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Cooperation in a Western City. American Economic Association, Vol. I, No. 4 by Albert Shaw

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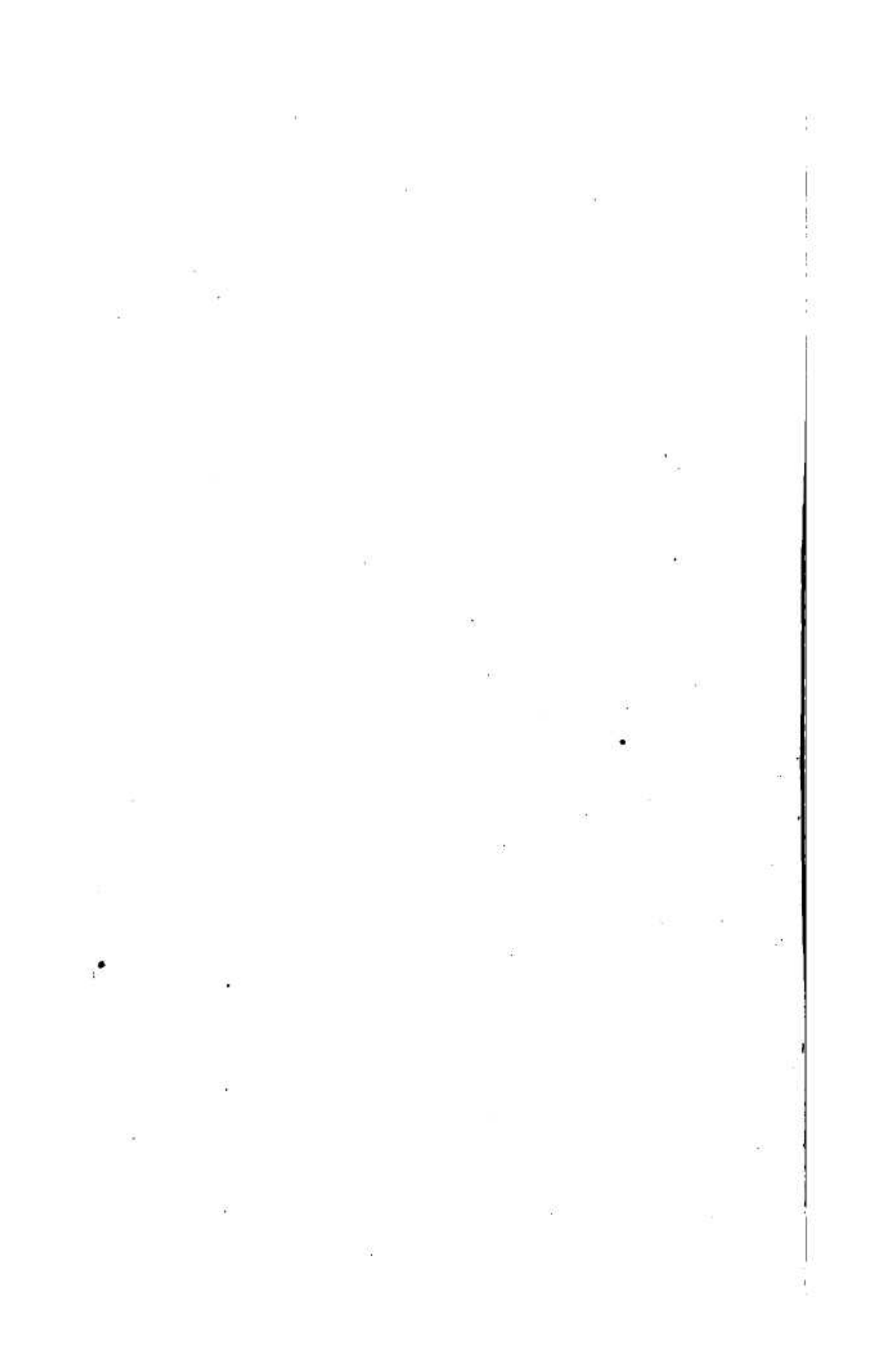
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IN
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By ALBERT SHAW, Ph. D.,

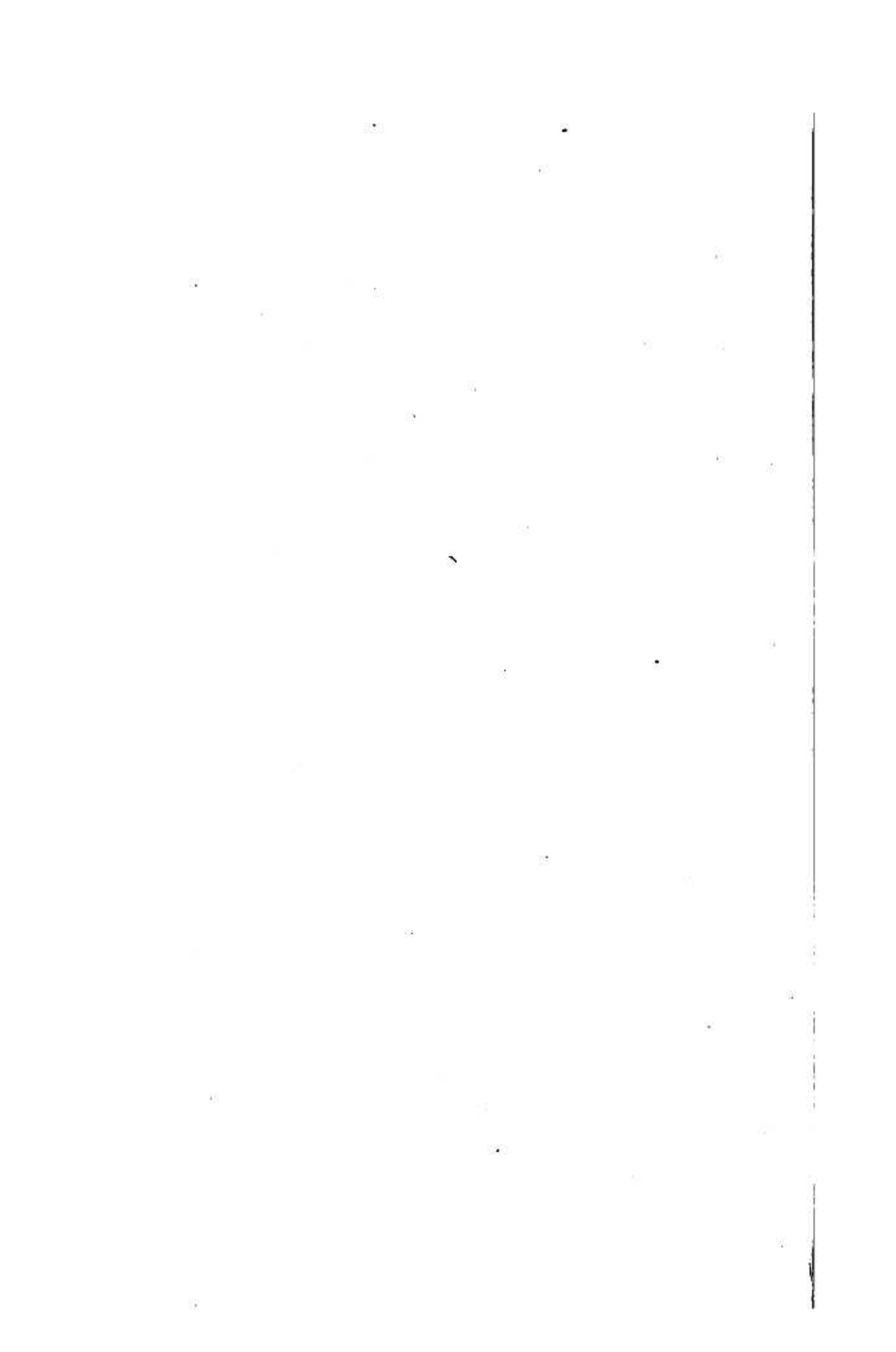
*Associate Editor of the Minneapolis Daily Tribune.
Author of "Icaria, a Chapter in the History of Communism."*

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COÖPERATION IN A WESTERN CITY.

I.

THE COÖPERATIVE COOPERS OF MINNEAPOLIS.

INTRODUCTORY.

The people of Minneapolis may be pardoned for exhibiting, at home and abroad, an extraordinary civic pride. Urban development at once so rapid and upon so liberal and metropolitan a scale has scarcely been seen elsewhere in the country; and citizens who are witnessing the unfolding as if by magic of a ragged western village into a splendid and palatial city, are stirred to enthusiasm, however dull their native temperament. In 1850 Minneapolis did not exist. In 1860 it was a village of 5,809 inhabitants. The number had increased in 1870 to 13,066, and in 1880 to 46,867. The State census of June, 1885, discovered a population of nearly 130,000, and the accessions of fifteen months have further swelled the number to about 155,000. It is not difficult to account for this remarkable and incessant growth. The railroad systems of the Northwest converge at Minneapolis and St. Paul and make these contiguous cities a principal distributing centre for a group of progressing States and Territories. The new demand of the world for the hard northern varieties of wheat has stimulated the cultivation of large areas of virgin soil, making Minnesota and Dakota the principal distinctive wheat-

growing region of the country, and giving Minneapolis eminence as the largest wheat-receiving market in America, not excepting Chicago or New York. The pine forests of the upper Mississippi and its tributaries have given Minneapolis the opportunity to build up a great industry in the manufacture of lumber. The magnificent water power afforded by the Falls of St. Anthony has invited the development about it of a city of large and diversified manufacturing industries, and it was natural that flour-milling should be preëminent among these industries. In point of fact, the flour mills occupy the central place in the industry and commerce of this prosperous young city. Twenty-six mills are clustered at the Falls, and they manufacture more flour by far than is made in any other city in the world. They have an aggregate daily capacity of about 35,000 barrels, and their product furnishes freight for from ten to twenty long railroad trains every twenty-four hours during the active milling season. These mills, with their revolutionized modern processes, are among the industrial wonders of the world, and are visited every season by thousands of strangers, who are duly impressed with the spectacle of a single mammoth mill which can produce seven thousand barrels of flour in a day, and of a group of mills which actually manufacture from five to six millions of barrels annually.

But it does not often occur to the interested visitor to inquire whence come the clean oak and elm barrels, of which many thousands are requisite every day. Barrels imply cooper shops; and the annual use of several millions of barrels by the mills would seem to indicate the existence of a subordinate industry of considerable proportions. But coopering is a humble craft in Minneapolis as elsewhere. The low-built wooden shops, obscurely located, attract no attention from the general public. Fluctuations in the price of flour, the shutting down or opening up of the mills,—these are matters of general interest and note; but the ups and downs of the cooper trade chiefly interest the coopers themselves. And yet these