

MANIFESTO TO PROGRESSIVE LONDONERS ON THE VESTRY ELECTIONS.

FELLOW-CITIZENS !

London's habitual disregard of London's own affairs is made manifest every May at the Vestry elections. One-third of the local governors of the Metropolis are then elected. The Vestries administer the Public Health Acts, and control the lighting, cleansing, and paving of our streets, the removal of dust, the regulation of buildings, the assessment of rates, and many others matters which affect the comfort and wellbeing of each one of us during every hour of our lives. Unfortunately the old-fashioned system under which the Vestries are elected is so contrived as to seriously hamper their usefulness. The iniquitously high and narrow qualification for membership, and the ever-present tradition of ancient abuses turn them into preserves for those who profit by the very nuisances which it is their business as vestrymen to abate, and who have presented themselves for election expressly that they may be secure from Vestry interference. Thus we often find that the successful candidates are local jerry-builders, owners of rookeries where men and women are housed like hogs, and where children perish by dirt and disease like flies in a frost. They solemnly denounce sanitary inspectors as spies, and deliberately frustrate the sanitary laws which they are supposed to administer.

How long will the rate-payers of London allow such men to enrich themselves, whilst ruining the health and emptying the pockets of those they represent, and to provide out of the poor-rate for the pauper orphans and widows whom they are creating? If we must select candidates with a qualification of £25 or £40, we can at least try to find honest ones, and work for them and vote for them when the day of election arrives. A few determined men can effect a big reform if they make up their minds to it. And it is worth doing. Rookeries destroyed, fever cleaned out, fresh air and open spaces provided will mean a lower death rate, lives saved which would have been wasted, health and steady work and pay in place of sickness and enforced idleness and want. We can take a step in this direction in London next week if we stir ourselves up to vigorous action.

Select good candidates whom you can depend upon to provide a proper sanitary staff large enough to cope with the new work which the Public Health Acts require. Insist on the payment of Trade Union wages to all men in Vestry employ. See that the Vestry has the dust collected by its own men, and no longer employs contractors who make the bigger profit the more they neglect their

duty. Discourage false economy by preventing the Vestry from employing unfair printers, or purchasing goods from sweaters who by low wages and long hours are filling the workhouses and increasing the poor rates. Demand proper baths and wash-houses, and insist on their being kept open on Sundays.

In choosing Progressive candidates remember that here is no question of Liberal or Tory, of Home Ruler or Unionist, of Churchman or Dissenter. The administrators of London affairs must be judged by their opinions and sympathies on London questions and their attitude towards the general progressive movement on which the future of the greatest city in the world depends. We have had plenty of speeches and of shouting about London Reform. Now is the opportunity to show that London reformers mean business.

The Executive Committee of the Fabian Society.

276, Strand,

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