

Allotments and How to Get Them

(AUGUST 1894.)

WHAT is the use of an allotment to a working man? It has many uses. In the first place, if he puts good labor into it, and if he keeps a pig to eat some of the produce and to supply manure, an acre allotment is worth three or four shillings a week to him, and often more.

Secondly, he is always sure of having a good supply of vegetables for his family.

When he is out of work, too, he can spend some of the time that would otherwise be wasted, in improving his own piece of land.

Allotments in a village often have the important result of providing a living for the old men; for a man who is past working for the farmer can frequently do a little on his own land or can get a day's work now and then on another man's allotment.

They will also make the laborers more independent when they have to deal with the farmers and landlords. Undoubtedly one of the chief things needed at the present time is an independent and sturdy spirit amongst the working men. In our midland and southern villages they grumble constantly about low wages and harsh treatment, but the majority of them dare not say a single outspoken word to help to make things better. They take whatever wages are offered them and they put up with every tyranny without protest. Why is this? Chiefly because they depend on others for work and food, and seldom have any Trade Union to look after their interests. But if a laborer has a sack or two of flour in his cottage, and a couple of good sides of bacon, and a stock of potatoes to tide him over the winter, he does not feel nearly so helpless and humble. And an allotment can provide him with these things.

Its cultivation, too, is after all something of a pleasure. Especially the factory-workers and miners who are cooped up all day will find the open-air work an agreeable and healthy change from their ordinary labor.

How to make an Allotment Profitable.

But allotments are not found to succeed everywhere and always. Certain things are necessary before they are likely to be of real use. The allotment must be

NEAR THE LABORER'S OWN HOME.

It is absurd to expect a man to walk out a mile or so and walk back again, after he has done a heavy day's work, in order to spend an hour on his allotment. And as an allotment always requires constant care and minute attention if it is to give the best results, it is absolutely necessary that it should be near the worker's home.

A FAIR RENT.

Often the laborers grow such good crops on their allotments and make them pay so well that the landlord takes the opportunity to charge them a much higher rent than he asks the farmer for the neighboring land of the same quality. Why should working men pay a penalty for cultivating their land well? And why should they work hard and constantly in order that the landlord may get an extra rent? The rent must certainly be a fair one.

If the rent is fair and the land close by, allotments will be a very great boon to steady and industrious men.

Common Pasture.

Laborers often find it profitable to save up their money if they can, and to invest it in a cow—that is to say, in those places where they can get pasture land to feed cattle on. Cow-keeping does not involve incessant work; and a man who has a cow not only obtains a fair profit from it, but is also sure of a good supply of milk for his children. Where land is needed for cottagers' cattle it will often be found convenient to have a common field for the whole village, managed by a committee of those who use it. And wherever cow-keeping prevails the villagers should always form a club to insure their stock, so that when a cow dies the owner may get money from the common fund to buy another.

How to get Allotments and Common Pasture.

If a landlord or farmer is willing to let to the Parish Council sufficient good land, near the village, at a reasonable rent, and without unjust and tyrannical conditions, this is much the best way for the workmen to get what they want. But often this desirable state of things does not exist. No matter how great the need of allotments may be in some villages, no land can be obtained. Who can take action in such a case?

The people's representative, THE PARISH COUNCIL.*

What the Parish Council Can Do.

It can negotiate with the landlords to hire a field or fields to be let out in allotments for any period it chooses; or to keep it, if pasture, as a common field for the cottagers' cattle.

This is the best way to proceed. Get the Parish Council to *hire* land for a term of years whenever allotments or pasturage are needed. It is the cheapest way, and the law makes no irritating rules about it.

If the landlords refuse to let the land, they can be made to do so. But then the Parish Council cannot act on its own account, but has to apply to the County Council for leave to take the land compulsorily. If the County Council refuses to give the necessary per-

* See Fabian Tract No. 62, "Parish and District Councils: What they are, and what they can do." *Id.* Post free from the Fabian Society, 276 Strand, London, W.C., for 1½d.

mission, the Parish Council may in most cases appeal to the Local Government Board, which can authorize it to proceed. The terms of the lease will be fixed by an arbitrator appointed by the Parish Council and the landlord, if they can agree on one, and if not, by the Local Government Board. The lease must be for not less than fourteen, or more than thirty-five years, and no individual may have more than four acres of pasture, or three acres of pasture and one acre of arable land. If the land compulsorily hired be permanent pasture, it may not be broken up without the landlord's consent.

Possibly the people would prefer that the land should be bought and should belong to the parish for ever. In that case the Parish Council must apply to the District Council, and that body may buy the land and place it under the management of the Parish Council. In case the District Council will not do its duty, an appeal may be made to the County Council to act instead. But if the landlords refuse to sell, the County Council is the only body which has the power to force them. In all cases of buying land for allotments, any six electors in the parish may apply to the District or County Council to take action if the Parish Council refuses to move. When the land has been *bought* for allotments, it may not be let in pieces of more than one acre, and no man may have more than one piece of it.

Common pasture can be obtained in all cases by the same processes.

The rent paid by the tenants for the land, or the sum paid per head for turning out cattle on the pasture, must always cover all the expenses connected with the land. Nothing can at present come out of the rates.

What the Laborers Must Do.

Simply this, that if the people elect the right men to the Parish Council they are almost certain to get the land they wish, and if they elect the right men to both Parish Council and County Council they can be *quite sure* of getting it. When the Parish Council has the will, there is a way open to it. But if the voters put men on the Parish, District, and County Councils simply because of their wealth and position and without their having shown genuine good-will towards the people, they are not likely to get what they want.

The working men can now elect any one they choose, for they are in the majority; no one will have more than one vote, and the election, where there is a contest, will be by secret ballot. Let them, therefore, make up their minds firmly beforehand whom they wish to have as Councillors,* and, when the election comes, let them support their candidates loyally through thick and thin.

* Printed Questions to be put to Councillors, to find out whether they are on the side of the working folk, will be sent free to any laborer who asks for them by a post-card addressed to the Fabian Society, 276 Strand, London, W.C. See next page.

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