

EXTRACTS.

Principles and Promise of the Co-operative Movement

BY K. T. PAUL, O. B. E.

Preamble.—We have come together to celebrate the continued prosperity of a great world-wide Movement. We are proud to realise not merely that this movement has spread over the wide world but even more that its universal success is due to the spontaneous response of many nations who constitute the one Human Family. We recognise in the fact that this movement holds certain secrets which are fundamental to human nature in that aspect of it which makes for human society. We realise in this phenomenon that Man has after all arrived at the discovery of a method which is so normally constructive that all previous methods of social relationship and social organisation are shown up as defective—as holding, in a real measure, elements of conflict and eventual destruction. Therefore it seems to be appropriate that, on this occasion, I should refrain from entering into any of the problems which attend the practical application of the co-operative method and venture to set out the ethical values of co-operative movement. The practical problems are numerous—even the most outstanding of them; and they are being dealt with all the time in the Press and on the Platform. Some of them will be dealt with on this occasion by others who are competent to speak on them with authority and experience. To me the obvious duty is to lift before you at the outset the radiant splendour of the inner spiritual secrets of what is one of the most divine things with which it is our privilege to be associated.

Fundamentally an Ethical Movement.—Here in South India our introduction to this movement has been in close connection with money. But we have not needed a long acquaintance with the movement to realise that instead of it being soiled by filthy lucre, it in its turn proves to be the magic which turns finance into a missionary enterprise and a business into a benefaction. It was no unmeaning rhetoric when the late Justice Sadasiva Ayyar said, “Co-operation is Religion.” With his

²Presidential address at the Celebration of the International Co-operator's Day in Madras City on July 7, 1928.—with acknowledgements to the Young Men of India for August.

incisive discernment he looked below cash and credit, beneath purchase and sale, underneath production and distribution, and saw that in this matter the human genius had reached to the secret springs of all true social instincts. Hitherto the social experiments had been based on surface channels whose muddy waters meandered in shallow beds which were frequently choked up with selfishness and personal greed. But now the springs far beneath have been reached, and thence the waters are gushing forth in creative purity.

Cooperation vs Competition.—The significance of this can be more strikingly perceived if we contemplate the alternative to Cooperation. What has been the alternative to Cooperation in all the nations, both East and West? It is Competition. Contrast the one with the other. Cooperation is "Each for All and All for Each." Competition is "Self for Self and the rest for Self." Competition *qua* competition can have no contribution to any who are unequal in the race, those who fall behind in the race, as it progresses. Competition has no room nor time for the weak or the underprivileged, and it assumes that they must, sooner or later, go to the wall. Generosity, humanity, philanthropy do come in as remedial measures. But Competition, even at its best, is only required by public opinion to observe certain negative qualities: it is expected to refrain from unfair methods in the race and in the use of the Rest for the advantage of Self. At its worst, Competition is no other than self-aggrandizement at the expense of everything that can be brought under use.

The value of Competition.—We are not forgetting that Competition also does hold certain ethical features which are of undoubted value to the Individual and in some measure also to the Group. Competition is also based on certain fundamental human instincts which are healthy and creative, such as the desire to excel and the desire to please. Much of what is precious in human nature usually comes into play through these instincts and desires. But at the same time Competition is related to certain other instincts and desires which are destructive and unsocial. And we do claim that Cooperation is based on yet other human instincts and desires, equally fundamental, but of far higher ethical values, for they are out of all comparison more constructive in their social potency.

Nature Red in Tooth and Claw.—It is sometimes alleged that the evolution of species has been worked out by heartless Nature under a relentless law of Competition. Nothing can be more unscientific and untrue. Under any such process it is impossible to conceive the evolution of group-life among beasts or men and much less the evolution of anything in Man that we call higher and finer in his nature. Every inner instinct which now impels or enables man and woman to do or to think above self-interest and self-gratification is indicative of certain processes which have through long ages operated in all sentient creatures sublimating self and lifting it constantly to that plane where it could find its best satisfaction when it does something for others and sees others happy. What is there greater in human achievement than Motherhood? Not all the achievements of Napoleon can be said really to excel the self-giving of the simplest village mother in Corsica where he was born. And this which is the divinest in Man has its roots in the earliest of species which first came on the scene millions of years ago. Each of these species, as the ages rolled onward, have struggled and suffered, lost and won, in a great never-ending war between self-taking and self-giving. The record has been one of victories and defeats all along the line and in every stage of the process. It is these victories of self-giving over self-taking that have in due time brought into being this marvellous crown of the whole process—Man—who is so essentially a social and spiritual personality that he could never find himself unless he gets out of himself and reaches out to help misery and wretchedness on the one hand and to the sublime and beautiful on the other.

Self-taking in terms of Self-giving.—But this interminable war between self-giving and self-taking which has brought the great species into being and ennobled them in ever higher degree from stage to stage was not a simple process even among the simplest of species. It was and it is never a straight issue between self-giving and self-taking. The secret is deeper. It is a fight to understand that there is no real self-taking except in terms of self-giving, and it is a fight to practise that principle in every-day activity. Nothing less than such a discernment operating almost automatically as an instinct ensures the continuance and even more the quality of the group and of the individual,—both *at the*

same time. That individual attains nearest to perfection who most habitually does his taking in terms of giving, that group race or species attains nearest to perfection which has the largest number of such individuals. If the individuals who give never take, that would mean the suicide of all the best individuals and eventually of the group. If the individuals who took never gave, that would mean a few vampires for whom all the rest live, and eventually it will be just one super-vampire and such a degradation of the rest that the whole group is laid at the mercy of any other group which has pursued a better course. These are no theories. We are quite familiar with a state of affairs which in its extreme form was illustrated when a crate of snakes were sent from South America to the London Zoo. The number of snakes consigned were over a dozen. When the crate was opened in London, there was just one huge reptile which had swallowed all the other snakes and had also eaten up every particle of the food which the caretaker had been rationing out every day for the whole lot. Which of us have contemplated with equanimity the phenomenon of the Steel Magnate or the Oil King or the Super-Trust that is thrown up by modern industrialism? Mass production on a gigantic scale when it is worked out on the competition method implies the aggregation of wealth in the hands of a few toward which an ever increasing number of human creatures contribute their powers to the utmost possibility. We have also seen in our own day the eventual collapse of not a few of such monopolies, whether they are based on class or caste, on capital or birth. The most tragic of such collapses is, of course, Russia where a continental population was thrown for a decade into the devastations of anarchy. Is it not significant that in that universal ruin of everything in Russia the one really steadying agency has been the Cooperatives? The one challenge which Moscow has found it necessary to deal with and finally to accommodate has come in steady silence from the farmers, and to the farmers the one source of strength is the Cooperative Movement.

He that Loseth his life shall save it and he that saveth his life shall lose it. Consider for a moment those paradoxes wherewith the Great Teacher revealed some of the verities of Human Personality. "He that loseth his life shall save it," said He, and He did not hesitate to lay down the opposite which goes even farther—

“He that saveth his life shall lose it.” To elucidate these great truths He used certain homely illustrations. “Ye are the salt of the earth” was one of them. Every man, woman and child anywhere in the world knows the properties of salt. It gives taste and zest to every kind of food, and what is more, it is the one universal agency to preserve what will otherwise rot and decompose. These are very great qualities. Salt brings out what is the essential savour of other things; and salt saves everything into which it enters from destruction. But it does all this at the expense of itself. Imagine *rasam* without salt. It is entirely insipid, no matter how many other ingredients you put into it. Put in a pinch of salt and the savour of all other things in the *rasam* are immediately brought out. But where is the salt which has worked this miracle? It is still there, but it is no longer by itself. It is now in the *rasam*, part and parcel of it, finding its own fulfilment by enabling the other things to express themselves in their own best qualities. So also consider what happens to a lime fruit or a mango when left alone. It rots and becomes unfit for man or beast. Let salt have a chance with it and the fruit is preserved for years and becomes excellent food for kings. But the salt which saved the fruit from death, has done it by losing itself. The salt is not lost; it is where its glory is to be, in the very heart and substance of what it has saved. Another pregnant parable was used by the Master when he said, “Ye are the Light of the World.” Here again is the appeal to a thing that is perfectly familiar to every human being, however humble in life and circumstances. Be it a palace or hut, be it a great city avenue or a crooked village lane, the darkness of night is dispelled not by any elaborate processes but by the simple device of lighting a lamp. One match is struck and the darkness of the whole area is instantly dispelled. But a light is of little use unless it keeps going and so the light which is working this wonder is all the time burning itself out. The wick must be trimmed and the oil replenished, or in modern conditions, the battery must be recharged, constantly, for the light is a process of self-giving on the part of the thing which is giving light. Here again the fulfilment of the very purpose of existence and the glory of it all is in the fact of losing one’s separate entity in the service of the world. This same truth the Master carried forward into its fuller and deeper significance in the famous parable of the Vine. “I am the Vine and ye are the branches” was His message. The Vine does not live

unto itself ; it exists for others. It bears fruits not in its stem but in its branches ; and the branches cannot bear fruit except when they abide in the stem. Such an interdependence is indispensable for fruit bearing. Again the peculiarity of the Vine is that it is relentlessly cut down almost to its roots every single season. It has to give up its glory and its possessions year after year. And because of that treatment it comes out in greater glory and in more abundant possession of branches every spring. And in all its limbs its life-blood courses bodying itself in luscious grapes which is most wonderful to see and most delicious to eat. But all that beauty and sustenance are forthwith given away. They are not for the Vine or its branches ; they are meant to be consumed, to be enjoyed and assimilated by others. And so in many another imagery the Master reiterated this Law of Life ever bringing out a fresh aspect of its application.

Reproduced from "Young Men of India" August, 28 Vol. 40 No. 8

(To be continued)

Chinese Agriculture and its Lessons for India.

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The achievements of Scientific Agriculture in the West are of such magnitude that we in India are apt to look to the West almost exclusively for inspiration and guidance in the matter of improvement of our Agriculture. While this attitude is for the most part justified there are other directions also to which we may turn with advantage. Agriculture in the Far East has important analogies with that of India not only because in the Far East as well as in India Agriculture dates back forty centuries but also because the pressure on land in India, if it has not already reached, is likely to reach before long the same degree it has in China and Japan. It is true that even these countries look to the West for development of their agriculture on scientific lines, but investigations have shown that the essential principles of many a discovery of agricultural science have been grouped very early in China and an unfailing practice built upon them. Indeed in certain departments it is the West that has to learn from China and Japan more than these centuries have to learn from them.