

The Rural Community

What true co-operative effort will do for country life

By George W. Russell

The rural community really can not be created. It is a natural growth when the right seed is planted. Cooperation is the seed. Let us take Ireland. Twenty-five years ago there was not a single co-operative society in the country. Individualism was the mode of life. Every farmer manufactured and sold as seemed best in his eyes. It was generally the worst possible way he could have chosen. Then came Sir Horace Plunkett and his colleagues, preaching co-operation. A creamery was established here, an agricultural society there, and having planted the ideas it was some time before the economic expert could decide whether they were planted in fertile soil. But that question was decided many years ago. The co-operative society, started for whatever purpose originally, is an omnivorous feeder, and it exercises a magnetic influence on all agricultural activities, so that we now have societies which buy milk, manufacture and sell butter, deal in poultry and eggs, cure bacon, provide fertilizers, feeding stuffs, seeds and machinery for their members, and even cater for every requirement of the farmer's household. This magnetic power of attracting and absorbing to themselves the various rural activities which the properly constituted co-operative societies have, makes them develop rapidly, until in the course of a decade or a generation there is created a real social organism, where the members buy together, manufacture together, market together; where finally their entire interests are bound up with the interests of the community.

I believe in half a century the whole business of rural Ireland will be done co-operatively. This is not a wild surmise, for we see exactly the same process going on in Denmark, Germany, Italy and every country where the co-operative seed was planted. Let us suppose that in a generation all the rural industries are organized on co-operative lines, what kind of a community should we expect to find as the result? How would its members live; what would be their relations to one another and their community? The agricultural scientist is making great discoveries. The mechanical engineer goes from one triumph to another. The chemist already could work wonders in our fields if there was a machinery for him to work thru. We cannot forestall the developments in each branch, but we can see clearly that the organized community can lay hold of discoveries and inventions which the individual farmer cannot. It is little for the co-operative society to buy expensive threshing sets and let its members have the use of them, but the individual farmer would have to save a long time before he could raise a thousand pounds. The society is a better buyer than the individual. It can buy things the individual cannot buy. It is a better producer also. The plant for a creamery is beyond the individual farmer; but our organized farmers in Ireland, small tho they are, find it no trouble to erect and equip a creamery with plant costing two thousand pounds.

Develop Electric Power

The organized rural community of the future will generate its own electricity at its central buildings, and run not only its factories and other enterprises by this power, but will supply light to the houses of its members and also mechanical power to run machinery on the farms. One of our Irish societies at Roscrea is making arrangements for supplying electric light for the whole town. In the organized rural community the eggs, milk, poultry, pigs, cattle, grain and wheat produced on the farm and not consumed, or required for further agricultural production, will automatically be delivered to the co-operative business centre of the district, where the manager of the dairy will turn the milk into butter or cheese, and the skim milk will be returned to feed the community's pigs. The poultry and egg department will pack and dispatch the fowl and eggs to market. The mill will grind the corn and return

When the American and Canadian commission to investigate co-operative credits visited Ireland they were greatly pleased with the co-operative development among farmers in the Emerald Isle. While there they were addressed by G. W. Russell, editor of the Irish Homestead, and one of the foremost leaders of the co-operative movement. Mr. Russell chose as his subject, "The Rural Community," and gave the delegates a picture of the practical possibilities of the co-operative movement. A part of this address is here published, because it will furnish food for thought and inspiration in our own country.

it ground to the member, or there may be a co-operative bakery to which some of it may go. The pigs will be dealt with in the abattoir, sent as fresh pork to the market or be turned into bacon to feed the members.

We may be certain that any intelligent rural community will try to feed itself first and will only sell the surplus. It will realize that it will be unable to buy any food half as good as the food it produces. The community will hold in common all the best machinery too expensive for the members to buy individually. The agricultural laborers will gradually become skilled mechanics, able to direct the plough, binders, diggers, cultivators and new implements we have no conception of now. They will be members of the society sharing in its profits in proportion to their wages even as the farmer will in proportion to his trade. The co-operative com-



AUSTRALIAN TROOPS IN BRITAIN
This picture Australian soldiers in England, where they and the Canadians undergo final training before being sent to the front line.

munity will have its own carpenters, smiths, mechanics, employed in the workshop at repairs or in making those things which can profitably be made locally. There may be a laundry where the washing—a heavy burden for the women—will be done; for we may be sure that every scrap of power generated will be utilized. One happy invention after another will come to lighten the labor of life.

There will be of course a village hall with a library and gymnasium, where the boys and girls will be made straight, athletic and graceful. In the evenings, when the work of the day is done, if we went into the village hall we would find a dance-

going on perhaps or a concert. There might be a co-operative choir or band. There would be a committee room where the council of the community would meet once a week, for their enterprises would have grown, and the business of such a parish community might easily be over one hundred thousand pounds, and would require constant thought. There would be no slackness on the part of the council in attending, because their fortunes would depend on their communal enterprises, and they would have to consider reports from the managers and officials of the various departments. The co-operative community would be a busy place. In years when the society was exceptionally prosperous and earned larger profits than usual on its trade, we should expect to find discussions in which all the members would join as to the use to be made of these profits—whether they should be altogether divided or what portion of them should be devoted to some public purpose. We may be certain that there would be animated discussions, because a real solidarity of feeling would have arisen and a pride in the work of the community engendered, and they would like to be able to outdo the good work done by the neighboring communities.

Help Rural Schools

One might like to endow the village school with a chemical laboratory, another might want to decorate the village hall with reproductions of famous pictures, another might suggest removing all the hedges and planting the roadsides and lanes with gooseberry bushes, currant bushes and fruit trees, as they do in some German communes today. There would be eloquent pleadings for this or that, for an intellectual heat would be engendered in this human hive and there would be no more illiterates or ignoramuses. The teaching in the village school would be altered to suit the new social order, and the children of the community would, we may be certain, be instructed in everything necessary for the intelligent conduct of the communal business. The spirit of rivalry between one community and another, which exists today between neighboring creameries, would excite the imagination of the members, and the organized community would be as swift to act as the unorganized community is slow to act. Intelligence would be organized as well as business.

The women would have their own associations, to promote domestic economy, care of the sick and the children. The girls would have their own industries of embroidery, crochet, lace, dressmaking, weaving, spinning, or whatever new industries the awakened intelligence of women may devise and lay hold of as the peculiar labor of their sex. The business of distribution of the produce and industries of the community would be carried on by great federations, which would attend to export and sale of the products of thousands of societies. Such communities would be real social organisms. The individual would be free to do as he willed, but he would find that communal activity would be infinitely more profitable than individual activity. We would then have a real democracy carrying on its own business, and bringing about reforms without pleading to, or begging of, the state, or intriguing with or imploring the aid of political middle men to get this, that, or the other done for them. They would be self-rectifying, because they would be self-helping above all things. The national councils and meetings of national federations would finally become the real parliament of the nation, for wherever all the economic power is centred, there also is centred all the political power. And no politician would dare to interfere with the organized industry of a nation.

Enemies to Fight

There is nothing to prevent such communities being formed. They would be a natural growth once the

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SCHOOL GARDEN COMPETITION

\$10.00—Prizes for Boys and Girls—\$10.00

A large number of school gardens will be planted in the three prairie provinces this spring. We want letters from boys and girls who are attending school and who have helped to plant these gardens. The letters should tell the size of the school ground, the size of the garden, how it is laid out and what is planted in it. How was the garden prepared? Who did the work and who takes care of the garden? Do the different pupils or grades have their own plots? Is there any organization in your school for managing the garden? What is the purpose of your school garden; is it to make money, or to be used as a part of the school work? Tell how it has been used in the school work up to the present time. Is the garden popular among the pupils? How will you take care of the garden during summer vacation? Do you expect to have a school fair this fall?

What we want is an interesting story telling all about your school garden and the benefit and pleasure you receive from it. If you can send us a picture of your garden it will be published if it is a good one, but will not count towards a prize.

For the best letter received a prize of \$5.00 will be given. For the second best \$3.00, and for the third best \$2.00. All letters to enter this competition must be written plainly on one side of the paper only and must not exceed 500 words in length, tho they may be shorter. These letters must reach The Guide on or before July 5, and should describe the garden and its use and care as near as possible up to that time or until the close of school. All letters must give the name of the school, the age of the writer, and be signed by the school teacher to certify that it is a correct account of the school garden. Address all letters:

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