ICARUS

If you are of a legal turn of mind and wish to know the political and legal status of these French settlers, you find that the society has a constitution—largely the plan of Cabet—which regulates their domestic affairs. The decisions within the community are settled in the general assembly in which all are expected to be present, although only men over twenty years of age may vote. The relation of the community to the State of Illinois is determined by the act of February 1, 1851, incorporating the "Icarian Community." Among the names of the incorporators you may observe one well-known in Iowa and Illinois, A. Piquenard, the architect of the capitol buildings at Des Moines and Springfield. Although jealously maintaining their French language and customs, the men of the community are, for the most part, naturalized citizens of the United States, and their relations with their American neighbors are usually friendly.

To the visitor who understands French and listens to the discussions among the men in the workshops and the women in the kitchen, it is evident that somehow the serpent of

dissension has entered this garden of communism. One faction represented by some 54 voters supports Cabet in his attempt to revise the constitution and resume his former position of dictator; the other, with 81 votes in the assembly, but without much power among the administrative staff, opposes this revision as illegal. This party is known as the "reds." Supporters of Cabet are "whites," "cabétistes," or "furets."

Friction is increased by the social groups which have developed among the women and by the class feeling which has appeared among the various groups of workers. The men who work at a distance complain that those who work near the dining hall are served first and receive the best food. All these currents of discontent swell the tide which seems about to engulf the community. Families are divided and men and women on opposite sides no longer speak except when work demands it. In the dining room are tables of the "reds" and tables of "cabétistes." On one occasion, five of the party opposed to Cabet enter the dining hall chanting in an undertone from the Marseillaise:

Contre nous de la tyrannie
L'étendard sanglant est levé.

Cabet, now an old man of 68, who had left his family in France to found this community on the soil of a strange land, is indignant at this charge of tyranny and at what he considers the ingratitude of his followers.

Finally, the majority party obtain control of the "gérance" or governing board as well as of the assembly. Thereupon, the "cabétistes" quit work. Their opponents, taking as their authority the words of Saint Paul—which appeared in French, by Cabet's orders, on the walls of the dining hall—"If any will not work, neither let him eat," notify the insurgents that unless they return to work, food, clothing, and lodgings will be refused them. Then, says a French writer, began Homeric battles around the tables as the "cabétistes" attempted to force their way into the dining hall, to the great damage of the Icarian tableware. Cabet, watching from his room on the second floor, encourages his adherents; but they are finally ousted. A fistfight occurs when the new officials attempt to

secure the records and keys from the old administration, while Cabet looks on with a smile, a situation which reminds an Icarian woman—in the opposition of course—of Charles IX at Saint Bartholomew. The climax of absurdity is reached when the new authorities attempt to remove two women "cabétistes" who teach in the school for girls. One of the teachers resists and is dragged out "by the hair" crying for help, while the terrified little girls scream and weep and some neutral American neighbors watch the scene from the vantage point of the temple ruins.

Again and again the sheriff is summoned to restore order. The mayor of Nauvoo urges a complete separation; the followers of Cabet withdraw to lodgings outside Icarian jurisdiction, and, soon after, depart for St. Louis, leaving the "reds" in possession of Icaria.

Cabet, disillusioned and brokenhearted, died on November 8, 1856, a few days after his arrival at St. Louis. His followers began a new Icaria at Cheltenham, near the city, where they maintained the struggle for eight years. Then, with a membership reduced from nearly 200 to less than 30, oppressed by debt and sickness, the community turned over the keys of the buildings to the mortgagee, and the last of this group of Icarians returned to the world of individualism and competition.

What of the group left behind at Nauvoo? Suppose we visit them some 20 years later. To do this, we must travel to a spot some four miles east of Corning, Iowa. Here is Icaria, a little hamlet built on a hill sloping down to the Nodaway River. In the center of a square is the dining hall which serves also as the assembly room. On the sides of this square are rows of small white cottages and the shops, laundry, bakery, and similar establishments. Beyond are some log cabins, still used by those for whom frame cottages have not yet been provided. On the outskirts are the barns, gardens, and orchards, while a magnificent wood forms an effective background for the whole. One feature of the usual Iowa village, however, is lacking: no church spire breaks the sky line above Icaria.

Perhaps you ask of the years following the departure of Cabet from Nauvoo.

What have been the fortunes of the group left behind in the dying city? At first confusion reigned: industry was disorganized and the titles to the property held in Cabet's name could be transferred only by action of the courts. Crops were poor. The panic of 1857 was already in the air. The feud had alienated their supporters in France who were friends of Cabet, so no assistance could be expected from the motherland.

The community had for several years owned about three thousand acres of land in Adams County, Iowa, where they hoped at some future time to establish the permanent Icaria. To this remote and unsettled property, the Icarians decided to migrate. The sale of their property at Nauvoo and other legal tangles, however, delayed the final exodus until 1860.

At Nauvoo, the French had found plenty of houses, cultivated fields, and neighbors who were friendly as soon as the suspicion resulting from the struggle with the Mormons was allayed. In Iowa, log houses, some without floors or windows, were their only shelter against the biting cold of winter. Most of their land was unfenced and unbroken prairie, and there was not a settler along the trail for 40 miles before they reached Icaria. Supplies had to be hauled some 100 miles by team.

At first they endured real hardships. Only the sick had white bread, sugar, and coffee. Milk, butter, corn bread, and bacon formed the menu of the others. Little by little, conditions improved. With the outbreak of the Civil War, the price of wool soared. The Icarians had a large number of sheep and wool was easy to transport to a distant market. Troops passing from the Missouri to the Des Moines River and emigrants westward-bound paid generously for supplies. The war, however, was not entirely an advantage, for it is said that every Icarian man qualified to enlist was enrolled in the Union army.

For most of the time, however, the members of the community were engaged in a constant struggle against debt and the wilderness. So many became discouraged and left the community that at one time they numbered only 35 persons. Despairing of paying for the entire tract or working it with their depleted forces, they had sold some 2000 acres of land, reserving about 1100 acres for themselves. Thus, the years

passed. A birth or a death, more rarely a wedding, now and then broke the monotony of their existence; and occasionally an old Icarian family returned to the fold.

By 1876, neighbors have moved in around Icaria, and the railroad has brought the community to the doors of the eastern markets; but their manner of living has changed very little. Each morning they assemble in the common dining room for breakfast of porridge, bread and butter, and coffee. For dinner and supper, meat, vegetables, marmalade, cheese, and fruit may be served. The tables are without cloths and the members drink from tin cups. Wine is produced only in sufficient quantities for solemn occasions. Water is the usual drink; and even this indispensable commodity has to be hauled in from a distance. Many of the men smoke, but tobacco is not furnished by the community—each smoker must raise and cure his own supply in his leisure hours.

If you knock at one of the family apartments, you will be received with the courtesy which a French man or woman seldom loses no matter how rough the surroundings. Below are two rooms—a living room and a bedroom. Upstairs, close under the roof, are two small rooms for the children.

In the evening, when the community assembles in the dining hall for discussion or to enjoy music, a program, or a play, some idea of the personnel at this time may be obtained. Gathered in this rather bare room are some 67 persons, 24 of whom are voters. Their dress is plain, but neither peculiar nor standardized. They converse in French, for almost all are French. Some of the newcomers are relating stories of the barricades in Paris during the Commune or discussing ways and means of enlarging the communistic society. The men and women who have faced the hardships of establishing their homes in the wilderness look at their hands, calloused and work-roughened, and debate the advisability of admitting others to share in the fruits of their toil. Again, Icaria is split into factions. On one side are the conservatives, chiefly older people who prefer things as they are and have little enthusiasm for converting the world; on the other side are the radicals, many of them young people. In this party are some restless agitators, born revolutionists, who demand

many changes. They want a program of industrial expansion, the establishment of workshops in nearby towns, and greater freedom in the admission of new members. They demand also that women be permitted to vote in the assembly, partly perhaps because this will increase the vote of their party.

In these discussions, there is constant reference to "the little gardens" which are violently condemned by the radical party and, in fact, find few supporters. Earlier in the life of the community, each family had been permitted to cultivate a little garden around its log house, where flowers might be raised. Some had planted vines and even fruit trees, and now that these were bearing fruit, the radical members could not tolerate this violation of their rules against private property. The possessors of the gardens, however, clung to their little plots of ground. It was not much but it was theirs, they would have said with Touchstone. The authorities tried to settle the quarrel by a compromise. As each family moved from their log house to a new frame house, the little garden was to be given up. At last only three households maintained their gardens in which the vines hung loaded with grapes. A member of the young Icarian party proposed that these grapes be sold by the community, but his motion was defeated.

This was the signal for open hostilities. The radicals claimed that the community had violated its constitution and announced their intention of withdrawing.

Over the division of the community property, however, amounting to some $60,000, a deadlock developed. The young Icarians had a majority of the total membership but they were outvoted by the conservatives 19 to 13. They could not secure what they considered their share of their property, but neither could the old Icarians expel the malcontents since this required a two-thirds vote.

At last the insurgents, some of them participants in the Paris Commune and all advocating more aggressive communism, appealed to the Circuit Court to revoke the charter granted to the community in 1860 on the ground that Icaria was really a communistic establishment instead of an agricultural society as the articles of incorporation provided. The American jury,

convinced that the two factions could not live together in harmony and perhaps suspicious of the communistic idea, decided that the charter had been violated; and in accordance with this verdict, the Icarian community was dissolved by a court decree on August 17, 1878.

The property having been divided on the basis of the number of members and the contribution of each in goods and work, the two factions prepared to set up housekeeping anew. The radicals, more aggressive than their opponents, took out a charter under the title, "La Communauté Icarienne," taking care to secure all the rights which had been held illegal under the old charter, such as establishing schools and manufacturing establishments. They offered the older group a bonus of $1500 for possession of the Icarian village, and this was accepted. Thereupon, they adopted a program which might have been expressed by the modern slogan, "Watch us grow," framed a new constitution, increased their agricultural and industrial activities, gave women a vote in the assembly, and provided for the admission of new members. Apparently, they were not very discriminating, for one member wrote in disgust that they had free-lovers, Shakers, nihilists, anarchists, socialists, and cranks of all kinds—the word "crank" being one of the American words adopted by the French Icarians.

The result was membership indigestion, and it soon became evident that the community was losing members faster than it gained them. "Why was this?" the leaders asked in dismay. Some said the withdrawals were due to an instinct similar to that which makes rats leave a sinking ship. This diagnosis was not far wrong. The community was receiving many improvised Icarians who expected to live at ease far from the degrading "wage slavery" of the cities, and they were both unable and unwilling to cut down trees, build houses, or plough the soil which was exasperatingly full of rocks. Moreover, their families also had to be supported, and the arrival of two skilled mechanics added to the ration list nine additional persons who, a French writer says, had lost none of their Alsatian appetites in the severe climate of Iowa.