

to fifteen sous per week, till 30,000 francs had been collected. But printing was not then free, and a patent cost 18,000 francs. The associates had to wait till 1870, when the efforts of Messrs. Gambetta and Thiers secured free printing for France. The first room the associates hired, as offices to receive subscriptions, was in a house, whose landlord becoming bankrupt, all their papers were put under seal by law; in time, they were given up, and, for greater security, the next office was held in a school of anatomy. The subscribers on contributing 100 francs became shareholders, and as money had in time to be raised by shares, at fifty francs, bearing interest, there are now 614 shareholders. However, when the cash in hand amounted to 40,000 francs, operations commenced; installation expenses amounted to 108,000 francs, and the debit was duly met. At this juncture the war broke out, which crippled the society for three years.

I would here observe, on the authority of the association, that the greatest difficulty in founding a co-operative establishment, lies in the workman himself—in his indiscipline; he views himself as independent, and lacks the necessary obedience or submission to a directing will. As the association has ten times more shareholders than printers, the latter are selected by ballot the first of every January, and taken on, per numerical order, as required. They also retire in the same way when business becomes slack. The directors receive a salary of under 5,000 francs. All applicants for work must be members of the Typographical Society, whose status act as a guarantee of good conduct. By the ballot it was found that men of unequal capacity were admitted, and as they were remunerated in groups by an equal salary, the best compositors left in disgust. The administration cut this form of socialism—the “equal division of unequal earnings”—in the bud, by deciding that fourteen sous per 1,000 letters should be the basis of payment, and each would thus be remunerated following his application and ability. If this be “practical socialism” the world is happily well smitten by it; yet the above phrase, which is the motto of the society, so frightened the Exhibition Commissioners that they would not reprint it in their catalogue! The compositors can earn nine francs a day; and the pay is about eight per cent higher than in other offices, which explains why vacancies are due only to sickness and death.

The first work produced by the society was a notice for a lost dog, and the second, a journal. During the siege, when newspapers only were printed, the society on one occasion burned 133 francs worth of wood to bring out the paper for which they were only paid 120 francs—but they had executed their contract. On the 18th of March, 1871, the government of M. Thiers was in office in the morning, and the Prefect threatened to imprison the manager of the society if he printed an opposition paper; he submitted. In the evening, Thiers had fled to Versailles, and the Communist Police Prefect threatened to shoot the same manager if he did not continue printing the obnoxious paper. In 1872, Paris was under martial law, and the Military Governor, learning the society was composed of 500 workmen, viewed it as half a regiment and nothing more, and was about proceeding to extremities, when influence was brought to bear, and he was initiated into the mysteries of co-operative societies.

Listen to this admission: The society stood in need of more capital, the workmen being slow with their subscriptions; an appeal was made to them to lend, and they declined to do so till assured of interest—just like an ordinary capitalist. Workmen do not lend their money to set up workmen; they seek the highest interest. Rothschild only lends to kings and states. By emitting shares, the society secured the necessary capital, and since, it exemplifies that nothing succeeds like success. The association is administered by elected delegates, and it is their opinion that there is nothing to prevent the 5,000 printers in Paris from forming sixty or eighty co-operative societies. Work will come; each satisfied client will recommend new ones, and success is certain if members be patient, obedient and secure excellent chiefs. The staff had the air of serious self-interest—each for all, and all for each. The specimens of printing shown me were well executed—and why not? The association does not receive apprentices, and the members do not believe in female compositors, who are, in France, at least, difficult to instruct, physically feeble and not inclined to remain long in the establishment. The members have examined the composing machine, but the inspection has not dismayed them, and it can find sometimes a job for rough and hasty work. I have been impressed with the capital importance of securing able directors, like those of the present