

The Study Course

A STUDY IN CO-OPERATION

The fourth study in the course which is being followed by a great many readers of The Guide is one of the most important and interesting in the whole season's work—Co-operation. This is a subject on which most of the progressive farmers in the West have first hand knowledge gleaned from their own experience. It is chiefly by the exchange of experiences among different parts of the West, and by becoming acquainted with the history and achievements of co-operative societies in other countries, that Western co-operators will gain the knowledge necessary to extend their work and increase the savings which they are making both in the purchase of supplies and in the cost of marketing their products. In the study course considerable space is given to co-operation and a general review is given of the different co-operative enterprises which have been established in this country, with briefer references to co-operation abroad. This information can be supplemented by the study of the books recommended for reading in the course, and by referring to back numbers of The Guide. For the last three years it has been the practice of The Guide to publish a special co-operative number in the month of March, while articles on particular phases of co-operation both at home and abroad have frequently appeared. Many readers of The Guide, no doubt, have carefully preserved the back numbers and these will now be found very valuable.

Women and Co-operation

The following is from an article on Women and Co-operative Stores, written for the Outlook, of New York, by Mrs. Florence Kelley, general secretary of the National Consumers' League:

A little group of workers in the cotton-mills of the English village of Rochdale, some three-quarters of a century ago, discussed the high cost of living and what was to be done about it.

In the end they bought a half-barrel of flour, and each subscriber to the co-operative enterprise took one share. It was cheaper than by the bag (as they had been accustomed to buy it), and, even more important, it was pure. For there is no question of the fact that retail dealers in those days commonly adulterated their flour with plaster-of-paris, which caused disease and death.

Little did those humble cotton-mill workers foresee that this modest investment was the beginning of a movement destined to amount almost to an economic revolution. It was the first experiment in co-operation for cheapening and improving the necessities of life. From that half-barrel of flour has developed a system of stores and factories which, controlled by co-operative societies, are today scattered all over the United Kingdom, serving as models for all the world.

For Pure Food

These societies are, to a steadily increasing extent, determining the quality and cost of goods produced for their members. They have been able to restrict the adulteration of food products and to prevent the fraudulent substitution of inferior material in articles of clothing used by poor working families. In some measure they have brought the cost of living in England under their control.

The societies originally bought goods in the open market, and sold them to their members at the full current retail price, eventually dividing the profit among the purchasers. But, with the growth of numbers, they found themselves able to keep their own retail prices closer to the current wholesale prices; and ordinary retailers, in order to stay in business, are now compelled to meet these prices, thus holding down the cost of many kinds of staple merchandise.

THE BOOKLET

The Course of Study booklet, which has been prepared and published by the Canadian Council of Agriculture, can be obtained from the Central office of the association in each of the three prairie provinces. Copies may also be secured from The Grain Growers' Guide at 25 cents each, five copies for \$1.00, and twenty copies for \$3.00.

The influence exerted by the societies in behalf of honest goods is overwhelmingly powerful. They are developing so many factories of their own that competing manufacturers are finding it more difficult to sell fraudulent fabrics.

It is largely by reason of the absence of a co-operative system in this country that we have so inordinate a development of department stores, with underpaid clerks and a monstrous flood of adulterated, trashy, perishable fabrics. The latter item represents an immense aggregate of economic waste, and the loss falls mainly upon the poor.

Tricks of the Trade

A Swiss fellow-student whom I knew long ago at Zurich was afterwards employed for twenty years as chief chemist in a silk-dyeing establishment in Philadelphia. He told me that crude silk arriving from China, Japan, and elsewhere was first boiled to get rid of the gum it contained, thus losing about ten per cent. of its weight. The owners of the silk required his employers to return it to them with this ten per cent. restored, and with an additional one hundred per cent. contributed to it, by "weighting" with metals—lead, tin or iron.

This, of course, is a customary trade practice, and every woman has had opportunity to observe its effects. If a silk dress becomes shiny after a while, that means adulteration of the fabric with lead. If a shirt-waist of silk, tho perhaps hanging in a closet unworn, exhibits star-like cuts or gashes, it is tin that is accountable. If a coat lining goes to pieces in straight slits, that is iron.

My Swiss acquaintance gave up his employment and took his two boys back to live on a modest farm in the Jura Mountains, in order, as he said, that they should not learn the dishonesties in which their father had been obliged to participate while pursuing the silk-dyeing craft. But, in telling this story, the fact on which I wish to lay emphasis is that such things happen far less when the factory is making goods to be sold to co-operative owners thereof, and, in general, for the co-operative trade in England.

Today the co-operative societies in that country have stores so widely scattered that they are to be found even in many villages, and the influence they exercise over purity of food products and the quality of other merchandise, as well as over prices, has been steadily gaining.

Mail Order Co-operation

Ultimately the co-operative movement in the United States is, I think, likely to take the form of co-operative ordering direct from producers, together with the establishment of municipal enterprises for public supply. The Supreme Court of Georgia has decided that municipalities in that State may lawfully carry on the production and sale of ice. New York City, having started milk stations for infants some years ago as a private philanthropic enterprise, now conducts a few municipal stations of the kind, and is soon to have many more. Municipal markets exist in many centres of population. Two cities in Texas and one in Tennessee have municipal abattoirs.

We may never have co-operative retail stores precisely on the English plan. But it is easy to imagine the future existence in our cities of sample rooms which will do an enormous mail order business. Such an establishment will not keep a stock of goods on hand for sale, but merely samples of all kinds of merchandise, to be shown or sent thru the mails to intending purchasers. It may serve as an intermediary between the producer and the ultimate consumer, bringing the two into close relations.

The parcel post will be of immense assistance, and when the Government takes over the telegraphs and telephones, making electric communication relatively inexpensive, we shall have facilities for instantaneous and cheap ordering.

A CO-OPERATIVE MAGAZINE

Below are some paragraphs from The Wheatshaf, a monthly co-operative record and magazine, published in England. The Wheatshaf is printed at the Co-operative Wholesale Society's printing works, Manchester, and beside a section of general interest to co-operators, contains a local section specially prepared for each district and containing news of the local society among whose members it circulates. The following items are from the general section of the November Wheatshaf:

A period of severe trial is always a testing time. The "come-day, go-day" life ends abruptly. New problems appear

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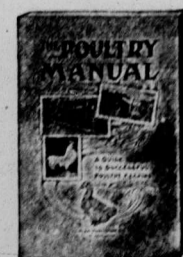
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