

WOMEN AND THE CO-OPERATIVE MOVEMENT

The early difference between form and substance, between rules and reality in the rôle of women in Co-operative societies was noted by G.D.H. Cole in "A Century of Co-operation".

"There had been, indeed, from the beginning no bar on women as members of the Co-operative Societies; and a woman, Ann Tweedale had actually played some part in the foundation of the Rochdale Pioneers. But for a long time few women attended the Quarterly Meetings and in most cases the man, not the woman, was the Co-operative member and received the Co-operative dividend". (p.216)

On the same page he has a quotation from the article by Mrs. Acland which inaugurated the "Women's Corner" in the Co-operative News in 1883 and this mixes boldness and modesty in its exhortation on woman's rôle:-

"We can be independent members of our store, but we are only asked to come and buy ... why should not we women do more than we do? Surely without departing from our own sphere and without trying to undertake work which can be better done by men there is more for us women to do than to spend money"

The article led to the formation of the Women's League for the Spread of Co-operation in June 1883 - and through a proud and varied record to the celebration this year of the centenary of the Co-operative Women's Guild. In this the Bulletin gladly joins, with an

"auspicious and drooping eye" for the Guild and more widely for the service of women in Co-operative organisations.

Kathleen Kempton and Angela Hardy and then Jean Gaffin and Dr. Thoms make their review and assessment of the century and some projection into the future. The centenary book on the Guild by the latter authors "Caring and Sharing" is due for publication in 1983. Mary Stott recalls some outstanding Guild members and identifies some of its achievements which have appealed to her and Norah Willis, - President-elect of the 1983 Co-operative Congress - reviews her experience of service in the Guild and in the democracy of the Movement

On the role of women in Co-operative employment Joan Straker reports from the consumer movement and Rhona Howarth more predominantly from the area of workers' Co-operatives. Finally, Muriel Russell takes an international view, drawing particularly from her service with the International Co-operative Alliance.

Of course, we had ambitions to extend even that rich variety - with articles for example, from trade-union experience. There was, also, assurance for a time of some male voices in the chorus. Such projects we had to abandon - at least for the moment. In the meantime we are grateful to the authors who have so effectively responded - and join in their appreciation and encouragement to the Guild.

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R.L.M.