

# What Mosdell Wrote About Pres. Coaker, Xmas, 1913,

## "A Big Man and A Big Organization," by H. M. Mosdell.

(The Fishermen's Advocate, Dec. 20, 1913)

THE history of every epoch and age and country is written in the biographies of the sons of men. As their activities so have the times and fashions been moulded. Thus, we have had outstanding personalities, whose personal characteristics have been either enviable or otherwise and their own particular circle of associates has copied them, while their general influence has spread out and beyond their intimates, even as the ripples from a stone thrown in the water circle far from the centre of disturbance. For no man either liveth unto himself or dieth unto himself and the man whose genius and ability has set him on the pedestal of fame is a beacon light to moral progress or a baleful torch luring to immorality and degradation.

Every great public building has its niches or recesses in which are set up the graven images of the men who have been benefactors of the people. They serve as symbols of popular gratitude and as incentives to a public spirit that seeks first the welfare of fellow-men. In our own particular country the place of honor must first be given the men who labored self-sacrificingly that Newfoundland might have a free and independent government; next to these great leaders come those who secured for every resident British subject of the Island the right to mark a ballot without coercion or intimidation. And in these latter days has risen W. F. COAKER, who ranks with the greatest of the land in his efforts and achievements on behalf of his fellow-countrymen. To him belongs all the credit of initiating and directing a wonderful movement has put our Toilers of the Sea in a position to enjoy to the full the benefits secured for them by his great predecessors.

The times were ripe for a change when W. F. COAKER organized the F.P.U. For many years it was admitted that some improvement was needed in the condition of our Fishermen. They were in the very peculiar position of being our chief wealth-producers and yet our poorest class. There was an almost unvarying demand for the products of their toil, indeed, to all intents and purposes it showed a steady increase. Yet the incomes of the Fishermen remained practically on the same dead level and their condition as a result showed little or no improvement over that of their predecessors for many generations back. This was eminently unfair and altogether too improper to be tolerated. It meant that they were laboring and others were making the profit therefrom while they got little more themselves than enough to make both ends meet. It was the old, old story of horny-handed Son of Toil being made a hewer of wood and a drawer of water for the middleman who marketed his produce abroad.

Isolated as we are, it is small wonder that the great labor unrest on the American Continent left us virtually untouched. In Canada and the United States the laboring classes threw off the shackles of what was, to all intents and purposes, slavery and forced the employer and the capitalist to pay them an adequate wage. As a result they bettered their condition immensely and enforced from all concerned due respect for honest, capable labor. All this occurred as the result of organization. For what isolated individual or groups of individuals found impossible of accomplishment was soon brought about when the great armies of Unionism entered the industrial field and did battle for what is but the common right of humanity.

Newfoundland Toilers awaited a champion, an organizer and a leader. Men there were a-plenty to pose as champions of the cause of the Fishermen, but it generally transpired that they were politicians at heart and not true friends of the Fishermen. Numerous leaders appeared at one time and another but they accomplished nothing either because of their half-hearted attempts or because they lacked the saving grace of organization. They were men who did not possess or engender in the Toilers that absolute confidence that is essential to the success of any general and champion of the cause of labor.

Men looked for the savior and the deliverer to come from the legislative halls or from the so-called upper classes. They had decided that he must be one learned in law or politics; prominent in business or some other department of public life. How else, said they, can he successfully organize and lead the Toilers and do battle on their behalf. But they were mistaken in their anticipations and once again was proven the old adage that it is usually the weak of the earth that is used to confound the mighty. The organizer and leader appeared in W. F. COAKER, who possessed none of the qualifications generally deemed essential to success. He was born of the common people; he was inexperienced in business or in politics; he was obscure and unknown.

BUT HE WAS THE MAN FOR THE TIME AND FOR THE WORK. What birth and experience denied was more than made up for in personality, in brain and in genius. Having knowledge of the need; having ideas and schemes to accomplish the work; having faith in himself and confidence in the ultimate success of his great undertaking he boldly launched his humane enterprise.

Men scoffed at COAKER, but they were men who did not know him. He comes from the backwoods, they said, and alleged this accident of birth as a reason for his failure, forgetting that such a one as Lincoln had his upbringing in a log-cabin. He is of the Toilers, alleged his enemies, a mere fisherman-farmer, overlooking the fact that most of the great enterprises that have benefitted and uplifted humanity have been fathered by Sons of the so-called Common Folk. Birth and breeding and inexperience of public affairs seemed to the scoffers insuperable obstacles for the man COAKER to surmount, but their estimates were ill-calculated. For birth and breeding gave him the inestimable advantage of an intimate knowledge of the life and needs of the men he set out to benefit and genius knows and admits no handicap from obscurity. A philosopher has said that the truly great man is him whose genius leads him to attempt and accomplish the apparently impossible and to act irrespective of contemporary, opinion inasmuch as his ideas and plans are so much in advance of his age as to outrun sympathy. Such a man was W. F. COAKER—solitary, but confident; despised but undaunted; scorned but determined.

It is given to but few to see the accomplishment of the work they initiate but COAKER has lived to see his great movement start, gather way, sweep aside the many obstacles in its path and give promise of a future of wonderful success and incalculable benefit to Newfoundland's Forty Thousand Toilers of the Sea. Five years ago he organized the Fishermen's Protective Union at Herring Neck, with a membership of less than a score; a couple of weeks ago the Supreme Council of the F.P.U. which met in St. John's was attended by almost two hundred delegates, representing close on Twenty Thousand Fishermen. There are Union Councils in two hundred of our harbors and Union Cash Stores in forty of these.

It is plain that on the score of things accomplished the F.P.U. has earned for itself the right to appeal to the confidence of the people. It has caused a big reduction in the cost of the Toiler's living, while at the same time it has boosted the prices paid for the products of his toil. In a word, the Union has secured for him higher wages while at the same time reducing his cost of living so that every dollar he earns goes almost twice as far as it did before W. F. COAKER formed the organization that champions his cause.

On a low estimate the F.P.U., by increasing the returns for the Fisherman's labor and at the same time cheapening the necessities of life, has put more than Two Million Dollars in the pockets of the Toilers the last two years.

More than this, it has fostered the spirit of undaunted independence in the minds of the Toilers of this Country. It has imparted to them the conceit every man should have in work well done. It has inspired our Fishermen with a self-confidence which will spur them on to greater efforts than ever for improving themselves materially and mentally.

It is not so very many years ago since the dealer calling on his supplier on business concerns never dreamed of approaching the merchant's house, except by the back door. He was treated in such a way as to impress the idea upon his mind that he was altogether inferior to the man who supplied him for the fishery. The fact that it was from the proceeds of his toil that the merchant waxed fat, prospered and amassed wealth and property was overlooked. The Fisherman forgot that in giving him supplies the merchant was making a better investment of his money and goods than he could have done in any other direction. It did not occur to the Toiler that his labor was indispensable to the welfare of the merchant.

The Union has taught them the true dignity and nobility of labor. The drones in the industrial hive are worse than useless; the worker is the valuable asset of the whole community. Gentility is not of necessity associated with idleness; it is the attribute of all true men whether in the fishing boat or the drawing room. The Union aims to teach its members this great lesson. It will be satisfied if it can make the Toilers unsatisfied with themselves until they have asserted themselves as peers of the honest, the industrious, the honorable of all walks of life. And the Toilers of this Country are pre-eminently worthy of ranking with the best of all lands.

But the F.P.U. is only at the beginning of its great and useful career. Its phenomenal success has proven that the root idea in COAKER'S brain when he fathered the organization was nothing less than a divine revelation. The Union has helped and cheered and uplifted the very men it was designed to reach. It has accomplished wonders in five years. It has designed for still greater things in the future, if the Toilers learn well the lesson of the past and labor in some measure for its further success, EVEN AS COAKER, THE FATHER OF THE MOVEMENT, HAS TOILED AND MADE SACRIFICES IN THIS REGARD ON THEIR BEHALF.

PRESIDENT COAKER'S APPRECIATION OF THE PUBLIC NEEDS OF THE COUNTRY IS STRIK-

INGLY SHOWN BY THE PLATFORM ADOPTED BY THE F.P.U. IN THE RECENT CAMPAIGN. What more needed by this Colony than a practical re-organization of the Marine and Fisheries Department and the extension of the Pension scheme until it is applicable to all our aged and incapacitated of both sexes? Or what more desirable than Bait Depots; Free Education; State Insurance and Long Distance Telephones? It is for these that COAKER stands in public life and for the accomplishment of these ends he is backed up by a following of Twenty Thousand Fishermen.

For the F.P.U. has come triumphantly through the fires of affliction and grievous persecution and COAKER, THE MAN WHO HAS LED IT ALONG THE DIFFICULT WAY HAS PROVEN HIS RIGHT TO THE TRUST AND RESPECT AND CONFIDENCE OF THE TOILERS. Every Toiler should recognise the truth of the dictum—"COAKER HAS SPOKEN; THEREFORE IT WILL SURELY BE DONE."

The attitude of the F.P.U. on the great public questions of the day is clearly defined in the platform adopted at the Bonavista Convention of the Union last year. The policy outlined is the most progressive ever adopted in this Country. It is remarkable for the absence of all "wild cat" schemes. It takes into consideration the most pressing needs of the Country and of the People and advocates safe, sane and economical methods for meeting these needs. There is not one plank in this platform calling for any expenditure of great sums of money. From the direct way in which it enunciates popular needs, department failures and administrative necessities, it proves conclusively that COAKER, THE MAN CHIEFLY RESPONSIBLE FOR OUTLINING THIS F.P.U. POLICY IS IN INTIMATE TOUCH WITH THE PUBLIC SITUATION, has given the questions of the day the most careful thought and has BRAINS, COURAGE AND INITIATIVE ENOUGH TO EVOLVE A CURE FOR THE ILLS OF OUR BODY POLITIC.

The power and influence of the man and the organization he has fathered were amply proven in the recent General Election. Every District in which Union Councils were generally organized returned F.P.U. members to the House of Assembly, the success being most marked in Bonavista where there was an actual turn over from the Morris Party of three thousand votes and two Ministers of the Crown were badly beaten in the battle of the ballots. THERE IS NOT THE SLIGHTEST DOUBT THAT IF THE OTHER DISTRICTS HAD BEEN FULLY ORGANISED BY THE F.P.U. THE PRESENT ADMINISTRATION WOULD HAVE BEEN DRIVEN FROM POWER.

Now these successes in business and politics amply prove that not only was COAKER'S scheme for the organization of a Fishermen's Union a feasible and eminently practical one but also that he chose the right time to launch it. It is this keen insight into men and their affairs that is the special characteristic which assures him success in his various undertakings. FOR COAKER IS GIFTED WITH THE USEFUL KNOWLEDGE OF HOW TO APPROACH AND HOW TO HANDLE THE MASSES. A great deal of his success in this respect is due to his unique and striking personality. No one would think of accusing him of being a spell-bound demagogue. In his manner, he is, if anything inclined to be somewhat quiet and retiring. BUT BEHIND EVERYTHING HE SAYS THERE IS A CHARACTER THAT IMPRESSES THE LISTENER WITH THE FACT THAT COAKER HAS A WHOLE-HEARTED INTEREST IN HIS GREAT WORK AND THAT HE HAS ABSOLUTE CONFIDENCE IN ITS ULTIMATE SUCCESS. He has the knack of infecting all who come in contact with him with his own enthusiasm for and faith in the great cause. And because his people have FOUND COAKER FAITHFUL ABOVE ALL THINGS TO THE TRUST THEY REPOSED IN HIM HE IS BOUND TO RISE IN THE ESTEEM OF THE FISHERMEN AND TO BIND THEM TO HIM WITH THE BONDS OF AFFECTION. For in this respect it always happens that to him that hath much more is given.

Nothing more clearly indicated the true character of W. F. COAKER than his invitation to Sir Robert Bond to lead the Union Forces during the recent campaign. A less cautious man or one more self-conceited would, in COAKER'S position, have essayed the task himself. But, sinking personal ambition and keeping an eye single to the interests of the F.P.U., the President secured a practical politician for the position. AND SO THE COUNTRY LEARNED THAT COAKER IS A MAN WHOSE HEAD IS NOT TURNED BY SUCCESS AND ALSO THAT HIS PRESENT POSITION DOES INDEED REQUIRE MUCH SELF-SACRIFICE AND NO LITTLE DIPLOMACY.

It is a foregone conclusion that under his leadership the Fishermen's Protective Union will eventually become the governing power of the land and thus in elevating the Toilers to this dignified position, which is theirs by every right of manhood, W. F. COAKER HAS WRIT HIS NAME LARGELY ON THE PAGE OF NEWFOUNDLAND HISTORY.

### Italy Declares Complete Blockade Austro-Hungary, Albanian Coasts

Rome, via Paris, May 26.—The Italian Government, believing that Austria is utilizing several ports on the Albanian Coast for secret commissariat departments, declared a blockade to-day "against that portion of the Austro-Hungarian Coast comprised between the Italian frontier on the north to the Montenegrin boundary on the south, including the islands, ports, anchorages and bays and also the Albanian Coast, from the Montenegrin limits on the north and including Cape Kiephali on the south."

The declaration specifies the geographical limits by latitude and longitude and adds:

"Vessels belonging to friendly and neutral powers will be allowed sufficient time to leave the zone, the amount of time to be determined by the chief of the naval forces."

"Measures will be taken in conformity with the rules of international law and treaties in existence against all vessels endeavoring to cross or which succeed in crossing the line marked by Cape Otrante and Cape Kiephali."

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### Smoke and Flame Mile High When Princess Irene Blew Up

London, May 28.—No trace has been found of a hart or steam launch which was moored alongside the Princess Irene or its crew of five men since the explosion which destroyed the big steamer and it is assumed five more names must be added to the list of dead.

One possible survivor of the explosion is in hospital suffering from shock. He was picked up in the water some time after the explosion but it has not been learned whether he was a member of the Princess Irene's crew or was blown out of some small boat nearby. Two barges which were alongside the Irene were demolished.

**Naval Officer's Account.**  
A naval officer who witnessed the explosion said in describing it: "The ship was moored, seventy yards from the point on shore where I was standing. Suddenly I noticed a little wisp of smoke aboard and called out, 'Is there a fire there?' "Before the men aboard could answer there came an explosion like a volcanic eruption. Then a great cloud of dust, coal, smoke and flame rose a mile high. Amidst the smoke, the eye could discern huge pieces of the ship bursting into smaller pieces as they rose.

"The ship didn't go down; she went up, distributing her remains in dust and jagged fragments over a radius of many miles. The smoke cloud of the explosion lasted, I think, only a moment or two. I rubbed my eyes and saw clear air where the Irene, barges and launches had been a moment before.

"The explosion seemed to stun everyone for a few minutes. Then

came the order 'away boats crews to pick up survivors.' But when I got into a boat and sailed past the spot where the explosion had occurred there was nothing but a single fragment to mark the place. Farther away, however, the water was dotted with pieces of wreckage."