

The Ragged-Trousered Philanthropists. By ROBERT TRESSALL, House-painter.
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net.

AN English house-painter, so the story runs, weary of the struggle against the present order of things, slipped out of it all, leaving behind him a dependent family—and a manuscript in which he had recorded his criticism of the system under which he had lived and died. The manuscript lay untouched until one day his daughter, a nurse maid, brought it to the attention of her mistress, who in turn persuaded one of the editors of *Punch* to look it over. "I consented without enthusiasm," says the editor, "expecting to be neither interested nor amused, and found that I had chanced upon a remarkable human document. With grim humor and pitiless realism the workingman has revealed the lives and hearts of his mates, their opinions of their betters, their political views, their attitude toward Socialism. Through the busy din of the hammer and the scraping knife, the clang of the pail, the swish of the whitewash, the yell of the foreman, comes the talk of the men, their jokes and curses, their hopes and terrors, the whimpering of their old people, the cry of their children." Here is a story without a plot, a novel in which there is no attempt to turn polished or clever phrases, no apparent effort to construct a piece of literature; nothing but a grim, sordid story of a score of laborers as they go about their daily work when work is to be had and their dull, hopeless search for it when the job fails. Yet it is a tale which from the first page, where the men are discovered busily remodeling "The Cave," until the last, when the tubercular Socialist is thinking it will be better to take his family with him than to leave them for society to rend as soon as he is gone, grips with the intensity of life itself. Gaunt hunger, ignorance, disease, and death stalk through its drab pages,

but always with the monotony of the commonplace, never with the dignity of tragedy. Along with them, a silent but persistent shadow, walks the pursuing fear of unemployment, never far from the thoughts of every character in the story, from the chief of the bosses down to the boy Bert, who, pale and thin from long hours and lack of sufficient food, drags the tool handcart from place to place at the behest of the not over-patient toilers. To little purpose does the socialistic member of their company try to explain to them the follies and cruelties of the system under which they live. His elaborate explanations of the "Money Trick" and the reasons for their miserable condition bring only jeers and ridicule from his dull and sodden mates, who follow unthinkingly the leadership of one or another party, refusing to give serious thought to the root causes of their misery. Ignorant and vicious they remain to the end, revealing with pitiless veracity the weaknesses of their own class. Now and again sardonic humor glints across the dreary chronicle, but for the most part these "ragged philanthropists" live and work hopelessly, giving all, receiving scarcely enough to keep the souls within their bodies. "It is a masterpiece of realism," says Robert Hunter. "The work of a craftsman, it is true, unerring, and pitiless in its delineation of men and life. Were Zola and Tolstoi living I am sure they would look upon this common house-painter with envy, as one whose novice hand had outdone them."