



# What the Farm Laborer Wants

(SECOND EDITION.—REVISED JUNE, 1893.)

**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, but he has no redress; 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 the Village Charities; 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 Easter **VESTRY**; but he can't do much there yet. He can also vote every year for the election of **GUARDIANS of the POOR**. This election is very important to him; and he ought to see that he is not cheated out of his vote on the excuse that his landlord pays the poor rate. Every occupier of a cottage is entitled to vote, whether he pays the poor rate or not.

But the most important elections are those for the **COUNTY COUNCIL, and for PARLIAMENT**.

Parliament and the County Council 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, do all they can to keep the friends of the laborers from getting elected to the County Council or to Parliament.* But they cannot prevent it if the laborers are determined to have their rights. Nobody can now be elected either to the County Council 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 a secret from everybody but themselves. Remember there are at least four laborers to every man of any other class in the country; and each laborer's vote is as good as the squire's.

The friends of the laborer are those who will help to pass laws to make him free. What must these laws give him?

### 1.—Parish Councils.

At present the village is ruled by the squire and the parson, with the help of the lawyer and farmer. The laborer needs to have the village ruled by a Parish Council, elected by the votes of all the village. Such a Council could get land for allotments for laborers, put up the necessary buildings on them, govern the parish school without fear or favor, look after the parish charities, build new cottages, lay on pure water, make good drains to keep away fever, provide and manage a cottage hospital, open a village reading room, protect the village green, see that no one stops up public footpaths, and in all ways be as careful of the interests of the laborers as the parson and the squire are now of their own.

### 2.—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 must have power to make them disgorge what they have stolen, and put a stop to all future robbery. (*See Note 1.*)

### 3.—Allotments.

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



The laborer will never get land on fair terms as long as he has to look for it to a private landlord. Once get an elected Parish Council, with power to grant allotments, and the laborers will be able to get as much land as they like, at fair rents, with no fear of being turned out as long as they pay honestly. Parish Councils are the only real means of getting allotments.

#### 4.—Better Homes.

But 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. The Parish Council could give him, too, a good supply of pure drinking water laid on to places in the village near the houses, so that it need not be fetched in pails from some foul well. The Parish Council could drain and light the whole village, and keep every bye-road as clean as the road up to the Squire's house.

#### 5.—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 2.*)

#### 6.—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 from his own Parish Council.



## 7.—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 vote only 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. PARISH COUNCILS.**

**RESTORATION OF COMMON LANDS.**

**REAL FREE SCHOOLS AND BETTER ONES.**

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

NOTE 2. 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. Complete set of 40 tracts, price  $\frac{2}{3}$  post free.

---

Published by the FABIAN SOCIETY, 276 Strand, London, W.C., and to be obtained of the Secretary, at 1/- per 100, or 1d. for 6.