

CONSUMERS' COÖPERATION

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Consumers' coöperation by Albert Sonnichsen

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ALBERT SONNICHSEN

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COÖPERATION**

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BY
ALBERT SONNICHSEN

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FOREWORD

UNTIL the war, no speaker on Consumers' Coöperation could escape a question as pertinent as it was monotonous: "Why has success been so brilliant and continuous in England and other European countries while results are so meager in the United States?" For the first time this form of Coöperation has become a serious working class interest. Extensively and intensively it is on a scale which makes possible if not an answer, at least a more confident prophecy that we are to take our place in this world attempt to make "democratizing industry" something more than a phrase.

I am far from giving it as a primary or even a secondary reason why coöperation so long halted in this country, but it has been sorely hampered by muddling together economic activities which have very little in common. A state of mind in which Profit-sharing, Labor Copartnership, Citrous Fruit Companies, Co-operative Creameries and the like, are identical with Consumers' Coöperation, is one in which progress is embarrassed.

No one will read Mr. Sonnichsen's admirable study without gratitude that once for all he has cleaned up his subject. No American writer has done this with so much lucidity and finality. This is the distinction, as it is the excellence of the book. There is up-to-date information, with cheering accounts of the extraordinary growth, almost boom, of the movement. The

volume would be well worth having for this alone. Its analysis and logical approach, however, are what students and those struggling with coöperative enterprises will find most illuminating. It is, moreover, on the side of its severe consistencies that it may be found open to criticism. Only as in England, where "production" has been brought definitely into the service of the store; only where goods are made not for profit but for consumers' use, have economic interests been in any real sense harmonized. Those who believe that Consumers' Coöperation is to conquer the world's industry find in that mastery the solution of conflicting business interests. Those of us who hold that private profit and interest on loans are still utilities and are to remain so for any calculable future will still think of Consumers' Coöperation as only a partner in making and distributing wealth. However powerful the partner becomes he will be beset by business interests which conflict as do those of borrower and lender — buyer and seller. To those of this opinion Mr. Sonnichsen's book is all the more welcome.

As a matter of fact, we are to struggle on in a most illogical and tangled world. Farmers' Elevators, Coöperative marketing and cheese factories are to remain. They are very awkward from Mr. Sonnichsen's point of view, but we must tolerate them as a part of the total Coöperative Movement. We have to do this in the teeth of inconsistencies as we do with other problems in practical life.

Economic organization and even economic theory which bring the interest of producer, necessary middlemen and consumers into final harmony are at a far and safe distance. Meantime the author has done something better than the impossible. More than any book since that of Beatrice Potter (Mrs. Sidney

Webb) — which Schmoller called "road breaking" — Mr. Sonnichsen has lifted Consumers' Coöperation into its own clear light. This will win him the praise he deserves.

JOHN GRAHAM BROOKS.