

## A Symposium on Co-operation—Letters to the Editors on the Cooperative Store.

### Cooperative Principles and the Co-operative Store.

To the Editors of *The Civilian*:—

In the discussion as to the membership of the Civil Service Co-operative Association, it seems to me that some of your correspondents are missing the point.

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What is a Co-operative Association—that is, how does it usually come to exist, and what distinguishes it fundamentally from other organizations for business purposes?

The answer to this question would be something as follows: A number of persons are more or less closely associated. The Association may be of this, that or the other character; they may be members of the same profession, trade, church, economic class, or what not. Finding themselves thus associated, usually on a trade or economic footing, the thought occurs to them: why not use this connection as a basis for a business enterprise—to buy goods cheaply, to borrow money on fair terms, or such like. If it is a store, each agrees to help stock it, to patronize it, and to share profits according to the extent of his patronage. If it is a loaning association, each puts in a sum, and they use the lump in turn, as necessity drives, at a charge that meets expenses. They usually know a good deal about each other; they are interested in each other; they trust each other; they are a sort of family, especially when they are beginning. Even when they extend enormously, as in England, and become nation-wide, they still call themselves “the state within the state.”

In other words Co-operation is the capitalization of sentiment — of the willingness to join with one's fellows and to give individual effort towards

a common enterprise. The great antitype is the joint stock company, which builds on money contributions alone, and in which the individuality of the member is no more a factor of operation than is that of the man in the moon.

This does not mean that co-operation is “sentimental.” Co-operative trading, like other trading, measures its success by dividends. But it does mean that co-operation is a distinct method—that its motive power and that of an ordinary company are as different as are steam and electricity in mechanics.

The theory that the dividend is the great unifier in a co-operative business is fallacious. The hope of a dividend is the mainspring of all commercial enterprise, but that the dividend is a means as well as the end itself is true only in a sense. The dividend acts only by reaction, on the principle that nothing succeeds like success. It is the flywheel of the machine, not the steam that starts and drives. The steam of a joint stock concern is capital; of a co-operative concern, homogeneity and loyalty in the membership.

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To apply this:

We were told that our store needed more trade, — that delivery expenses were out of proportion, and that more members and more patronage were required to restore the balance. And at once the solution was proposed, that the best if not the only way to secure this was to open the membership forthwith to the general public, the argument being added that the public already contributed more than half of the store's business, that the public had asked for admission, and that the public in general presented better material for recruiting under the