



Denmark: A Country That Has Tried Co-operation

By CLARENCE POE

What Co-operation Has Done for Denmark

EVERY intelligent Southern farmer now wants to know how coöperation has worked out in those states and countries where it has been tried longest.

Here in the United States coöperation has been tried most fully in California—and California is the most prosperous agricultural state in the Union. Enough has been said in proof of that fact.

Among the countries of the world, the fullest development of coöperation has been reached in Denmark, and of that I wish to have something more to say just now. I am going to take as a text a little book, "Denmark: A Coöperative Commonwealth," by Frederick C. Howe, just published by Harcourt, Brace & Company, New York.

Of course I personally visited Denmark several years ago, and gave the story of the marvelous success of coöperation among Danish farmers in my book, "How Farmers Coöperate and Double Profits." But I am going to quote from Dr. Howe's book now, partly because many Progressive Farmer readers have no copy of "How Farmers Coöperate and Double Profits" and because those who do have copies will find Dr. Howe's book a vivid and striking confirmation of my own report.

"A Little Land Full of Happy People"

THE thing that I shall remember longest about Denmark is the description of it given by a Dane at one of the agricultural high schools I visited there. "Denmark," he said, "is a little land full of happy people." And their happiness is largely due to coöperation. Coöperation has given them economic independence and it has also developed an almost unparalleled spirit of fellowship, friendship, and good will among the people.

Denmark, as I wrote at the time, "almost meets my ideal of a nation—a place where nobody is rich enough to be idle, and nobody poor enough to beg." In the same strain writes Dr. Howe:

"Wealth is more equitably divided than in any other country in Europe; possibly more equitably than in any other country in the world. . . . Denmark has become in many ways the most contented state in the world. . . . I have never been in a country where the people seem more free from care."

Few of the people are wealthy but they are comfortable, independent, and have learned how to enjoy life. As Dr. Howe says, "The initiative of the people has been awakened by other rewards than great wealth." The same thing was said to me only a few days ago by a friend just back from Denmark. The enrichment of life for all rather than the enrichment of pocketbooks for the few seems to be the national ideal.

The Secret of Danish Content

THE pursuit of happiness—that is declared by our Declaration of Independence to be one of the inalienable rights of man. And it seems that coöperation has enabled the farmers of Denmark to succeed better in this quest than have our own American farmers.

In Denmark coöperation is indeed the rule and not the exception. A farmer does not just belong to just one coöperative organization; he belongs to several—four or five or even more. He belongs to no coöperative crop marketing organization because he sells no crops as such. He feeds all his crops to his cattle, hogs, poultry and other livestock. But he belongs to a coöperative creamery, a coöperative bacon-factory, a coöperative poultry-and-egg marketing association, a coöperative insurance association, a coöperative rural credit organization, a coöperative society for purchasing feeds and machinery, etc. And his coöperative marketing societies are organized on the same binding business basis on which our coöperative marketing associa-

tions of the South are organized. As one agricultural leader said to me in Denmark:

"You must make your American farmers resolve on the compulsory feature in the very beginning. Great as are the advantages of coöperation in Denmark, our farmers would nevertheless have failed in great measure—just as the German farmers would also have failed—if we had not had the compulsory feature inserted in all our agreements. When a creamery is started, each subscriber agrees to deliver all his milk that is not required for family use for ten years to come (sometimes it's seven years, but usually it's ten) to his coöperative organization."

The majority of the Danes have bank deposits. Whereas in the United States the percentage of tenancy has increased from 25 to almost 40 per cent in forty years, in Denmark the percentage of tenancy has decreased almost as rapidly. In 1850 nearly half the Danish farmers were tenants. Now only one farmer in ten is a tenant. This is because coöperation has made farming profitable. As one Danish farmer who had lived in America said to me when I was over there: "I get along as well with 13 acres here in Denmark as I did with 160 in America." Danish farmers are happy, for one thing, therefore, because through coöperation they know they are getting a square deal for themselves. And while this has not given them great wealth, it has given them a contented independence. As Dr. Howe puts it:

"A man may have a relatively small income, but if he is able to buy cheaply and sell advantageously, if he is protected from exploitation, if he is guarded in old age and sickness by insurance and given an opportunity to rise by his efforts, he may be better off than a man with a much higher money income in another country. This is the kind of well-being that the Dane enjoys."

"Has Made Farming a Fine Art"

THERE is still another way in which coöperation has added to the happiness of Danish farmers. In the old days they did not take much pride in farming. They kept poor livestock, made poor butter, and worked in a somewhat monotonous, humdrum fashion. Now coöperative marketing has educated them and stimulated them to high quality production and to a realization of the fact that farming when rightly conducted is at once an industry, a business, and a profession. As Dr. Howe says:

"The Danish peasant has a dignity and a pride in his profession. He feels that it is worthy of his best efforts. And he is as interested in fine cattle, in his annual records of milk production and in his many activities as is the business or professional man of other countries."

"Coöperation has made the farmer proud of his profession. Farming is a fine art in Denmark. It is the most important thing in the state. The

POEMS OF NATURE AND COUNTRY LIFE: "THE CATFISH"

A GREAT many poets (like many philosophers and the Lord's apostles and a host of humbler folks) have a passion for fishing. John Charles McNeill was no exception to this rule. About this time of year the fishing spirit got into his blood, and he knew the ways of fish—also of Negroes. The following verses represent this blended knowledge:—

When de nights is warm en de moon is full,
You kin ketch mo' cats dan you cares to pull.
No trouble 'bout de bait;
A grub'll do or a lil' fat meat,
Fer all he wants is supp'n' to eat,
En he ain't no han' to wait.

Ner dar ain't no trouble 'bout luck wid him.
You kin tie yo' line to a swingin' limb,
En when you goes to look,
You'll fin' dat limb a-dodgin' 'roun',
En bubbles risin' en floatin' on down,
En a catfish on yo' hook.

But I chooses to take a pole in mine
En git in a spotch es bright moonshine
En fish dar wid my han';
I know, den, when he hits his lick
(He swallows de hook; you need'n be quick),
En I lets him show his man.

When I slings him out on de good dry grass,
He don't complain, but he's full er sass.
He kicks a little while,
Den lays dar, wid a pleasing look,
En, while I's rippin' out de hook,
He takes it wid a smile.

—John Charles McNeill.

debates of Parliament, the discussions in the press, the objectives of the schools, the concern, in fact, of all the people, is the well-being of the farmer. This is the motive of Denmark, just as banking, business, commerce, is the economic motive of other countries."

Another investigator has written interestingly concerning the influence of coöperation on the small or peasant farmers:

"The peasant or little farmer who is a member of one of these societies, who helps to build up their success and enjoys their benefits, acquires a new outlook. The jealousies and suspicions which are in most countries so common among those who live by the land, fall from him. Feeling that he has a voice in the direction of great affairs, he acquires an added value and a healthy importance in his own eyes. . . . He knows also that in his degree and according to his output he is on an equal footing with the largest producer and proportionately is doing as well. There is no longer any fear that because he is a little man he will be browbeaten or forced to accept a worse price for what he has to sell than does his rich and powerful neighbor. The skilled minds which direct his business work as zealously for him as for that important neighbor."

"Bread, Beauty and Brotherhood"

ONCE heard the poet Edwin Markham say that man's supreme needs are represented by three B's—"Bread, Beauty, and Brotherhood"—bread being mentioned to symbolize our material needs, just as beauty and brotherhood are spiritual needs.

I believe the Danish farmers have succeeded better than our American farmers in "the pursuit of happiness" because they have more fully acted on this principle. Coöperation has given them a new sense of brotherhood, fellowship, comradeship. Coöperation with its resultant benefits has also enabled them to see more of the beauty of life and of art and nature. Everybody in Denmark is educated; there are no illiterates; a one-horse farmer will take five or six papers and magazines; the whole nation attends lectures and the "people's high schools"; and I found that men of 72 and 76 took agricultural short courses at schools I visited! Music is almost universally appreciated, and reproductions of famous paintings hang in the government-owned railway stations I passed through.

We repeat what we also tried to make clear last week—that we must not be content with a low ideal of agricultural coöperation in the South. We must not simply sign our names to a coöperative marketing contract, vote for a director to manage the business, and think that is the end of it.

We must go on and on, and on and on, with the coöperative idea. We must have local organizations to educate our people into new opportunities and new privileges of coöperation. We must learn to work with our fellows not only for making more money but along all lines that make for the enrichment of life.

So will farming in the South also become indeed "a fine art." Here, too, men will learn to seek not bread alone but "bread and beauty and brotherhood." And in our more favored country we will build not merely "a little land full of happy people" but "a great land full of happy people."

Nothing short of this is a worthy ideal for the leaders and advocates of coöperative marketing. The history of Denmark proves that it is attainable.

Favorite Bible Verses

JOHN 14:14.—If ye shall ask anything in my name, I will do it.

Psalms 133:1.—Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.

A Thought for the Week

DR. JACKS has asked quite recently a Frenchman, a Swede, a Dutchman, an American, a Chinaman, and a Japanese, "What is the leading interest in your country? What do you people really believe in?" The answer in each case was "Education." When he varied his question and asked, "What have you learned from the war?" the answer came, "We have learned our need of education." Dr. Jacks said to me, "Men outside politics are beginning to see what education involves. It involves the whole man, body, mind, spirit. I do not think you can frame an intelligent definition of education without coming up against religion. In its simplest expression, education is a desire to escape from darkness to light. It is fear of ignorance and faith in knowledge."—"A Gentleman with a Duster," in Painted Windows.

HOW SHE SQUELCHED THEM!

SAYS a gonster contributor to the April Atlantic: "Years ago when my friends were all marrying and the exultant husbands often twitted me for not having landed anything, I could nearly always silence them by saying, 'If I had been as easily satisfied as your wife was, I would have been married long ago!'"