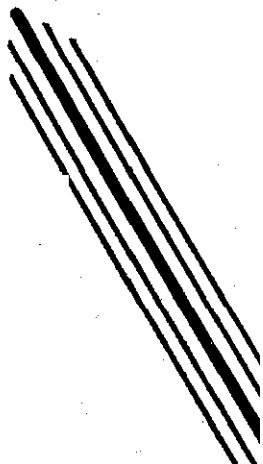




**Agricultural
Co-operation in
Fascist Italy**

FREPPÉ COTTA



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**AGRICULTURAL CO-OPERATION
IN FASCIST ITALY**

AGRICULTURAL CO-OPERATION IN FASCIST ITALY

*With a Full Account of the
General Organisation of Co-operation*

BY

FREPPÉ COTTA

Honours Diploma in Co-operation and Social Science

WITH A PREFACE BY

C. R. FAY, M.A., D.Sc.

Chairman, The Horace Plunkett Foundation

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TO
THE KING AND LORD
OF
THE EARTH, THE FIELD OF AGRICULTURE,
HUMBLY AND GRATEFULLY

PREFACE

THIS work of Mr. Cotta gives chapter and verse for the study of an agricultural renaissance that is one of the most remarkable, indeed paradoxical, social phenomena of these days. This well-documented account of it is, in this respect, a very timely and necessary amplification of the short study of Italian Co-operation issued earlier in the year by the Horace Plunkett Foundation. Mr. Cotta shows how the results therein outlined have been achieved, and presents a detailed picture of the unexpectedly free initiative and democratic control by which Italian agriculture has been rejuvenated under a political régime of dictatorship. He gives a new insight into the underlying economic purpose of the Fascist régime and brings evidence to show that the Italian Government, far from restricting the development of Co-operation, is encouraging it in every way—provided that this way does not lead to the political arena.

The main value of this volume may be that of a textbook for students of agricultural economics, and it is in particular a notable contribution to the growing literature of Agricultural Co-operation, but it should not escape the attention of the wider public which, not only in Great Britain but in other democratic countries, is watching with some apprehension the growing encroachment of the State upon the economic, and particularly the agricultural economic, life of the community. Here we have a clear contrast with what is happening in British and Scandinavian countries; where political liberties are felt to be secure, planned economy in agriculture is being adopted with a varied measure of statutory compulsion; in Italy, even for the great national effort of the annual wheat campaign, no coercive means are used and brilliant results are achieved by methods in which Horace Plunkett himself would have found no Co-operative

flaw. Possibly a sense of national discipline, such as England only knew during the War, is the genius of this and other voluntary organisations described by Mr. Cotta; but this picture of an agricultural economic democracy, illustrated by the essential texts of the rules and regulations of its more important bodies, is none the less striking. Much of the data is available here for the first time in English, and since agriculture is by far the most important of the new Corporations or Guilds, it will be studied with interest by those who are trying to see what, if any, new economic significance there is in the Italian conception of a Corporative State.

Mr. Cotta is an Indian of Goa, whose native language is Portuguese, and his success in dealing with Italian documents in English is remarkable. He came to England to study Co-operation, first in the Manchester College, then here at the Foundation, and chose Italian Co-operation for his field of research. His publication of this volume is a generous parting gesture, and we are glad to be able to recommend it on its merits; but this endorsement, it should be clearly stated, in no way carries with it an endorsement of political dictatorship and in no way signifies a loss of faith in the principles of democracy to which the membership of the International Co-operative Alliance remains faithful.

THE HORACE PLUNKETT FOUNDATION.

C. R. FAY,
Chairman.

INTRODUCTION

AN outstanding fact of the world economy of to-day is the paramount importance now given to agriculture.

One of the causes of this agricultural revival is the growing economic nationalism, which with high tariffs, quotas, import and export control is restricting international trade and endeavouring to make each country self-sufficient.

A second cause is the breakdown of unbridled Industrialism and Capitalism, which has brought in its wake unparalleled unemployment, a solution, or at least a partial solution, for which can be found by taking men back to the land.

A third cause lies, perhaps, much deeper. Before the Industrial Revolution agriculture was the chief industry. The wisest thinkers, philosophers and writers of all ages had stressed the primary importance of agriculture. Napoleon, great conqueror and empire-builder, had said: "Agriculture is the soul, the foundation of the kingdom; industry ministers to the comfort and happiness of the kingdom; foreign trade ought to be the servant of agriculture and home industry. These last ought never to be subordinate to trade."

Dazzled by the glitter of the achievements of Industrialisation men had wandered away from Mother Earth. With the crash of 1929 a definite reaction against the Industrial System set in. On the other hand, the consequences of the Great War were becoming more pronounced. It was said that that war had been fought to end war. But the old rivalries have not disappeared. National self-consciousness has definitely increased. In some countries the desire for rehabilitation, greatness, expansion has become the motive power of the national life. And these countries have been the first and the foremost to realise the truths to which Napoleon gave expression. They have, therefore, given agriculture the first place in their nation-building programme.

In Germany Herr Darré is endeavouring to settle the

unemployed in the sparsely populated parts of East Prussia, and his policy is to root them to the soil. It is outside our present scope to discuss the philosophy and the ultimate aims of the *Blut und Boden* (Blood and Soil) motto underlying the land policy of the Nazis. What matters to us here and now is simply the fact that the new régime in the Fatherland is endeavouring by means of a most intensive propaganda to impress upon the German people that their future lies on the soil, and is sparing no facilities in agricultural purchasing, marketing and credit to make farming attractive.

In Spain, too, peasant proprietorship has been one of the main objectives of the new republic. Huge estates have been divided into peasant holdings. Here again we shall not stop to discuss the methods used by the Spanish Government to effect that change. What we desire simply to note is that peasant proprietorship is being created and agriculture is being intensified.

In America, the Tennessee Valley Experiment has been called the most striking example of social and economic planning to be found anywhere in the world to-day outside Soviet Russia. But while in Russia direct and indirect compulsion has been used to bring the *kulaks* into the collective *kolkhozy*, in the Tennessee Valley land improvement, cheap electric power, credit facilities, better housing and cultural attractions have drawn more families to more and better farming. Similar experiments with the object of providing subsistence farms to the teeming urban unemployed are being tried in West Virginia and other regions.

Here in England, Mr. Stanley Baldwin, speaking at a Conservative Rally at Spetchley Park, near Worcester, on Saturday, the 23rd June, 1934, said that he was proud to belong to the first Government for three generations which had made the interests of agriculture one of its principal occupations.¹ Mr. Walter Elliot, the present Minister of Agriculture, introducing on the 9th July, 1934, in the House of Commons, the estimates for his Department, said that agriculture was no longer a minor issue in Britain, and that the industry had to be taken seriously as one of the greatest

¹ Cf. *Manchester Guardian* of 25th June, 1934.

questions of the day, both for its economic importance and for its place in the national life.¹

But is agriculture to be developed and protected indefinitely by marketing boards and subsidies? Or can agriculture be made permanently more attractive without a modification of the prevailing system of land tenure? Or can such voluntary bodies as the Distributist League of Mr. G. K. Chesterton and the Catholic Land Associations² bring a definite contribution to the solution of the problems of agriculture and unemployment? These are some of the questions which will receive an answer when the British long-term policy is worked out. That there is widespread dissatisfaction with the present conditions there is no doubt.

In Italy the Land Movement has been glorified into a Religion, and Signor Mussolini has become its greatest apostle. Said he: "To-day, thanks to Fascism, one breathes in Italy an atmosphere that might be called of *rurality*. Everywhere one speaks of the return to the land. Everywhere one wants to deflate the urbanism so deleterious to life and to the race. In the fields there is death, but there is much more life; in the cities—specially in the great ones—it is death that dominates in the midst of an enervating and feeble life."³ And true to this gospel the Fascist régime had planned a "new reclamation scheme to which 3,800,000,000 lire has been allotted, to be spread over thirty years (an equal sum being spent by the landowners), while the scheme itself is to be completed in fourteen years. . . . 5,962,508 acres are to be reclaimed. . . . Five million acres more have been declared to be fit for more intense cultivation, and if the landowners do not undertake this in accordance with the plans of the Government experts, so that the transformation of agriculture may be carried out

¹ Cf. *Manchester Guardian*, 10th July, 1934.

² Cf. *Fles to the Fields*, Heath Cranton, Ltd.—Professor W. G. S. Adams (Warden of All Souls), in a paper read before the Agricultural Section of the British Association at the recent Aberdeen meeting, said that "he believed that even in this country the small farm would increase and would become a more rather than a less important factor in rural community life." Cf. *The Times*, 11th September, 1934, p. 6.

³ Cf. *Agenda del Cooperatore*, 1934. XII. p. 353. *Ente Nazionale Fascista della Cooperazione*, Rome.

with the least possible delay, the Prefect of the province may step in and take the work over."¹

Through the *Opera Nazionale per i Combattenti* (the National Association for Ex-Soldiers) alone, one of the organisations specially favoured by the *Duce* (recently he spent three hours threshing corn with them at Sabaudia with the thermometer at 98° F. in the shade), during the ten years ended in 1932, 450,000 hectares (1 hectare=2.471 acres) of marshy land have been reclaimed, nearly 89,000 hectares brought under cultivation, 24,000 hectares cleared, 705 kilometres of canals and 931 kilometres of roads made, 258 million lire spent, and 14,166 new peasant proprietors created, each holding in the average nearly 5 acres.²

No wonder, then, that, undaunted by the Malthusian theory, Signor Mussolini could exclaim: "In an Italy entirely reclaimed, cultivated, irrigated, and disciplined, that is Fascist, there is room and bread for another ten million people."³

Enough has been said, I think, however limited and cursory our survey may have been, of modern world tendencies and developments⁴ in agriculture and agrarian policies to demonstrate the opportuneness of a careful study of agricultural co-operation. The English Marketing Boards, which are meant to help agriculture, are a kind of co-operation from the top. But if the benefits conferred by them on the producer are to be made permanent, with a better reconciliation with the interests of the consumer and the whole body of taxpayers, the Marketing Boards will have to give place, sooner or later, to the more orthodox, more simple and less expensive co-operation from the bottom, co-ordinated, and helped, if necessary, by the Government.

Present developments in Germany, Spain, the United States of America and Italy are all for an increase of peasant proprietorship. Tendencies almost throughout the world

¹ Cf. *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 14th edition, Vol. XII, p. 760.

² Cf. *L'Opera Nazionale per i Combattenti*, pp. 8-9. Stabilimento Tipografico Ditta Carlo Colombo, Roma, Aprile 1933.

³ Cf. *Agenda del Cooperatore*, 1934, XII, p. 328.

⁴ *The Times* of the 14th August last reported the project of a big rural colonisation scheme to relieve unemployment, on which \$10,000,000 was to be spent, in Quebec, Canada.

are in the same direction. Now, the peasant proprietor is born, economically, with the original sins of poverty and dependence, from which only co-operation can redeem him. It is scarcely necessary to labour this point, which has almost become an axiom. For, be he only a subsistence farmer, he will require at least seeds and manures; and unless he buys them co-operatively he will be at the mercy of the middleman, and will not obtain the best in quality and the cheapest in price. Then he will require a surplus to sell in order to enable him to pay interest and amortisation charges, taxes, rates, to buy clothes, etc.; and unless he sells co-operatively he will again be at the mercy of the middleman. He may want credit if he is, say, to avoid a glut on the market at harvest time; and unless he obtains co-operative credit he may fall into the hands of the usurer. He will surely desire to insure his live stock against accidents, disease and death; and any but co-operative insurance may be beyond his means. To prove that co-operation is the necessary complement of small-scale farming, one recent instance may be quoted. The Federal Emergency Relief Administration has made a grant of \$300,000 to the Tennessee Valley Associated Corporation, Inc., formed at the beginning of the current year to promote and foster co-operation in the great Tennessee Valley Settlement to which reference was previously made.¹

During a visit to Italy last April, of three weeks' duration (the original object of which was to investigate her famous *affittanze collettive*), the writer found that her organisation of agricultural co-operation, in the branches above referred to and in others, was on the whole so complete and so rich as to be fully worth a special study. That study is the object of these pages. No attempt will be made to give a detailed history of the evolution of the various types of societies. Besides a very profuse literature in Italian, a good deal has been written on the subject in English, especially in many publications of the International Institute of Agriculture in Rome. To gather it all in one volume, with the amount of detail and analysis necessary to make the publication

¹ Cf. *Cooperations Rurals*, May 1934, p. 42.

useful, would be a very big task indeed. It would, moreover, be beyond our present limited purpose.

This work will, therefore, restrict itself to a careful examination of the whole structure of the organisation of agricultural co-operation as at present constituted, from the primaries to the federals. But before that, we shall carefully examine from its beginning the general organisation of co-operation created by the Fascist régime. Such a treatment will enable us to grasp first of all the whole concept, the plan and the aims of the whole organisation. If in the course of our study we go into details it will be with two distinct objects in view. First, by an objective examination of the structure we shall endeavour to see to what extent Italian agricultural co-operation has, by its incorporation in the corporative organisation and by its co-ordination with other legitimate national interests, lost, if at all, that democratic control and freedom which are necessary to make it co-operative in the orthodox sense. Secondly, the examination of detail will serve the purpose of enabling those who have co-operative problems to face in the present agriculturally minded world, to take such leaves out of the Italian book as will suit their particular case. The principles will be found to be the same; the details may vary.

Professor C. R. Fay says in the Preface to *Co-operation at Home and Abroad* that information for that work was obtained in three ways: 1. Observation of co-operative establishments. 2. Conversation with leaders and officials of the movements. 3. Books, reports and pamphlets. And he goes on to say that while he did not find the first very valuable, the second served chiefly to direct to, and to elucidate, the groundwork provided by the third. The little experience that the writer has gained in his co-operative pilgrimages to Ireland and to Italy has been similar to that of Professor Fay: printed matter, which can be obtained only by such visits, is the best and surest source of information.

This essay will be based, therefore, on the mass of literature, books, pamphlets, reviews, periodicals, in Italian, French

and English, so lavishly and so generously placed at my disposal by the *Ente Nazionale Fascista della Cooperazione*, by the International Institute of Agriculture and by the International Labour Office in Rome. The knowledge gained from these sources will be sifted, processed and weighed in the light of the information and impressions obtained in my visits to some of the typical primary societies and to the federal organisations, and in my many and long conversations with the officials of the organisations mentioned, and with other responsible persons not connected with the Movement. Nine months' systematic study of British and International Co-operation at the Co-operative College, Manchester, and further study at the Plunkett Foundation will be brought to bear on the whole.

I should like to record here my gratitude to the officials of the organisations visited for their great courtesy, kindness and help. And while it would be too long (so really numerous they are) to name them all, I must not omit to mention the names of Doctors Fabbricci, Labadessa, and D'Angelo of the *Ente Nazionale Fascista della Cooperazione*, Mr. Montgomery of the International Institute of Agriculture, and Dr. Cabrini of the Rome branch of the International Labour Office, to all of whom I am more particularly indebted. My thanks are due also to Professor Hall of the Co-operative College, Manchester, Mr. Karl Walter of the Horace Plunkett Foundation and Mr. May of the International Co-operative Alliance, whose very kind letters of introduction opened the way to make my visit to Italy so pleasant and so fruitful.

London,
October 11, 1934.

CONTENTS

CHAP.	PAGE
PREFACE	vii
INTRODUCTION	ix
I. THE GENESIS OF THE PRESENT ORGANISATION	1
II. LEGISLATION GOVERNING CO-OPERATION	8
III. ENTE NAZIONALE FASCISTA DELLA COOPERAZIONE	16
IV. AGRICULTURAL LABOUR AND CULTIVATION SOCIETIES	28
V. COLLECTIVE PURCHASE AND MARKETING SOCIETIES	44
VI. PROCESSING SOCIETIES	54
VII. RURAL OR AGRICULTURAL CREDIT SOCIETIES	72
VIII. CATTLE INSURANCE SOCIETIES	90
IX. NATIONAL FEDERATIONS	101
X. FEDERAZIONE ITALIANA DEI CONSORZI AGRARI	109
XI. PROPAGANDA AND EDUCATION	124
XII. CONCLUSION	131
APPENDIX	140
BIBLIOGRAPHY	143
INDEX	145

APPEN-

SOCIETÀ COOPERATIVA AGRICOLA FRA
BALANCE SHEET,

LIABILITIES

	Lire.	Lire.
1. <i>Share Capital</i>	48,300·00	
2. <i>Reserve Fund</i>	34,944·55	
3. <i>Provident Fund</i>	7,301·65	
	<hr style="width: 100%;"/>	90,546·20
4. <i>Creditors :</i>		
Various under various heads	165,304·21	
Building Co-operative	1,277·15	
Improvement Work Squads	101,649·18	
Various Suppliers	236,937·29	
<i>Ministry of Agriculture :</i>		
Capital	2,381,800·00	
Interest	26,878·06	
	<hr style="width: 100%;"/>	2,408,678·06
<i>National Bank of Labour :</i>		
Sums received	156,196·75	
Interest and Charges	13,293·25	
	<hr style="width: 100%;"/>	169,490·00
5. <i>Bills Outstanding</i>		3,083,335·89
		<hr style="width: 100%;"/>
		31,066·70
		<hr style="width: 100%;"/>
Net Profit for the year		3,204,948·79
		<hr style="width: 100%;"/>
Total Liabilities	Lire	3,206,317·75
		<hr style="width: 100%;"/>

DIX

OPERAI RAVENNATI DI OSTIA

30th September, 1933

ASSETS

		Lire.
1. Buildings with Improvement Works		2,558,175·70
2. Dead and Live Stock		231,282·00
3. Advances for cultivation		42,591·10
4. Debtors :	Lire.	
Various under various heads	40,922·48	
Workers' Co-operative	5,494·54	
Consumers' Co-operative	<u>35,018·33</u> ¹	
		81,435·35
5. Society's Deposits (Guarantee)		1,300·00
6. Banks, Current Accounts :		
<i>Credito Marittimo</i>	34·00	
National Bank of Labour	<u>50·00</u>	
		84·00
7. Cash in hand		55,070·38
8. Ministry of Agriculture A/c Aqueduct : ²		
Amount of Contract	266,000	
Less 25% borne by Society	<u>66,500</u>	
		199,500·00
9. Losses of Previous Years :		
Year 1930-31	5,961·84	
Year 1931-32	<u>30,917·38</u>	
		<u>36,879·22</u>
Total Assets	Lire	<u><u>3,206,317·75</u></u>

¹ This sign of co-operation between Producers' and Consumers' Societies should be noted.

² This was being built by the Society itself to supply Ostia with drinking water. The Society paid 25 per cent. of the cost. Under the scheme of *bonifica integrale*, the integral betterment of the countryside, the Government provides up to 75 per cent. of the cost for the provision of rural water supply.

SOCIETÀ COOPERATIVA AGRICOLA FRA
OPERAI RAVENNATI DI OSTIA

EXPENDITURE AND REVENUE ACCOUNT, 1932-33

EXPENDITURE

	Lire.
1. Loss on Water-melon crop	13,529.50
2. Loss on Potato crop	10,891.17
3. Loss on Barley crop	7,666.47
4. Loss on Cattle Farm	3,713.63
5. General Works	34,792.65
6. Expenses of Administration	127,413.71
Total	198,007.13
Sundries	10,177.09
Total Expenditure	208,184.22
Surplus for the year	1,368.96
Total	Lire 209,553.18

REVENUE

	Lire.
1. Rent of Land (net)	53,642.33
2. Rent on Colonists' Houses	58,145.00
3. Revenue of Machinery Station (net)	19,576.59
4. Society's Cultivation :	Lire.
Wheat	24,489.88
Oats	259.60
	24,749.48
5. Surplus Stock	18,859.40
6. Commissions and Discounts	17,783.28
Total	192,756.08
7. Sundries	16,797.10
Total Revenue	Lire 209,553.18

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INDEX

- A.
- ACERBO, G., 55, 87
 Administration, *see* Control and Administration.
 Advances, 13, 50, 67, 70
Affittanze Collettive, xiii, 28, 31, 37, 42
 Agricultural Labour and Cultivation :
 Consortia or Unions, 37, 48
 Federation, 19, 38, 101-8
 Societies, 12, 25, 28-43, 47, 51, 138
 America, x, xii, xiii, 119
 American Farm Board, 49
 Amortisation, *see* Finance.
 Arbitration, 36, 98
 Artisans' Communities of Italy, Federation of, 75
Associazione Operai Braccianti di Ravenna, 36, 37, 38
- B.
- Baldwin, Stanley, x
 Banks :
 Bank of Italy, 76, 78, 83, 84, 88
 Bombay Provincial Co-operative Bank, 86, 87
 C.W.S. Bank, 116
 National Bank of Agriculture, 118, 122
 National Bank of Labour, 37, 84, 88
 Popular Banks, 72, 88
 Prussian Central Co-operative Bank, 86
 Savings Banks, 59, 76, 77, 84, 88
 Schulze-Delitzsch Bank, 72, 82
 (*See also under Credit.*)
 Bazzini, F., 39
 Binding rule, 47, 59, 64, 68
Bonifica idraulica, 28, 48
Bonifica integrale, 130, 141
 British Movement, 1, 5, 18, 25, 33, 47, 60, 65, 101, 105, 109, 110, 115, 125, 128, 134
 Bufalo, E. del, 2
 Buffoli, L., 6
- C.
- Cabrini, A., xv
 Calore, A., 52
 Cash Trading, 132, 134
 Catalonia, 136-7
 Catholic Land Associations, xi
 Cattle Insurance :
 Federation, 19, 99, 101
 Inspectorate of Trento, 100
 Societies, 11, 25, 90-100, 138
 Cattle Marketing, 50, 120
 Centrosoyus, 133, 134, 136
 Cerutti, Father, 72
 Charter of Labour, 103
 Chesterton, G. K., xi
 Coccoon-drying Societies, 50, 62-9, 120
 Collective farms, Russian, x, 28, 41
 Commons, House of, x, 31
 Congress, British Co-operative, 20
Consorti Agrari, *see* Purchase and Marketing Societies.
Consortio Agrario di Siena e Grosseto, 48-50, 56
Consortio Maremma, 48
 Consumers' Societies, Italian, 18, 122, 133, 134, 139, 141
 Control and Administration :
 Board of Directors, 18, 22, 23, 82
 College of Syndics, 24, 36, 81, 93, 114
 Commission of Discount, 80
 Commission of Experts, 93, 95, 96
 Committee of *Provisori*, 36, 81, 115
 Consultative Committee, 93
 Council of Administration, 9, 13, 33, 34, 35, 45, 46, 47, 67, 78, 80, 81, 83, 84, 93-5, 98, 105, 113
 Director, 22, 23, 24, 26, 114
 Executive Committee, 113
 Federal Council, 105, 106, 108
 General Assembly, 9, 34, 35, 79, 93, 98, 105, 113
 Manager, 35, 48, 81
 National Council, 18, 20, 22, 23, 24
 Office of the Presidency, 48

- Control and Administration—*cont.*
 President, 23, 24, 26, 35, 36, 48, 80,
 93, 94, 95, 96, 98, 107, 113, 114
 Provincial Congress, 105
 Provincial Secretaries, 26, 127
Rachner, 74, 82, 94
 Technical Committee, 35
 Co-operative Productive Federa-
 tion, 103
 Co-operative Union, British, 5, 16,
 17, 18, 22, 24, 25, 27, 101, 103,
 104, 134
 Co-operative Wholesale Societies :
 English, 1, 109, 110, 111, 112,
 113, 115, 116
 Joint English and Scottish, 109
 Scottish, 1, 109, 112, 113
 (For Italian Co-operative
 Federations *see* under F.)
 Corporations, 20
 Provincial Councils of Corporative
 Economy, 104
 Credit :
 Artisans and Small Industries,
 Autonomous Dept. of Credit
 for, 75, 77
Central Societies, German, 86
Ente Finanziario dei Consorzi
Agrari, 13, 117, 138
 Facilities, 37, 54, 67, 70, 87, 138
Filialen, 86, 87
Monte dei Paschi, 50
Provinzial Kassen, 86
 Raiffeisen Societies, 51, 72-4, 77,
 79, 82, 86-7
 Regional Institutes, 73, 76, 77,
 84, 87
Reichs Genossenschafts Kasse, 86
 Rural or Agricultural Credit
 Societies, 72-89
 ——— Association of, 19, 101
Zentral Darlehens Kasse, 86
 (See also Banks.)
- D.
- D'Angelo, A., xv
 Dairy Societies :
 Danish, 57, 59, 65, 66
 French, 57
 Irish, 57-60, 62, 65
 Italian, 12, 25, 54-62
 ——— Unions of, 62
 Soresina, 61
 Darré, Herr, ix
 Democratic Control, 10, 24, 35, 47,
 61, 66, 82, 93, 105, 113, 132,
 133. (See also Voting Rights.)
 Deposits, 45, 59, 78, 83
 Depreciation, *see* Finance.
 Dissolution of Societies, *see* Liqui-
 dation.
 Distillery Societies, 12, 70
 Distributist League, xi
 Dividend on Purchase, *see* Surplus
 under Finance.
- E.
- Education, Co-operative :
 British, General, 125
 ——— Co-operative College, Man-
 chester, xv, 125, 128
 Italian, General, 27, 50, 124-30,
 132, 135, 139
 ——— Higher Institute of Co-
 operation, Rome, 125-30
 Elliot, Walter, x, 31, 41
 Emigration, internal, 28
*Ente Nazionale Fascista della Coop-
 erazione*, xv, 13, 14, 16-27,
 101-4, 106-7, 125, 127, 131,
 136
 Experimental Stations, 45, 50, 116
- F.
- Fabian Society, 6
 Fabbricci, Dr., xv
 Failure of Society, 83
 Fascist Régime or Party, xiv, 6, 7,
 14, 19
 Fay, C. R., xiv
 Federations, Co-operative :
*Confederazione Cooperativa Itali-
 ana* (old), 4, 5
 Fascist National Federation of
 Co-operative Societies of
 Agricultural Labourers, 38
Federazione Italiana dei Consorzi
Agrari, 15, 19, 51-3, 56, 109-23,
 138
Lega Nazionale delle Cooperative
 (old), 4, 5, 7
 National Federation of Produc-
 tive and Labour Co-operative
 Societies (old), 2
 Present Federations (10), 14, 18-
 22, 101-8, 133, 136
*Sindacato Italiano delle Coopera-
 tive* (old), 5, 13
 (For British Federations *see*
 under C and I.)
 Federations, political, syndical,
 etc., 4, 19, 50, 102, 106, 107
Fedexport, 120-21
 Feeding Stuffs, 49, 118
 Fertilisers, 49, 117

Finance :

- Amortisation and Depreciation, 40, 41, 57, 65, 66
- Contributions to *Ente* and Federations, 25, 107
- Entrance Fees, 10, 33, 57, 59, 65, 78, 95, 98, 111
- Funds: share capital, loans, reserves, etc., 8, 9, 11, 26, 33, 47, 64-6, 77-8, 82, 98, 111, 112
- Indivisible Collective Assets, 11, 60-61, 135
- Interest on Capital, 11, 34, 60, 66, 79, 112, 132, 133
- Market Value of Shares, 10
- Surplus, 10, 11, 26, 33, 47, 59, 65-6, 78, 82, 112, 132-3
- Finlay, Father, 55, 124
- Fiscal Provisions, 10-12, 90, 99
- Focarile, C., 39
- Fruit Marketing, 50, 120-21

G.

- Germany, ix, xii, 72, 75, 86
- Grading, 46, 50, 63, 64, 70, 120, 121

H.

- Haas Organisation, 51, 74, 86
- Hall, F., xv
- Harvesting Conditions, 46
- Horace Plunkett Foundation, xv
- Howard, A., 3

I.

- India, 86, 90
- Industrial and Provident Societies Act, British, 9, 59
- Inspections, 13, 17, 18, 84, 94, 99
- International Co-operative Alliance, xv, 131-3, 135-7
- Congress, 131, 133, 135, 137
- International Institute of Agriculture, Rome, xiii, xv
- Labour Office, Rome, xv
- Irish Agricultural Organisation Society, 16, 20, 24
- Wholesale Society, 49,

110

- Irish Free State, 16, 25, 49, 62

L.

- Labadessa, R., xv, 27, 66
- Labour Charter, 103
- Labour Contracts, collective, 13, 102, 106, 107

- Labour, Magistracy of, 102
- Laissez-faire* Policy, 137
- Land Reclamation, 28, 36-9
- Land Settlement and Tenure, ix-xiii, 29-32, 40
- Legislation, Co-operative, 8-16, 25, 70, 72, 107, 119
- Leo XIII, 72
- Liquidation of Societies, 9, 11, 57, 60, 66, 82-3, 98-9
- Littoria, 29, 139
- Lloyd, E. A., 1, 3, 6
- Luzzati, L., 6, 72, 116, 128

M.

- MacLagan Committee on Co-operation, 86
- Marketing Boards, xi, xii, 66
- Marketing, orderly, 44, 49, 50, 51, 56, 64, 70, 118-21
- Marketing regulations, 46
- May, H. J., xv, 131, 132
- Mechanisation of Agriculture, 41
- Membership Conditions, 8, 17-21, 32, 46, 55, 58, 64, 74, 75, 82, 92, 99, 104, 111, 132
- Ministries, Italian:
 - Agriculture, 12, 39, 76, 83, 84, 91, 118, 128, 140, 141
 - Corporations, 14, 17, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 99, 102, 107, 108
 - Finance, 83, 84
- Montgomery, J. K., xv
- Mussolini, Benito, xi, xii, 7, 39, 40, 42, 115, 117, 137, 138

N.

- Napoleon, ix

O.

- Open Membership, *see* Membership.
- Opera Nazionale per i Combattenti*, xii, 19, 29, 128
- Ostia del Mare, 39
- Ostia Society, 38-42, 138, 140-42
- Overlapping, 1
- Owen, Robert, 28

P.

- Planned Economy, 136, 137
- Polish Co-operative Council, 16, 22, 136
- Politics in Co-operation, 3-7, 29, 31, 115, 116, 132-4, 136
- Pools, 46-7, 50, 64, 68, 70, 118-19

- Principles of Co-operation, 55-6,
113, 132-36
Processing Societies, 54-71
—— Federation of, 19, 101-8
Propaganda, 27, 34, 50, 116, 124-27,
130
Provident Societies, 76, 84
Publications, Co-operative, 21, 26,
50, 115-17, 119
Public Works Contracts, 12, 37
Purchase and Marketing Societies,
44-53, 63, 68-9, 76, 111, 122,
138
—— Federation of, 19, 101-8
- R.
- Razzetti, C., 53
Registry of Friendly Societies,
British, 18, 101
Re-insurance, Cattle Insurance, 91,
99
Rerum Novarum, 72
Rochdale Pioneers, 3-4, 109, 131-5,
136
Russia, x, 41, 109, 115, 134, 136,
137
- S.
- Sabaudia, xii, 29, 139
Schools of Agriculture, Travelling,
50, 93, 116
Seed Supply, 49, 50, 64, 118, 120
Silos, 49, 50, 54
Small Holdings, Disabilities of, 63
—— Association of, 31
Soldiers' Association, see *Opera
Nazionale per i Combattenti*.
- Spain, x, xii
Statistics, 5, 38, 42, 52-3, 56, 81
62, 68, 71, 72-3, 88, 100
Strickland, C. F., 2
Supply Prices, averaging of, 47
Syndicats Agricoles, 46
- T.
- Taxation of Co-operative Societies,
10, 91
Tennessee Valley Associated Cor-
poration, xiii
—— Experiment, x, xiii
- U.
- Unemployment, ix, x, xii, 6, 28, 31
41
- V.
- Veterinary Surgeon, 93, 94, 95, 96
Voluntary Co-operation, 17, 104
135
Voting Rights, 20, 35, 79, 106, 113
- W.
- Walter, Karl, xv, 39, 115, 139
Warehouse Certificates, 50, 68, 69
Warehousing, 50, 63, 64, 69
Wheat Campaign and Marketing,
49, 118
Wheat Drying, 69
Wine-making Societies, 12, 66, 69-
71
Wine Marketing, 50, 119
Wollemborg, L., 6, 72