

History of Co-operation in Scotland

The "History of Co-operation in Scotland" is the title of a very interesting book, written by William Maxwell, J.P., who has recently retired from the board of management of the Scottish Wholesale Society. Mr. Maxwell is a man who has spent his life in active service of various co-operative societies in Scotland and is well fitted for the task of writing the stories of the lives of the numerous societies that are in existence at the present day in that country.

The writer deals with the inception and the leaders of co-operation in Scotland in a very liberal and lucid manner. He gives at the commencement a description of the conditions of the workmen in 1700, showing how the people lived and how they gradually came together in little communities for the purpose of discussing various questions and started the nucleus of the first co-operative societies, which have since grown to such enormous proportions.

The writer could not have picked on a better country than Scotland for the history of co-operation, as it was the poor working-people themselves who first formulated the societies. The author says:—"You will search in vain through that long and painful story of trial and privation for the slightest indication of any of the better educated classes suggesting or trying to promote a scheme or schemes whereby the people might emancipate themselves to some extent from the thralldom of poverty, which kept them so long in isolated and hopeless lethargy."

In almost every country in Europe, and even far beyond Europe, history teems with evidences of efforts being made to reform society so that the lot of the poor might be improved. In Scotland the poor were preached at to be content with their lot, as if it were a Divine decree. Scotland had few humanitarians in the eighteenth century, so that it may safely be affirmed that until well on into last century the battles of reforms had to be fought by the workers. They had not the slightest means of knowing anything that was going on in the world outside their own locality. Any little effort of united action for their improvement was entirely spontaneous, and not the outcome of any well-planned scheme or organization, which has done so much for them since the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Thus their starting of village clubs for sick and funeral relief, and later on the launching of the village store, where simple efforts to minimize the effects of the cruel poverty with which they were constantly menaced; and it also foreshadowed a hope that they would be enabled by these means to maintain an independence that would keep them from soliciting or accepting charity. Scottish co-operation in this way, at least in the early efforts, owed little to outside influences.

The methods of conducting the old societies as pointed out by the writer, seem to have varied very much. The earliest efforts were simply a few neighbors agreeing to purchase some of the necessities of life in bulk, and dividing them into the proportions required by the agreeing parties; this operation was performed in one of their private houses. The money to purchase the goods in bulk having been collected before the purchase was made, the debt question had no place in these transactions. The author makes use of a private instance showing how at the present day people practice co-operation without knowing it, as they did in the earlier days:—"A gentleman known to us, an opponent of every co-operative, purchases a boat-load of coal every winter, and the coal is divided among those of his neighbors, who are willing to join him; they procure the coal for less than they could do locally. They boast of this, and in the same breath denounce co-operations. The poor villagers of over a hundred years ago were co-operating perhaps without knowing it, but it is strange that the anti-co-operator of to-day should be repeating the operation. Farm produce such as potatoes, meal, flour, and occasionally a pig, lent itself to such forms of division in the early days. It was a simple and easy step from this form of dividing goods in bulk, to forming the same people into a club for the extension of the idea." In this, as the writer describes, we get the seed of the great

co-operative movement, at least in many villages in Scotland.

The author presents the reader with reliable data of the starting of a store in 1709. The Fenwick Weavers' Society is given the honor of being the first to enter the co-operative field, not only in Scotland but in Britain. The following letter is an exact copy of the original and is rather remarkable in regards to spelling:—

9th November 1709

"This present Day it is agreed upon by the members of our society to take what money we have in our Box and buy what Victuals may be necessary to sell for the benefit our society. And the managers of our society may borrow what money They think Proper for that End and purpose. And when the interest is paid of what money you borrow and the men received their wages for buying and selling the Victuals we Deal in, the society will both reap and benefit and sustain the loss of them, and if any member of our society Pay not what quantity of Victuals he receives at the end of four weeks If the managers require it of him. Neither him nor his shall have any more right to our society's Victuals If he be found buying Victuals from any other and leaving the trade in Debt of the same according to the option of the society."

The reader is forced to note in particular the unanimity with which the early societies condemned the giving of credit, and also how they made provision to assist any of their members when in distress. Disloyalty they would not tolerate, and it is evident that a disloyal member to the store, which on joining he had promised to support, was a man not to be trusted, and he certainly did not get off scot-free from the enthusiasts who were members of the committee. Showing the deep religious convictions that guided the members, one illustration given by the author will serve. "At a full quarterly meeting of one society the question of Sunday labour in the bakehouse was raised. It was discussed very calmly and though it was pointed out regretfully that the ovens had to be kindled and the sponge for the bread set, it was agreed that a committee be appointed to inquire and report if it was absolutely necessary to do this work on the Sabbath. The committee reported in due time, 'That the work must continue; it was a work of necessity,' and the report was regretfully accepted."

Bannockburn Society

The rules which governed Bannockburn Society are here given as they follow the usual lines, in fact they were largely taken from the Glasgow Co-operative society. One or two are quoted, to show the methods adopted eighty years ago:—

"Article 6—The capital of the society shall be held in shares of one pound sterling, and to be paid (if necessary) by instalments of not less than one penny per week. Members on registering their names shall pay one shilling as part payment of their share, and for every deposit of five shillings a proportional share of the profits and liberty of voting shall be allowed, but no member to hold more than one share; children, however, may be entered as members, but shall not be entitled to vote under fifteen years of age."

Article 7—Any person desiring to leave the society can only get his share and the profits thereon in goods at the retail price of the bazaar, after paying a deduction of ten per cent. to the funds of the society. But a member removing out of the

parish of St. Ninians will be allowed his share in money, with the profits thereon as declared at the general meeting, and when death takes place in the family of a member, or is himself unfit for work from bodily affliction, he shall be at liberty to take goods at the society's prices to the amount of his share and profit thereon accumulating till the previous general meeting.

Article 9—Members having paid their full share will be at liberty if they find it necessary, to take goods on credit to the amount of five shillings, to be paid in full in one month from the time the first is taken.

Article 10—That so soon as the funds of the society shall permit, a bazaar will be open for the purpose of retailing such commodities as shall be required by the members, or sold with advantages to the society (and be advertised in at least two newspapers); that no credit be either taken or given, with the exception of regulation 9."

Bannockburn Society was numbered among the successful societies; the determined stand made against credit was their saving clause. It was not till 1858 that the subject of credit appeared in their minutes. For twenty-eight years they had evidently kept both to the letter and spirit of their rules. After the above date the question crops up frequently, but from the strong expressions used against the system, one can gather that the majority were still in favor of cash payments.

Societies had no sooner launched their grocery department than they took up the supply of butcher meat, a cloth department, and a shoemaking section. They divided their general committee into sub-committees, with officials for each. They had what they called a sub-committee and—to-day it would be called a finance committee; and each sub-committee had to show a balance-sheet for their department. Of course there was no printed balance-sheet; the accounts were simply read from manuscript at quarterly meetings. Profits were added to shares at the end of each year, the members receiving a card, with the value added to their share or part of share; thus each member knew his holding in the society. Another peculiarity existed regarding loyalty to the society. If it came to the knowledge of the committee that one of the members was buying his goods elsewhere, he was at once summoned before the committee, and, if he was found guilty of inconsistency he was fined 1s. or 2s. according to the enormity of the offence, and warned of heavier punishment should he continue in his unco-operative practices. Committees of the present day would have their hands full if they proceeded on the lines of the Bannockburn committee, but the moral obligation is or ought to be as great on members now as it was in this fine old society.

The Dawn of Modern Co-operation and Co-operative Legislation

The author, although he deals with co-operation in Scotland, finds it necessary to cross the border for a time, to explain more fully how the new era in the movement came about. He, however, discusses briefly at the commencement, the part played by Mr. Alexander Campbell, a distinguished Scotchman, in the great change which is generally believed to have begun in Rochdale.

Mr. Alexander Campbell, of Glasgow, was appointed in 1837, as one of the first

missionaries under Robert Owen's scheme, to advocate the cause so fully set forth in the "New Moral World." The author, at the commencement of the book, deals considerably with the movement inaugurated by Robert Owen in the early days. The influences which he exerted on all of the societies in those days are felt down to the present day. This appointment took him over a great part of the Dominion, lecturing in all the towns of importance. It was he who first advised the principle of dividing profits on purchases; which is claimed to be one of the greatest, if not the most important discoveries in connection with the co-operative movement. Rochdale was early in the field with co-operative ideas. The members numbered fifty-two and the capital was slightly over one hundred pounds. One of the most important rules of the society was as follows:—

"That at each general meeting the officers in their financial statement shall publish the amount of profits realized by the society during the preceding quarter, which shall be divided thus: Interest at the rate of 3½ per cent. per annum shall be paid on all shares paid up previous to the quarter's commencement, the remaining profits shall be paid to each member in proportion to the amount of money expended at the store."

From this moment co-operation pulsed with a new life. A way had at last been discovered whereby the working-classes could supplement their scanty and irregular incomes, a new hope of helping themselves animated the despairing, and that without effort. All must consume, thus all could participate in the profits which formerly were so inequitably apportioned. The very poorest now had a chance, if they cared to accept it, for the shares could be got with accruing profits. Thus the sun of co-operation had risen, and its feeble rays gathered light and heat as the day advanced.

It was in 1846 that parliament was first called upon to deal with co-operative societies. The "Friendly Societies' Act" of 1846, had a clause introduced that was termed the "Frugal Investment Clause," which enabled societies to be established for the frugal investment of the savings of the members by providing themselves with corn, coal, flour and other necessities, or to provide education. This was the first legislative recognition of the humble store. Later a bill was introduced in parliament and passed called the "Industrial and Provident Societies' Act." This Act, although it opened a separate register for these societies, continued to apply to them many of the clauses of the "Friendly Societies Act." The new Act gave permission "to carry on in common any labor, trade or handicrafts, except the working of mines, minerals or quarries beyond the limits of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and the business of banking." The title of the Act is "Industrial and Provident." Mr. E. W. Brasbrook says that "this expression has never superseded the term 'co-operative societies,' by which they are familiarly known. It aptly indicates their two-fold operation. They are 'industrial' in their productive sense, as combining the labor of many for the benefit of the whole; they are 'provident' in the distributive sense, as enabling the member to economize the cost of the necessities of life and thus to obtain some modest luxuries, to increase his standard of comfort, to accumulate profits, to become by their means the proprietor of his own dwelling, and in many other ways to improve his own position. The industrial side of the system is most truly co-operative when it pays good wages, and gives the worker a share in the profits."

In the year 1860 another extension of the Act was necessary in order to give more freedom to the societies in dealing with their profits. In the new Bill education was provided for. This Bill granted the societies the privilege of incorporation, and assimilating them to companies under the Companies Act rather than to societies under the "Friendly Societies Act." It retained, however, their more cheap and simple system of registration.

Again (in 1867) further amendments were made. It was E. V. Neale who

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A CO-OPERATIVE SPECIAL

An increasingly large number of the readers of THE GUIDE are becoming interested in the subject of co-operation. They are realizing that by working together they can secure the necessities of life at a reduced cost, and secure maximum of service from minimum of expenditure in time, labor and money. In order that all our readers may have the benefit of the experience of others it is the intention to issue a co-operative number of THE GUIDE sometime during the winter. For this reason we would like every local association in the three Prairie Provinces, or any other farmers' organization in the West that has co-operated in the purchase of commodities, or in the sale of farm produce, to send us a complete report of their work. We want to know to what extent they carried on that work and the benefits (financially and otherwise) that were received. We must have all these reports in not later than January 15th. We want the report on every co-operative work that has been done, no matter if it is merely the purchase of formaldehyde or buying seed, or selling grain, or selling hay or anything else.

THE GRAIN GROWERS' GUIDE.