

# The Hutterite Communities in Paraguay

WE wanted to build. We wanted to begin afresh and make a society genuine from its bed-rock foundations. We were sick of struggling with other men in wars and in daily business. We wanted to find real fellowship. We wanted to find a way of life in which the gifts that lie in each individual could develop without cramping and stifling those of other people. We wanted a common unity of work and purpose.

The story of our efforts for this is an adventurous one. This group—the Sociedad Fraternal Hutteriana—now in the heart of South America, arose in the post-war Germany of 1920. Complete dislocation of life through war and revolution, compelled a fresh attempt to get to the root: peoples' need and desire to live together as social beings, and their continual inability to do this. Many talks about economic and religious problems caused a small group—one family and few single people—to begin practically by pooling all they had and living in community. Many conferences were held and books and pamphlets were published about this new movement, and its relationship with earlier movements, especially with the Early Christian Community in Jerusalem, and the Communities of Brothers formed during the religious Reformation in Europe in the Sixteenth Century. It was only after several years of communal life that the group learned that the descendants of those brothers of Reformation times were still living in community—after four hundred years—and were now settled in North America.

Dr. Eberhard Arnold, leader of the group in Germany, visited the American communities, and both groups recognized complete unity of belief and practice—a significant fact, considering the wide difference between the time and historical context of their origin. Their stories also have a marked similarity. Arising in Switzerland and Germany, the communities of four hundred years ago were driven by persecution from one land to another across Central and Eastern Europe into Russia. From here, always in search of freedom of conscience, they emigrated to North America in 1870, though even in this land they have suffered because of their refusal to take part in war. After 1933 the new community in Europe was forced by persecution, through dissolution by the state [1937] and later by the danger that members would be forcibly separated, to find new homes for itself, first in Lichtenstein, then for some five years in England, and now in Paraguay. Three members, however, were left behind in England to wind up affairs there, and then follow the main group to South America. They soon found themselves joined by a growing number of men and women who sincerely wanted to live in community. This unexpected gathering led to the beginning of a new English Bruderhof at Wheathill in Shropshire, where there are now nearly one hundred and forty people.

We share all our property in common. That seems to us the natural consequence of comradeship, and we trust one another fully. Trust in each other also makes it possible to speak frankly about faults and grievances, and each one takes such honest speaking to heart as a duty. Being like any men and women anywhere, hating to 'give offence,' to put ourselves in the wrong, or to own up and ask pardon, it often goes much against the grain to speak openly of what makes us uneasy, but we know the only way to keep peace in the whole community is to have everything at peace, clear and honest, between the individual members. Usually a difference can be put right between the two or three people concerned, but if these cannot settle it alone they ask the help of others, and finally of the whole group. These guiding lines for living peaceably together are given in the Sermon on the Mount, and can be followed only in the spirit of these words.

The door is always open to those who wish to share in the common life. We welcome visitors who want to stay with us for a time to work with us and learn more of living in community.

If you visited us here in Paraguay, you would come, after a strenuous journey by river-boat and by wagon or truck ride over

bad roads, to a part of the country whose landscape alternates between forestland and grassland [known as *camp*]. The forestland is a littler higher than the *camp*, but it is all fairly flat. Here there are three settlements, which we call Bruderhöfe. Each Bruderhof is built on the edge of the forest and the camp. Large numbers of cattle graze on the camp; cattle-raising is one of the most important industries in Paraguay and we have both a beef and milk herd. Timber is felled in the forest and brought to the saw-mill to be prepared for building or carpentry work. We also need a large fuel supply for our steam-engines, besides fire-wood for cooking and water-heating. Our house-building is often done almost entirely in wood, with thatch for the roofs. When we are able to spare enough men from other work departments, we make bricks, but this is a tremendous undertaking when everything must be done from the initial digging out of the clay to the final firing. Nevertheless we now have several brick buildings, with thatched roofs.

We wish to educate our children for a full and creative life, encouraging the development of all good gifts, and bringing them through their own experience to realize that their powers are used to their deepest satisfaction only when they are used in service and in love to all around them. Such knowledge can, of course, come only by living experience, never by moralising. To win through to such a realisation demands the development of a firm character and of self-control.

As the children grow up they are, whenever possible, sent out from the community to learn a trade or profession. Two of our young people are now in Asuncion studying to be teachers, and another is training as a potter. Among others who have gone out, one is a teacher, one a nurse, one a midwife, one learned sewing and houswifery, another cobbling, another carpentry and two learned to work with cattle. The training usually takes place in Asuncion, the capital of Paraguay. Here we have a house where the young people live during their time away from the Brotherhood and where, while seeing the life that is normally lived to-day, they can turn to the house-parents, or other brothers and sisters, for advice in any problems that may arise, and can always find help and encouragement. They are then better equipped to make the decision, which each must make as he grows up, whether to stay in the community or to go away.

Much work on the agricultural and domestic side must be put in to support this big group of our five hundred people. Garden land is cultivated so that we may have fruit and vegetables. The cooking is done in the communal kitchen, and washing in the communal laundry, on each Bruderhof. The work for the men and that for the women is distributed by a man and woman chosen by the whole Brotherhood for that task. All are ready to do any services asked of them, however humble. We are glad to use any special ability or training when this is a help to the work as a whole, but if we have, for instance, several women teachers among us, and no one to clean the vegetables or wash the clothes, it is clear that a teacher will work in the kitchen or laundry. The determining factor is always: "What work will best serve the cause as a whole?" and accordingly, all work is done gladly.

The whole brotherhood bears the responsibility for all that is done in the community, and this remains the case when men and women are chosen from among them to be especially responsible for different branches of the work and for different functions in the peaceful ordering of the communal life. The brother or sister who is appointed to such a service has the complete trust of all the others. This is possible only in an atmosphere of mutual confidence, where we know that all work together for the same cause of peace and unity, and to bring this to more and more people.

While each Bruderhof administers its own purely internal affairs, the three Bruderhöfe are closely united, spiritually and economically, in one brotherhood. In times of great stress, as in the locust swarms of last autumn, one Bruderhof calls on another for help, and help is given in the fullest measure possible. Sim-

ilarly, if one Bruderhof has some crop in abundance, it shares with the two that lack. All that affects the whole Community, such as its task of mission in Paraguay and other countries, the maintenance and economic expansion of the Community, or the education of the older children, are talked over, and measures agreed upon by the three Bruderhöfe together.

Questions are discussed and settled in the brotherhood meetings. Everything is done with the full consent of *all* the members. This may sound difficult to achieve, or un-natural and unreal to those who are accustomed to meetings where there are as many opinions as there are people. When we consider all questions objectively, and when we look to a cause greater and more important than ourselves, then we come to a united answer: this is our constant experience. This real and free agreement takes away all problems of majority and minority votes and of compulsion, and so removes a potent source of division, weakness and discontent. All are convinced with heart and soul that there is only one truth, one supreme Absolute, and that is God. All are ready to give their whole strength that His will may be done: His will that is shown to us through Christ. This conviction brings an activity of love and service that cannot be expressed only within the group.

The community also offers help through its social work. As soon as the community settled in Paraguay, our three doctors began medical work among our neighbours: Paraguayans from nearby villages and Mennonite settlers from Europe. Soon a small hospital was built. Paraguay is poor and living conditions bad, and there is little knowledge of how to treat illness. Cases are frequently left too long and are then brought perhaps many miles to the hospital by jolting wagons. As people gain confidence in our doctors, the work with in-and out-patients is continually increasing. We need more doctors and nurses to serve this wide area where there is no other medical help available.

From its very beginning the Community has received orphan children and cared for them and educated them together with the children of our own families. Directly the war in Europe ended in 1946, plans and preparations were made to bring sixty orphaned children from the devastated lands of Central Europe and to look after them here in a Children's Village especially built and equipped. Two of our brothers went to Europe in 1947 to select the children, but, although they were able to choose as many children as we could receive, the whole scheme was rejected. In 1948 two brothers were once again in Germany, and it is now possible for ten children to come for three years to the Wheathill Bruderhof in England. While these brothers were in Germany, it

was decided, on reading their reports, to receive a number of displaced persons in Primavera. For this purpose our brothers visited D.P. camps and interviewed people who wished to come to us. One hundred and fourteen people of all ages, among them war widows and their children, sailed from Bremerhaven on October 7th and arrived in Primavera in the early days of November. A strenuous building program was undertaken to house them as they arrived, and the area of agricultural land is being greatly increased. They come from Russia, Poland and the Baltic States, and their coming has added to the already strongly international character of the community. We now have representatives of seventeen nationalities among us [two more than in I.R.O.!] Talks at mealtimes must often be translated into three languages: Russian or Spanish, German and English. It is too early as yet to say how these new helpers will find their feet among us. Their coming has brought us face to face with the problems of human life in Europe: the continual nightmare pressure of fear and distrust, national antipathies, the loss of freedom and normal relationships, the ingrained discontent, especially among the youth, but also there is often generosity and a strong sense of comradeship. We hope that the New Year will bring us to a progressively better understanding one of another.

With the widening rift between East and West, the constant menace of renewed war, and the hunger and distress of millions of people, fettered and dispossessed, it is imperative for each one to consider which type of social order shall claim his allegiance. The rift between East and West is beyond our individual power to close, but the gulf between word and deed, ideal and practice is left open at our own responsibility and peril. The signs that this gulf, which is the fundamental one, is closed, are the common interest, the common care one for another, the common purse, the common table: the reality that men can live together in unity. That is the significance of community in the world to-day.  
*The Brotherhood, Primavera, Alto Paraguay.* EILEEN TAYLOR

Allan Anderson and Herman Arnold, two members of the Hutterite Brotherhood in Paraguay, are now travelling in this country and will remain here through 1949. Any one who wants to know more about the community—or who might be interested in settling there—can get in touch with them at 2410 Wyoming Avenue N. W., Washington 8, D. C.

HERE & NOW:

## The Uncommon People

AS citizens of a mass democracy, we hear a great deal about the Common People and the Common Man. We shouldn't forget, however, that the values for which these symbols stand have been created and are now being preserved, insofar as it is possible to preserve them in an age of total warfare, by the Uncommon People and the Uncommon Man. It is these people, the rebels, the eccentrics, the doers, the humorists, the congenial square pegs who live as though the platitudes about justice and freedom and democracy and the pursuit of pleasure were descriptions of real life: they act, here & now, according to the values which the church-going, law-abiding, Gallup-Poll-reading Common Man dares only to dream about.

This new department is dedicated to three propositions:

Dwight Macdonald

- (1) A deed in the hand is worth two manifestos on the bush.
- (2) The individual is *not* powerless, and something *can* be Done About It.
- (3) Human behavior is unpredictable and cuts across class lines: judges sometimes act as decently as pickpockets (see below).

These propositions obviously conflict with the theoretical system that underlies modern progressive thought: Marxism. The point about Marxism today is that it is not a philosophy of rebellion and action but rather one of conformity and quietism. By overstating the determinist element in history and by overemphasizing the role of organized mass action in historical change, Marxism de-