

Communal Life Being Practised at Primavera

'Society of Brothers' Merges Property, Uses No Money

ASUNCION, Paraguay—On a farm called Primavera (Springtime), not far from here, 700 men, women and children of many nationalities are living a communal life based, they say, on Biblical teachings.

These people belong to the Society of Brothers, a group that believes not only in communal living but also in pacifism. Members are pledged to give up pursuit of private gain and merge their interests for life with those of their group.

There are three communal villages at Primavera, where the families live in simple thatched-roofed houses of wood and brick. Since all property is on a one-for-all and all-for-one basis, money is not used except for transactions with the outside world. There are no policemen. On the rare occasions when an intransigent member refuses to respond to reason he is asked to go away.

Though at least 15 nationalities are represented at Primavera, the great majority of the settlers (about four-fifths) are German or English. Of the 25 Americans, several are former Harvard University students who learned about Primavera while at the university and decided, after coming down for a look, to abandon their old ways of living and stay on.

Monogamy Practised

These people are not ascetics. While a few of them smoke or drink, there is no flat prohibition of either practice. Monogamy is the rule and big families are encouraged. Work is distributed among the adults according to talents and abilities. Working mothers may leave their children for the day at the village nursery.

Breakfast is a family occasion enjoyed in the privacy of the home. But lunch and supper are served in communal dining rooms from central kitchens. Mealtimes are also a time for group discussions.

The Society of Brothers came into being in Germany in 1920 with an ideology based on that of the four-centuries-old Hutterite sect. Forced out of Germany by the Nazis, the Brothers migrated first to Britain and later (in 1941) to Paraguay, where the government promised them freedom from military service and freedom to run their own educational and administrative affairs.

The Brothers were influenced in their choice of Paraguay as a place of settlement by the fact that another pacifist sect—the Mennonites—already had well-established colonies here. There are 13,000 Mennonites in Paraguay. Unlike the Society of the Brothers, they recognize private ownership. And their settlements operate on a cooperative rather than a communal basis.

Doubles Membership

The Primavera group has more than doubled in numbers since the Society of Brothers settled 12 years ago. But the going has not been easy, and there are still many economic problems to be overcome.

Lack of capital equipment is a big difficulty. The property comprises 20,000 acres, half forest and half open, and it has had to be developed with little by the way of mechanized equipment.

Even today the community owns only three trucks and two standard-sized tractors. A thousand acres are planted, mostly in corn and mandioca. The society derives some income from the sale of timber and of beautifully turned articles made from exotic hardwoods.

The three villages at Primavera have been built and furnished virtually from scratch, with materials available in the vicinity. The brothers are proud of their hospital and their schools. When children reach maturity they are given the choice of joining the brotherhood for life or going off on their own.

Boston Globe-N. Y. Herald Tribune

N.Y. Herald Tribune FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 1953 - Asuncion



Farmers working the soil on farm near Asuncion, Paraguay.

Follow Biblical Teachings

700 Working on Paraguay Commune

By A. T. Steele

Copyright, 1953, N. Y. Herald Tribune Inc. ASUNCION, Paraguay, Nov. 26.—On a farm called Primavera (Springtime), not far from here, 700 men, women and children of many nationalities are living a communal life based, they say, on Biblical teachings.

These people belong to the Society of Brothers—a group that believes not only in communal living but also in pacifism. Members are pledged to give up pursuit of private gain and merge their interests for life with those of their group.

There are three communal villages at Primavera, where the families live in simple thatched-roofed houses of wood and brick. Since all property is on a one-for-all and all-for-one basis, money is not used except for transactions with the outside world. There are no policemen. On the rare occasions when an intransigent member refuses to respond to reason he is asked to go away.

15 Countries Represented

Though at least fifteen nationalities are represented at Primavera, the great majority of the settlers (about four-fifths) are German or English. Of the twenty-five Americans, several are former Harvard University students who learned about Primavera while at the university and decided, after coming down for a look, to abandon their old ways of living and stay on.

These people are not ascetics. While few of them smoke or drink, there is no flat prohibition of either practice. Monogamy is encouraged. Work is distributed among the adults according to talents and abilities. Working mothers may leave their children for the day at the village nursery.

Breakfast is a family occasion enjoyed in the privacy of the home. But lunch and supper are served in communal dining rooms from central kitchens. Mealtimes are also a time for group discussions.

The Society of Brothers came into being in Germany in 1920 with an ideology based on that of the four-centuries-old Hutterite sect. Forced out of Germany by the Nazis, the Brothers migrated first to Britain and later (in 1941) to Paraguay, where the government promised them freedom from military service and freedom to run their own educational and administrative affairs. Meanwhile, a new "bruderhof" (communal village) has grown up at Wheatill, Shropshire, in England. Today it has more than 150 members.

Mennonites There Too

The Brothers were influenced in their choice of Paraguay as a place of settlement by the fact that another pacifist sect—the Mennonites—already had well-established colonies here. There are 13,000 Mennonites in Paraguay. Unlike the Society of Brothers, they recognize private ownership. And their settlements operate on a cooperative rather than a communal basis.

The Primavera group has more than doubled in numbers since the Society of Brothers settled twelve years ago. But the going has not been easy and there are still many economic problems to be overcome. Lack of capital equipment is a big difficulty. The property comprises 20,000 acres.

The three villages at Primavera have been built and furnished virtually from scratch,

with materials available in the vicinity. The Brothers are proud of their hospital and their schools. When children reach maturity they are given the choice of joining the Brotherhood for life or going off on their own.

Many of the men at Primavera go in for beards, but the unshaven condition is not obligatory. Despite the fact that Primavera is only 100 miles as the crow flies northeast of Asuncion, it suffers somewhat from isolation. With roads as they are, coming into town is a major operation except by plane. Members say life at Primavera is easier than it was in the early years of pioneering. However it is still fairly austere and will probably remain so until productivity is stepped up. The Brothers say the percentage of backsliders at Primavera is low, and they point to the growth of the community as one evidence of progress.