

The Co-operative Movement

By George Keen

Continued from Last Week

During the last generation co-operation has made remarkable strides on the European continent. Before 1882 there was no co-operative dairy in Denmark. Today there are more than 1200 and you have, no doubt, heard of their influence in the British market. Retail societies were almost unknown in Denmark prior to the eighties of the last century. In 1906 there were 1200. In Sweden, in the ten years ending 1906, 3162 co-operative societies of various kinds were registered. Finland in 1901 had one co-operative society—a store. In 1908 there were 310 stores, 308 dairies, 206 banking and 192 for miscellaneous purposes. In a little more than six years 1016 societies came into existence. In Roumania there are more than 2000 credit societies, among the peasants, who were almost unacquainted with such institutions 15 years ago. In Hungary distributive co-operation was actually unknown in 1890. Today there are more than 800 societies federated with the "Wholesale" organized in 1898. In Switzerland, while the movement in its initiation was almost contemporary with that of the Rochdale pioneers, the great bulk of the existing societies have been formed during the last 20 years. No less than 2138 societies were established in that, the smallest country in Europe, between 1900 and 1907. Co-operative societies in Holland run into the thousands, organized during the last fifteen years.

The progress of the movement in Germany has been remarkable, there being no less than 25,714 societies of various kinds in existence. In the agricultural section 13,127 were credit and banking, 1,699 raw material, 3,294 productive, being mostly dairy, and 892 miscellaneous. In France, Austria, Italy, Norway and Russia the movement is also well represented and indeed nearly every country in the civilized world, including Japan and India, a co-operative union having recently been organized in the latter country.

I am afraid that I have given you a surfeit of statistics, but while I cannot expect in a rapid review their portent to be fully appreciated, they will give

some idea of the extent to which the co-operative faith in our social relations is accepted throughout the world, and that while men may differ in temperament because of their racial origin, national environment or religious opinions they can agree in the moral virtue and social value of this great international co-operative movement, which would substitute harmony, economy and justice for the prevailing industrial unrest, economic waste and class privileges, prejudices and hatred.

Canada and United States

The United States and Canada have been long regarded as the Sahara of the movement, the great desert upon which it is difficult for the seed of co-operation to take root. There is, however, considerable activity on both sides of the line. A few weeks ago a convention was held at Minneapolis of leading agricultural authorities, including the assistant-secretary of agriculture from Washington, to define true co-operation which it did on the lines I have mentioned. In Canada considerable progress is being made in distribution, the Canadian union having thirteen societies in affiliation and a number of others in process of organization.

Co-operation is bound to make headway on this continent. It is the only possible alternative to trusts, and with intelligent activity on the part of our people will eventually be found to be a substitute, gradually taking the place of capitalistic exploitation, in the same manner as local prohibition seems to be gradually replacing the licensed system. A democracy will not permanently tolerate the ever-growing tendency of trusts to dominate trade and commerce in the interests of the few.

Co-operative Sale of Honey

Every form of genuine co-operative effort is looked upon with favor by the movement. In your own case it would take the form of the co-operative sale of your produce and the purchase of your supplies. The latter feature will, I should imagine, although I have no personal experience, be relatively unimportant.

You will have gathered from my remarks that in my judgment, the only genuine co-operative method would be for each producer to sell his crop to the society at the market price, to accept a flat rate of say 5 per cent. or 6 per cent. on his capital and for the net profits of sale to be divided among the members in proportion to the value of the product each contributes to the society. Such a society ought to be of great value to producer and consumer alike in eliminating unnecessary expenses in distribution and in maintaining a standard of quality, a most essential feature in all food products.

I know nothing of the honey industry so am not qualified to give technical advice, but, looking at the subject in a common sense light, I would suggest that a capable business man, with the necessary tact to work in harmony with the members and also possessing the technical experience of the business to efficiently manage the institution and sell the produce, should be appointed. Members should each have one vote only and it should be given in person. Care is needed that the members, through the directors, control the policy and supervise the business, and to that end directors should be appointed with the necessary co-operative spirit and possessed of good common sense. Short of this qualification it will mean that while your society will in form be co-operative, it will in management really be proprietary, and in course of time you would find, as is frequently the case on this continent, the business gravitating into the individual ownership of the manager and the conditions you are seeking to avoid will be restored. One of the difficulties I anticipate, you will have to meet with will be the exercising of a close oversight in the conduct of the business, your directors and members being drawn from such a large area in this province. Unless a considerable section of the members take an intelligent interest in the affairs of the society, it will soon cease to be one in fact. To overcome this difficulty I would suggest that county sections should be formed, if they are not already in existence, and that each county or a combination

of adjacent counties, should elect its director to the board of the society, which will no doubt meet in Toronto or some other central place, and that the general meeting should be held in sectional districts, each sectional director submitting the policy and proposals of his board to the local members of all the sections so ascertained by their votes prevailing as the authority of the members in general meeting assembled.

One Billion Dollars Saved

Reverting to agriculture generally I may say that while during the last half century one billion dollars have been saved to British co-operators by their associated efforts in the purchase of merchandise and in one city alone—that of Edinburgh—the savings so effected have in the last 26 years reached the extraordinary total of \$21,379,035, their opportunities, by the nature of the industries in which they are engaged, are more circumscribed than those of the farming community of this country.

Agricultural Development

In the case of the farmers of Canada, they finance, by personal or borrowed capital, their own labor and market its produce so that they can effect by co-operative effort great savings both "coming and going", that is to say in the production and sale of the commodities they have to market as well as in the purchase of the merchandise they have to buy.

Notwithstanding the enormous success of British Co-operation it will be seen from the figures that I have given that but a very small percentage of my fellow co-operators in the old land benefit by the co-operative employment of their labor.

In every agricultural trading centre in Canada might be gradually evolved a co-operative institution which would not only organize the farmers' demand for merchandise and eliminate the middleman's profit therefrom, but it might at the same time organize the sale of his produce also by placing it in the hands of the consumer direct, through his own distributive societies, developing along parallel lines in Canadian towns and cities, and with the great British co-operative consuming population.

Social Advantage

Such an institution would do more. It would replace suspicion of each other's motives by fraternal confidence in each other's integrity and good intentions. It would, as in Britain and other countries, provide opportunities for social intercourse, recreation and education, and do as it has done for British co-operators to a remarkable extent, give the farmers of the country better opportunities for acquiring personal experience in the transaction of business and the treatment of public questions, thereby providing for the service of the state a body of men truly democratic in their habits of mind, fraternal to their social ambitions and intellectually equipped for the development by pure, good and progressive methods of government, of this great Dominion of Canada so fraught with opportunities for the advantage and happiness of mankind.

RUMELY'S BUY OUT AMERICAN-ABELL PLANT

Toronto, Jan. 8.—Ed. A. Rumely, representing the Rumely concern, of La Porte, Ind., has concluded negotiations for the purchase of the stock in the American-Abell Engine and Thresher company, of Toronto. The company he represents has recently bought out the Advance Company, of Battle Creek, Mich., and among its assets was a half share in the American-Abell company, of Toronto.

"We hope to double the output of the plant here," said Mr. Rumely. "After a while we shall either extend the plant or open up another in Canada for the manufacture of tractors, which are replacing horses in Western Canada."

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