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The Co-Operators The Pirates and Tommy Atkins

By R. B. SUTHERS.

To think of Tommy Atkins in the trenches, the singing, careless hero whose one thought is to do his duty and to serve his country, and to think in the same moment of his brother at home the Pirate, who is not heroic, whose one thought is to rob his fellow-citizens—well, it is a very silly thing to do. It is altogether too disturbing.

Can these two men be brothers, men of the same race, the same country, bred in the same traditions and habits and customs? It seems impossible.

When one thinks of the loathsome creature those thoughts at this tragic time are directed chiefly to profit-making; when one thinks of the filthy intrigues, the base tricks, the lying, and the scheming by which that profit is too often consummated; when one sees the horrible effrontery with which this soulless vampire wishes to have it proved that he is by descent a Hun.

Perhaps he is; perhaps he is not. Perhaps, if he were put in khaki and shipped over to France, and sent into the trenches, perhaps he, too, would sing and fight and die for his country at one-and-a-halfpenny a day. Environment works wonders.

Meantime, he is at home and probably too old to be put into khaki. The problem is how to make him as much of a gentleman as Tommy Atkins. Can it be done?

If it ever be done it will be done by assimilating the Pirate's environment to that of Tommy Atkins. Tommy Atkins does his work, which happens to be killing, and he gets his pay. He makes no profit. He is not even on piece work. He does not get so much a head for Germans killed. He gets his pay—a bare living in most cases—and he is happy, and he sings, and he thinks chiefly of doing his duty.

The Pirate, on the other hand, thinks last of his duty. He thinks first of his profits. And the horrible thing is that in war time he should scheme to make more and more profits, that he should scheme to rob the very men who are fighting to save his wounds and his wealth from appropriation by the enemy. Let us hope that this state of mind is due only to his environment. Pro-making is not yet generally considered the ghoulish activity it really is. It is the custom; but the excesses we have witnessed lately ought to make it clear that the evil is fundamental. All profit is robbery.

If we put the Pirate—the Food Pirate, or the Coal Pirate, or the Clothing Pirate—on the same terms as Tommy Atkins, if we gave him pay for his work and took away the opportunities of making profit, he might become as much a gentleman as Tommy Atkins. It seems impossible. But environment is all-powerful. When are we going to try it?

At present the Pirate is flourishing like a green bay-tree. He waxes fat out of war profits, and he kicks. You cannot shame him. He knows there is a war. He knows that men are dying. He sees thousands of wounded heroes in the streets who cannot afford out of their pay to buy the comforts their condition demands. Does his conscience prick him? Never a prick.

The other day, in Parliament, the Pirates raised Cain because the Chancellor of the Exchequer insisted that they should hand over part of their munitions profits under the Excess Profits Tax. These abandoned wretches actually tried to destroy the Government rather than forego their plunder. After standing firm against their demands, the Chancellor finally decided to "think the matter over again." One of these patriots threatened that if their profits were not left untouched the supply of munitions might not be produced so smoothly. Why was he not taken out and hanged in Whitehall instanter?

Another day the wool patriots howled and snarled because they are only getting an increase of 50 per cent on pre-war prices for their wool crop this year. The sixpenny Milk Pirates have flooded the papers with advertisements to prove their innocence of profiteering to excess, and all the time the fivepenny milkman tells us that he is satisfied with the profits on fivepence. The Meat Pirates, the Bacon Pirates, the Bread Pirates, and all the other buccaneers are as busy as usual, pending the report of the latest Government Committee on the increase of prices and pending the heavy hand which the hopeful public expect Authority to drop on the Pir-

ates when that Committee has reported. I don't think the Pirates are trembling much.

The Pirates wax fat and they kick. Their influence knows no bounds. One section of these vampires, not satisfied with the opportunities for plunder afforded by the ordinary channels, are seeking to line their pockets with the poor savings of the Co-operators.

The Co-operative Movement in this country is a gigantic affair, or it is otherwise, according to your point of view. All the societies together now have an annual turnover of more than £160,000,000. Compared with the whole trade of the country, £160,000,000 is not much—a mere bagatelle. Even compared with the possible spending power of the wage-earners, it is not a great sum. Only about £1 in £7 of wages is spent at the Co-operative stores. But £160,000,000 is a respectable turnover compared with nothing, and according to the Pirates Co-operative stores ought to be abolished. That £160,000,000 of trade, say the Pirates, ought to belong to us.

The Pirates have watched the growth of Co-operation with ill-concealed hatred. They do not like Co-operation except when the Co-operators are Pirates. They have in past years made strenuous efforts to destroy the movement, and still it grows. Lately they have made another attack, but for the present they have been foiled. After the war they promise to give Co-operation a knock-out blow.

The latest attack on the Co-operative Movement took the form of a Parliamentary attempt to impose on the "dividends" of Co-operative societies the payment of income-tax.

Up to the time of the war, Co-operative societies have not been charged with income-tax on their "dividends" as ordinary trading concerns are charged income-tax on their "profits."

This immunity has been a thorn in the flesh of the Pirates for years. They have worn the carpet off the

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backstairs of the Treasury times without number in the effort to influence the authorities to bring Co-operative dividends under the tax.

Unfortunately for the Pirates the Co-operators had such a strong case that no Chancellor of the Exchequer has yet been able to oblige them. That case is a strong to-day, but the Pirates are stronger and more unscrupulous than ever. The Coalition, for the purposes of the war also has meant a Coalition of Liberal and Tory Pirates for the purposes of private plunder.

Last year the Pirates scored a point. They succeeded in inducing the Chancellor of the Exchequer to impose the Excess Profits Tax on the Co-operative dividends. The Co-operators protested, but they have no direct representatives in the House, and the money being urgently needed for the war; the Co-operators did not carry their protest as far as they would have done under peace conditions. The Pirates are never guilty of similar diffidence, in protecting their interests.

This year the Pirates hoped to win all along the line. They tried again to bring all the Co-operative dividend under the income-tax, but the Chancellor of the Exchequer refused to give way, and the Pirates had to be content with his promise that "the whole question should be the subject of inquiry after the war."

Meantime, Co-operative trade has been increasing and the Pirates are marshalling their forces for a great campaign. The object is to crush or cripple Co-operation amongst wage-earners. The attempt to impose income-tax on Co-operative dividends is not simply a question of justice in taxation; it is part of the plan for undermining and destroying the whole edifice of Co-operation.

The reason no Chancellor of the Exchequer has hitherto imposed income-tax on Co-operative dividends is that the dividends are not "profits." No twisting of the facts can make them "profits," and some of the Pirates have at last realised this, and are now attacking from a new position.

A hundred or a thousand co-operators over a shop. They subscribe the capital required, on which they receive a fixed interest. Income-tax, if should be noticed, is charged on this interest.

The shop manager buys goods and sells them to the Co-operators. He buys them with the Co-operators' money, and receives payment from the Co-operators. The goods are sold at the usual market prices, and, as in ordinary trade, the manager of the shop finds there is a balance to the good. In the ordinary shop this "profit," and is taken by the owner of business. In the Co-operative store this balance is not "profit"; it belongs to the Co-operators, who bought their own goods, and is divided amongst them in proportion to the amount of their individual purchases.

A Co-operator, spends £1 at the Co-operative shop; B spends £2; C spends £3. Total sales, £6. Expenses of running the shop, £5 5s. Balance to the good, 15s. This 15s. is divided amongst the Co-operators in proportion to their purchases.—A who spent £1, gets 2s. 6d. "dividend." B gets 5s., C gets 7s. 6d. This "Dividend" is not charged with income-tax.

The Pirates say it should be. They say it is "profit." But it is plain that the Co-operative "dividend" is not profit, but "prevented profit." It would be profit if the shop were run by a trader for profit.

If the Co-operative shop sold its goods at cost price there would be no "dividend" and no alleged profits to tax. A, instead of paying £1 for his supply of goods, would pay 17s. 6d. He would be just as well off as before. If the Chancellor of the Exchequer succumbed to the pressure of the Pirates, this is no doubt what the Co-operative stores would do. But the Co-operators are fond of "dividends," because it offers a method of saving and a stimulus to saving, and they would rather retain the system.

Some of the Pirates have recognized that if it comes to a fight the Co-operators could, more or less, easily escape the income-tax net, so they have invented a new weapon of attack. This is the argument: "The Co-operative Movement is doing a trade of £160,000,000 a year. This trade, if in other hands, would be yielding profits, which would pay income-tax. Why should the State lose this income-tax? If Co-operators decide to sell at cost price and make no 'profits'

or dividend, then they should be taxed on their total turnover."

It is a specious argument, but it does not cut any cake. It is not inevitable that the £160,000,000 of Co-operative trade, if in other hands, would yield income-tax. There are thousands of small shopkeepers whose income is below the income-tax limit. If the new argument is sound, all trade ought to be in the hands of individuals with incomes of £130 and upwards. This would no doubt please the big Pirates, but it is not yet the law of the land, and is therefore no argument for taxing Co-operative "dividends."

There are other signs that the Co-operators' progress is getting on the nerves of the profiteers. Last week a wholesale firm announced that in future they would not sell any goods to Co-operative stores. So there is to be another boycott campaign. The last one was not very successful, but all these preparations for "restriction" will have to be met by the Co-operators, and there is no doubt they need waking up to their powers and possibilities. The war should have taught them that being clothed in the armour of righteousness is not sufficient defence against the machinations of profiteers.

If there is space I should like to quote a gem of purest ray serene from the letter of an anti-Co-operator in the Press. He says: "No honest citizen who thinks can expect permanently to continue to sell his labour to enterprise and purchase his requirements from Socialism."

That is the whole secret of the attack on Co-operation. The Pirates want those "dividends." All of them, to honest man, it appears, has a right to the whole of his wages. It is his duty to hand over a portion to a "Pirate." It is a queer "morality." If our employer paid your wages in food and clothing instead of money, would this honest gentleman think he had a right to grab part of that food and clothing?

Perhaps he would. It used to be one in that way before the Truck Acts were passed. But what a loathsome morality! We have to teach the Pirates that no honest man would wish to make a profit on the labour of his fellow-men. All the honest man gets is pay for his work, the fruits of his labour. "Profit" added to this is robbery.

The Monk and The Rainbow

Father Dietrich Dominican First to Discover How it Originates

A very striking example of the fact that even to natural science—which, our present generation so proudly, and with some justice, claims as its own—the medieval scholars furnished contributions, has been brought to the attention of the learned world of late in the recent translation from the Latin into German, by the distinguished Professor Wuerschmidt, of the University of Erlangen, of the work of the Dominican Father Dietrich on "The Theory of the Rainbow," says the New World.

This volume was compiled between the years 1304 and 1310, in the very heart of the Middle Ages, and has won, particularly since its translation into the praise and commendation of many learned men.

Prof. Hallman, for example, the renowned meteorologist of Hamburg, Germany, declares that "it is the greatest achievement of its kind in the West since the Middle Ages." It is also, he says a valuable contribution to the science with which it deals. And of its author the well-known Max Jacob says:

"Father Dietrich was the first one to discover that the rainbow originates through the double breaking and one reflex of the rays of the sun in the 'raindrop.' We have to thank him for the first correct designs of the path of the ray as it enters and leaves the little sphere."

The Middle Ages, product of true Christian though, have many wondrous things to teach us. Profitable for all of us would be the more intense study of the Ages of Faith and Unbelief and Christianity.

A Pessimistic Scout.

Lieut. MacCorson of the Nova Scotia Highland Brigade in camp at Aldershot, inspecting his platoon after Sunday service, and noticing that Sandy MacDonald did not carry a Bible, the following dialogue took place:

Lieut.—"Would you not like to take a testament to the front with you, MacDonald?"
Sandy—"Nothin' doin'."
Lieut.—"It might save your life at the eleventh hour."
Sandy—"It would be just my luck to get killed at 10.45."

"There's a blind man outside who wants to see you, sir."
"I don't blame him."

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