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The Farm Labourer as He Is

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portant part of the clerical work. This is no small matter in a Union having 400 to 700 branches throughout the country and sometimes in the Colonies. As a rule the branches are required to send in, every three months, a statement of their income and expenditure. These are checked and scrutinised, to ensure accuracy and to detect any application of funds to purposes not permitted by rule. When this has been accomplished, an abstract statement giving the income and expenditure of every branch, along with other necessary information, is published as a "Quarterly Report." A financial statement for the year is also sent in, detailing the transactions of the branch. These also are examined, errors investigated, and every item put down under its proper head. An "Annual Report" is then prepared, containing detailed statements of the financial position of the branch and the investments and expenditure of the General Office. It contains tabulated statements of the moneys advanced to members for the purchase of their homes, the growth of the organisation, the number of members superannuated, with their ages and membership, the cause of accidents and deaths, with their costs, besides a list of the admissions and exclusions during the year. Under this last head we get interesting information, and discover that not only are there exclusions for misappropriation of funds and actions contrary to the interests of the Union, but drunkenness, convictions in a criminal court, malingering, and chronic laziness are considered offences deserving expulsion.

Besides the financial reports, nearly all the Unions issue a monthly statement containing a record of the state of trade in the country, the number of members unemployed, and the branches of trade which they follow. Some of the more important Trade Unions publish monthly periodicals containing articles on sociological and economic questions. These will grow in number and influence, and will probably do much to perpetuate and extend the latest phase of trade-unionist activity, the development of working class representation in the House of Commons. One thing is certain: the Trade Union leaders are neither unlearned nor inexperienced in the practical industrial affairs of everyday life.

ROBERT YOUNG

THE FARM LABOURER AS HE IS.

HAVING been a farm labourer all my life, I cannot help realising how little accurate knowledge the public has of the conditions under

which men of my occupation live and work. Farm-life is a thing apart from the town dweller, and is consequently but little understood. The popular conception is that it is a life of drudgery, that the work is mechanical and uninteresting, and that in misery and hopelessness the labourer drags out his three score years and ten. There is doubtless much truth in this view, but it does not present all the facts of the case. A sharp distinction must be drawn between the life itself and certain conditions which have been introduced into it. The village youth has naturally no aversion to the soil; on the contrary, he loves it. To him the work is not monotonous. Each season has its special duties and its special delights. Ploughing, sowing, reaping, thrashing, have each their special attractions, and bring with them joys that only the initiated can understand. Nor must it be supposed that the labourer turns his back upon the land in the hope of obtaining higher wages. If ever a delusion of this kind existed in the country it may now fairly be said to have passed away. There is less difference between the wages of labourers in town and country than is sometimes imagined. The sum of money received on Saturday does not represent the entire income of the village labourer. He has a number of other advantages the value of which cannot easily be estimated. Over his fellow-worker in the town he has a distinct advantage in the matter of rent. For a very small sum he gets not only a house but a garden, in which he can grow all the vegetables necessary for himself and family, and in which stands a sty where he can keep and feed a pig. By remaining in the country, therefore, he saves three or four shillings weekly in rent, spends nothing on vegetables, and obtains almost the whole of his meat at the minimum of cost. These and other advantages quite make up for any seeming deficiency in the matter of wages. In the face of facts like these one may be led to wonder at the rural exodus, and to ask why it is that the labourer is discontented. We are confidently told in certain quarters that the present dissatisfaction with the conditions of farm-life is quite unjustifiable, that the labourer has inherited the habit of grumbling along with other vices from his father, who grumbled not without a cause. When wages were low and bread was dear the case was different, but now the labourer ought to be satisfied. The labourer would be well advised to listen to these words of counsel if it were right to judge present conditions by the standard of the past, but it is not. The condition of a worker in one industry must be compared with the condition of workers in other industries of equal skill. This is precisely what the

labourer is doing, and hence his dissatisfaction. He finds that, in other things than wages, the condition of other workers has steadily been improving, while he has remained practically stationary. The little improvement which has taken place in his lot is due entirely to the scarcity of labour and other outside conditions, and is in no way connected with his actual status as a worker. He has little, if any, more freedom of action than had his fathers before him. He has no weekly half-holiday to be devoted to recreation. Week in and week out there is no relaxation from toil. Whatever joy is his is found in work and in communion with nature. Equal, physically and mentally, to the town worker, he feels himself wronged, and so he seeks work which he does not like, and which he possibly performs at a reduced income. A little, a very little, common sense is all that is needed to put matters right, but it will be necessary for farmers and others to revise some of their opinions.

To fully understand the ground of the labourer's objection one has only to become acquainted with the facts. To a lad leaving school farm life offers no definite and fixed hours of labour. He is never his own master. Hired to a farmer for a year to attend horses, his life is made up of working, eating, and sleeping. He is expected to rise about 4 o'clock in the morning, and his regular duties will not be over until 7 o'clock in the evening, after which he has his supper, and must then soon begin thinking of going to bed in order not to be sleepy when 4 o'clock again arrives. Should occasion arise he will be summoned for duty at any hour between 7 p.m. and 4 a.m. He cannot leave the farm for a day without asking permission. He has never a Sunday free from work, and must always be indoors at a given hour on Sunday night. He finds no fault with the wages he will receive, but simply prefers an existence which looks a little less like slavery. The same thing is true of all the different kinds of farm hands, with the exception of the daily labourer, who generally has his evenings and Sundays to himself. But even he is not entirely a stranger to the oftentimes unreasonable demands of the farmer. At busy times, such as the hay and clover harvest, it is absolutely necessary for the men to work overtime. At these periods the farmer fancies himself quite justified in expecting his men to work all day with feverish speed and for three hours longer than usual with no extra remuneration beyond possibly a drink of beer. Of course it may be said that there is a farmer's side to all this. I have tried to state the position as it appears to many of my fellow-labourers.

JOSEPH CLARK