

# A CENTURY OF LONDON CO-OPERATION



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**THIS IS THE STORY**  
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**LONDON CO-OPERATIVE SOCIETY**  
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One of the largest Distributive Co-operative Societies  
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Co-operation began in London over a hundred years ago; Robert Owen helped its foundation; Socialists and Chartists and Reformers gave their aid; the Christian Socialists secured its legal status in the national life; the workmen of West and East Ham, Edmonton and West London maintained their co-operative societies in the latter years of the nineteenth century.

Out of the chaos following the Great War came the amalgamation of the co-operative societies of the North, East, and West into the London Co-operative Society that is now an effective force in commercial life; an exemplar in industrial organisation and employment; a guiding instrument in the educational, musical, literary, and artistic pleasures of its members; an awakener from apathy in civic affairs; and a persuading influence in modern politics.

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&c.

# A CENTURY OF LONDON CO-OPERATION

BY

W. HENRY BROWN

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## FOREWORD.

*I have never contributed a foreword to any publication with more readiness and gladness than I do to this History of the London Co-operative Society.*

*The Education Committee deserve our thanks for so promptly using the opportunity which the amalgamations have afforded to weave the threads of Co-operative history in London into a constructive story.*

*The selection of the Author was indeed a happy one, for Mr. W. H. Brown has an unrivalled knowledge of both the tradition and facts of Co-operative development in the Metropolis. The lives of the Author, and his father, provide an intimate and continuous contact with Co-operative thought and action over two-thirds of the period covered in the book. He is rich in having personally known men like Lloyd Jones, Tom Hughes, and E. V. Neale, and having had the close friendship of J. M. Ludlow, G. J. Holyoake, E. O. Greening, Mr. Ben Jones, and a host of other personalities who have given their distinctive contribution to Co-operation in the Capital City.*

*The story vividly describes the vicissitude of Co-operation in London. The reaching out of the Pioneer minds beyond the possible response of their day and generation; the disillusionment and apparent failure because of the absence of material results at particular times; and eventually the emergence of the stimulating fact of the Indestructibility of the Idea.*

*The wonderful enthusiasm of London's early Co-operators caused them to make of Co-operation a magnificent declaration of principles. Perhaps a contributory cause of their failure was their inability to realise that however grand the Ideal it must touch the daily routine of life to become realisable.*

*Failure in the accepted sense dogged a multitude of early efforts until, through the travail of experience, Co-operation took root in the more modest and bumble efforts of men and women whose names will never be read in our history books, but whose lives and deeds are just as intimately woven into the accomplishments of to-day as the thinkers whose names are known to us.*

*Even the policies which succeed often do so because of the character which opposition forms. So who can, or would wish, to assess the value of this or that contribution to the cause of progress?*

*As I read this History and the events which recall the past, a whole host of men and women who have played their part well appear to step into and emblazon its pages. Let us never forget that it is the mass of unrecorded efforts which largely contributes to the success of our great democratic movements.*

*History usually shines a strong light on the personality of the pioneers. Perhaps the most useful lesson which our Co-operative Pioneers teach us is to realise that they were men who broke with the traditions, customs, and dogmas of their day—and thought and acted for themselves.*

*Therefore let us, as Co-operators, keep our minds receptive to the knowledge that there is pioneering work to be done in each generation.*

*Although the progress made is exhilarating, London is not yet won for Co-operation. It is true that the foundations are being well laid, but the figures of membership, trade, and capital are infinitesimal to what they must become before we can say the Premier City of the World is the Co-operative Heart of a Co-operative Nation.*

*It was once told to me that Bismarck, when driving through the streets of London, said: "What a City to Sack!" I never ride through the miles of London's streets and survey the endless range of shops and businesses belonging to Private Enterprise, in which even to-day the infrequent Co-operative Store appears to be a democratic Oasis in the Desert of Capitalism, without thinking:—*

*"What a City to win to Co-operation!"*

*The London Co-operative Society is the material manifestation of the vision of those wonderful souls of a hundred years ago, and it is an instrument capable of completing our task. Truly, London Co-operators have a Past of which they are proud. The present is full of joyful achievement. Let us see to it that our future is Upwards, Onwards, towards the Co-operative Commonwealth.*

ALFRED BARNES.