

WE SCRAPPED COMMUNISM—IN 1623

By O. K. Dorn

When the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth in the Autumn of 1620, there were no immediate considerations of either private property or the profit motive. This was due to the fact that the whole body of colonists had bound themselves together in a pact, the terms of which provided that for seven years they would work together, put their produce in a common warehouse and receive their subsistence out of the common store. At the end of the seven years there would be a settlement with the London merchants who had furnished funds to finance the Mayflower trip, purchase supplies, clothing, household utensils, furniture, farm implements, tools, equipment and such sundry articles as were needed in making a settlement in a barren new land.

There were other problems which were more pressing and immediate than the ones of owning property and of obtaining credit for labor. The first and most important was of survival in a cold, unfriendly wilderness and that problem was not solved any too well. During the first Winter more than half of those brave adventuring souls died and you will recall from your early readings in

history that the graves were carefully covered over so that the Indians would be unaware of this great reduction in numbers.

When the first Spring arrived the problems then became those of clearing land, planting crops, and building cabins and without any hesitation the little group banded together and worked as one in the fields. The crops would be for all. The primitive attempts at farming were immediately supplemented by fur trading, fishing and lumbering, all of which furnished cargoes for the return voyages of visiting ships.

After the lapse of the third year, the system of common tillage, which even in those earliest of colonial days rewarded idleness and paralyzed industry, was given up and each family was allotted land for its own cultivation. After chafing three years more under the bondage of the London merchants, the original contract was set aside and the colonists bought outright all claims of the original investors. So after six, instead of the original seven years, the colony became one in which the institution of private property was finally evolved and where private initiative dominated in economic if not in religious matters.