

~~Writing in 1893, about that visit of his, Dr Woodward summed the matter in the following interesting and modest passage:—~~

~~“The writer is free to say that while European industrial schools had much to suggest in regard to the capacity of pupils for manual work, and of their enduring interest in it, they suggested to him no improvement in his methods of instruction, and very little in regard to the scope of his work. On the contrary they exhibited a narrowness of purpose and a crudeness of method which ought by all means to be avoided. With the exception of some of the primary schools of Paris, he saw no pupil in an industrial school who was not there to learn a trade. The general educational value of manual training for pupils who might not become craftsmen was not then recognised in any school.~~

~~“Such was the state of things in 1885. Great changes have taken place in Europe during the past nine years, but it is a historical fact, which some appear reluctant to admit, that manual training, as we in America understand it, was not imported from any country.” (Report of Commissioner of Education, Washington, for year 1893-94, p. 894).~~

~~The international position in regard to Manual Training appears, then, to be this. A hint caught from Russia in 1868 was developed in America to the proportions of a new educational method. A visit to Europe in 1885 enabled Dr. C. M. Woodward to show Manchester and other places the true inwardness of the American system. As England was already well aware of the industrial advantages that America enjoyed from her superior education, this knowledge was applied there, and has since 1890 been grafted on to the whole primary school system of England. It has proved so successful there that now in 1897-99 our Irish educational authorities have recommended its adoption in Irish schools. And in the end of 1900 we are beginning to adopt it, tentatively and gradually. Let us recollect that we are ten years behind England, which was itself already twenty years behind America. That will show us that we have no “new-fangled fad” to deal with. And as so many Irish youths go to America we may reflect what “hewers of wood and drawers of waters” they must find themselves condemned to be by the mere fact that they land in the New World handicapped by the total lack of that education which the Great Republic has so munificently provided for all the American youths.~~

2.—*Educational Value of Co-operation among Irish Farmers.*

By P. J. HANNON, Esq.

[Read Wednesday, 19th December, 1900.]

THOSE who have followed the career of Mr. Horace Plunkett's co-operative agricultural propaganda in Ireland during the past ten years can hardly entertain any doubts as to the great results achieved from a material point of view. When one realises that Irish butter, which practically had been superseded

by the brands of Denmark and Normandy, is now on a competitive level with the most progressive of our continental rivals; that the Irish egg, which grew to be a synonym for all that was unwholesome and unpalatable in the most unpopular item of daily consumption among the masses of Englishmen, is now sought for eagerly at prices far ahead of those of which the foreign article fetches; that agricultural requirements, such as fertilizers, feeding stuffs, machinery, and seeds, which are direct instruments of agricultural production, are reduced to a minimum of cost with a practically absolute guarantee of quality; that farm operations, such as threshing, winnowing, reaping, spraying of potatoes, and so on, have been rendered much more efficient at a considerable reduction in the labour bill; that grain and other farm crops are transmitted direct to the best market without the intervention of a host of unnecessary middlemen; and that the improvement of live stock has been made available to the poorest tenant-occupier for the merest trifle comparatively; and that capital can be provided for productive purposes in the very poorest localities at a nominal interest and under circumstances most favourable to improved farming; and all this through a combination of those farmers into groups, the motto of which is "self help by mutual help:" there will be little hesitation in accepting the part such a movement is destined to play in the social and economic welfare of our people.

But the object of this paper is not to dwell upon the advantages which co-operation confers upon the farmer as an institution for ordinary business purposes, but to bring before you its effect upon the country as a medium of education, especially education of a practical or technical character, tending to make the worker a more accomplished and intelligent performer of the functions he discharges in the industrial life of the country.

It is, of course, well-known that the most remarkable developments of the vast and complex industrial activity of Great Britain during the past half-a-century is the formation of voluntary associations, which, in the words of an eminent writer, "combine the powerful motive force arising from the recognition of high ideas with the dogged pursuit of certain practical objects." But this associative movement did not extend itself to those who were engaged in the agricultural industry in England, nor has it, indeed, up to the present made any appreciable change in English rural economics, owing to a variety of causes which need not now be discussed, but many of which differentiate between the general character of the farming industry in the two countries on either sides of the channel. Mr. Plunkett, however, perceived that the Irish tenant was at once an employer and labourer, his own labour contributing largely to the gross turn over of his business, and

he at once proceeded to apply the methods of industrial organisation of workers to those who were engaged upon the land. The first appeals were naturally made so that the profits of farming might be enhanced, and in the earlier propaganda there is absence of that idealism which is now one of its most prominent characteristics. Associations grew rapidly, and every county in the four provinces became dotted over with creameries and their auxiliaries, agricultural societies, agricultural banks, poultry and home industries societies, with others for cottage gardening, flax improvement, and the improvement of live stock.

But while these associations grew, a very striking change was gradually developing itself, a change well described by Dr. Baernreither in his *English Associations of Working Men*. "Still, more than this, the workman who directs all these countless associations of the most varied kinds has ceased to be an inactive spectator of the State and Society. His life has received a new purpose and character His understanding and his insight in economic matters are increasing; he is learning by his own experience to recognise the difficulties which oppose themselves to the carrying out of social institutions; he is becoming more moderate in his claims, calmer in judgment, and more contented with success. Step by step, by his meetings, journals and congresses, he is attracting the general interest of the public, and becoming a more active, independent and powerful factor in State life. But the main thing is that the world of thought is filled with things clearly practicable and attainable, and that no Utopias find a place in it."

In Ireland the most serious drawback to successful farming has been want of knowledge of the industry itself. Both primary and intermediate schools were alike without any efficient provision for instruction in the sciences and arts applicable to agriculture, and so the good old system of "what was good enough for my father is good enough for me" was pursued with all the tender attachment of the Celtic character for generations. The times and methods of cultivation, the rotation of crops, the use of concentrated fertilizers for soils, and concentrated foods for farm animals were alike unknown, the preservation of farm-yard manure and the economical treatment of live stock were equally neglected, and there was much waste, much worry, idle winters, and gradually diminishing profits. The Irish farmer gave himself little trouble in an effort to understand the successful methods of his fellow cultivators in similar situated countries abroad, nor indeed with the best intentions in the world had he any facilities to acquire this knowledge. Every individual pursued his own course after a fashion peculiar to himself, and without any more authoritative guide than his own caprice, or

his experience of the primitive course adopted by his ancestors. There was little desire to take his neighbours and fellow workers into his confidence and far less desire to associate with him in matters of purchase and sale and general mutual improvement. He seldom read journals or magazines dealing with the concerns vital to farmers. He only occasionally adverted to his personal concerns with regard to his farmstead and homestead, and his evenings and spare hours were mainly spent in discussing political questions at home or foreign wars or other international complications abroad.

The Co-operative movement has produced an extraordinary revolution in all this, and has given an impetus to the spread of information among those composing the various voluntary associations in Ireland, which is year after year manifesting itself with increasing advantage to the whole community.

Perhaps the most attractive educational development directly due to the influence of the teachings of Mr. Plunkett, is the better understanding established and more kindly feeling generated among Irishmen of different creeds and classes. If there was one kind of knowledge which our countrymen wanted more than another it was knowledge of one another. Hitherto the curse of this country has been in a large measure, want of mutual respect and confidence between persons of different religious denominations, and want of mutual regard and mutual help between persons of different social standing. Religious bickerings and social snobbery have, in my opinion, done more to demoralise the people in many parts of the country than any other conceivable agency. In the co-operative societies of which there are now upwards of five hundred, there is hardly one which does not embrace within its membership persons of all classes and creeds in the community in which it exists. The inevitable result is that men who thus come together for economic and industrial purposes learn to attach a proper value to one another's good qualities, and gradually realise that every section of their countrymen is an indispensable element in the construction of a more prosperous commonwealth and in the creation of a more healthy and more comprehensive national life. This cannot be regarded otherwise than as an educational process of the highest value, from a national point of view, and for the first time in our history, it has become a practical reality through the agency of co-operative associations.

When one sees in the County Armagh a Catholic priest unanimously elected Chairman of a Society, by a Committee consisting of equal numbers of Protestants and Catholics; when one finds in the county of Down the Parish Priest, the Rector and the Presbyterian Minister holding a series of meetings and taking the chair at these meetings in turn; and when one finds in Cork, Kilkenny, or Galway, the local Protestant Clergyman or the local Protestant landlord voted with

acclamation President of a local society, one begins to hope that a better day has dawned for a people whose history has been darkened by class ascendancy and religious intolerance. Priests in Tyrone, Londonderry and Monaghan told me their Protestant neighbours scarcely spoke a kindly word to them till a co-operative society was established, and a parson in Mayo told me he never could believe the Catholics around him were such excellent people till he met them at the weekly meetings of the society in the various schoolrooms throughout the parish. In a co-operative creamery in Fermanagh with a membership of 360, only 66 are Protestants and yet the chairman, who is an ordinary farmer is a Protestant and is in the fullest confidence of all the people. The landlord now more readily understands the doubts, difficulties and struggles of the tenant, and the tenant is comforted and encouraged from the fact that his landlord is prepared to work side by side with him in the interests of both. I dwell upon this phase of the educational value of co-operation because those who look forward with hope and enthusiasm to a better Ireland in the future regard their ideal as impracticable unless it embraces the owner and the occupier as equally requisite to national prosperity and when it treats every wealth-producer as a necessary item of industrial progress, regardless of the place of worship at which his conscience dictates that he should adore the Author of his being.

Not less remarkable is the moral force of co-operation in the making of men, in imparting a spirit of self-reliance to persons who had little or no incentive towards this desirable end before. Both these phases of co-operative education have been beautifully dwelt upon by Mr. W. B. Yeats, in a speech delivered at a delegates' dinner at one of the annual conferences of the societies. "The end of all government, the end of all politics, the end of all movements was the making of character. The political movement, or the system of government, was the best that made—when time had been given for its work to be done—the most men of high and stable character in a country, and certainly, he could not imagine a movement that was more likely to make men of high and stable character than a movement which was teaching men to have confidence in one another and to do their work by combining together, instead of opposing one another; and that was helping to end the suspicion of class for class; and that was giving men confidence in themselves by teaching them to do for themselves things they had been accustomed to have done for them."

There are, as I have said, upwards of five hundred of these societies, embracing a membership of more than 50,000, and I now propose to direct attention to the practical training which these institutions have imparted to the farmers who compose them. In the old days, farmers who made butter paid little at-

tention either to the selection and treatment of their dairy cattle or the arrangement and cleanliness of their dairies, not to speak of improved facilities for marketing their produce. Now through their frequent meetings and conferences, the circulation of various journals and periodicals, and the lectures given by the organisers and officials of the I.A.O.S., the ordinary farmer has become much better informed on the subjects pertaining to his industry. He has come to understand the methods of his foreign rivals, and he can appreciate the introduction of complex machinery into a business hitherto conducted by individuals in a most primitive way. He has been taught that rules of cleanliness must be observed in his farmstead, and he is fully convinced that a well-bred milch cow is more profitable than one of doubtful pedigree and badly developed parts. He is fully alive to the necessity of using artificial foods for farm animals and will have little difficulty in quickly estimating the money value of the improved feeding. But beyond all this he has grasped the solution of the sorest of economic problems in an agricultural community, viz., how to cope with foreign competition, and has applied the intelligence thus acquired to the production of an article in the best marketable condition. In the creamery districts of the country strict rules are enforced regulating the conditions under which milk is received, and in some localities, especially in the North of Ireland, special committees have been appointed to make periodical inspection of byres and cowsheds and the natural result of this friendly surveillance is to establish a certain order and regularity in the farmyard which inspires the family with increased earnestness in making their daily toil a success.

Those who are intimately acquainted with the conditions of Irish farming will remember that it is only quite recently that the Feeding Stuffs and Fertilizers Act came to be understood and applied in Ireland. The Irish farmer as an individual was accustomed to secure his seeds, manures and cattle foods, with little regard to their quality and at prices which but too frequently embodied an enormous margin of profit for the various agents who stood between him and the seedsman or manufacturer. Through their associations farmers have been educated in the scientific principles which underlie the adjustment of agricultural values, and it is quite interesting to hear rough frieze-coated peasants explain in intelligible language the nature and relative values of the constituents upon which the value of a manure depends, or compare the respective merits of seeds whose germinating power and purity may differ in different samples by so much per cent.

In the agricultural co-operative societies enormous quantities of various requirements have been purchased, and perhaps the most pleasing feature of this advantageous distributive process is that every committee of a society insists on samples

of their consignments of goods being taken, and an analysis conducted by a public analyst according to the prescribed Order in Council. The satisfaction which fills the minds of men situated as Irish tenant-farmers are, and hitherto occupying an absolutely unprotected position with regard to their trade dealings, can easily be understood.

The education influence of co-operation exercised through the medium of Agricultural Banks established on the Raffeisen principle has been fully dealt with on a former occasion in a paper read before this Society, and need not be referred to here, but it may be mentioned in passing that no branch of I.A.O.S. programme has been more fruitful in the building up of character and the spread of valuable information among the poorer circles of our countrymen. As the extension of these village banks was especially desirable in several poor localities along the Western seaboard where Irish is practically the only language spoken, an Irish speaking organiser was appointed in order that the clearest exposition of the objects and functions of these institutions might be conveyed. His reports and the results of the observations of many visitors tend to prove that co-operative propaganda in these remote districts has an educative influence very far-reaching indeed. A leaflet in Gaelic, written by Dr. Douglas Hyde has been widely distributed in these Irish-speaking districts.

The poultry and egg industries of the country have been in a very backward state for many years. There was general ignorance as to the proper fowls to keep and how to make most out of them. The fowls sent to market were of the poorest description, and the eggs were not merely small and generally exported in a dirty condition, but the period of time which elapsed from the date of laying till they reached the consumer was such as to preclude them from the premier place in the market, and gave to this important Irish product a reputation not by any means an enviable one. Co-operative societies successfully entered upon the task of educating the farmers—or rather, perhaps, the wives of the farmers—as to improvements of breeds, better accommodation for and more careful attention to fowls, and the requirements of the markets in which the output of the poultry yard must compete against colonial and continental producers. The wife of an Irish cottier appreciates quite fully the importance of an improved breed of fowls, as well as the necessity of selling her eggs in a perfectly fresh state where these societies exist.

During the past four years agricultural experiments have become a most interesting feature of the educational work of Co-operative Societies. In 1896 and 1897 practical demonstrations in the utility of potato spraying were given by a number of societies and the result has been that this necessary measure for the preservation of the chief crop grown in the

country is now being carried out with the greatest care at the proper time and in the most economical way in almost every district into which agricultural organisation has penetrated. Before these experiments had been conducted by these local societies there was a strong prejudice against potato spraying, and I can well remember when we first undertook to urge the necessity of a dressing of Bordeaux mixture as a preventative for potato blight we were quite frequently met with the observation that the crop "should be left to the mercy of God." Well, very few farmers now hesitate to acknowledge the importance of spraying, and its widespread introduction is due, in no small degree, to the advance of agricultural co-operation. In 1898-1899, and the present year experimental work on an extensive scale has been taken up by societies under the guidance and instruction of experts provided by the I.A.O.S.

Upwards of one hundred experimental plots were managed this year by co-operative societies with the greatest profit to the districts in which they were established. The sites of these plots were always selected at points easily accessible to the farmers of the locality, and were the scenes of frequent meetings at which the nature and progress of the experiments were fully and carefully explained. These plots had for their objects the practical demonstration of the best time to sow certain corn crops, particularly barley, the quantity of seed per acre which gave the best return, the variety of seed best suited to particular districts, the artificials, both as regards kind and quantity, which produced the best results, whether used with or without farm-yard manure. Besides these there were tests for grass-seed mixtures, the use of basic slag upon grass lands, and the relative value of certain varieties of potato and root crops upon certain soils. One society is at present carrying out with the assistance of the Congested Districts Board an elaborate series of experiments as to the best substitute for fat to be added to skim milk for calf rearing. The practical value of this experimental work is discussed at every meeting of the society and its committee as well as at local conferences. Besides, the results are embodied in the reports which are drafted in homely language for circulation among the whole population affected in each particular case.

All the organisers employed by the I.A.O.S. are men practically acquainted with the economic conditions of the country, and most of them are experienced agriculturists as well, and the visits paid by these officials to societies not merely tend to improve the business details of the management of the society, but give clear and definite instruction to the members on various heads of their farm economy. Magic lantern illustrations are employed and discussion invited on the subject of the technical advice imparted by the lecturer. Over one

and-a-quarter million technical instruction leaflets have been distributed by the I.A.O.S. all over the country. These embrace such subjects as:—factory dairying in all its branches, the sampling and testing of milk and cream pasteurization, the use of ice in dairying, the breeding and feeding of poultry for table purposes and egg production, barley growing, flax cultivation, the destruction of charlock by spraying, prevention of fowl cholera, rules for creamery milk suppliers, instruction in account keeping, feeding of pigs, cottage gardening, shelter for cattle, rot and staggers in sheep, and very many others. The expert staff of the I.A.O.S. include at present a Danish Egg-packing Instructor, two trained agriculturists from English agricultural colleges, an organiser holding the diploma of the Royal Agricultural Society of England, a poultry expert trained at Reading, a creamery inspector from the Midland Dairy Institute, two qualified flax experts, a lady inspector of lace making and home industries, and a specialist in fruit and flower culture.

During the current winter, in consequence of arrangements made in conjunction with the Department of Agriculture, the scope of the experimental work will be much extended, and a new feature is being introduced in the delivery of a series of practical lectures by experts in upwards of twenty subjects affecting the future of Irish agriculture.

The value of the educational work of the co-operative movement is still further enhanced by the division of the whole country into twenty-three conference districts. In each of these districts a permanent conference committee selected by the societies has been elected, and this Permanent Conference Committee, as it is called, summons at regular intervals general meetings of delegates from all the societies in each district included within the Conference area. I attended seventeen of these general meetings this year and in some cases the agenda paper had twenty items upon it, ranging from the training of the officials of societies to the modification of railway rates and the enforcement of the law against the fraudulent sale of margarine as butter. Those out of touch with the progress of voluntary associations in Ireland on the lines advocated by Mr. Plunkett, can have no conception of the intelligence, shrewdness and business capacity of these delegates in the subjects brought up for consideration. An incidental visit to such a conference would be an interesting lesson in Irish economics, and a forcible illustration of the growth of the thinking and reasoning powers of Irishmen when associated on the principle of "each for all, and all for each." An American writer, Mr. H. R. Lloyd, who visited this country some years ago to study the methods employed by Mr. Plunkett, writes in his work on *Labour Co-Partnership*: "These men who, inch by inch have pulled themselves out of

the slough, will never be pushed back into it alive. These co-operators will be the backbone of all future reforms in Ireland."

Recently a few societies succeeded in the establishment of village libraries for the use of their members, and some others have arranged for reading-rooms at the head-quarters of the society, where interesting and profitable reading matter is provided for the members, and where frequent discussions take place.

One society in the County of Mayo is organising for the winter weekly meetings in the schoolrooms all over the parish which it embraces, these meetings to be devoted to debates on local agricultural and economic topics and to the consideration of suggestions for local development brought up by its members. This farmers' debating and mutual improvement society, as it may be described, includes in its membership a Catholic priest, a Protestant rector, a Presbyterian minister, three local landlords, two land agents and about two hundred farmers. The meetings of these men in a friendly give-and-take spirit once a week, bringing their united intelligence and experience to bear upon the practical problems immediately concerning their welfare must necessarily have a far-reaching effect upon social progress in a remote rural community.

A few weeks ago the I.A.O.S. decided to take up the question of the improvement of the social life of the peasantry. Several thousand leaflets entitled, "Co-operation and Social Life in Ireland," have been issued, and committees of societies are now earnestly considering in what way the suggestions made therein may be carried out. I shall quote two paragraphs from this leaflet as indicating the means adopted towards the employments of organised groups of persons whereby the individuals composing such groups may be educated in matters vital to their daily existence.

'One of the saddest things in this country is the unsanitary condition of the cottages. The cabin itself may be small and it may not be possible at once to remedy this, but there is no legislative necessity to have a slimy duck pond near the door collecting the drainings from a manure heap. Can we expect Irish boys and girls to grow up healthy people and lovers of their homes while this continues, as it does in many districts. Are we content they should live in that degree of cleanliness which satisfies the aspirations of a pig or that they should have no more intellectual life than beams from the mild eye of a cow? It is a charge brought against us that our Irish villages and cabins are most often untidy and dirty, and this would seem to indicate an utter lack of feeling for beauty, which yet cannot be truly said of a people who have the loveliest folk tales and songs in Europe. Co-operation

has a wider and higher meaning than the purchase of cheap manures, or the sale of butter and eggs, and its best influence should be in social life.

In other countries the Co-operative Society is the Pioneer of social reform. Why not in Ireland? It should be the aim of every society in Ireland to have a meeting place for its members which could be utilised for a reading room, library, concerts, lectures, or local Feis. Bodies like the Gaelic League would willingly lend aid whenever the undertaking was in sympathy with the objects of their own association."

And again—

"Now, try and do this. Form a committee of members to undertake work of this kind. Let them investigate the sanitary condition of the cottages of the poor and use their influence with the people themselves, with the landlord or his agent or with the District Council, to have improvements effected. The use of the cabin as a cowshed ought to be discouraged. The cows are not benefitted by the manifold smells of a room crowded with human beings. We heard the practice defended on the ground that it was good for the cows 'to be with the Christians,' but we do not think the promises of religion extend so far. Now that fixity of tenure is established, the green lake which defended the approaches of the cabin against the evictor is unnecessary. It emanates typhoid all day long, and by its removal the mortality among chickens would certainly decrease, to say nothing of human beings. If things are satisfactory here, let a village library be started and a room hired for the members to meet. If there is a room at the creamery which could be used for this purpose, so much the better. Here lectures could be delivered, Irish classes held, instruction on technical subjects given. It should be a place where members could on one night of the week at least meet, and feel themselves better for meeting."

It will be perceived from these quotations that the objects of agricultural co-operation are not limited to the improvement of the facilities for purchase and sale, nor yet to imparting technical instruction in better methods of farming, but extend to the amelioration of village life and home comforts which among our poorer countrymen are indeed in a pitiable state. Co-operation is not merely putting money into the pockets of the people, not merely building up character and fostering the growth of a more vigorous industrial life but is also endeavouring to make the surroundings of daily life more congenial and to introduce a higher standard of comfort into the homes of the people.