

May 1948

# CHRISTIANS COOPERATING

## Commune in the Jungle

BILL PATRICK

For some years now we have been reading with great interest your paper the "Catholic Worker," which you send regularly to us, and I felt I would like to write to express our appreciation for the stand you have taken for many of the fundamental truths of the Christian life, and at the same time to report shortly about our life and progress here in Paraguay.

### Values

Amidst the flood of new inventions for the greater comfort of the human race, the increasing emphasis placed upon visible and tangible success, the growing spirit of hatred and mistrust between nations, and the babel of voices which pours in from every side, it is refreshing to us to see in you a group struggling to place the truth before men, to overcome the prejudices and passions which cause war and racial discrimination, to help the poor and the oppressed, to restore the sanctity and purity of the family life as the central unit of a greater society, and to bring men back to a sense of their original calling, back to the real and fundamental values of life. It is our wish to enter into an ever deepening contact with all such groups as yours, for the spirit which drives men to speak fear-

lessly against all the perversity in the world today also brings such men together in a common seeking for truth, in a common desire to live that life of unity and peace which is the answer to all human need and misery.

### 27 Years

It is this urge to unity and community, proceeding from the spirit of love, which brought us together, and which has kept us together during the 27½ years of our common life—years filled with struggle and often privation, but bringing with them an ever deepening sense of fulfillment of that calling which is the will of God for all men. It is our experience that this life of complete sharing, this life of the common effort and the common table, where each gives according to his strength and receives according to his need, is the answer to the questions of a humanity torn in a thousand directions. We here are of many different nationalities, but we find the question of race or national antagonism does not and cannot arise amongst those moved by a common spirit, for they have become citizens of a new kingdom.

### Education

In the same way problems of education are also solved in the spirit

of unity existing between parents and teachers, so that the children grow up with a sense of the wholeness of life, and are able to see clearly the issues which lie before them when they reach maturity. Divorce, unemployment, social injustice and all such questions have no reality in a life of wholesome simplicity, because there is a harmony and oneness in the will of God which reveals itself not only as the negation of falsehood, but as the affirmation of truth in newness of life.

### Work

The last seven years of building up here in Paraguay have been years filled with work and rich in experience. The country itself is very poor, and crippled by having no direct outlet to the sea. Disease of all kinds is rampant because of the extreme poverty and lack of hygiene amongst the country people. This poverty has been greatly aggravated by the events of the past years, for in 1945 and 1946, we were invaded by swarms of locusts, and as you perhaps heard, 1947, was a year of civil war. This fighting, which took place to a great extent in our vicinity placed us in a difficult situation, but throughout the whole of the hostilities not one of us was harmed. We did of course suffer considerable material loss in the requisitioning of horses, wagons, cattle,



etc., and it is only now that we are feeling the full effects of this on our agriculture which is the economic basis of our life. Here the loss cannot be estimated in terms of money, for the work of years has been damaged. In the country as a whole the result, apart from the immediate suffering and misery, was that a very high percent of the livestock was slaughtered, and few crops were planted. This has been followed by another huge invasion of locusts, eating everything before them, and now by several months of drought which has paralysed work on the land.

### Sickness

At the same time a wave of disease seems to be sweeping over the country, and a continuous stream of sick people pours in daily to our small hospital, so that our three doctors—the only ones serving a huge section of Paraguay—are kept busy almost day and night. During the past months there has been a steady average of about 20 outpatients daily, apart from those cases which have to be admitted, and the calls upon the doctors to visit sick people in their homes. Many of these patients make journeys of one, two or even three days to see the doctor, and one woman told me that we were the only hope the poor people here had of relief for their suffering. This great poverty is indeed a problem, for it means that very many cannot pay at all, while others offer to make some gift in kind or to do odd jobs. This makes it very difficult for us to get an adequate supply of medicine, for which we must pay cash, and such things as an X-Ray or refrigerator, simple necessities of any hospital,

are luxuries beyond our reach. The accommodation is also too small, and wards are urgently needed for maternity and isolation cases.

### Needs

You will see from this that any assistance which can be given to us in this work would be more than welcome. I know that you are a poor and struggling group as we are, but there may be amongst your readers those who are able in some way to make it possible for the poor in Paraguay to have something of that medical attention which is the simple right of each citizen of the U. S. A. It may be of interest to you to know that those who come to our hospital are almost all Catholics, but of course we make no distinction of race, creed, wealth or position, but help each according to his need.

### D. P. Orphans

It is in this sharing of the blessings which have been given to us that we find joy for the present and a purpose for the future. Thus we have also decided to take in sixty war orphans from Europe to give them a new beginning in life. We have sent brothers to Europe to seek out the children and to arrange the transport, and here in Paraguay a high proportion of our working strength is employed in building houses and planting food for them. Here also we need any help which can be given, whether

it be of money, gifts or working strength, and we will gladly send full details of this plan to anyone who is interested. This contribution we are able to make to lessen the suffering in the world is small enough, but it is given gladly. We are poor, but the earth on which we live is rich, and it could nourish many more than are here at present. We need those who are willing to help us to show to men that brotherhood is not something to be longed for but something to be lived. It is perhaps not without significance that here in Paraguay, the home of Jesuit communities, freedom of conscience is offered to us in all those vital questions concerning men today, and the possibility of living together in peace and brotherhood is given. We feel deeply grateful to God for each day we are able to experience this unity and joy together.

Please write and tell us what you think of the various points raised in this letter and please ask any questions you wish. We send greetings and good wishes to you in the fight you have undertaken, and hope that we may truly be led closer together in this common search and struggle.

Sociedad Fraternal Hutteriana, Primavera, Alto Paraguay, South America.