Chapter 47

The Ghouls

Barrington did not do any more work that day, but before going home he went to the doctor's house and the latter dressed the cuts on his head and arms. Philpot's body was taken away on the ambulance to the mortuary.

Hunter arrived at the house shortly afterwards and at once began to shout and bully because the painting of the gable was not yet commenced. When he heard of the accident he blamed them for using the rope, and said they should have asked for a new one. Before he went away he had a long, private conversation with Crass, who told him that Philpot had no relatives and that his life was insured for ten pounds in a society of which Crass was also a member. He knew that Philpot had arranged that in the event of his death the money was to be paid to the old woman with whom he lodged, who was a very close friend. The result of this confidential talk was that Crass and Hunter came to the conclusion that it was probable that she would be very glad to be relieved of the trouble of attending to the business of the funeral, and that Crass, as a close friend of the dead man, and a fellow member of the society, was the most suitable person to take charge of the business for her. He was already slightly acquainted with the old lady, so he would go to see her at once and get her authority to act on her behalf. Of course, they would not be able to do much until after

the inquest, but they could get the coffin made--as Hunter knew the mortuary keeper there would be no difficulty about getting in for a minute to measure the corpse.

This matter having been arranged, Hunter departed to order a new rope, and shortly afterwards Crass--having made sure that everyone would have plenty to do while he was gone--quietly slipped away to go to see Philpot's landlady. He went off so secretly that the men did not know that he had been away at all until they saw him come back just before twelve o'clock.

The new rope was brought to the house about one o'clock and this time the ladder was raised without any mishap. Harlow was put on to paint the gable, and he felt so nervous that he was allowed to have Sawkins to stand by and hold the ladder all the time. Everyone felt nervous that afternoon, and they all went about their work in an unusually careful manner.

When Bert had finished limewashing the cellar, Crass set him to work outside, painting the gate of the side entrance. While the boy was thus occupied he was accosted by a solemn-looking man who asked him about the accident. The solemn stranger was very sympathetic and inquired what was the name of the man who had been killed, and whether he was married. Bert informed him that Philpot was a widower, and that he had no children.

'Ah, well, that's so much the better, isn't it?' said the stranger

shaking his head mournfully. 'It's a dreadful thing, you know, when there's children left unprovided for. You don't happen to know where he lived, do you?'

'Yes,' said Bert, mentioning the address and beginning to wonder what the solemn man wanted to know for, and why he appeared to be so sorry for Philpot since it was quite evident that he had never known him.

'Thanks very much,' said the man, pulling out his pocket-book and making a note of it. 'Thanks very much indeed. Good afternoon,' and he hurried off.

'Good afternoon, sir,' said Bert and he turned to resume his work. Crass came along the garden just as the mysterious stranger was disappearing round the corner.

'What did HE want?' said Crass, who had seen the man talking to Bert.

'I don't know exactly; he was asking about the accident, and whether Joe left any children, and where he lived. He must be a very decent sort of chap, I should think. He seems quite sorry about it.'

'Oh, he does, does he?' said Crass, with a peculiar expression. 'Don't you know who he is?'

'No,' replied the boy; 'but I thought p'raps he was a reporter of some paper.

''E ain't no reporter: that's old Snatchum the undertaker. 'E's smellin' round after a job; but 'e's out of it this time, smart as 'e thinks 'e is.'

Barrington came back the next morning to work, and at breakfast-time there was a lot of talk about the accident. They said that it was all very well for Hunter to talk like that about the rope, but he had known for a long time that it was nearly worn out. Newman said that only about three weeks previously when they were raising a ladder at another job he had shown the rope to him, and Misery had replied that there was nothing wrong with it. Several others besides Newman claimed to have mentioned the matter to Hunter, and each of them said he had received the same sort of reply. But when Barrington suggested that they should attend the inquest and give evidence to that effect, they all became suddenly silent and in a conversation Barrington afterwards had with Newman the latter pointed out that if he were to do so, it would do no good to Philpot. It would not bring him back but it would be sure to do himself a lot of harm. He would never get another job at Rushton's and probably many of the other employers would 'mark him' as well.

'So if YOU say anything about it,' concluded Newman, 'don't bring my name into it.'

Barrington was constrained to admit that all things considered it was right for Newman to mind his own business. He felt that it would not be fair to urge him or anyone else to do or say anything that would

injure themselves.

Misery came to the house about eleven o'clock and informed several of the hands that as work was very slack they would get their back day at pay time. He said that the firm had tendered for one or two jobs, so they could call round about Wednesday and perhaps he might then be able to give some of them another start, Barrington was not one of those who were 'stood off', although he had expected to be on account of the speech he had made at the Beano, and everyone said that he would have got the push sure enough if it had not been for the accident.

Before he went away, Nimrod instructed Owen and Crass to go to the yard at once: they would there find Payne the carpenter, who was making Philpot's coffin, which would be ready for Crass to varnish by the time they got there.

Misery told Owen that he had left the coffin plate and the instructions with Payne and added that he was not to take too much time over the writing, because it was a very cheap job.

When they arrived at the yard, Payne was just finishing the coffin, which was of elm. All that remained to be done to it was the pitching of the joints inside and Payne was in the act of lifting the pot of boiling pitch off the fire to do this.

As it was such a cheap job, there was no time to polish it properly, so Crass proceeded to give it a couple of coats of spirit varnish, and

while he was doing this Owen wrote the plate, which was made of very thin zinc lacquered over to make it look like brass:

JOSEPH PHILPOT

Died

September 1st 19--

Aged 56 years.

The inquest was held on the following Monday morning, and as both Rushton and Hunter thought it possible that Barrington might attempt to impute some blame to them, they had worked the oracle and had contrived to have several friends of their own put on the jury. There was, however, no need for their alarm, because Barrington could not say that he had himself noticed, or called Hunter's attention to the state of the rope; and he did not wish to mention the names of the others without their permission. The evidence of Crass and the other men who were called was to the effect that it was a pure accident. None of them had noticed that the rope was unsound. Hunter also swore that he did not know of it--none of the men had ever called his attention to it; if they had done so he would have procured a new one immediately.

Philpot's landlady and Mr Rushton were also called as witnesses, and the end was that the jury returned a verdict of accidental death, and added that they did not think any blame attached to anyone.

The coroner discharged the jury, and as they and the witnesses passed out of the room, Hunter followed Rushton outside, with the hope of

being honoured by a little conversation with him on the satisfactory issue of the case; but Rushton went off without taking any notice of him, so Hunter returned to the room where the court had been held to get the coroner's certificate authorizing the interment of the body. This document is usually handed to the friends of the deceased or to the undertaker acting for them. When Hunter got back to the room he found that during his absence the coroner had given it to Philpot's landlady, who had taken it with her. He accordingly hastened outside again to ask her for it, but the woman was nowhere to be seen.

Crass and the other men were also gone; they had hurried off to return to work, and after a moment's hesitation Hunter decided that it did not matter much about the certificate. Crass had arranged the business with the landlady and he could get the paper from her later on. Having come to this conclusion, he dismissed the subject from his mind: he had several prices to work out that afternoon--estimates from some jobs the firm was going to tender for.

That evening, after having been home to tea, Crass and Sawkins met by appointment at the carpenter's shop to take the coffin to the mortuary, where Misery had arranged to meet them at half past eight o'clock. Hunter's plan was to have the funeral take place from the mortuary, which was only about a quarter of an hour's walk from the yard; so tonight they were just going to lift in the body and get the lid screwed down.

It was blowing hard and raining heavily when Crass and Sawkins set out,

carrying the coffin--covered with a black cloth--on their shoulders. They also took a small pair of tressels for the coffin to stand on. Crass carried one of these slung over his arm and Sawkins the other.

On their way they had to pass the 'Cricketers' and the place looked so inviting that they decided to stop and have a drink--just to keep the damp out, and as they could not very well take the coffin inside with them, they stood it up against the brick wall a little way from the side of the door: as Crass remarked with a laugh, there was not much danger of anyone pinching it. The Old Dear served them and just as they finished drinking the two half-pints there was a loud crash outside and Crass and Sawkins rushed out and found that the coffin had blown down and was lying bottom upwards across the pavement, while the black cloth that had been wrapped round it was out in the middle of the muddy road. Having recovered this, they shook as much of the dirt off as they could, and having wrapped it round the coffin again they resumed their journey to the mortuary, where they found Hunter waiting for them, engaged in earnest conversation with the keeper. The electric light was switched on, and as Crass and Sawkins came in they saw that the marble slab was empty.

The corpse was gone.

'Snatchum came this afternoon with a hand-truck and a corfin,' explained the keeper. 'I was out at the time, and the missis thought it was all right so she let him have the key.'

Hunter and Crass looked blankly at each other.

'Well, this takes the biskit!' said the latter as soon as he could speak.

'I thought you said you had settled everything all right with the old woman?' said Hunter.

'So I did,' replied Crass. 'I seen 'er on Friday, and I told 'er to leave it all to me to attend to, and she said she would. I told 'er that Philpot said to me that if ever anything 'appened to 'im I was to take charge of everything for 'er, because I was 'is best friend. And I told 'er we'd do it as cheap as possible.'

'Well, it seems to me as you've bungled it somehow,' said Nimrod, gloomily. 'I ought to have gone and seen 'er myself, I was afraid you'd make a mess of it,' he added in a wailing tone. 'It's always the same; everything that I don't attend to myself goes wrong.'

An uncomfortable silence fell. Crass thought that the principal piece of bungling in this affair was Hunter's failure to secure possession of the Coroner's certificate after the inquest, but he was afraid to say so.

Outside, the rain was still falling and drove in through the partly open door, causing the atmosphere of the mortuary to be even more than usually cold and damp. The empty coffin had been reared against one of

the walls and the marble slab was still stained with blood, for the keeper had not had time to clean it since the body had been removed.

'I can see 'ow it's been worked,' said Crass at last. 'There's one of the members of the club who works for Snatchum, and 'e's took it on 'isself to give the order for the funeral; but 'e's got no right to do it.'

'Right or no right, 'e's done it,' replied Misery, 'so you'd better take the box back to the shop.'

Crass and Sawkins accordingly returned to the workshop, where they were presently joined by Nimrod.

'I've been thinking this business over as I came along,' he said, 'and I don't see being beat like this by Snatchum; so you two can just put the tressels and the box on a hand cart and we'll take it over to Philpot's house.'

Nimrod walked on the pavement while the other two pushed the cart, and it was about half past nine, when they arrived at the street in Windley where Philpot used to live. They halted in a dark part of the street a few yards away from the house and on the opposite side.

'I think the best thing we can do,' said Misery, 'is for me and Sawkins to wait 'ere while you go to the 'ouse and see 'ow the land lies. You've done all the business with 'er so far. It's no use takin' the

box unless we know the corpse is there; for all we know, Snatchum may 'ave taken it 'ome with 'im.'

'Yes; I think that'll be the best way,' agreed Crass, after a moment's thought.

Nimrod and Sawkins accordingly took shelter in the doorway of an empty house, leaving the handcart at the kerb, while Crass went across the street and knocked at Philpot's door. They saw it opened by an elderly woman holding a lighted candle in her hand; then Crass went inside and the door was shut. In about a quarter of an hour he reappeared and, leaving the door partly open behind him, he came out and crossed over to where the others were waiting. As he drew near they could see that he carried a piece of paper in his hand.

'It's all right,' he said in a hoarse whisper as he came up. I've got the stifficut.'

Misery took the paper eagerly and scanned it by the light of a match that Crass struck. It was the certificate right enough, and with a sigh of relief Hunter put it into his note-book and stowed it safely away in the inner pocket of his coat, while Crass explained the result of his errand.

It appeared that the other member of the Society, accompanied by Snatchum, had called upon the old woman and had bluffed her into giving them the order for the funeral. It was they who had put her up to

getting the certificate from the Coroner--they had been careful to keep away from the inquest themselves so as not to arouse Hunter's or Crass's suspicions.

'When they brought the body 'ome this afternoon,' Crass went on, 'Snatchum tried to get the stifficut orf 'er, but she'd been thinkin' things over and she was a bit frightened 'cos she knowed she'd made arrangements with me, and she thought she'd better see me first; so she told 'im she'd give it to 'im on Thursday; that's the day as 'e was goin' to 'ave the funeral.'

'He'll find he's a day too late,' said Misery, with a ghastly grin. 'We'll get the job done on Wednesday.'

'She didn't want to give it to me, at first,' Crass concluded, 'but I told 'er we'd see 'er right if old Snatchum tried to make 'er pay for the other coffin.'

'I don't think he's likely to make much fuss about it,' said Hunter. 'He won't want everybody to know he was so anxious for the job.'

Crass and Sawkins pushed the handcart over to the other side of the road and then, lifting the coffin off, they carried it into the house, Nimrod going first.

The old woman was waiting for them with the candle at the end of the passage.

'I shall be very glad when it's all over,' she said, as she led the way up the narrow stairs, closely followed by Hunter, who carried the tressels, Crass and Sawkins, bringing up the rear with the coffin. 'I shall be very glad when it's all over, for I'm sick and tired of answerin' the door to undertakers. If there's been one 'ere since Friday there's been a dozen, all after the job, not to mention all the cards what's been put under the door, besides the one's what I've had give to me by different people. I had a pair of boots bein' mended and the man took the trouble to bring 'em 'ome when they was finished--a thing 'e's never done before--just for an excuse to give me an undertaker's card.

'Then the milkman brought one, and so did the baker, and the greengrocer give me another when I went in there on Saturday to buy some vegetables for Sunday dinner.'

Arrived at the top landing the old woman opened a door and entered a small and wretchedly furnished room.

Across the lower sash of the window hung a tattered piece of lace curtain. The low ceiling was cracked and discoloured.

There was a rickety little wooden washstand, and along one side of the room a narrow bed covered with a ragged grey quilt, on which lay a bundle containing the clothes that the dead man was wearing at the time of the accident.

There was a little table in front of the window, with a small looking-glass upon it, and a cane-seated chair was placed by the bedside and the floor was covered with a faded piece of drab-coloured carpet of no perceptible pattern, worn into holes in several places.

In the middle of this dreary room, upon a pair of tressels, was the coffin containing Philpot's body. Seen by the dim and flickering light of the candle, the aspect of this coffin, covered over with a white sheet, was terrible in its silent, pathetic solitude.

Hunter placed the pair of tressels he had been carrying against the wall, and the other two put the empty coffin on the floor by the side of the bed. The old woman stood the candlestick on the mantelpiece, and withdrew, remarking that they would not need her assistance. The three men then removed their overcoats and laid them on the end of the bed, and from the pocket of his Crass took out two large screwdrivers, one of which he handed to Hunter. Sawkins held the candle while they unscrewed and took off the lid of the coffin they had brought with them: it was not quite empty, for they had brought a bag of tools inside it.

'I think we shall be able to work better if we takes the other one orf the trussels and puts it on the floor,' remarked Crass.

'Yes, I think so, too,' replied Hunter.

Crass took off the sheet and threw it on the bed, revealing the other coffin, which was very similar in appearance to the one they had brought with them, being of elms with the usual imitation brass furniture. Hunter took hold of the head and Crass the foot and they lifted it off the tressels on to the floor.

''E's not very 'eavy; that's one good thing,' observed Hunter.

''E always was a very thin chap,' replied Crass.

The screws that held down the lid had been covered over with large-headed brass nails which had to be wrenched off before they could get at the screws, of which there were eight altogether. It was evident from the appearance of the beads of these screws that they were old ones that had been used for some purpose before: they were rusty and of different sizes, some being rather larger or smaller, than they should have been. They were screwed in so firmly that by the time they had drawn half of them out the two men were streaming with perspiration. After a while Hunter took the candle from Sawkins and the latter had a try at the screws.

'Anyone would think the dam' things had been there for a 'undred years,' remarked Hunter, savagely, as he wiped the sweat from his face and neck with his handkerchief.

Kneeling on the lid of the coffin and panting and grunting with the exertion, the other two continued to struggle with their task. Suddenly

Crass uttered an obscene curse; he had broken off one side of the head of the screw he was trying to turn and almost at the same instant a similar misfortune happened to Sawkins.

After this, Hunter again took a screwdriver himself, and when they got all the screws out with the exception of the two broken ones, Crass took a hammer and chisel out of the bag and proceeded to cut off what was left of the tops of the two that remained. But even after this was done the two screws still held the lid on the coffin, and so they had to hammer the end of the blade of the chisel underneath and lever the lid up so that they could get hold of it with their fingers. It split up one side as they tore it off, exposing the dead man to view.

Although the marks of the cuts and bruises were still visible on Philpot's face, they were softened down by the pallor of death, and a placid, peaceful expression pervaded his features. His hands were crossed upon his breast, and as he lay there in the snow-white grave clothes, almost covered in by the white lace frill that bordered the sides of the coffin, he looked like one in a profound and tranquil sleep.

They laid the broken lid on the bed, and placed the two coffins side by side on the floor as close together as possible. Sawkins stood at one side holding the candle in his left hand and ready to render with his right any assistance that might unexpectedly prove to be necessary. Crass, standing at the foot, took hold of the body by the ankles, while Hunter at the other end seized it by the shoulders with his huge,

clawlike hands, which resembled the talons of some obscene bird of prey, and they dragged it out and placed it in the other coffin.

Whilst Hunter--hovering ghoulishly over the corpse--arranged the grave clothes and the frilling, Crass laid the broken cover on the top of the other coffin and pushed it under the bed out of the way. Then he selected the necessary screws and nails from the bag, and Hunter having by this time finished, they proceeded to screw down the lid. Then they lifted the coffin on to the tressels, covering it over with the sheet, and the appearance it then presented was so exactly similar to what they had seen when they first entered the room, that it caused the same thought to occur to all of them: Suppose Snatchum took it into his head to come there and take the body out again? If he were to do so and take it up to the cemetery they might be compelled to give up the certificate to him and then all their trouble would be lost.

After a brief consultation, they resolved that it would be safer to take the corpse on the handcart to the yard and keep it in the carpenter's shop until the funeral, which could take place from there. Crass and Sawkins accordingly lifted the coffin off the tressels, and--while Hunter held the light--proceeded to carry it downstairs, a task of considerable difficulty owing to the narrowness of the staircase and the landing. However, they got it down at last and, having put it on the handcart, covered it over with the black wrapper. It was still raining and the lamp in the cart was nearly out, so Sawkins trimmed the wick and relit it before they started.

Hunter wished them 'Good-night' at the corner of the street, because it was not necessary for him to accompany them to the yard--they would be able to manage all that remained to be done by themselves. He said he would make the arrangements for the funeral as soon as he possibly could the next morning, and he would come to the job and let them know, as soon as he knew himself, at what time they would have to be in attendance to act as bearers. He had gone a little distance on his way when he stopped and turned back to them.

'It's not necessary for either of you to make a song about this business, you know,' he said.

The two men said that they quite understood that: he could depend on their keeping their mouths shut.

When Hunter had gone, Crass drew out his watch. It was a quarter to eleven. A little way down the road the lights of a public house were gleaming through the mist.

'We shall be just in time to get a drink before closing time if we buck up,' he said. And with this object they hurried on as fast as they could.

When they reached the tavern they left the cart standing by the kerb, and went inside, where Crass ordered two pints of four-ale, which he permitted Sawkins to pay for.

'How are we going on about this job?' inquired the latter after they had each taken a long drink, for they were thirsty after their exertions. 'I reckon we ought to 'ave more than a bob for it, don't you? It's not like a ordinary "lift in".'

'Of course it ain't,' replied Crass. 'We ought to 'ave about, say'--reflecting--'say arf a dollar each at the very least.'

'Little enough too,' said Sawkins. 'I was going to say arf a crown, myself.'

Crass agreed that even half a crown would not be too much.

''Ow are we going' on about chargin' it on our time sheets?' asked Sawkins, after a pause. 'If we just put a "lift in", they might only pay us a bob as usual.'

As a rule when they had taken a coffin home, they wrote on their time sheets, 'One lift in', for which they were usually paid one shilling, unless it happened to be a very high-class funeral, when they sometimes got one and sixpence. They were never paid by the hour for these jobs.

Crass smoked reflectively.

'I think the best way will be to put it like this,' he said at length. '"Philpot's funeral. One lift out and one lift in. Also takin' corpse to carpenter's shop." 'Ow would that do?'

Sawkins said that would be a very good way to put it, and they finished their beer just as the landlord intimated that it was closing time. The cart was standing where they left it, the black cloth saturated with the rain, which dripped mournfully from its sable folds.

When they reached the plot of waste ground over which they had to pass in order to reach the gates of the yard, they had to proceed very cautiously, for it was very dark, and the lantern did not give much light. A number of carts and lorries were standing there, and the path wound through pools of water and heaps of refuse. After much difficulty and jolting, they reached the gate, which Crass unlocked with the key he had obtained from the office earlier in the evening. They soon opened the door of the carpenter's shop and, after lighting the gas, they arranged the tressels and then brought in the coffin and placed it upon them. Then they locked the door and placed the key in its usual hiding-place, but the key of the outer gate they took with them and dropped into the letter-box at the office, which they had to pass on their way home.

As they turned away from the door, they were suddenly confronted by a policeman who flashed his lantern in their faces and demanded to know why they had tried the lock...

The next morning was a very busy one for Hunter, who had to see several new jobs commenced. They were all small affairs. Most of them would only take two or three days from start to finish.

Attending to this work occupied most of his morning, but all the same he managed to do the necessary business connected with the funeral, which he arranged to take place at two o'clock on Wednesday afternoon from the mortuary, where the coffin had been removed during the day, Hunter deciding that it would not look well to have the funeral start from the workshop.

Although Hunter had kept it as quiet as possible, there was a small crowd, including several old workmates of Philpot's who happened to be out of work, waiting outside the mortuary to see the funeral start, and amongst them were Bill Bates and the Semi-drunk, who were both sober. Barrington and Owen were also there, having left work for the day in order to go to the funeral. They were there too in a sense as the representatives of the other workmen, for Barrington carried a large wreath which had been subscribed for voluntarily by Rushton's men. They could not all afford to lose the time to attend the funeral, although most of them would have liked to pay that tribute of regard to their old mate, so they had done this as the next best thing. Attached to the wreath was a strip of white satin ribbon, upon which Owen had painted a suitable inscription.

Promptly at two o'clock the hearse and the mourning coach drove up with Hunter and the four bearers--Crass, Slyme, Payne and Sawkins, all dressed in black with frock coats and silk hats. Although they were nominally attired in the same way, there was a remarkable dissimilarity in their appearance. Crass's coat was of smooth, intensely black

cloth, having been recently dyed, and his hat was rather low in the crown, being of that shape that curved outwards towards the top. Hunter's coat was a kind of serge with a rather rusty cast of colour and his hat was very tall and straight, slightly narrower at the crown than at the brim. As for the others, each of them had a hat of a different fashion and date, and their 'black' clothes ranged from rusty brown to dark blue.

These differences were due to the fact that most of the garments had been purchased at different times from different second-hand clothes shops, and never being used except on such occasions as the present, they lasted for an indefinite time.

When the coffin was brought out and placed in the hearse, Hunter laid upon it the wreath that Barrington gave him, together with the another he had brought himself, which had a similar ribbon with the words: 'From Rushton & Co. With deep sympathy.'

Seeing that Barrington and Owen were the only occupants of the carriage, Bill Bates and the Semi-drunk came up to the door and asked if there was any objection to their coming and as neither Owen nor Barrington objected, they did not think it necessary to ask anyone else's permission, so they got in.

Meanwhile, Hunter had taken his position a few yards in front of the hearse and the bearers each his proper position, two on each side. As the procession turned into the main road, they saw Snatchum standing at

the corner looking very gloomy. Hunter kept his eyes fixed straight ahead and affected not to see him, but Crass could not resist the temptation to indulge in a jeering smile, which so enraged Snatchum that he shouted out:

'It don't matter! I shan't lose much! I can use it for someone else!'

The distance to the cemetery was about three miles, so as soon as they got out of the busy streets of the town, Hunter called a halt, and got up on the hearse beside the driver, Crass sat on the other side, and two of the other bearers stood in the space behind the driver's seat, the fourth getting up beside the driver of the coach; and then they proceeded at a rapid pace.

As they drew near to the cemetery they slowed down, and finally stopped when about fifty yards from the gate. Then Hunter and the bearers resumed their former position, mid they passed through the open gate and up to the door of the church, where they were received by the clerk--a man in a rusty black cassock, who stood by while they carried the coffin in and placed it on a kind of elevated table which revolved on a pivot. They brought it in footfirst, and as soon as they had placed it upon the table, the clerk swung it round so as to bring the foot of the coffin towards the door ready to be carried out again.

There was a special pew set apart for the undertakers, and in this Hunter and the bearers took their seats to await the arrival of the clergyman. Barrington and the three others sat on the opposite side.

There was no altar or pulpit in this church, but a kind of reading desk stood on a slightly raised platform at the other end of the aisle.

After a wait of about ten minutes, the clergyman entered and, at once proceeding to the desk, began to recite in a rapid and wholly unintelligible manner the usual office. If it had not been for the fact that each of his hearers had a copy of the words--for there was a little book in each pew--none of them would have been able to gather the sense of what the man was gabbling. Under any other circumstances, the spectacle of a human being mouthing in this absurd way would have compelled laughter, and so would the suggestion that this individual really believed that he was addressing the Supreme Being. His attitude and manner were contemptuously indifferent. While he recited, intoned, or gabbled, the words of the office, he was reading the certificate and some other paper the clerk had placed upon the desk, and when he had finished reading these, his gaze wandered abstractedly round the chapel, resting for a long time with an expression of curiosity upon Bill Bates and the Semi-drunk, who were doing their best to follow in their books the words he was repeating. He next turned his attention to his fingers, holding his hand away from him nearly at arm's length and critically examining the nails.

From time to time as this miserable mockery proceeded the clerk in the rusty black cassock mechanically droned out a sonorous 'Ah-men', and after the conclusion of the lesson the clergyman went out of the church, taking a short cut through the grave-stones and monuments, while the bearers again shouldered the coffin and followed the clerk to

the grave. When they arrived within a few yards of their destination, they were rejoined by the clergyman, who was waiting for them at the corner of one of the paths. He put himself at the head of the procession with an open book in his hand, and as they walked slowly along, he resumed his reading or repetition of the words of the service.

He had on an old black cassock and a much soiled and slightly torn surplice. The unseemly appearance of this dirty garment was heightened by the circumstance that he had not taken the trouble to adjust it properly. It hung all lop-sided, showing about six inches more of the black cassock underneath one side than the other. However, perhaps it is not right to criticize this person's appearance so severely, because the poor fellow was paid only seven-and-six for each burial, and as this was only the fourth funeral he had officiated at that day, probably he could not afford to wear clean linen--at any rate, not for the funerals of the lower classes.

He continued his unintelligible jargon while they were lowering the coffin into the grave, and those who happened to know the words of the office by heart were, with some difficulty, able to understand what he was saying:

'Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God of His great mercy to take unto Himself the soul of our Dear Brother here departed, we therefore commit his body to the ground; earth to earth; ashes to ashes, dust to dust--'

The earth fell from the clerk's hand and rattled on the lid of the coffin with a mournful sound, and when the clergyman had finished repeating the remainder of the service, he turned and walked away in the direction of the church. Hunter and the rest of the funeral party made their way back towards the gate of the cemetery where the hearse and the carriage were waiting.

On their way they saw another funeral procession coming towards them. It was a very plain-looking closed hearse with only one horse. There was no undertaker in front and no bearers walked by the sides.

It was a pauper's funeral.

Three men, evidently dressed in their Sunday clothes, followed behind the hearse. As they reached the church door, four old men who were dressed in ordinary everyday clothes, came forward and opening the hearse took out the coffin and carried it into the church, followed by the other three, who were evidently relatives of the deceased. The four old men were paupers--inmates of the workhouse, who were paid sixpence each for acting as bearers.

They were just taking out the coffin from the hearse as Hunter's party was passing, and most of the latter paused for a moment and watched them carry it into the church. The roughly made coffin was of white deal, not painted or covered in any way, and devoid of any fittings or ornament with the exception of a square piece of zinc on the lid. None of Rushton's party was near enough to recognize any of the mourners or

to read what was written on the zinc, but if they had been they would have seen, roughly painted in black letters

J.L.

Aged 67

and some of them would have recognized the three mourners who were Jack Linden's sons.

As for the bearers, they were all retired working men who had come into their 'titles'. One of them was old Latham, the venetian blind maker.