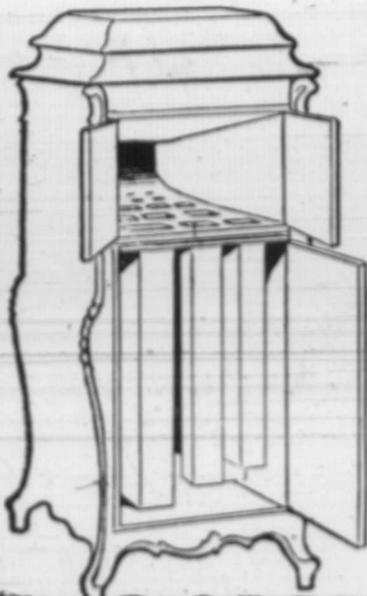




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Co-operation in Ireland

Continued from Page 8.

have mentioned. The people in such communities have their minds quickened by having to attend to so many of the practical affairs of life themselves, instead of leaving them to others to control. They feel an intelligent interest in their enterprises and realize that it is they as a community who are guiding them and who are responsible for the increased comfort they feel as a result. Thus a sense of the community arises in them. They are no longer isolated units, eking a miserable subsistence from the soil, as the people in Dungloe, for example, were doing not ten years ago. And with this sense of the community they feel themselves able to restore some gaiety to the country-side. They get a village hall, or a rural library, which serves the purpose of both hall and library, they organize a village band or a village choir; they have dances for the boys and girls; perhaps some one helps them to get up a play or a concert. Thus life becomes a gayer and a more gracious thing in the country-side. There is more work, and more play, and more pay! For the economic basis is the beginning of all brightening of the country.

Good-natured folk with kind hearts and woolly brains sometimes try to improve the standard of the amenities of life without realizing that the economic structure must first be changed. They preach cleanliness, and the culture of roses; and the policy of the open window to folk who can hardly wring a bare living out of the earth! The co-operative method realizes that, save perhaps in the case of some eastern ascetic, an empty stomach is a poor foundation for the joy of living.

When the comforts of a bare livelihood are first secured, it is not difficult to get the rest of the work done. But before better living there must come better business. When you have both, you find that the drain of emigration begins to stop. The people are, not so much attracted by the glare of the big cities and the strange adventures they imagine, when they find plenty and gaiety at home.

Political and Spiritual Influence

The rural problem in Ireland is slow to solve, but it is being solved, and in the right way. The self-reliance of the people is being surely developed and the knowledge that salvation is of themselves. In many places the actual results are astonishing; in many others only the beginnings are there. But the reconstruction of Irish rural life has got to a point where it cannot be stopped till it has reached its appointed end.

There is one other result of the effect of co-operation which, altho' it seems peculiar to Ireland, is worthy of being mentioned here. Ireland is well known as the seat of many factions—political, religious and social, and it has earned a certain notoriety for making the maximum of enmity out of the minimum of difference. A country so lately torn by the threat of civil war and by the realization of rebellion might be expected to reflect inside the co-operative movement the differences which raged outside. But altho' Irish co-operators number amongst them as well as moderate Unionists and moderate Nationalists many people in the North who have signed Sir Edward Carson's covenant and some people in the South who adhere to the revolutionary doctrines of those who led the late rebellion, none of the disturbances which have so recently happened in the country have had the smallest effect upon the co-operative movement. The sturdy Northern, however he may loathe the "rebel South," is perfectly prepared to meet the (possibly) rebellious Southern round the committee table of a conference or of a central federation. And, like the "lion and the lamb," the Jesuit priest and the Orange parson not only meet together in the councils of the movement, but behave towards each other not merely as fellow-councillors, but as warm personal friends. And what is true of the leaders of the movement is true also of the rank and file. Men come to the annual congresses of the Agricultural Organization Society who hold (and perhaps during the year have expressed in their individual capacity) the strongest views on one side or other of the controversies of the day, and meet in friendly devotion to the interests of the movement those whom, in another

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