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CO-OPERATION.

BY ANDREW ROY.

Co-operation, which is meant the banding together of a number of workmen for the purpose of applying their earnings in starting a store, opening a coal mine, building a blast furnace, or engaging in other industrial pursuit, and thus becoming at once the possessor of their own capital and labor, had its origin in England in the year 1843. The subject had been for a number of years previously discussed during strikes and labor troubles.

In 1843 the flannel weavers of Rochdale having failed in their effort to secure an advance of wages which they regarded as due them, turned their attention to the question of opening a store on a co-operative plan, and by the lessened cost of purchasing pro-

visions make up in a measure for that which had been denied them by their employers. A society was organized consisting of forty members, and a little shop in Toad Lane was rented for \$50 a year. All the cash the company could raise to commence business with did not exceed \$10; the whole stock of the store consisted of a barrel of salt, a few pounds of butter and a little oatmeal. For some time the little store was made the butt of much clumsy ridicule, but the members were men of sense and intelligence, who attended to their own business, and the ridicule about the "owd weaver's shop in Toad Lane" soon gave way to wonder and admiration. The affairs of the society continued to flourish from the day the little shop was opened, and its fame was sung before long from "Land's End to John O'Groat's." At the end of fourteen years it had grown into one of the largest establishments in the United Kingdom—the business of the association having reached the enormous amount of \$380,000 per annum, and all this business was done on a cash basis. This co-operative society still exists; its business has branched out into every other department of trade, and a score of first-class stores are owned by the company. There is now a library and reading-room in connection with the society, which contains 20,000 volumes and all the leading periodicals published in Great Britain and the United States. A newspaper, called the *Rochdale Co-operative News*, is published in connection with the society, and is the official organ of the co-operative movement in England.

The success attending the venture of the Rochdale weavers soon spread over all England; other co-operative societies were formed, and there are now in Great Britain between 1,400 and 1,500 such associations in existence, having an aggregate membership of upward of 500,000, the annual sales of all these co-operative stores reaching the enormous amount of \$75,000,000 per annum. Every one of these societies was little better off at the date of organization as to means than the Rochdale association. They were originally established for the purpose of purchasing food, clothing and other necessaries of life at wholesale prices for the benefit of members. Their rules are such that a share in no case exceeds \$5, and the greatest number of shares each member may purchase is usually limited to 200. Members are not required to pay the whole amount subscribed in advance, and in default of payment, resulting from sickness or want of employment, the time is extended.

A committee of management, consisting of a few of the wiser heads of the society, are elected by members to serve for a stated time, who receive a small compensation for their services. Business meetings are usually held every quarter. Many of the societies have grown into enormous proportions, almost surpassing credence. The co-operative society of Halifax has twenty-five branches, and does a business aggregating at least one and a half million dollars per annum, and realizing a net annual profit of fully \$150,000. Like the Rochdale society, a magnificent library and reading-room has been provided, which issues to its members 500 volumes per week. The leading daily, weekly, monthly and quarterly periodicals are always on hand. In fact, a leading feature of co-operative societies in England consists in supplying their members with wholesome literature, for such societies are only a possibility among intelligent workingmen. Wherever there are reading-rooms and libraries among workingmen there is the beginning of industrial independence; there you will find temperance, morality and thrift, without which there can be no intelligence.

The manner of carrying on business on the part of these co-operative stores is as follows: All goods are purchased and sold for cash. Goods are sold to all purchasers alike, whether they belong to the society or not, for one price. Only the best goods the markets can afford are purchased and offered for sale. So careful are the managing committees at many of the stores that any goods suspected of being adulterated are sent to chemists for analysis, the workingmen who control these societies justly concluding that as all the food of the world is raised by the brawny arm of labor, so the workingman has the best right to pure, healthful, unadulterated food. This plan also gives such stores a deserved reputation for keeping only the purest articles for sale. All true men will pay a good price for a pure article of food rather than purchase an article at a less price which has been adulterated. As a general rule only stores that sell for cash have succeeded, nearly all those adopting the credit system having failed. The average interest to investors derived from these co-operative stores often reaches as high as 28 per cent. Some pay better than others, according as they are managed with skill and judgment. So successful have they been, however, that they may be said to have become permanent institutions in England, and it is believed that they will, before the lapse of many years, control the whole pro-

ductive and distributive business of the United Kingdom. They possess another great advantage to the workingman—they encourage thrift. Thousands of workingmen who are now in a measure well to do never had a dollar ahead until they became members of a co-operative society. Having accumulated a little for a rainy day, the desire to add to it grows upon most men, and the possession of means invariably commands respect on the part of society, for, as Dr. Franklin says in *Poor Richard's*, "Now that I have a cow and a horse everybody says 'good morning, sir.'"

In Great Britain, with its dense population, its aristocracy, its laws of entail, the avenues to wealth or political distinction have ever been hermetically sealed against the workingman, except only through co-operative associations such as have been described, where a very little capital, but an abundance of good business sense, was all that was needed to command success. Co-operation grew out of the necessities of the English laborer, and all honor to him who, surrounded with such formidable barriers, has found a safe and sure way to improve his condition in his life.

Although co-operation has been attended with such grand results in the mother country, it has attracted very little attention in this country up to date. Twenty-five years ago numerous associations similar in character to the co-operative societies of Great Britain were organized in the New England States and other portions of the Union; but instead of flourishing and becoming a vast power in bettering the condition of the industrial masses, the great majority of them soon declined and passed away. The reason for this is, however, obvious; they were organized too soon. In this country, with its free institutions, its sparse population, its vast agricultural and mineral resources, its boundless great west, the avenues to wealth and honor have been so numerous and so easily accessible that workingmen capable of leading in great industrial reforms have been drawn into business or public life, and have done for themselves as individuals what the English workingman could never hope to accomplish—become capitalists on their own account, owning stores, opening mines, building railroads and achieving honor in the public service. The man who a few years ago was a day laborer on the farm, in the coal mine, at the rolling mill, is now the controlling spirit in every department of human industry, while the rail splitter, the tanner, the tailor and the canal boat driver have become world-renowned Presidents.

But as our country becomes filled up with a denser population; as wealth finds its way into fewer hands; as corporations increase in magnitude and power; as the public service becomes more and more corrupt by the use and influence of money, the opportunities for workingmen rising in life will become correspondingly difficult. The labor leaders will then in self-defense, as in England, organize co-operative societies to protect themselves against the growing power of aggregated capital. And this will be the beginning of the end of industrial independence.

The miners of Kansas are reaching out and solving the labor question, not by fruitless and endless strikes and combinations against capital, but by the practical application of industrial co-operation. I found during a recent visit to Osage County, in that State, two mines worked by the co-operation of miners, who, combining labor and capital, were doing for themselves what no strike had ever accomplished or ever will accomplish for them.

The Superior Coal and Mining Company, situated at Osage City, a joint stock enterprise, composed of 41 members, all miners, was organized four years ago. They purchased 56 acres of land owning coal and surface, but since the mines were opened most of the land has been sold out in lots to individual members. The mines have been worked successfully on the long-wall system, the prevailing plan of mining coal in the district.

The Industrial Coal and Mining Company was organized in March, 1880, and consists of 12 members, all miners, each of whom holds an equal share in the mining adventure. The company have leased the coal they work, paying half a cent per bushel royalty. The plant consists of 40 acres; the mines are located at Scranton. Upon the organization of the company work was immediately commenced in the shaft and was pushed so vigorously and successfully that less than fourteen hundred dollars were expended in sinking the shaft and in completing all arrangements for shipping purposes.

Another enterprise called the Co-operative Store Company, was commenced June, 1881; this enterprise is located at Scranton, and consists of 19 members, all of whom are working miners. The store room is 20x22 feet.

These industrial movements owe their being to the Knights of Labor, an organization of working men of great numbers and power in the coal mining regions of the West. Such movements

deserve encouragement as the true solution of the "Labor Question," and are of more real value to the practical interests of workmen than an army of strikers and labor agitators. Success to the Knights of Labor of Kansas. Long may their banner of industrial progress wave in the van. The true labor reformer desires to build up, not to pull down; to save, not to destroy.

Industrial co-operation is being revived all over this country among our workmen, and ought to be recognized by every true friend of labor; but above all the workmen must work at their own temporal salvation. "God helps those that help themselves," is a maxim that is true alike of individuals and of communities, and it is especially true of American workmen. By the constitution of this country every man is equal before the law, and under our school system every boy, no matter how poor, can receive an education which fits him for every pursuit of life. This is a duty the Republic owes to all its citizens, for without education free institutions could not long exist.

In this country everything is possible to workingmen; the history of the Republic shows that many of the most active workers and thinkers and the best men in every department have been drawn from the industrial classes. Men who are born and reared in easy circumstances seldom put forth great efforts or achieve enduring places in history. The spirit of manly self-reliance which faces and surmounts great obstacles is fostered on the farm, in the workshop and in the mine. "The best part of every man's education is that which he gives himself," said Sir Walter Scott. Life is a great school and the world a great school-master. The original differences between men are not naturally great; they consist more in self-help than in native talent. What men achieve in life is the result of industry and perseverance, rather than native superiority.

Historians tell us that Robert Bruce, the hero king of Scotland, having made six unsuccessful attempts to regain the throne of his ancestors and restore the liberties of his country, was almost in despair. He was one day lodging in a barn in Ireland, when he saw a spider on the ceiling trying to pass from one rafter to another. Six times it made the attempt and failed, but the seventh it succeeded. The king took courage; he thought he read his fate in the success of the spider. Rallying a few trusty followers, he again landed in Scotland, and again raised the flag of his

country. From this time he was successful; he overthrew the English in every battle, and on the field of Bannockburn established the liberties of Scotland and humbled the proudest monarch in Christendom.
