

823.91

T799a

The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists

by

Robert Tressell

LAWRENCE & WISHART
LONDON

THE RAGGED TROUSERED
PHILANTHROPISTS



823.81

728.8

The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists

by

Robert Tressell

LAWRENCE & WISHART
LONDON

First published 1955
Reprinted 1956

The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists was first published by Grant Richards Ltd. in 1914, in the edition edited by Miss Jessie Pope, and this same edition is now published by the Richards Press Ltd. We gratefully acknowledge the courtesy of the Richards Press Ltd. for permission to publish the present complete edition.

Printed in Great Britain by
The Camelot Press Ltd., London and Southampton

PUBLISHER'S FOREWORD

WE are proud to publish this edition of *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, the first to be based faithfully on the author's manuscript. A masterpiece of its own kind has been fully restored, printed exactly as the author wrote it. It is the first account in English of the lives and opinions of a group of working men, written with realism and passion, not by an outside observer, but by "one of themselves". In our lifetime it has become a classic of the Labour movement.

Robert Noonan, who wrote this book under the pen-name of Robert Tressell, was a house-painter of Irish extraction. After various wanderings, he settled in Hastings about 1902, and worked for local builders. In his spare time he wrote *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*. He died of tuberculosis in 1911, in the Liverpool Royal Infirmary. Three years later, in April, 1914, his book was published by Grant Richards Ltd.

He had left the manuscript with his daughter, who on his death took a job as a servant-girl in London. Tied up with pink ribbon, it reposed in a tin box under her bed. Waiting at table, she chanced to hear her employers talking about books and mentioned to them her father's work. This was how it came to be published. It was edited for Grant Richards by Miss Jessie Pope, and great credit is due to them for bringing it before the public.

The original handwritten manuscript came to light in a somewhat damaged condition in 1946. It could then be seen that the 1914 edition comprised only about two-thirds of the whole. Moreover, not only had extensive cuts been made, but the published book had been built up by combining passages that in the original were often unconnected.

In this way the editor had greatly altered the book, changing the author's original intention. Tressell gave his novel an optimistic ending. For this a passage was substituted from the middle of the manuscript, which in its new context suggested that the chief character, the Socialist workman, Owen, was bent on suicide. Many incidents were omitted altogether. One character, Barrington, a Socialist who obviously played an important role in the author's original conception, was erased. A sub-plot

concerning the seduction of a worker's wife by their lodger was entirely changed, perhaps out of consideration for the prejudices of the time.

In addition to these and other cuts and changes, there was the usual editing and systematising of grammar and punctuation in readiness for the press.

In May, 1918, appeared a still shorter version, the widely circulated "abridged edition". Eleven chapters of the 1914 version were omitted from it.

The present edition follows Tressell's manuscript. Some manuscript pages were pasted over, corrected, paraphrased or summarised. Where they could not be restored, the original editor's paraphrases are given, and are printed within two square brackets. A few pages have been entirely lost, and gaps of this kind are indicated by a row of dots. Where necessary linking passages have been supplied by the present editor, and these are printed within square brackets. The author's original grammar, spelling and punctuation, based on his quick apprehension of spoken idiom, as well as his somewhat inconsistent use of capital letters, are restored. Only the minimum of corrections have been made.

The arrangement and titles of chapters in this edition correspond to the list of chapters which the author attached to his manuscript in all except one particular. The original list includes fifty-five chapters, of which the third is entitled "Mugsborough". Corresponding to this there was attached to the manuscript a fragment, reproduced in this edition as an Appendix. The fifty-five chapters in the author's original list are therefore reduced to fifty-four.

The author's original Preface (uncompleted) has been restored. He designed his own title page, which is reproduced in this edition. It will be noted that he spelt his pen-name "Tressell", and not "Tressal", as it was rendered in the editions circulating hitherto.

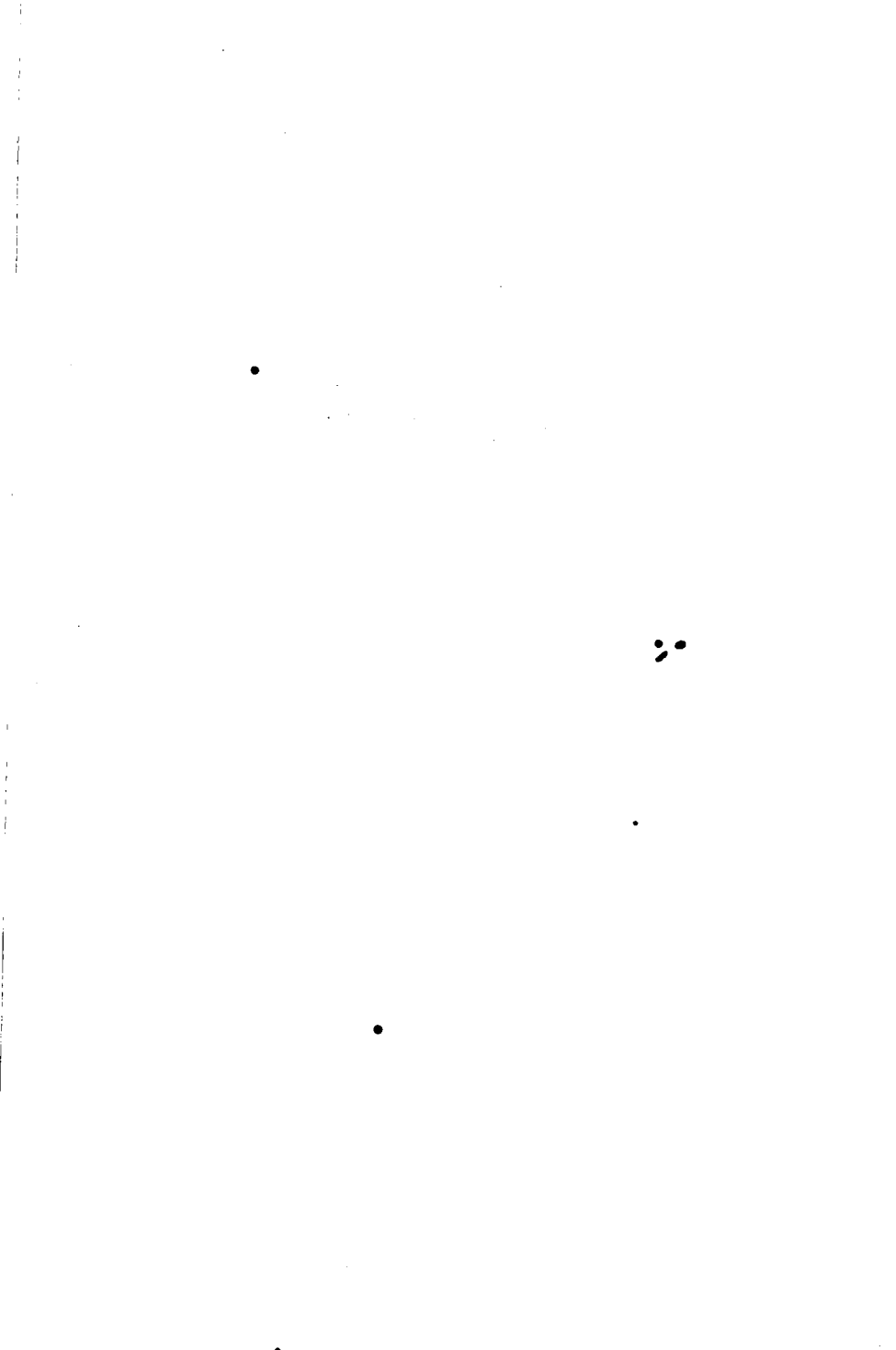
The Publishers would like to pay tribute to their editor, Mr. F. C. Ball. His book, *Tressell of Mugsborough*, records all that has been discovered so far about the author of *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, and describes the circumstances of the recovery of the manuscript. Mr. Ball has devoted many years to making Tressell's achievement known and accessible, and this present edition is a monument to his devoted labours.

THE RAGGED TROUSERED PHILANTHROPISTS.

Being the story of twelve months
in Hell, told by one of the
damned, and written down
by Robert Tressell.

Original title page drawn by the author

•



CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
Preface	II
1. An Imperial Banquet. A Philosophical Discussion. The Mysterious Stranger. Britons Never shall be Slaves	13
2. Nimrod: a Mighty Hunter before the Lord	31
3. The Financiers	49
4. The Placard	67
5. The Clock-case	72
6. It is not My Crime	79
7. The Exterminating Machines	97
8. The Cap on the Stairs	109
9. Who is to Pay?	116
10. The Long Hill	119
11. Hands and Brains	126
12. The Letting of the Room	132
13. Penal Servitude and Death	135
14. Three Children. The Wages of Intelligence	143
15. The Undeserving Persons and the Upper and Nether Millstones	148
16. True Freedom	167
17. The Rev. John Starr	176
18. The Lodger	189
19. The Filling of the Tank	194
20. The Forty Thieves. The Battle: •Brigands <i>versus</i> Bandits	207
21. The Reign of Terror. The Great Money Trick	216
22. The Phrenologist	231
23. The 'Open-air'	242
24. Ruth	252
25. The Oblong	268

10	THE RAGGED TROUSERED PHILANTHROPISTS	
26.	The Slaughter	302
27.	The March of the Imperialists	309
28.	The Week before Christmas	313
29.	The Pandorama	322
30.	The Brigands hold a Council of War	330
31.	The Deserter	336
32.	The Veteran	338
33.	The Soldier's Children	340
34.	The Beginning of the End	347
35.	Facing the "Problem"	359
36.	The O.B.S.	365
37.	A Brilliant Epigram	371
38.	The Brigands' Cave	381
39.	The Brigands at Work	386
40.	<i>Vive la System!</i>	394
41.	The Easter Offering. The Beano Meeting	404
42.	June	414
43.	The Good Old Summer-time	421
44.	The Beano	468
45.	The Great Oration	498
46.	The 'Sixty-five'	543
47.	The Ghouls	551
48.	The Wise Men of the East	567
49.	The Undesired	592
50.	Sundered	596
51.	The Widow's Son	603
52.	"It's a Far, Far Better Thing that I do, than I have Ever Done"	610
53.	Barrington Finds a Situation	615
54.	The End	620
	Appendix. Mugsborough	631

PREFACE

IN writing this book my intention was to present, in the form of an interesting story, a faithful picture of working-class life—more especially of those engaged in the Building trades—in a small town in the south of England.

I wished to describe the relations existing between the workmen and their employers, the attitude and feelings of these two classes towards each other; the condition of the workers during the different seasons of the year, their circumstances when at work and when out of employment: their pleasures, their intellectual outlook, their religious and political opinions and ideals.

The action of the story covers a period of only a little over twelve months, but in order that the picture might be complete it was necessary to describe how the workers are circumstanced at all periods of their lives, from the cradle to the grave. Therefore the characters include women and children, a young boy—the apprentice—some improvers, journeymen in the prime of life, and worn-out old men.

I designed to show the conditions resulting from poverty and unemployment: to expose the futility of the measures taken to deal with them and to indicate what I believe to be the only real remedy, namely—Socialism. I intended to explain what Socialists understand by the word "Poverty": to define the Socialist theory of the causes of poverty, and to explain how Socialists propose to abolish poverty.

It may be objected that, considering the number of books dealing with these subjects already existing, such a work as this was uncalled for. The answer is that not only are the majority of people opposed to Socialism, but a very brief conversation with an average anti-socialist is sufficient to show that he does not know what Socialism means. The same is true of all the anti-socialist writers and the 'great statesmen' who make anti-socialist speeches: unless we believe that they are all deliberate liars and impostors, who to serve their own interests labour to mislead other people, we must conclude that they do not understand Socialism. There is no other possible explanation of the

extraordinary things they write and say. The thing they cry out against is not Socialism but a phantom of their own imagining.

Another answer is that 'The Philanthropists' is not a treatise or essay, but a novel. My main object was to write a readable story full of human interest and based on the happenings of everyday life, the subject of Socialism being treated incidentally.

✓ This was the task I set myself. To what extent I have succeeded is for others to say; but whatever their verdict, the work possesses at least one merit—that of being true. I have invented nothing. There are no scenes or incidents in the story that I have not either witnessed myself or had conclusive evidence of. As far as I dared I let the characters express themselves in their own sort of language and consequently some passages may be considered objectionable. At the same time I believe that—because it is true—the book is not without its humorous side.

The scenes and characters are typical of every town in the South of England and they will be readily recognised by those concerned. If the book is published I think it will appeal to a very large number of readers. Because it is true, it will probably be denounced as a libel on the working classes and their employers, and upon the religious-professing section of the community. But I believe it will be acknowledged as true by most of those who are compelled to spend their lives amid the surroundings it describes, and it will be evident that no attack is made upon sincere religion. . . .

Chapter I

AN IMPERIAL BANQUET. A PHILOSOPHICAL DISCUSSION. THE MYSTERIOUS STRANGER. BRITONS NEVER SHALL BE SLAVES

THE house was named 'The Cave'. It was a large old-fashioned three-storied building standing in about an acre of ground, and situated about a mile outside the town of Mugsborough. It stood back nearly two hundred yards from the main road and was reached by means of a by-road or lane, on each side of which was a hedge formed of hawthorn trees and blackberry bushes. This house had been unoccupied for many years and it was now being altered and renovated for its new owner by the firm of Rushton & Co. Builders and Decorators.

There were, altogether, about twenty-five men working there, carpenters, plumbers, plasterers, bricklayers and painters, besides several unskilled labourers. New floors were being put in where the old ones were decayed, and upstairs two of the rooms were being made into one by demolishing the parting wall and substituting an iron girder. Some of the window frames and sashes were so rotten that they were being replaced. Some of the ceilings and walls were so cracked and broken that they had to be replastered. Openings were being cut through walls and doors were being put where no doors had ever been before. Old broken chimney pots were being taken down and new ones were being taken up and fixed in their places. All the old whitewash had to be washed off the ceilings and all the old paper had to be scraped off the walls preparatory to the house being repainted and decorated. The air was full of the sounds of hammering and sawing, the ringing of trowels, the rattle of pails, the splashing of water brushes, and the scraping of the stripping knives used by those who were removing the old wallpaper. Besides being full of these sounds the air was heavily laden with dust and disease germs, powdered mortar, lime, plaster, and the dirt that had been accumulating within the old house for years. In brief, those employed there might be said to be living in a Tariff Reform Paradise—they had Plenty of Work.

At twelve o'clock Bob Crass—the painters' foreman—blew a prolonged blast upon a whistle and all hands assembled in the kitchen, where Bert the apprentice had already prepared the tea, which was ready in the large galvanised iron pail that he had placed in the middle of the floor. By the side of the pail were a number of old jam-jars, mugs, dilapidated tea-cups and one or two empty condensed milk tins. Each man on the "job" paid Bert threepence a week for the tea and sugar—they did not have milk—and although they had tea at breakfast-time as well as at dinner, the lad was generally considered to be making a fortune. •

Two pairs of steps, laid parallel on their sides at a distance of about eight feet from each other, with a plank laid across, in front of the fire, several upturned pails, and the drawers belonging to the dresser, formed the seating accommodation. The floor of the room was covered with all manner of debris, dust, dirt, fragments of old mortar and plaster. A sack containing cement was leaning against one of the walls, and a bucket containing some stale whitewash stood in one corner.

As each man came in he filled his cup, jam-jar or condensed milk tin with tea from the steaming pail, before sitting down. Most of them brought their food in little wicker baskets which they held on their laps or placed on the floor beside them.

At first there was no attempt at conversation and nothing was heard but the sounds of eating and drinking and the frizzling of the bloater which Easton, one of the painters, was toasting on the end of a pointed stick at the fire.

"I don't think much of this bloody tea," suddenly remarked Sawkins, one of the labourers.

"Well it oughter be all right," retorted Bert; "it's been bilin' ever since 'arf past eleven."

Bert White was a frail-looking, weedy, pale-faced boy, fifteen years of age and about four feet nine inches in height. His trousers were part of a suit that he had once worn for best, but that was so long ago that they had become too small for him, fitting rather tightly and scarcely reaching the top of his patched and broken hobnailed boots. The knees and the bottoms of the legs of his trousers had been patched with square pieces of cloth, several shades darker than the original fabric, and these patches were now all in rags. His coat was several sizes too large for him and hung about him like a dirty ragged sack. He was a pitiable spectacle of neglect and wretchedness as he sat there on an

upturned pail, eating his bread and cheese with fingers that, like his clothing, were grimed with paint and dirt.

"Well then, you can't have put enough tea in, or else you've bin usin' up wot was left yesterday," continued Sawkins.

"Why the bloody 'ell don't you leave the boy alone?" said Harlow, another painter. "If you don't like the tea you needn't drink it. For my part, I'm sick of listening to you about it every damn day."

"It's all very well for you to say I needn't drink it," answered Sawkins, "but I've paid my share an' I've got a right to express an opinion. It's my belief that 'arf the money we gives 'im is spent in penny 'orribles: 'e's always got one in 'is hand, an' to make wot tea 'e does buy last, 'e collects all the slops wot's left and biles it up day after day."

"No, I don't!" said Bert, who was on the verge of tears. "It's not me wot buys the things at all. I gives all the money I gets to Crass, and 'e buys them 'imself, so there!"

At this revelation, some of the men furtively exchanged significant glances, and Crass, the foreman, became very red.

"You'd better keep your bloody thruppence and make your own tea after this week," he said, addressing Sawkins, "and then p'raps we'll 'ave a little peace at meal-times."

"An' you needn't ask me to cook no bloaters or bacon for you no more," added Bert, tearfully, "cos I won't do it."

Sawkins was not popular with any of the others. When, about twelve months previously, he first came to work for Rushton & Co., he was a simple labourer, but since then he had 'picked up' a slight knowledge of the trade, and having armed himself with a putty-knife and put on a white jacket, regarded himself as a fully qualified painter. The others did not perhaps object to him trying to better his condition, but his wages—fivepence an hour—were twopence an hour less than the standard rate, and the result was that in slack times often a better workman was "stood off" when Sawkins was kept on. Moreover, he was generally regarded as a sneak who carried tales to the foreman and the 'Bloke'. Every new hand who was taken on was usually warned by his new mates "not to let that b——r Sawkins see anything."

The unpleasant silence which now ensued was at length broken by one of the men, who told a dirty story, and in the laughter and applause that followed, the incident of the tea was forgotten.

"How did you get on yesterday?" asked Crass, addressing

Bundy, the plasterer, who was intently studying the sporting columns of the *Daily Obscure*.

"No luck," replied Bundy, gloomily. "I had a bob each way on Stockwell, in the first race, but it was scratched before the start."

This gave rise to a conversation between Crass, Bundy, and one or two others concerning the chances of different horses in the morrow's races. It was Friday, and no one had much money, so at the suggestion of Bundy, a Syndicate was formed, each member contributing threepence, for the purpose of backing a dead certainty given by the renowned Captain Kiddem of the *Obscure*. One of those who did not join the syndicate was Frank Owen, who was as usual absorbed in a newspaper. He was generally regarded as a bit of a crank: for it was felt that there must be something wrong about a man who took no interest in racing or football and was always talking a lot of rot about religion and politics. If it had not been for the fact that he was generally admitted to be an exceptionally good workman, they would have had but little hesitation about thinking that he was mad. This man was about thirty-two years of age, and of medium height, but so slightly built that he appeared taller. There was a suggestion of refinement in his clean-shaven face, but his complexion was ominously clear, and an unnatural colour flushed the thin cheeks.

There was a certain amount of justification for the attitude of his fellow workmen, for Owen held the most unusual and unorthodox opinions on the subjects mentioned.

The affairs of the world are ordered in accordance with orthodox opinions. If anyone [did not think in accordance with these he soon discovered this fact for himself. Owen saw that in the world a small class of people were] possessed of a great abundance and superfluity of the things that are produced by work. He saw also that a very great number—in fact, the majority of the people—lived on the verge of want; and that a smaller but still very large number lived lives of semi-starvation from the cradle to the grave; while a yet smaller but still very great number actually died of hunger, or, maddened by privation, killed themselves and their children in order to put a period to their misery. [And strangest of all—in his opinion—he saw that the people who enjoyed abundance of the things that are made by work, were the people who did Nothing: and that the others, who lived in want or died of hunger, were the people who worked.] And seeing all this he thought that it was wrong, that