

What the Farm Laborer Wants

(THIRD EDITION.—REVISED AUGUST, 1894.)

He wants Better Wages.—Now he usually gets ten or twelve shillings a week, not enough to keep himself and his family in health.

He wants a Safe and Healthy Home.—Frequently he lives in a cottage belonging to the farmer or the squire, often little better than a pigstye, out of which he can be turned at a week's notice. The drinking water may be bad, and the drainage worse; and so fever comes, and ague, and rheumatism.

He wants more Freedom.—Now he must touch his hat to the squire, or he will get no blankets at Christmas; he must go to church, or the parson can cut him out of his Charity List; and he must submit like a slave to the farmer, or he will get turned off the land when winter comes.

No laborer by himself can get better wages, a better home, or more freedom. He is so poor, that the farmer, the squire, and the parson are always too many for him. Too often, he, like his father before him, will just drag along with his family on his wages, beg for out-door relief in his old age, and finish up by being buried as a pauper.

But many a thing that a man cannot get by himself, he can get if banded together with his fellows into a Trade Union. If all the laborers in the village will stand by one another, they can raise wages several shillings a week, get good homes for themselves with land to work on, and become more powerful in the village than the squire and the parson and the farmer put together.

All these things an agricultural laborer can get, slowly but surely, bit by bit, if he will only use the power which he already has—if he will only stand shoulder to shoulder with his fellow men and claim his rights.

Two things he must do.

He must have a Union. He must Use his Vote.

Joining the Union will cost him a few pence a week, but the Union will, in return, enable him to fight his battles. The Coal Porters in London, without a Union, used to get about twenty-four shillings a week; now that they have a Union they get thirty-two shillings, or at least eight shillings a week more than they had before; and all they have to pay to the Union is threepence a week. A Union is always worth more than it costs.

Moreover, the laborer now has several Votes. Using these costs him nothing at all, and can do very much to make things better for him.

The laborer can vote at the **PARISH MEETING** whenever one is held. He can also vote every year for the election of **PARISH COUNCILLORS** and of **DISTRICT COUNCILLORS**, who are also **GUARDIANS**. These elections are very important, and he cannot be cheated out of his vote on the excuse that his land



lord pays the poor rate. Every occupier of a cottage and every lodger voter is entitled to vote, and may also be elected a member of the Parish or District Council, whether he pays the poor rate or not.

The laborer can also vote at the elections for the **COUNTY COUNCIL, and for PARLIAMENT.**

Parliament, the County Council, and the Parish and District Councils can do for the laborer out of the rates and taxes what he can never do for himself out of his small wages. *That is why the landlords, the farmers, and sometimes even the parsons have done all they could to keep the friends of the laborers from getting elected to the County Council or to Parliament.* And that is why they prevented the establishment of Parish Councils as long as they could, and will try to keep the laborers off the Council now. But they cannot prevent it if the laborers are determined to have their rights. Nobody can now be elected, either to any of the local Councils or to Parliament, without the votes of laborers; and the laborers must see to it that only their own friends get elected. They need not be afraid to vote as they like, for the ballot keeps their votes secret. Remember there are at least four laborers to every man of any other class in the country; and no one can now have more than one vote at the election of a Parish or District Council. Each laborer's vote is as good as the squire's or the parson's.

What the Parish Councils Can Do.*

In the past the village has been ruled by the squire and the parson, with the help of the lawyer and farmer. Now it will be ruled by the Parish Meeting and the Parish Council, elected by the votes of all the village. These bodies can get land for allotments for laborers, and for a village hall and baths, look after the parish charities, lay on pure water, light the village streets, make good drains to keep away fever, open a village library and reading room, protect the village green, see that no one stops up public footpaths, and generally look after the interests of the laborers. (See Note 1.)

But the laborers want more than this, and they must use their votes at the election of Members of Parliament so that the powers of the Parish Council may be increased. They want

1. Restoration of the Common Land.

In the old times there were plenty of common lands and roadside strips on which the villager could play cricket, graze his donkey or cow, or let his poultry and geese pick up a living; but the landlords in Parliament made laws by which these rights were lost. Every year the squires, with the help of their lawyers, sneak acres of common land. The Parish Council can put a stop to all future robbery, but it must have power to make them disgorge what has been stolen. (See Notes 1 and 2.)

2. Cheap and Good Allotments.

Everyone knows how the farmer and the squire try to prevent the men from getting reasonably cheap allotments.

Parish Councils have power to hire land for allotments if they can come to an agreement with the landowner, but they have no power

* For further particulars see Fabian Tract No. 62, "Parish and District Councils: What they are and what they can do." Price 1d. Fabian Society, 276 Strand, London.

to buy land or *compel* the landowner to let it. If he refuses to sell or to let, the Parish Council or six electors may appeal to the District Council, the County Council, or the Local Government Board. (See Note 3). All this appealing will take a long time and cost a lot of money, and may not be successful. The laborers must not be satisfied until Parliament has given the Parish Councils full powers to buy or hire all the land they want. (See Note 1.)

3. Better Homes.

Allotments of bare land are not much use so long as the laborer can be turned out of his cottage at a week's notice. They know this well in Ireland, where the Boards of Guardians often build cottages and let them to laborers at fair rents. Our Parish Councils must have the same power. When the laborer has no other landlord than the Parish Council which he and his fellow laborers elect, he will no longer run the risk of being turned out of house and home merely because his master is angry with him. (See Notes 1 and 3.)

4. Real Free Schools and Better Ones.

Parliament has already passed a Free Education Act, but in many village schools pence are still asked for, and the laborers must see to it that the Act shall be a reality instead of a sham.

They should now demand Free Education everywhere, not as a charity but as a right; and they should also demand that the schools should be managed by an elected Board instead of by the parson and his friends. The laborers should vote for Free Education in schools under public control, with good teachers, plenty of books, and a free dinner for every child; and, when clever village boys or girls have passed their standards, there should be free Continuation Schools provided where they can be prepared for public scholarships which will give them a free College training. (See Note 4.)

5. Pensions for the Old People.

When the laborer gets old, or so broken with rheumatism that he can work no more, what happens to him now? He becomes a pauper, and either goes into the workhouse, or (if he is lucky) gets half-a-crown a week as out-door relief to starve on. He loses his vote; he is no longer a citizen. When he dies he is buried as a pauper.

This is not what the rich provide for their own class. Perhaps the squire is an army officer; if so, in the prime of life he will get a pension, paid regularly out of the taxes. While he lives, even in his old age, he keeps all his rights and dignities; when he dies he will be buried with all honor.

Why should not the laborer have a pension in his old age, like the army officer and the government clerk? He has served his country as truly as they, and instead of the workhouse or parish pay, the worn-out laborer must demand an honorable pension so that he may spend his old age in freedom.

6. Reform of Taxation.

Whenever the laborer spends threepence for tobacco, he pays *only a farthing* for the tobacco itself: the other twopence three-farthings is a tax. Every glass of beer, every cup of tea, every mug of cocoa, every pound of currants is made dearer because the

Government has taxed it. But all the money got by this taxation is used up, before it comes to the laborer, in making things pleasant for people like the squires, parsons, and other rich idlers. Now the laborer must only vote for those members of Parliament who will take the taxes off his tobacco and his beer, his tea, his cocoa and his currants, and put in their place new taxes on the backs of those who can best bear them.

Whose backs are these? Why, the backs of the landlords, of course: that is, those people who take the rent out of the land, though they never do a stroke of hard work to raise the crops. They did not make the land: why should they have the power to make other men pay for it? In past times much of the land was held by those that worked on it, and they kept for themselves the whole of the crops. Now the land is "owned" by a few landlords who, among them all, draw over fifty million pounds a year as rent of agricultural land alone. This amounts to more than a pound a week for every agricultural laborer in the country. Is not this reason enough why wages are so low?

Some day we shall get back the rent which the landlords take from us, and restore the land to the people. Meantime it is only fair that those who draw the rent should pay the rates. All the things which the Parish Council can be set to do for the village can be paid for out of the rates; and the landlord and the tithe-owner must pay those rates.

These, then, are the wants of the Farm Laborer:—

BETTER WAGES.

MORE POWERS FOR THE PARISH COUNCILS.

RESTORATION OF COMMON LANDS.

REAL FREE SCHOOLS AND BETTER ONES.

CHEAP AND GOOD ALLOTMENTS.

PENSIONS FOR THE OLD PEOPLE.

BETTER HOMES. REFORM OF TAXATION.

All these things you can get for yourself by your Trade Union and your vote, if you and all the other laborers in the district will join the Union and will agree to vote only for those who will promise to help to get them for you.

NOTE 1. In villages which have no Parish Council the Parish Meeting can obtain all its powers upon application to the County Council.

NOTE 2. Send word of any encroachment on commons, waysides, or footpaths to the Secretary, Commons Preservation Society, 1 Gt. College St., Westminster.

NOTE 3. Leaflets showing how Allotments and Cottages can be obtained under the present law can be obtained, free of charge, by writing to the Fabian Society, 276 Strand, London.

NOTE 4. Any parent from whom school pence are still demanded should write to the Secretary, Education Department, London, claiming a free school.

For list and particulars of other tracts like this, write to the Secretary of the Fabian Society, 276 Strand, W.C. Printed lists of questions to be put to candidates for the Parish, District, or County Councils, or Parliament, will be sent free to any laborer. Complete set of 53 tracts, price 2/3 post free; or, bound in buckram, 3/9 post free.

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