CHAPTER 6

NOVA SCOTIA SEES THE LIGHT

Cooperation Abroad. The history, progress, and methods of cooperation as found in the Scandinavian countries, Finland, and England have already been presented in this book chiefly to show the tremendous possibilities which this movement offers for the masses who choose to embrace it. Before leaving the examples set up by our foreign cousins, however, it might be in keeping to explore one more country which is much closer home, and learn how the people of this country enriched their lives manifold through the medium of cooperation in its fullest sense. Nova Scotia, a province of the Dominion of Canada, awakened to the magic of cooperation in the early '20's, and since that short period of time has made tremendous progress in developing a system of self-help through cooperative principles that has given this little province world-wide recognition in the field of cooperation.

The Status Of Eastern Nova Scotia. The eastern part of Nova Scotia, composed of seven counties, covering an area of about 20,000 square miles, with a population of around 200,000 people, is the setting of the now justly famous cooperative achievement of this most easterly unit of the Dominion of Canada. Both consumer and marketing cooperative associations have played a big part in the farming and fishing industries of these people, while with the miners, consumer cooperative societies have been the most prominent. Up until 1907, there was but one cooperative seed growing in all of Nova Scotia, and that was located at Sidney Mines, in the form of a cooperative store. This little store, starting with a beginning capital of $348 in 1907, now has an annual turnover of about $2,000,000, having four branches, besides owning and operating a bakery, a tailor shop, and a pasteurized milk plant. Despite this early example of consumer cooperation, in this area, this particular cooperative, strange to say, is not typical of the present cooperative movement in Nova Scotia, in that it follows the custom of the English cooperative system of concerning itself with more efficient marketing concepts only, while the Nova Scotia cooperatives as a whole go much deeper into the cooperative movement to the extent of enriching the lives of their membership in countless ways.
Destitution. Even as late as 1927 fishermen and farmers of Nova Scotia were destitute. Their produce was barely returning them enough income to keep body and soul together. Many of these men had to support large families on as little as $300 to $400 a year, with no prospects for any improvement in their financial condition to look forward to. In desperation these men sought the counsel of a Catholic priest, Rev. J. J. Tompkins. This man had been preaching the doctrine of cooperation for years to these people, but they had not listened. Dr. Tompkins organized a number of small study clubs, and tried to get these people to start thinking about a solution to their problems. He even had to teach some of the people to read and write before they could function properly in these study clubs. Dr. Tompkins told these men to decide upon what they really wanted to do in order to help themselves. Thus, most of their actions resulted from their own ideas, while Dr. Tompkins continued to supply them with pamphlets, books, and all other available literature that he could find on the economic system. Thus did Nova Scotia put her first foot forward in the building of a foundation for cooperation and self-help.

Cooperative Education. Father Tompkins soon found himself swamped with demands for cooperative education. In 1927 the demand upon his time became so great that overtures were made to the St. Francis Xavier University of Antigonish that an extension division be added so that some form of systematic education be offered to the people as a whole, rather than the chosen few who were allowed to attend this University. This extension division was in due time added, and much of the success of the cooperative movement in Nova Scotia is due to this extension department, together with the "Men of Antigonish," who got out among the people and worked with them, mainly through the many study clubs which they organized. Prior to the organization of this department, Dr. Tompkins had organized a People's School, fashioned after the Danish Folks School of half a century ago. Thus the ground work was effectively laid for cooperative education, as well as the beginning of a number of credit unions. The miners, as well as the farmers and fishermen, were included in the work of cooperative education. The cooperative movement in Nova Scotia is somewhat distinct from other countries, in that study clubs and credit unions were formed before any cooperative action was practiced. In other countries, usually cooperative education, by means of study clubs, was the sole forerunner of cooperative activity. But the Nova Scotia idea stresses the addition of the credit union to go hand in hand with every study club. It certainly was a wise provision.
A Crate Of Lobsters. How four fishermen of Nova Scotia banded together and marketed a crate of lobsters has an interesting lesson for every farmer in America. The private lobster dealers in Nova Scotia had a set price of 7 cents a pound on all full-sized lobsters brought in by the fishermen. Four fishermen who were members of one of the study clubs decided to put into actual practice some of their knowledge. Consequently, they hunted through an old fish magazine, and found the address of a lobster dealer of Boston, Mass., and shipped him a 140-pound crate of lobsters. At the rate of the local price paid for lobsters, this crate of 140 pounds of lobsters would have brought these fishermen $9.80. However, these men were bold enough to hope that the Boston buyer would pay them as high as $12, or even $13 for the shipment, instead of the customary $9.80. In due course of time, they received their check for the lobsters, and this check was not for $9.80, nor $12 or $13, but for $32. These men, by cooperating in their marketing, had sold their lobsters for about 23 cents a pound, instead of 7 cents. While this might be an extreme example, it serves to illustrate the point.

Buying Pools. Through the medium of St. Francis Xavier University and its staff of workers, farmers, fishermen, miners and others were educated in the study of economics. Largely through the medium of study clubs, these people were taught how to organize credit unions to supply their own banking requirements, consumer cooperation for the purchasing of materials such as groceries, farm supplies, etc., and cooperative marketing for the realization of better prices for their primary products. One interesting outgrowth of the purchasing pools for farmers is that in just three years time, the organized farmers of Eastern Nova Scotia saved themselves $75,000 on about 15,000 tons of commercial fertilizers, while each year they have flour and feed shipped to them directly from Lake Superior at a saving of $8,000. These are but two examples of the large savings gained through cooperative purchasing.

Cooperative Marketing By Fishermen. The crate of lobsters previously mentioned was but the forerunner of many other crates of lobsters not only for Boston, but to many other markets as well. When the Nova Scotia fishermen found out the wide spread of profit that the local buyers had been making, they decided to do their own marketing. At first, only crates of lobsters were marketed cooperatively. Later, thanks to their credit unions, they soon had sufficient capital to establish their own cooperative lobster factories, as well as their own cooperative fish processing plants. By the first of January, 1938, these fishermen had established 17
cooperative lobster factories, and 11 fish processing plants, and the end is not yet in sight. Besides these numerous ventures in cooperative marketing, 40 consumer stores have already been established in this area. All of this progress has been made in 10 short years.

The Nova Scotia Way. The cooperative movement has become rooted in Eastern Nova Scotia in a manner somewhat similar to European countries studied, but it has certain features, because of varying conditions, that distinguish it from others. Consumer cooperatives have possibly received more emphasis in Nova Scotia than have the farm marketing cooperatives. The cooperative marketing of fish undoubtedly is also further developed than that of farm commodities. The method pursued in all the cooperative countries in establishing the groundwork, however, is much the same. Cooperative education must precede successful cooperative action. Nova Scotia has placed special emphasis on the study club as the unit of action. After a study club had become established, its members were urged to organize a credit union to function as an auxiliary to the study club. As noted previously, this idea is distinctly a feature of all the cooperative activity in Nova Scotia. Also, the people of Nova Scotia who started the cooperative movement were united more by religious than racial ties, as was the case in several of the successful European countries.

The Nova Scotia Study Clubs. Farmers, as well as fishermen, miners, factory workers, and office workers are all members of the many study clubs in Nova Scotia. No one who is really interested in study clubs is denied membership. The extension division of St. Francis Xavier University prepares mimeographed study sheets for the use of the leaders and members of the various study clubs. In fact, the men in charge of this extension division not only prepare these study sheets, but they are constantly out among their people, always maintaining a close personal contact with the people whom they serve. The study clubs usually meet once a week in the home of one of its members. Each club selects its own leader, and these leaders are called in monthly to the university for special training in leading group discussions on current economic problems. There are also special study groups for women which pertain to the art of home making.

The Return Of Ownership. The cause of destitution among the people of Nova Scotia was due largely to the centralized ownership of the products that the people had to buy and sell. What was then true in Nova Scotia is even more so today in our own country. Small local merchants still have considerable trouble in our country to keep
above water because of the gigantic chain store and monopolistic corporations driving them to financial ruin. After the "Men of Antigonish," as the leaders of the extension department of St. Francis Xavier University are so often called, had finally succeeded in convincing their people that they could do far more for themselves than anyone else possibly could, they began to buy and sell on a cooperative basis. Thus they eliminated the profits of the middleman, which in too many cases were decidedly unfair. This democratic form of marketing gave each member of these cooperative organizations partial ownership of his own business, where he also had a voice in the management. This is true also of the other cooperative societies located all over the world. The cooperative movement in Nova Scotia, as in all countries where it is practiced, restores widespread ownership to the masses, and drives out centralized ownership by the few whenever centralized ownership is unfair.

GUIDE QUESTIONS FOR CHAPTER 6

1. Explain the character of the first cooperative store in Nova Scotia.
2. What educational program was responsible for the beginning of cooperative thought in Nova Scotia?
3. How does the origin of cooperation in Nova Scotia differ from that of the other cooperative countries previously studied?
4. Describe the experience of four fishermen in the direct marketing of a crate of lobsters.
5. Discuss the savings made by farmers' buying pools in Nova Scotia.
6. Describe the growth of cooperative fisheries of Nova Scotia.
7. Of what importance is the study club in the Nova Scotia plan of cooperative activity?
8. Explain the mechanism of the Nova Scotia study clubs.
9. Describe the effects that cooperative buying and selling have had upon the people of Nova Scotia.