

sue the good of the public: and, indeed, it is no wonder to see men act so differently; for in other commonwealths every man knows that unless he provides for himself, how flourishing soever the commonwealth may be, he must die of hunger; so that he sees the necessity of preferring his own concerns to the public; but in Utopia, where every man has a right to everything, they all know that if care is taken to keep the public stores full, no private man can want anything; for among them there is no unequal distribution, so that no man is poor, none in necessity; and though no man has anything, yet they are all rich; for what can make a man so rich as to lead a serene and cheerful life, free from anxieties. . . .<sup>7</sup>

The chances are good that More was engaging in superb irony throughout much of this work, that at most it is only an exercise of the fancy. In any event, later writers have presented such fancies with deadly, and deadening, seriousness.

Most of the utopian ideas appear to have been suggested during this early period, but we had best not stop to explore them. A considerable change had come over utopian literature by the nineteenth century. Indeed, this century was the century of utopians, par excellence. Many intellectuals turned their attention to describ-

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 135.

ing perfect societies and offering programs for realizing them. There were utopian socialists, communitarians, anarchists, "scientific" socialists, syndicalists, and perfectionists. There was a great deal of enthusiasm for utopian projects, and men began actually to try to put them into effect.

### Utopian Communities

The first considerable effort along this line was the communitarian movement. In general, the idea in founding communities was for a group to separate itself from the corrupting influence of the "world" and arrive at perfection in isolation from contaminating influences. There were a great many such communities attempted. Some were religious in orientation, for there was a great deal of religious enthusiasm in the first half of the nineteenth century. Others were secular in origin and aims. But whether religious or secular they were usually communistic, that is, they proposed to labor for the common good and share equally, or at least according to need, in the goods produced.

America was a popular place to locate such experiments, since they needed physical isolation and considerable tolerance from political authorities. Some of the more famous of the American communities were Brook Farm, New Har-

mony, North American Phalanx, Amana, Oneida, Nashoba, Fruitlands, Icaria, and the religious communities of the Shakers and Rappites.

Two examples of such communities will suffice. One of the most famous was the one located on the banks of the Wabash river in Indiana; it was called New Harmony. New Harmony was the brain child, and purse child, of Robert Owen, a wealthy Scottish manufacturer. Owen's idea was to found self-sufficient villages. As one writer describes his utopia:

He saw the world made up of villages, rid of the capitalist and free from that private property which was completely incompatible with social well-being, producing solely for the collective good. . . . Briefly stated, he recommended . . . that colonies of workers should be formed on the co-operative principle. These colonies or villages of co-operation with a population varying from 500 to 2000 souls . . . were to be engaged in both agriculture and manufacturing; they were to be housed in great quadrangles located in the midst of each colony, containing the common dormitories, common kitchen and dining rooms, common schools, library, reading rooms, guest rooms, etc. . . . All were to work at suitable tasks according to their ability. . . .

These villages were to be joined together in a great federation

which would replace the old world of the "capitalistic system with its poverty and misery, its injustice and inequality, its falsehood and deception; and all were to be united in brotherly co-operative effort."<sup>8</sup>

In Owen's most ambitious attempt to put his ideas into effect, the community of New Harmony, he was confronted by continual difficulties for the short time that he continued the effort. Splinter groups of dissenters were continually forming and moving off elsewhere. There were complaints about those who ate but did not work. Since decisions were to be made democratically, all work and other activity was frequently stopped for discussions and votes. Some complained that Owen was profiteering from the sale of land, though he sold the land on credit or gave leases for ten thousand years. "Money had been officially abolished but in every lane and alley the Harmonists privately traded and bargained and bickered over cash."<sup>9</sup> "There was trouble over liquor. Prohibition was decreed, but everywhere people were drunk, supplied by sly bootlegging members."<sup>10</sup> In short, before its

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 219-20.

<sup>9</sup> Everett Webber, *Escape to Utopia* (New York: Hastings House, 1959), p. 151.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.