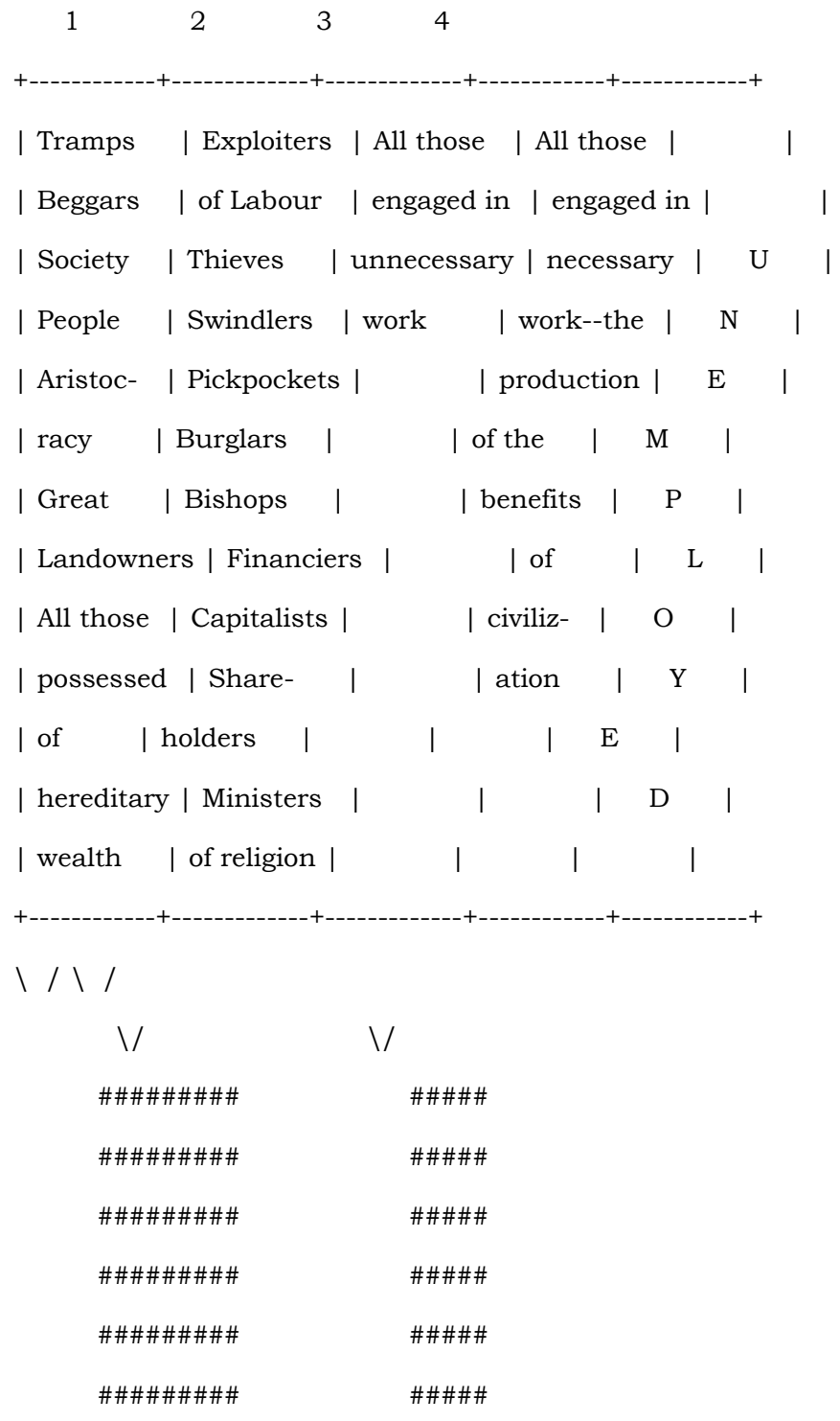




'This represents the total amount of the benefits of civilization and necessaries of life produced by the people in number four. We now proceed to "Share Out" the things in the same way as they are actually divided amongst the different classes of the population under the present imbecile system.

'As the people in divisions one and two are universally considered to be the most worthy and deserving we give them--two-thirds of the whole.

'The remainder we give to be "Shared Out" amongst the people represented by divisions three and four.



How the things produced by the people in division 4 are 'shared out' amongst the different classes of the population.

'Now you mustn't run away with the idea that the people in three and four take their share quietly and divide the things equally between them. Not at all. Some get very little, some none, some more than a fair share. It is in these two divisions that the ferocious "Battle of Life" ranges most fiercely; and of course in this battle the weak and the virtuous fare the worst. Even those whose exceptional abilities or opportunities enable them to succeed, are compelled to practise selfishness, because a man of exceptional ability who was not selfish would devote his abilities to relieving the manifest sufferings of others, and not to his own profit, and if he did the former he would not be successful in the sense that the world understands the word. All those who really seek to "Love their neighbour as themselves", or to return good for evil, the gentle, the kind, and all those who refrain from doing to others the things they would not like to suffer themselves; all these are of necessity found amongst the vanquished; because only the worst--only those who are aggressive, cunning, selfish and mean are fitted to survive. And all these people in numbers three and four are so fully occupied in this dreadful struggle to secure a little, that but few of them pause to inquire why there are not more of the things they are fighting for, or why it is necessary to fight like this at all!'

For a few minutes silence prevailed, each man's mind being busy trying to think of some objection to the lecturer's arguments.

'How could the small number of people in number one and two consume as

much as you've given 'em in your drorin'?' demanded Crass.

'They don't actually consume all of it,' replied Owen. 'Much of it is wantonly wasted. They also make fortunes by selling some of it in foreign countries; but they consume a great part of it themselves, because the amount of labour expended on the things enjoyed by these people is greater than that expended in the production of the things used by the workers. Most of the people who do nothing get the best of everything. More than three-quarters of the time of the working classes is spent in producing the things used by the wealthy. Compare the quality and quantity of the clothing possessed by the wife or daughter of a rich man with that of the wife or daughter of a worker. The time and labour spent on producing the one is twenty times greater in one case than in the other; and it's the same with everything else. Their homes, their clothing, boots, hats, jewellery, and their food. Everything must be of the very best that art or long and painful labour can produce. But for most of those whose labour produces all these good things--anything is considered good enough. For themselves, the philanthropic workers manufacture shoddy cloth--that is, cheap cloth made of old rags and dirt; and shoddy, uncomfortable ironclad boots. If you see a workman wearing a really good suit of clothes you may safely conclude that he is either leading an unnatural life--that is, he is not married--or that he has obtained it from a tallyman on the hire system and has not yet paid for it--or that it is someone else's cast-off suit that he has bought second-hand or had given to him by some charitable person. It's the same with the food. All the ducks and geese, pheasants, partridges, and all the very best parts of the very

best meat--all the soles and the finest plaice and salmon and trout--'

''Ere chuck it,' cried Harlow, fiercely. 'We don't want to 'ear no more of it,' and several others protested against the lecturer wasting time on such mere details.

'--all the very best of everything is reserved exclusively for the enjoyment of the people in divisions one and two, while the workers subsist on block ornaments, margarine, adulterated tea, mysterious beer, and are content--only grumbling when they are unable to obtain even such fare as this.'

Owen paused and a gloomy silence followed, but suddenly Crass brightened up. He detected a serious flaw in the lecturer's argument.

'You say the people in one and two gets all the best of everything, but what about the tramps and beggars? You've got them in division one.'

'Yes, I know. You see, that's the proper place for them. They belong to a Loafer class. They are no better mentally or morally than any of the other loafers in that division; neither are they of any more use. Of course, when we consider them in relation to the amount they consume of the things produced by others, they are not so harmful as the other loafers, because they consume comparatively little. But all the same they are in their right place in that division. All those people don't get the same share. The section represents not individuals--but the loafer class.'

'But I thought you said you was goin' to prove that money was the cause of poverty,' said Easton.

'So it is,' said Owen. 'Can't you see that it's money that's caused all these people to lose sight of the true purpose of labour--the production of the things we need? All these people are suffering from the delusion that it doesn't matter what kind of work they do--or whether they merely do nothing--so long as they get MONEY for doing it. Under the present extraordinary system, that's the only object they have in view--to get money. Their ideas are so topsy-turvey that they regard with contempt those who are engaged in useful work! With the exception of criminals and the poorer sort of loafers, the working classes are considered to be the lowest and least worthy in the community. Those who manage to get money for doing something other than productive work are considered more worthy of respect on that account. Those who do nothing themselves, but get money out of the labour of others, are regarded as being more worthy still! But the ones who are esteemed most of all and honoured above all the rest, are those who obtain money for doing absolutely nothing!'

'But I can't see as that proves that money is the cause of poverty,' said Easton.

'Look here,' said Owen. 'The people in number four produce everything, don't they?'

'Yes; we knows all about that,' interrupted Harlow. 'But they gets paid for it, don't they? They gets their wages.'

'Yes, and what does their wages consist of?' said Owen.

'Why, money, of course,' replied Harlow, impatiently.

And what do they do with their money when they get it? Do they eat it, or drink it, or wear it?'

At this apparently absurd question several of those who had hitherto been attentive listeners laughed derisively; it was really very difficult to listen patiently to such nonsense.

'Of course they don't,' answered Harlow scornfully. 'They buy the things they want with it.'

'Do you think that most of them manage to save a part of their wages--put it away in the bank.'

'Well, I can speak for meself,' replied Harlow amid laughter. 'It takes me all my bloody time to pay my rent and other expenses and to keep my little lot in shoe leather, and it's dam little I spend on beer; p'r'aps a tanner or a bob a week at the most.'

'A single man can save money if he likes,' said Slyme.

'I'm not speaking of single men,' replied Owen. 'I'm referring to those who live natural lives.'

'What about all the money what's in the Post Office Savings Bank, and Building and Friendly Societies?' said Crass.

'A very large part of that belongs to people who are in business, or who have some other source of income than their own wages. There are some exceptionally fortunate workers who happen to have good situations and higher wages than the ordinary run of workmen. Then there are some who are so placed--by letting lodgings, for instance--that they are able to live rent free. Others whose wives go out to work; and others again who have exceptional jobs and work a lot of overtime--but these are all exceptional cases.'

'I say as no married workin' man can save any money at all!' shouted Harlow, 'not unless 'e goes without some of even the few things we are able to get--and makes 'is wife and kids go without as well.'

''Ear, 'ear,' said everybody except Crass and Slyme, who were both thrifty working men, and each of them had some money saved in one or other of the institutions mentioned.

'Then that means,' said Owen, 'that means that the wages the people in division four receive is not equivalent to the work they do.'

'Wotcher mean, equivalent?' cried Crass. 'Why the 'ell don't yer talk

plain English without draggin' in a lot of long words wot nobody can't understand?'

'I mean this,' replied Owen, speaking very slowly. 'Everything is produced by the people in number four. In return for their work they are given--Money, and the things they have made become the property of the people who do nothing. Then, as the money is of no use, the workers go to shops and give it away in exchange for some of the things they themselves have made. They spend--or give back--ALL their wages; but as the money they got as wages is not equal in value to the things they produced, they find that they are only able to buy back a VERY SMALL PART. So you see that these little discs of metal--this Money--is a device for enabling those who do not work to rob the workers of the greater part of the fruits of their toil.'

The silence that ensued was broken by Crass.

'It sounds very pretty,' he sneered, 'but I can't make no 'ead or tail of it, meself.'

'Look here!' cried Owen. 'The producing class--these people in number four are supposed to be paid for their work. Their wages are supposed to be equal in value to their work. But it's not so. If it were, by spending all their wages, the producing class would be able to buy back All they had produced.'

Owen ceased speaking and silence once more ensued. No one gave any

sign of understanding, or of agreeing or of disagreeing with what he had said. Their attitude was strictly neutral. Barrington's pipe had gone out during the argument. He relit it from the fire with a piece of twisted paper.

'If their wages were really equal in value to the product of their labour,' Owen repeated, 'they would be able to buy back not a small part--but the Whole.'...

At this, a remark from Bundy caused a shout of laughter, and when Wantley added point to the joke by making a sound like the discharge of a pistol the merriment increased tenfold.

'Well, that's done it,' remarked Easton, as he got up and opened the window.

'It's about time you was buried, if the smell's anything to go by,' said Harlow, addressing Wantley, who laughed and appeared to think he had distinguished himself.

'But even if we include the whole of the working classes,' continued Owen, 'that is, the people in number three as well as those in number four, we find that their combined wages are insufficient to buy the things made by the producers. The total value of the wealth produced in this country during the last year was £1,800,000,000, and the total amount paid in wages during the same period was only £600,000,000. In other words, by means of the Money Trick, the workers were robbed of

two-thirds of the value of their labour. All the people in numbers three and four are working and suffering and starving and fighting in order that the rich people in numbers one and two may live in luxury, and do nothing. These are the wretches who cause poverty: they not only devour or waste or hoard the things made by the worker, but as soon as their own wants are supplied--they compel the workers to cease working and prevent them producing the things they need. Most of these people!' cried Owen, his usually pale face flushing red and his eyes shining with sudden anger, 'most of these people do not deserve to be called human beings at all! They're devils! They know that whilst they are indulging in pleasures of every kind--all around them men and women and little children are existing in want or dying of hunger.'

The silence which followed was at length broken by Harlow:

'You say the workers is entitled to all they produce, but you forget there's the raw materials to pay for. They don't make them, you know.'

'Of course the workers don't create the raw materials,' replied Owen. 'But I am not aware that the capitalists or the landlords do so either. The raw materials exist in abundance in and on the earth, but they are of no use until labour has been applied to them.'

'But then, you see, the earth belongs to the landlords!' cried Crass, unguardedly.

'I know that; and of course you think it's right that the whole country

should belong to a few people--'

'I must call the lecturer to horder,' interrupted Philpot. 'The land question is not before the meeting at present.'

'You talk about the producers being robbed of most of the value of what they produce,' said Harlow, 'but you must remember that it ain't all produced by hand labour. What about the things what's made by machinery?'

'The machines themselves were made by the workers,' returned Owen, 'but of course they do not belong to the workers, who have been robbed of them by means of the Money Trick.'

'But who invented all the machinery?' cried Crass.

'That's more than you or I or anyone else can say,' returned Owen, 'but it certainly wasn't the wealthy loafer class, or the landlords, or the employers. Most of the men who invented the machinery lived and died unknown, in poverty and often in actual want. The inventors too were robbed by the exploiter-of-labour class. There are no men living at present who can justly claim to have invented the machinery that exists today. The most they can truthfully say is that they have added to or improved upon the ideas of those who lived and worked before them. Even Watt and Stevenson merely improved upon steam engines and locomotives already existing. Your question has really nothing to do with the subject we are discussing: we are only trying to find out why

the majority of people have to go short of the benefits of civilization. One of the causes is--the majority of the population are engaged in work that does not produce those things; and most of what IS produced is appropriated and wasted by those who have no right to it.

'The workers produce Everything! If you walk through the streets of a town or a city, and look around, Everything that you can see--Factories, Machinery, Houses, Railways, Tramways, Canals, Furniture, Clothing, Food and the very road or pavement you stand upon were all made by the working class, who spend all their wages in buying back only a very small part of the things they produce. Therefore what remains in the possession of their masters represents the difference between the value of the work done and the wages paid for doing it. This systematic robbery has been going on for generations, the value of the accumulated loot is enormous, and all of it, all the wealth at present in the possession of the rich, is rightly the property of the working class--it has been stolen from them by means of the Money Trick.'...

For some moments an oppressive silence prevailed. The men stared with puzzled, uncomfortable looks alternately at each other and at the drawings on the wall. They were compelled to do a little thinking on their own account, and it was a process to which they were unaccustomed. In their infancy they had been taught to distrust their own intelligence and to leave 'thinking' to their 'pastors' and masters and to their 'betters' generally. All their lives they had been true to this teaching, they had always had blind, unreasoning faith in the

wisdom and humanity of their pastors and masters. That was the reason why they and their children had been all their lives on the verge of starvation and nakedness, whilst their 'betters'--who did nothing but the thinking--went clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day.

Several men had risen from their seats and were attentively studying the diagrams Owen had drawn on the wall; and nearly all the others were making the same mental efforts--they were trying to think of something to say in defence of those who robbed them of the fruits of their toil.

'I don't see no bloody sense in always runnin' down the rich,' said Harlow at last. 'There's always been rich and poor in the world and there always will be.'

'Of course,' said Slyme. 'It says in the Bible that the poor shall always be with us.'

'What the bloody 'ell kind of system do you think we ought to 'ave?' demanded Crass. 'If everything's wrong, 'ow's it goin' to be altered?'

At this, everybody brightened up again, and exchanged looks of satisfaction and relief. Of course! It wasn't necessary to think about these things at all! Nothing could ever be altered: it had always been more or less the same, and it always would be.

'It seems to me that you all HOPE it is impossible to alter it,' said

Owen. 'Without trying to find out whether it could be done, you persuade yourselves that it is impossible, and then, instead of being sorry, you're glad!'

Some of them laughed in a silly, half-ashamed way.

'How do YOU reckon it could be altered?' said Harlow.

'The way to alter it is, first to enlighten the people as to the real cause of their sufferings, and then--'

'Well,' interrupted Crass, with a self-satisfied chuckle, 'it'll take a better bloody man than you to enlighten ME!'

'I don't want to be henlightened into Darkness!' said Slyme piously.

'But what sort of System do you propose, then?' repeated Harlow.

'After you've got 'em all enlightened--if you don't believe in sharing out all the money equal, how ARE you goin' to alter it?'

'I don't know 'ow 'e's goin' to alter it,' sneered Crass, looking at his watch and standing up, 'but I do know what the time is--two minits past one!'

'The next lecture,' said Philpot, addressing the meeting as they all prepared to return to work, 'the next lecture will be postponded till

tomorrer at the usual time, when it will be my painful dooty to call upon Mr Owen to give 'is well-known and most hobnoxious address entitled "Work and how to avoid it." Hall them as wants to be henlightened kindly attend.'

'Or hall them as don't get the sack tonight,' remarked Easton grimly.