



The Communistic Societies of the United States: Economic Social and Religious Utopias of the Nineteenth Century

Charles Nordhoff

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A veteran newspaper correspondent, Charles Nordhoff was the first trained observer to give a detailed account of the communitarian societies that were a marked feature of American life in the nineteenth century. He visited dozens of these communities — virtually every one in existence — and read extensively in their doctrinal and other literature in preparation for this book. His straightforward, factual report on what he saw and learned is still a vital document for students of American history, sociology, and culture.

The Amana Society, the Harmonists at Economy, the Separatists of Zoar, the Shakers, the Oneida and Wallingford Perfectionists, the Aurora and Bethel communes, the Icarians, the Bishop Hill colony, the Cedar Vale commune, the Social Freedom Community, and three non-communistic colonies (Anaheim, California; Vineland, New Jersey; and Silkville Prairie Home, Kansas) are all examined in detail. They emerge from these pages as living experiments in human relations.

For each community, Nordhoff discusses history, religious or other guiding philosophy, social habits, and customs, and business and administration. He also supplies vignettes of his visits and interviews, vividly describing the houses and other buildings, the physical settings, the clothing, food, everyday conversation, intellectual and aesthetic aspiration, etc. within each society.

With its concluding chapter on conditions requisite to the success of a communistic society and on the effects of such a society upon its members, and its 38 illustrations of interiors and exteriors, typical clothing styles, and so on, Nordhoff's work is a refreshingly unprejudiced report on socialism and communism in their prescientific infancy. It is especially welcome at a time of growing interest in America's social and cultural past.

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