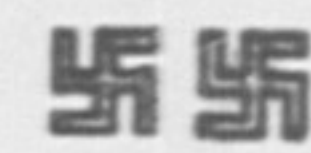
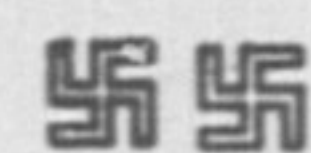


## COÖPERATION AND THE NEGRO



E. FRANKLIN FRAZIER



THE recent impulse given to Coöperation through organization on the part of the farmers and the removal of legal barriers is sure to affect the Negro. This is inevitable since any attempt on the part of white farmers to sell directly to the consumer would be futile without the coöperation of the Negro. The products coming from the latter if under the control of speculators are sufficient to nullify to a large extent the collective action of white coöperators. Successful coöperation requires the organization of production in relation to the size of the market.

The types of coöperation in which the Negro will probably engage are: Coöperative Marketing Societies; Coöperative Supply Associations; and Credit Unions.

There are at present in the South sporadic suggestions of and attempts at coöperative marketing. The meat exhibits among Negro farmers under the direction of farm demonstrators, where the products are sold collectively, carry with them the germs of a developed system of coöperation. More promising, though temporary, essays in coöperation are the occasional combinations to furnish carloads of hogs and other products which are sold at a more favorable price than individual bargaining could command. Even these ephemeral organizations have failed in most cases. They have failed partly because of the ignorance of the Negro farmer and partly because he, under necessity, has been compelled to sell prematurely. The absence of any organization to bind him to his promises and the economic domination of the white landlord have had a share in these failures. A more determined and consistent attempt to organize coöperatively can be seen in the coming meeting of peanut growers in Texas in the fall, when a coöperative market association is to be formed.

Successful coöperative marketing among Negro farmers can be achieved only when they are placed on a cash basis in renting and, under intelligent leaders, are organized according to their mode of production and the area of the market. Moreover, the areas

which will be organized as logical units will naturally contain white and colored farmers. The question arises immediately: Is the Negro farmer to enter these societies on equality with the white members? It should be the duty of rural colored leaders to see that Negro farmers enter on equal terms or form independent societies. In an organization where the size of one's holdings do not count in voting power the accident of color would certainly have no place. Certain social consequences implied in these organizations merit more consideration than can be given them here.

Under the caption of Consumers' Coöperatives we shall consider those organizations which maintain stores to supply their members daily with groceries; and those organized for the purchasing of feeding stuffs and farm implements. At present the writer has not at hand any data concerning the fate of the first type among Negroes; he has heard rumors of some stranded undertakings. There are, however, widely dispersed attempts at coöperation where Negro farmers, recognizing the economic advantage of collective buying of feed and implements, have combined. But these associations have been temporary and spasmodic. The rural leader, after acquainting himself with the principles of coöperation, should seize upon these favorable moments to organize permanent societies. Even where the necessary knowledge is available, there is another obstacle to be met. In many small rural communities of the South, the Negro consumer is absolutely powerless to free himself from the white landlord's commissary. White landlords who resent the teaching of scientific methods of agriculture to their colored tenants and even neighbors would not tolerate the inauguration of a system to eliminate their stores. It is useless, of course, as a colored rural worker remarked to me recently, to think of such stores in many sections. Nevertheless, a great step towards economic emancipation could be achieved through the development of coöperative enterprises in many centers of Negro population.

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While considering the present progress and future possibilities of coöperation among Negroes it is necessary to take into account the question of credit. The coöperative movement in Europe took its inception in the credit unions of Germany; and in Denmark where coöperation pervades the economic structure, the crowning achievement has been a coöperative bank. The writer has been informed that there are several rural credit unions in North Carolina among colored people. This is a hopeful sign. But on the whole the subjection of the Negro farmer has been due to his inability to get credit. The writer has been informed by a man intimately acquainted with the condition of Negro farmers that Farm Loan Banks have discriminated against colored applicants. Even if these banks function impartially, there will still be need of rural credit institutions among colored farmers. But the organization of this fundamental branch of production must wait upon intelligent leadership and expert information.

In conclusion, it appears that if the colored people, especially the farmers, are to avail themselves of the economic and social

advantages of coöperation, in spite of the large percentage of illiteracy, the following program is necessary:

(1) To disseminate among them literature on the principles of coöperative enterprises.

(2) To get rural leaders, after the study of the mode of production and the market of different communities, to organize consumers and farmers; and

(3) To liberate the Negro from the present share crop system of farming.

It is to be regretted that such an occasion as the recent Farmers' conference at Tuskegee Institute was not utilized to disseminate among Negro Farmers the principles of economic co-operation. The incidental references to spontaneous attempts at coöperative marketing by the farmers attending the conference not only should have invited an investigation of the progress of the movement among Negro farmers, but should have been the basis of a discussion of the problems connected with this new era in agriculture. With the proper information and encouragement the farmers could have used their initial undertakings as the foundation for further efforts.

## OLD THINGS



CHARLES BERTRAM JOHNSON



I LOVE old faces mellow wise,  
That smile; their young-old laughing  
eyes  
Undimmed, still view, in sheer pretense  
Of youth, their own sweet innocence.

I love old hands that trembling bless  
Youth's wild impetuous duress;  
That find in childhood's tangled cares,  
Life's answers to unuttered prayers.

Old things to me are dear and best:  
Old faith—that after life is rest;  
That somehow, from above our will,  
God works His gracious marvels still.