

INTRODUCTION

UTOPIAN SOCIALISM AND COMMUNISTIC EXPERIMENTS

WE noted in the General Introduction that the theories of utopian socialism frequently led to experiments in communistic settlements, and we may add here that these theories gained more or less popularity in the United States in a measure as the scheme was more or less closely associated with such experiments. Thus the system of the great French utopian, Charles Saint-Simon, that had for its principal aim the organization of national and international industry on a scientific basis, and was a universal social philosophy which did not admit of experiments on a miniature scale, found no echo in the United States. The philosophy of Robert Owen, in which communities are not an essential factor, but play an important part as preparatory schools for the communistic *régime* and as object lessons in the communistic mode of life, gained a considerable foothold in the United States, altho it did not attain the same degree of strength or exercise the same measure of influence on social thought as it did in the country of its birth, England. On the other hand, the system of the French utopian, Charles Fourier, which was based principally upon social organizations on a small scale, developed more strength in this country than it did in France, while the purely experimental Icarian movement, altho originating in France, found its practical application exclusively in the United States.

The causes which contributed to make this country the chief theater of experiments of the utopian socialists of all nations were many.

The social experimenters as a rule hoped that their settlement would gradually develop into a complete society with a higher order of civilization. For that purpose they needed large tracts of cheap land in places removed from the corrupting influences of modern life, and America abounded in such lands at the beginning and in the middle of the nineteenth century.

Besides, the industrial and agricultural possibilities of the young and growing country, its political liberty and freedom of conscience, had an irresistible charm for these pioneers of the new order of things.

The number of communistic and semi-communistic colonies founded in this country during the nineteenth century is largely a matter of speculation.

Noyes,* writing in 1869, gives an account of about sixty communities exclusive of the Shaker societies. In 1875 Nordhoff † enumerated eighteen Shaker societies embracing fifty-eight separate "families" or communes, and twelve other, chiefly religious, communities, which, however, included three of those mentioned by Noyes; and three years later Mr. Hinds ‡ recorded sixteen new communities, partly in existence and partly in process of formation. Mr.

*"History of American Socialisms," by John Humphrey Noyes.

†"The Communistic Societies of the United States," by Charles Nordhoff.

‡"American Communities," by William A. Hinds. The greater portion of the first part of this book was already written when a second revised and enlarged edition of Mr. Hinds' work appeared from the press of Charles H. Kerr & Company, Chicago. The new edition includes an account of the Owenite and Fourieristic experiments which were not touched upon in the first edition; it traces the history of the most important religious communities, as well as that of the Icarian communities, down to date; adds more than twenty new communities to those described by previous authors; and is now

Shaw *, in 1884, asserted that in the course of his researches he had come across at least fifty communities organized since 1870, and the Rev. Mr. Kent,† writing in 1901, described twenty-five new communities and brotherhoods established in our own days.

Basing our estimates on the fragmentary accounts of these authors, we may safely assume that several hundred communities existed in different parts of the United States during the last century, and that the number of persons who at one time or another participated in the experiments ran into the hundreds of thousands.

The history of these numerous communities is as varied as their classification with reference to their origin and particular object, but here we are concerned only with such of them which formed part of a general movement directly or indirectly connected with a distinct school of utopian socialism. These we may divide into the following four leading groups:

I. SECTARIAN COMMUNITIES

This group is comprised of the Shakers, the Perfectionists, and several communities organized by German immigrants. Their primary object was in all cases the free and unhampered exercise of their peculiar religious beliefs. Their communism was but a secondary feature, introduced in some instances as part of their religious system, and in others as a measure to preserve the integrity of their sect and to remove their members from the influences of the infidel world.

They had no general theories of social reconstruction; altogether the most elaborate and complete account of American communities.

* "Icaria, a Chapter in the History of Communism," by Albert Shaw, Ph. D.

† "Co-operative Communities in the United States," by Rev. Alexander Kent, in Bulletin of Department of Labor, No. 35, July, 1901.

they made no propaganda for communism, and established their settlements, not as an object-lesson for their neighbors, but as a retreat for themselves. They are usually styled *Religious Communities* in the literature on the subject, but we hardly think this designation expressive of their aims and character. What distinguishes them from other communities is, not the fact that they were religious, for so were many communities of the other groups, but the fact that ✓ their religious beliefs and practises were of a peculiar and sectarian nature.

These communities are the earliest in point of time, the strongest in point of numbers, and many of them still survive. But in the history of the socialist movement they played but a secondary part, and for this reason we will limit ourselves here to a brief account of the most important and typical of them.

2. THE OWENITE COMMUNITIES

This was a group of communities founded either by Owen directly or under the influence of his agitation. They were the first communities organized in this country in furtherance of a general social theory and as a means of propaganda. Only twelve of the group were rescued from oblivion, altho in all likelihood many more existed. The period covered by these experiments is that from the year 1825 to the year 1830.

3. THE FOURIERISTIC COMMUNITIES

These communities were organized by American followers of Charles Fourier. In their plan of organization they strove to approach as closely as possible the ideal of the industrial communities designated as "Phalanxes" in Fourier's system, and most of them styled themselves Phalanxes.

Fourierism was the first socialist system to attain the dignity of a national movement in the United States. The

movement lasted about a decade, from 1840 to 1850, and produced over forty social experiments in different parts of the country.

4. THE ICARIAN COMMUNITIES

The Icarian settlements were a series of experiments growing out from a single enterprise of the Frenchman Étienne Cabet, and altho we meet them in five different States, at different times and under different names, they must be considered as one community.

The original community "Icaria" was founded in 1848, and its numerous offsprings, formed by a constant process of schisms and migrations, prolonged its existence for almost half a century.

The Icarian movement developed some strength in the fifties of the last century, and was of but little significance after that period. Altho conducted on American soil, the experiment was confined almost exclusively to Frenchmen, and had little or no influence on the modern reform movements.

