

Icaria

Sanford W. Huff

ISSN 0003-4827

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Recommended Citation

The Annals of Iowa, 5(2) (Apr. 1867): 848-853

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I C A R I A .

The County of Adams, in Iowa, is on the Missouri Slope, third from the river, and of the second tier from the southern boundary of the State. Near the center of the County, on a stream known as the Nodaway River, is situated the village, or rather hamlet, of Icaria. It consists of about thirty log houses, most of them quite small, but neat and tasteful in their fittings, arrangement and floral adornments. It is now fourteen years since the first of these buildings were constructed, the settlement having been commenced in 1853.

The people composing this place have a history, of which I propose to give some account. Not their monotonous life in their present location; but anteriorly to the time of settlement here, they bear a relation to parties and schemes which alone give it value. As the result of a great social movement, the discussion of which was once the theme of millions in the old world, and which even disturbed the repose and threatened the peace of nations; and as the fruit of the personal labors of one of the master minds in that discussion, it also has some significance.

* The "Icarian Community" at Icaria, is an organization which grew out of the socialistic ideas which were promulgated twenty to thirty years ago—originating in France, and spreading widely over Germany and Central Europe, and discussed with some degree of earnestness even in this country. To such an extent had this theory of Social Reform been disseminated among the common people of France, and the manifold grievances which they had suffered at the hands of the privileged classes, so taken possession of their judgment, that it entered largely as an element into the revolution of '48, which dethroned their monarch, and alarmed others of the crowned heads of Europe for the permanency of their dynasties. We cannot say that it entered prominently into that swift revolution, but it was clearly an element of discord which led to it, and which did not escape the observation of the powers whose security was threatened.

Icaria, this drowsy hamlet beside the Nodaway, was born in France sometime during the winter of 1847-8, and had for its paternity, a man twice honored with exile, and once with imprisonment, by the reigning monarchs of that nation, for the boldness and bitterness with which he promulgated his peculiar individual opinions upon political and social topics.

Cabet, the father of Icaria, was clearly, by constitution and composition, an agitator. One of those restless spirits, with progressive proclivities, who are entirely harmless in a Republic, but of whom thrones and principalities, and privileged orders, have a mortal dread, when accompanied by great abilities.

Previously to 1834, he had acquired distinction in the political discussions of the day; and in that year, having been led in his hot zeal to indulge in remarks distasteful to his sovereign, was exiled for five years. Retiring to England, he engaged in the study of history, and published several historical works. While pursuing these studies, which led him again and again over the story of the selfishness, follies and vices of the ruling classes, and the attendant evils to the masses, with a mind already biased in favor of popular liberty, for the frank expression of which he was now suffering exile, the transition was an easy and natural process to his enthusiastic nature—to the antithetical position in which all distinctions, either of honors or wealth, should be done away, and the members of community share in everything equal; all individuality being sunk in advancing the interests and happiness of the aggregate mass. Revolving these subjects in mind, was developed the theory and plans of Socialism; the paramount idea of which is, that all property shall be held in common—all honors extinguished—all individuality lost—labor regulated and graded to the capability of each—equality of sexes.

“ Establishing a society in which all are equal co-partners—in which the capital consists of all the wealth of all the members—founded upon perfect unity
“ in all its component parts—union of the people, forming one sole family of
“ brothers, and one sole army of workmen—union of territory, forming one sole
“ possession—union in the general exploitation of agriculture and general indus-

"try—union in education, forming one great and entire system of instruction
 "and education for the whole people. * * * A mutual and universal as-
 "surance against all accidents, disasters and misfortunes. * * * Furnishing
 "to each, all which is necessary for support and comfort, upon the condition
 "that each labors according to his strength and ability. * * * *Suppressing*
 "all the abuses of property, as opulence and *poverty*—the right of inheritance—
 "buying and selling—commerce and shop-keeping—hence frauds, adultera-
 "tions, and bankruptcies—all systems of banking and usury—the payment of
 "wages to workmen—the payment of salaries to public functionaries—all taxes;
 "all courts of law and litigation."

As soon as the years of his banishment had expired in 1839, he lost no time in returning to France, and commenced the agitation of his new and favorite scheme for remedying the evils of the race.

During the succeeding few years, he published numerous works, in which his Utopia was eloquently described, and all its minute details of government and system of operations, specifically laid down. In order to experiment practically upon it, he attempted the organization and establishment of communities in France—but met with so much opposition, and so many hinderances from the powers that ruled, that to escape what he called persecution, he prepared to leave France, and to work out his social problem in America. The "Icarian Community" was the result of that preparation.

In February, 1848, his Colony, or Community, which had been previously organized, sailed from Havre for Texas, where a million acres of land had been secured for their occupancy, on the western bank of Red River. This first instalment of Colonists numbered seventy persons. Others followed at intervals of a fortnight. Cabet staid behind to see the last of his followers embarked, when he was to follow and commence active operations on this side the Atlantic. But in the meantime came the revolution.

Like the swift and terrible tornado that sometimes breaks in on the serenity of a summer day, without recognizable premonition of its approach, and sweeps with terrific effect across our western prairies, scattering ruin in its path, the revolution of the 24th of February, broke in upon the reigning quietude of France, crushing the throne, and scattering

orders, casts, and privileged classes—breaking in pieces every semblance of kingly authority that stood in its way. Louis Phillippe, who, but a few years before, in the plentitude of his power and influence, had exiled the citizen Cabet and scores of others, is now, within an hour after he had supposed himself intrenched permanently in his regal authority, flying, a terror-stricken fugitive from the kingdom, to escape the wrath of the indignant populace whom he had provoked to action by his prevarication and obstinate denial of just rights.

Of these indignant participators in these scenes of aggression upon the king, who were most zealous in pushing him from his lofty place, Cabet was prominent, and at last felt himself avenged upon the monarch for what he thought unjust banishment.

His favorite schemes do not however seem to have been advanced by the change. Parties gained the ascendancy, and leaders sprang up as hostile to him and his theories, under the republic, as had been the privileged classes of the monarchy. Disgusted with his want of success, he now prepared to follow in his colony of "Communists," who had gone the year before to America. In January, 1849, he arrived in New Orleans, when, to his surprise and chigrin, he found his colony, which, having become disheartened and demoralized in their experiment in Texas, had broken up and returned to that city.

Collecting such as he could still persuade to continue in the enterprise, numbering 280 persons, to-wit: 142 men, 74 women, and 64 children, he brought them to Nauvoo, the site of Mormon triumphs and disasters, on this side the great plains. Having purchased this site of the Mormons, and established his colony in working order, he returned to Paris in 1851, on some business connected with his community. But again misfortune and disaster awaited him in his native France.

Bringing himself in some way into inimical relations to Louis Napoleon, who was now bearing rule, he was proscribed by him, and finally arrested Dec. 2d, and thrown into prison

in the fort of Bicetre—afterwards transported by force to England, from whence, after a few months delay, he sailed for America in June, 1852.

In the meantime, the "Icarian Community" had become incorporated by the Legislature of the State of Illinois (Feb. 1851) and gone into systematic operation. For the three years following, little of note occurred with the Communists.

But in 1855, I find the records of a terrible war raging at Nauvoo—fierce, but without carnage. The arch instigator, and leader upon one side, is the founder of the organization, Cabet, whose restless spirit, like Banquo's obstinate ghost, "would not down" at the bidding of any circumstances. Not finding any wider or nobler field upon which to expend his redundant vitality, he now busies himself in disturbing the placid equanimity of his little community.

The shell which was thrown into this quiet camp was in the shape of a proposition, intended to make him practically Dictator of Icarian Nauvoo. Under the specious title of President, he desired to be granted the sole privilege of "making regulations for the community, and of appointing and removing at pleasure all its officers." Oh, Cabet! where have you laid the massive volumes in which, for twenty-five years, you labored to indoctrinate mankind with another and opposite system—that of universal and exact equality in power, property and influence! In what secret prison place have you hidden and barred them, that your earlier thoughts do not, like ghosts, rise to rebuke you? You who paled the cheek of princes with your leveling theories, and would have equalized the masses of nations, now asking to play the absolute over an organization built to give practical illustration to your theory.

But the Icarians, it seems, were not as ready to forget the logic of his writings and utterances as the author, and stoutly resisted and thoroughly resented this attempted violation of former teachings and pledges, and after a contest which lasted several weeks, the attempt was made a failure; but not until he had succeeded in detaching a portion of the communists,

and seceding with them, withdrew to St. Louis, where, a few years afterwards, he died.

In the meantime, in 1853, a branch colony was sent forward and established in Adams County, Iowa. From time to time it received accessions from the mother community, until finally, as that waned in strength by depletion by death and desertion, it was abandoned, and its remaining strength transferred and gathered to Icaria, which now, with its thirty log houses, is the practical culmination, or rather residuary of the personal life efforts of the author of a scheme for social reform, the enunciation of which, and the ingenious reasoning concerning it, had caught the imagination and freighted with hope the souls of oppressed millions; an organization which looked forward, at its beginning, with expectations of future greatness; which, in the words of one of its "articles of engagement," as its constitution is called, "is destined to form a city and a state, submitted to the general laws of the United States."

The following letter from Dr. White, State Geologist, who recently visited them at their homes while on a geological tour into that County, gives specific information of its present status:

IOWA CITY, IOWA, March 9, 1867.

DR. S. W. HUFF—*Dear Sir*: In reply to your inquiries concerning the present condition of the Icarian Colony in Adams County, Iowa, I can say but very little. While making a reconnoissance of that County, last September, I met their present President, Monsieur Marchand, and, by his invitation, made them a brief visit soon afterwards. I found M. Marchand a pleasant, intelligent gentleman, well but plainly dressed, evidently possessing much knowledge of the world, although his society is now so limited. The members of the community are now reduced to less than fifty, I believe, all told. Their village consists of a collection of small log houses; those which I entered having an air of neatness and comfort. The men and women were as comfortably clad as the citizens around them, and all were respectful and obliging. The children were well-behaved, and I was assured that their education was properly provided for. One of the small houses was devoted to the library which contains many hundred volumes, besides some pictures and apparatus.

Their location is near the East Nodaway River, six miles eastward from Quincy, the county seat. Their land is principally good prairie, but they have some timber along the stream. If I remember rightly they have seventeen hundred acres in all. They have a considerable part of this in cultivation, their entire business being farming and stock-raising, and I have the impression that they are pecuniarily prospering. I have never heard of any difficulty between them and the other citizens, and believe them to be orderly and industrious.

I am Yours, Very Truly,

C. A. WHITE.

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