

**A MANUAL FOR CO-
OPERATORS. PREPARED AT THE
REQUEST OF THE
CO-OPERATIVE CONGRESS, HELD
AT GLOUCESTER, IN APRIL, 1879**

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A Manual for Co-Operators. Prepared at the Request of the Co-Operative Congress, Held at Gloucester, in April, 1879 by Thomas Hughes & Edward Vansittart Neale

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IN APRIL, 1879.

EDITED BY

THOMAS HUGHES, Q.C.,

AND

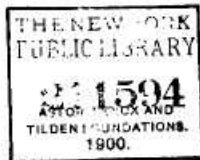
EDWARD VANSITTART NEALE,

GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE CO-OPERATIVE UNION.

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PUBLISHED FOR
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CITY BUILDINGS, CORPORATION STREET, MANCHESTER.

1881.



*Resolution of the Co-operative Congress, held at
Leeds, in June, 1881:—*

“That we publish the Manual in the same manner as
the other ~~facts of the Board~~; and that our hearty
thanks be given to Mr. Hughes and Mr. Neale for
the labour ~~they have devoted~~ to it.”

PREFACE.

IT has seemed desirable to explain to those who are responsible for this Manual, by way of preface, whence it comes, whom it represents, and why it is put forth.

WHENCE IT CAME.—The present proposal came from the Southern Section of the Central Co-operative Union, who, in December, 1878, resolved that it was desirable that a Manual should be prepared, and that an outline should, in the first instance, be submitted for their approval. This was done on February 19th, 1879, when the following outline was approved, and referred to the United Board:—

INTRODUCTORY.—Historical Sketch of Co-operation.

PART I.—The Moral Basis of Co-operation, and its Relations to—

- (a) Religious Faith.
- (b) Other Philanthropic Movements.
- (c) Socialism, Communism, and other Politico-Social Movements.

PART II.—The Economical Basis of Co-operation, and its Relations to—

- (a) Competition.
- (b) Current Economic Theories.
- (c) The State.

PART III.—The Practice of Co-operation—

- (a) In Distribution.
- (b) In Production.
- (c) In Social Life.
- (d) As respects the Law.

PART IV.—The Helps and Hindrances to Co-operation—
Dangers to be guarded against.

ADOPTION BY CENTRAL BOARD.—At the annual meeting of the Central Board, held at Gloucester on the 12th of April, 1879, the above outline was laid before the members from all the sections, and adopted by them; and it was resolved to recommend it to the Congress then about to be held, in order that, if approved, the necessary authority should be given for its preparation and publication.

SANCTION BY CONGRESS.—Accordingly, at the Congress held at Gloucester in the month of April, 1879, the proposal was brought before the general meeting of the representatives of the societies in union, and was unanimously approved, and the duty of preparing and editing the Manual in conformity with the approved outlines was, in the first instance, entrusted to myself, with the General Secretary, Mr. E. V. Neale. On Mr. Neale's suggestion, the United Board resolved, on December 5th, 1879, "That each Section of the Board be requested to appoint one, to act as a committee with the Editors to revise the work." It is under this authority and supervision, therefore, that this Manual is now published.

It will thus be clear to all readers acquainted with the constitution of the Co-operative Union, that every precaution has been taken to ascertain and carry out the wishes of the societies who are members of it. To them the words Southern Section, United Board, and Congress will be familiar; but, as it is hoped that this Manual may reach many persons not in any way connected with the Union, and having no knowledge of its history or constitution, it may be well here to give some short details on these points.

ORIGIN AND CONSTITUTION OF THE CO-OPERATIVE UNION.—The Union, then, is composed of societies registered under the Industrial Societies Acts, the first of which (the 15 and 16 Vict., c. 31) was passed on the 30th June, 1852. (At that time there were already upwards of forty societies in existence, some of which were represented by a Central Board sitting in London—of which, perhaps, the present Union and Board may claim to be the legitimate successors; but, for present purposes, the Act by which such industrial combinations were first legalised may be taken as a starting point.)

It is needless to give in any detail the history of the movement in the first years after the passing of the Act which legalised industrial societies. They grew and thrived apace under its protection, but soon began to understand from their own individual experience that some union between them was necessary, if the full benefit of the Act was to be realised. What each society had done for its individual members, a central organisation to which all might belong might do for the societies as a body. The chance of injurious rivalry between them might thus be avoided, commercial advantages might be obtained, and the sound principles and high tone which characterised the early associations might be preserved and extended to the whole body.

For some years, however, this desire for union took no definite shape, beyond conferences of delegates from the Lancashire and Yorkshire societies, which were held from time to time—generally on Good Friday in each year. At length the time for a practical effort seemed to have come; and at the conference of 1863—after the 25 and 26 Vict., 1861-2, had given to the societies a corporate existence, and allowed one society to hold shares in another in its registered name—it was resolved to establish a centre of supply, of which every society in its corporate capacity might become a member. Accordingly, in the autumn of that year* the Wholesale Society of Manchester was founded and commenced business. The necessary capital was subscribed by fifty societies, numbering in the whole 17,545 individual members.

The experiment was at once successful. The first balance sheet showed average weekly sales of £800. Its progress up to the close of 1880 may be gathered from the fact that in the September quarter for that year the average weekly sales were £70,844. In the March of that year 591 societies, with 333,324 members, held shares in the Wholesale Society, which had supplied goods during the quarter to 757 societies and done a business amounting in 1879 to

* The first half-year's accounts are dated April, 1864.

£2,929,456. Branches have been established in London and Newcastle, and purchasing agencies in Ireland, France, the United States, and several of the British Colonies.

But we must return to an earlier period—to 1868, when the members of societies which formed the Wholesale numbered in the last quarter 74,494, and its sales for the year amounted to £381,462 only, in place of the large numbers quoted above. Still, even then, those who had watched the growth of the movement from the first felt that the time had arrived to stimulate the desire of union for other purposes than the utilisation of joint capital for the purchase of goods in the best market on the most favourable terms. The initial steps for this object, which are described in the preface to the report of the Congress for 1869, were taken in London, principally through the exertions of an indefatigable veteran of co-operation, now unhappily lost to us, the late Mr. William Pare. Communications were opened with the Conference Committee of the Lancashire and Yorkshire Co-operative Societies, and, with their approval and support, a Congress was held in the Theatre of the Society of Arts, on May 31st and the three following days of 1869, which was attended by 62 delegates from 57 societies or companies, 23 in London or its immediate neighbourhood, and a considerable number of visitors. It led to the appointment of a committee, which afterwards combined with the Lancashire and Yorkshire Committee; and out of this combination arose, in 1873, by resolutions of a Congress held in Newcastle-on-Tyne, the organisation of the present Co-operative Union.

This Union includes, at the time when these lines are written, 539 societies,* which, in the year ending February 28th, 1880, subscribed £2,190. 5s. 3d. for the current expenses of the Union.

It is governed by an Annual Congress composed of delegates elected by the subscribing societies, and a Central Board also directly elected by them, consisting at present of fifty-three members, and divided into six sections corresponding

* Out of about 1,350 existing in Great Britain.

to the divisions of Great Britain placed respectively under their charge.

These sections, taken in geographical order from south to north, are*—

NAME.	DISTRICT.	SOCIETIES.
Southern	Southern and Eastern Counties	88
Western	South-Western and Western Counties	20
Midland	Midland Counties and Lincolnshire	86
North-Western ..	North-Western Counties and Yorkshire....	206
Northern	The Four Northern Counties	67
Scottish	Scotland	76

They act as a body through twelve representatives, appointed by the sections, and called the United Board, which meets regularly three times a year at Manchester. A fourth meeting, where all the sections are represented by as many members as can attend, is held in connection with the Annual Congress, which is ambulatory, meeting in each sectional district in rotation.

Each section has a secretary, and most of them are divided into sub-sections, each of these again having its own secretary, whose principal duties are—to organise local conferences, to keep up correspondence between the societies *inter se* and with the Board, and to bring before the whole Union any cases where advice or other help is required. The secretary of the United Board, who is also General Secretary of the Union, is in constant communication with the local secretaries of all the sections. The Union is thus, as it were, in permanent session, always ready to take action wherever it may be necessary or desirable—a permanent centre of advice and help in case of need. It is also, through its General Secretary, in correspondence with the leaders of kindred social movements in Europe and America—such as Herr Schulze-Delitzsch in Germany; M. Godin, M. C. Limousin, and Mr. C. Roberts in France; and Signor Vigano in Italy. Indeed it may be confidently affirmed that, so far as the English co-operative movement is recognised abroad, it is identified with the Co-operative Union.

* For details, see the Rules and Orders of the Union.